



July 17, 2025

To: Eau Claire City Council
From: Scott Rogers, Vice President Governmental Affairs

Re: Eau Claire Century Code update and proposed amendments

The Chamber's motto - "Together for Business • Together for Community" - reflects our commitment to build a strong area economy and quality of life in the Eau Claire region. We're writing today to express our continued support of the overall purposes of the Century Code Update, and to reiterate the critical importance of its goals to "Produce more housing supply, diversity of choices, and affordability," "Improve development process certainties," and "Reduce exclusionary zoning practices." Most of the proposed code does, indeed, address these important objectives.

Unfortunately, there are some provisions in the current draft that would do the opposite: Inhibit infill development, significantly increase already-challenging construction costs, add red tape, and ultimately make it harder to increase housing supply and improve affordability. You have also heard from the JONAH Affordable Housing Task Force, the Housing Opportunities Commission, the Housing Our Neighbors Planning Collaborative, and the Chippewa Valley Home Builders Association with similar concerns and specific data on the negative effects of these provisions.

Therefore, while we support adoption of the new code, it should only be enacted after approving the following proposed amendments:

- **Tree preservation:** The amendment proposed by Council Members Schoen and Johnson to provide more balance between sustainability goals and the urgent need for more affordable housing. Tree cover is a desirable community asset, but the current language is the wrong strategy in the wrong place for achieving actual results. Onerous and expensive standards will inhibit infill development, which overall is better for the environment, more financially productive for the community, and efficiently uses existing infrastructure. Otherwise, it will push development to places other than the City of Eau Claire. There are community-wide strategies and incentives for tree preservation and urban forest enhancement - apart from the zoning code - that would be more effective to achieve the same benefits.
- **Aesthetic garage frontage mandates for two- to four-unit dwellings:** The amendment by Council Member Brewster endorsed by the Plan Commission to standardize the garage frontage limit at a more reasonable 15 feet, the same as for single family dwellings. This would establish affordability and marketability needs as more important than subjective aesthetic taste
- **Requiring balconies or patios on multi-family projects.** The amendment also recommended by the Plan Commission that would mandate fewer amenity requirements, effectively eliminating the balcony requirement. Developers already include balconies on many projects

as determined by market demand, but the amendment eliminates it as a mandate that would inhibit projects trying to serve people where a lower rent cost is essential.

We are also uncomfortable with the current provisions for parkland dedication and impact fees, which the Chippewa Valley Home Builders Association points out could add over \$2,300 to the cost of a single-family lot, over \$1,900 to a twin home unit, and considerable costs to multi-family developments. Since the city is currently assessing its portfolio and use of parks, we would encourage an amendment to postpone enactment of this section until such analysis is completed.

As you make these important decisions, it's critical to remember the following things about the application of this zoning code:

- It's important to think of the city and region as an economic and social system, where every decision on one thing can have consequences on other parts of the system.
- The City of Eau Claire's zoning code will only apply within this city. The policies of other governmental jurisdictions surrounding us can be different. Any city policies that inhibit housing or make it too expensive will push development to other places, potentially with negative economic and/or environmental consequences.
- Encouraging additional housing supply is not the only answer to affordability, but there can be no improvement in affordability and availability of housing without more supply.

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

Sincerely,



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P.S. We arrive at our positions on behalf of the business community through application of the principles in the Chamber's [Business Issues Agenda](#). Here are its areas which apply to this process:

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.