



Memorandum

Community Development Housing Opportunities Commission

April 9, 2025

To: Zoning Policy Advisory Committee

From: Housing Opportunities Commission

Re: Century Code Update

The Housing Opportunities Commission (HOC) was created by the City Council in 2020 to advise the City Council and further city housing policy. Included as part of the stated Purpose and Intent of the Commission is to:

“Recommend and review ordinances and other policies of general application that best ensure the availability of affordable housing in the city of Eau Claire.”

The stated duties of HOC include:

“Review affordable housing policies and provide recommendations and comments to the Plan Commission and City Council.”

Given these responsibilities, we are writing today to comment on the Century Code Update process as it relates to these responsibilities of the HOC. As the ZPAC approaches final draft recommendations for the City’s updated zoning code, we ask that you consider the following:

- The City of Eau Claire and Chippewa Valley are experiencing a critical need for more housing supply and improved affordability.
- The HOC agrees with the 12 stated purposes of the Century Code Update. All of them are important and, if achieved, will provide value to our community.
- The goal to “Produce more housing supply, diversity of choices, and affordability” is, in the view of HOC, the most critical purpose and should be a paramount consideration against which all sections of the code should be measured.
- A significant number of the proposed new standards have the potential to advance these goals through changes in minimum lot sizes, allowing gentle density increases, incentivizing compact and sustainable development, improving development process certainties, reducing exclusionary zoning practices, and lessening pressure on sprawl.
- It is important for ZPAC to carefully consider the impact on supply and affordability as it reviews proposed content related to building design standards, parking requirements, aesthetics, anti-monotony mandates, tree preservation, park impact fees, and other sections. If not done in a carefully balanced way, they could produce unintended consequences that could inhibit improvements to supply and affordability.

HOC is aware that the Chippewa Valley Home Builders Association is reaching out to ZPAC with specific examples of negative cost impacts related to some sections of the Code draft, and the Commissioners share some of those concerns because of the potential to raise housing cost. Below are some areas that should be reconsidered:

- Aesthetic standards that add significant costs that have to be recovered in the building price or rental rates. Twin homes and multi-family developments represent the most affordable housing types, and this is where such standards may have the most negative impact.
- Onerous tree preservation standards. A balanced approach could encourage tree cover with incentives rather than arbitrary requirements and fees that significantly increase costs and discourage infill development.
- Park impact fees and requirements. Parks are a significant asset that Eau Claire already enjoys. We understand the city is currently assessing its portfolio and use of parks. Imposition of these requirements should be postponed until such analysis is completed.
- Mandates for multi-family developments such as a high percentage of balconies, social gathering space, etc. This is an area where the market should be allowed to determine what is built, especially considering that multi-family is the most affordable type of housing that can be provided. Developers will still frequently provide these amenities for market reasons, but to mandate them for all developments is counterproductive to affordability.

Parking mandates that add costs to projects and are contrary to some of the stated goals of the zoning rewrite to reduce auto dependency. Once again, the space devoted to parking should be market-determined and it can't be assumed that every family and every bedroom represents an auto that must be parked. When applying one of the zoning rewrite's purposes of using current best practices, it should be noted that an increasing number of cities across the country are successfully removing parking minimums.

It is the hope of the Housing Opportunities Commission that the ZPAC will continue to work towards a Zoning Code that balances the city planning with the need to keep housing costs from climbing unnecessarily. Feel free to reach out to the HOC members with any questions or concerns.

Respectfully Submitted,



Jennifer Chaput, Commission Chair