



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Tuesday, Oct. 25, 2022

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Critical Local Services at Point of Serious Concern

League Annual Conference energizes members to help fix broken funding system

MADISON – The League of Wisconsin Municipalities concluded its 124th Annual Conference Friday at the La Crosse Center in La Crosse with members energized to fix the broken system of funding local governments. During the conference, 622 registered attendees from all across the state gathered to discuss the biggest issues facing local government. The conferees were empowered to tell their stories to their legislators and share with their communities in order to move the needle on legislative action.

“We appreciate everyone who attended the League’s 124th Annual Conference last week to continue efforts to highlight the dire, and in some cases life-threatening, impacts residents are seeing due to the broken system of funding local governments,” said Jerry Deschane, Executive Director of the League. “We encourage all municipal leaders to continue telling their stories. For decades and across different administrations, there has been an over reliance on property taxes to fund critical local services and many communities are at a breaking point due to a slow burning problem escalating over the years into a serious point of concern. We are working to re-establish our partnership and repair this broken system alongside the Wisconsin Counties Association and Wisconsin Towns Association.”

As noted by Manitowoc Mayor and the League’s Past President, Justin Nickels, and reported by WisPolitics, “We want to educate all the citizens, and the legislators, and the folks running for governor how critical this issue is -- how it's come to a point where no municipality, even the large growth communities in the state, can do more and can continue to provide the services, the critical services that our citizens expect. We are truly trying to put the dollars that we are getting from the taxpayers back to them in services they are getting every single day: police, fire, snowplows, grass cleanup and fall cleanup this time of year.”

During the Annual Conference, attendees shared the impacts that illustrate the need to fix the broken system of funding local governments:

- In Manitowoc, due to the broken system of funding local governments, they need to adjust the level of service they provide to citizens since they now won't plow “residential roads until snow hits three inches because we just can't afford to send all those snow plows out on the main roads and then to the side roads.”

- An attendee from the Village of Wausaukee expressed why we must fix this broken system of funding, saying “EMS services just increased tenfold” and went on to note “we’re looking at short-term borrowing just to fund operations... Bottom line: [There has been] no real increase in shared revenue in 15-plus years, yet costs have increased five, 10, and 20 times. Small muni[cipalities] are suffering.”
- The Village of Holmen is one of many communities statewide who have a public safety referendum on the ballot. This quickly growing community notes it has seen a “101% rise in calls for police services since 2016, [while] over the same period fire/EMS calls have risen 51%.” The Village has noted that without this public safety referendum, “The Village Police Department and Holmen Area Fire Department partner communities, will have to make difficult choices about where risk reduction and response services are modified, curtailed, or eliminated to meet the demands of increasing service demands.”
- The City of Fond du Lac also went to referendum to add new fire/EMS positions and they noted during the conference how much that was needed in order to maintain services, “Fond du Lac Fire/Rescue is one of only a handful of internationally accredited agencies... By not maintaining funding, we could jeopardize the incredible level of service they provide.”
- Mike Hallquist, Brookfield Alderman of District 4 took to Twitter to note: “Very, very real possibility that by 2025 Brookfield is forced to either substantially cut core services our residents want, or we turn to a referendum. This isn't a partisan or ideological problem, it's just a problem.”

You can also watch the League’s press conference that was shared live on the League’s Facebook page on the first day of the Annual Conference to learn more about how we need to fix the broken system of funding local governments. The press conference was featured in the [La Crosse Tribune](#) and [WXOW](#). Check out the full press conference [here](#).

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The League of Wisconsin Municipalities advocates for Wisconsin’s cities and villages, large and small, urban and rural, speaking up for local democracy and common-sense citizen-led government. Learn more at <http://www.lwm-info.org/>



PHOTO: Patrick Barlow, Village President of Holmen, left, Jerry Deschane, Executive Director of the League of Wisconsin Municipalities, center, and Justin Nickels, Mayor of Manitowoc and past President of the League of Wisconsin Municipalities, right.