



May 5, 2025

To: Eau Claire Zoning Policy Advisory Committee
From: Scott Rogers, Vice President Governmental Affairs

Congratulations to ZPAC on entering the home stretch of a long process to update and modernize the City of Eau Claire's Zoning Code.

The following are excerpts from the Chamber's current Business Issues Agenda that relate to this undertaking:

Housing supply and affordability

The local supply of available and affordable housing impacts our ability to meet the needs of a growing population, as well as affordability for all individuals and families. The Chippewa Valley Housing Task Force found that there is a shortage of housing in our community at all price and income levels. It is important for public policy to encourage increasing the supply of housing and removing barriers to housing development.

- Review, and modify as needed, regulations, policies, and building codes to ensure that they are up to date and do not unnecessarily hamper construction activities or increase costs.
- Update zoning codes and policies to eliminate outdated and arbitrary standards in order to encourage infill development, creation of missing middle housing types, a greater diversity of housing choices, compact growth, efficiency of public resources, and the ability to build the types of housing demanded by the marketplace. It is also important to reduce uncertainty in the development process, develop objective standards that can be adhered to without subjective approval processes, and respect property rights.
- Coordinate housing and transportation policies to maximize the impact of public benefits and resources.

Energy and the environment

Economic growth and environmental progress go hand in hand. Responsible stewardship of our resources can both grow our economy and preserve the planet.

- Compact, infill development provides an opportunity to grow housing and commercial opportunities in an environmentally-responsible fashion, reducing the amount of rural land needed for growth and providing more cost-effective utilization of existing infrastructure.

The purpose of this letter is to express our continued support of the overall purposes of the Century Code Update, and to reiterate the critical importance of the goal to "Produce more housing supply, diversity of choices, and affordability." Furthermore, the purposes that state: "Improve development process certainties" and "Reduce exclusionary zoning practices" are complementary keys to achieving improved supply and affordability.

We are aware of the communications ZPAC has received from the Housing Opportunities Commission and the Chippewa Valley Home Builders Association. They similarly express important points about the

value of specific improvements to the code, but also concerns about potential unintended consequences of other provisions that could inhibit supply and affordability.

As the City moves towards adopting a final version of its zoning code, we suggest policymakers keep the following points in mind:

- The city is part of an overall economic and social system. Every decision has consequences for other parts of the system, so specific standards adopted in one area can significantly affect another.
- One of the stated purposes of the process is to “Educate with evidence-based literature/data on the need for zoning reforms and associated co-benefits.” Applying this reveals that other communities have successfully adopted many of these reforms without the negative consequences feared by some.
- Taken as a whole, infill development is better for the environment, more financially productive for the community, and provides more opportunity for increases in supply and improvements in affordability. Onerous standards inhibiting infill could result in broader net negative consequences for land use and the environment.
- Carefully consider the supply and affordability consequences as provisions are finalized related to building design standards, aesthetics and anti-monotony mandates, tree preservation, park impact fees, amenities for multi-family housing, and parking requirements. Perhaps some of the desires in these areas can be achieved through incentives rather than costly mandates.
- Sections of the code that will positively affect supply and affordability include those that provide for smaller lot sizes and setbacks, revised zoning districts to allow for more housing types and gentle density increases, and the development of objective standards that will allow administrative approvals and reduce unnecessary costs and uncertainty in the development process.

The Century Code Update is an important process to help our community achieve improved housing supply and affordability. We encourage the ZPAC to keep this foremost in mind as the final code is approved.

Sincerely,



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