



Scott Rogers <rogers@eauclairechamber.org>

Call to Action: Eau Claire Zoning Code

1 message

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Reply-To: Scott Rogers <reply-m755w35z@eauclaireareachamberofcommerce.growthzoneapp.com>

To: rogers@eauclairechamber.org

We need your help TODAY to prevent enactment of provisions in the proposed City of Eau Claire Zoning Code that would drastically affect the ability to improve housing supply and affordability in our community when we need it the most.

What this is about: If you've been following our [Chamber Business Advocate](#) coverage over the past few months, you know that the Eau Claire City Council will be voting next week on a full update of the city's zoning code. This is an important step in moving towards the critical priority to improve our local housing supply and affordability. While most of the code is a step in the right direction to modernize regulations, allow the market to function, and improve development certainties, there are a few provisions that could do the opposite -- significantly increase development costs and create unintended consequences discouraging needed infill housing in the city.

Why this is urgent: The eleven members of the Eau Claire City Council will be voting to enact the full code next week, with a Public Hearing at 6 p.m. on Monday and action at its Legislative Session at 4 p.m. on Tuesday. So the time is short to weigh in by contacting City Council members. This is the one chance for the Council to pass amendments to address the problematic sections of the proposed code before it takes effect.

What needs to be changed: There are three sections of the proposed code that would inhibit infill development, significantly increase already-challenging construction costs, add red tape, and ultimately make it harder to increase housing supply and improve affordability. For all three, there will be amendments proposed at the Council meeting to improve the language to avoid those negative consequences but still achieve the overall goals of the zoning code update. They are:

1. Tree preservation standards: The proposed code currently includes provisions that would require homeowners and builders to replace or pay significant fees for trees over 12 inches in diameter that are removed. At \$400 per inch for the required 30% replacement, fees could run into the thousands of dollars even for just a few affected trees.

Proposed amendment: Council members Jessica Schoen and Charlie Johnson are introducing an amendment that would exempt most current lots with four or fewer dwelling units, exempt affordable housing projects, provide more simplified regulations when 10 or fewer trees are removed, and increase the diameter requirement to 14 inches. "These changes ensure our most affordable housing types are not impacted by additional costs while still maintaining a reasonable amount of protections for trees across the community," said Schoen in an email explaining the amendment.

Notes: The Chamber supports this amendment. Tree cover is a desirable community asset, but this is the wrong strategy for achieving realistic 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. Instead of this provision, there are community-wide strategies and incentives for tree preservation that would more realistically achieve the same benefits.

2. Aesthetic mandates for two- to four-unit dwellings that limit garage front projections to five feet. This essentially mandates aesthetic taste but would increase costs and inhibit affordability for entry level home buyers, such as those purchasing twin homes, and others occupying homes on the more affordable end of the spectrum.

Proposed amendment: At its June 30 meeting, the Plan Commission endorsed a recommended amendment drafted by Council Member Aaron Brewster to standardize the garage frontage limit at a more reasonable 15 feet, the same as for single family dwellings.

Notes: The Chamber supports this amendment. It establishes affordability and meeting marketability needs as more important than subjective aesthetic taste

3. Requiring balconies or patios on multi-family projects. The current draft includes amenity requirements for multi-family housing projects that essentially would require about three fourths of the units to have a balcony. The Chippewa Valley Home Builders Assn estimates this would add about \$150/month to rent for a typical apartment.

Proposed amendment: The Plan Commission also recommended another amendment proposed by Brewster that would mandate fewer amenity requirements, effectively eliminating the balcony requirement.

Notes: The Chamber supports this amendment. Developers already include balconies on many projects as determined by market demand, but eliminates it as a mandate that would inhibit projects trying to serve people where a lower rent cost is essential.

What YOU can do:

- **Take a moment right now to contact the eleven members of the Eau Claire City Council and ask them to approve all three of these amendments.** In your own words, just let them know briefly why you're concerned about housing supply and affordability in our community. If you live or do business in the city, explain that connection.

[Click here to send an email to all City Council members](#)

[Click here for individual contact information for each City Council member](#)

- **Speak at the Public Hearing** on Monday evening at 6:00 p.m. There is a three-minute time limit.

More information:

[Century Code Update full website](#) (City of Eau Claire)

[Full zoning code documents](#) (City of Eau Claire)

Housing affordability advocates and the business community have provided these communications with comments about the need to prioritize affordability in the zoning code:

[Zoning letter - JONAH Affordable Housing Task Force](#) (JONAH)

[Zoning Letter](#) (Housing Opportunities Commission)

[Zoning communication](#) (Housing Our Neighbors Planning Cooperative)

[Chamber letter to Zoning Policy Advisory Comm](#) (Eau Claire Area Chamber of Commerce)

[Remarks to June 30 Plan Commission](#) (Scott Rogers, Eau Claire Area Chamber of Commerce)

[Remarks to July 7 City Council Meeting](#) (Scott Rogers, Eau Claire Area Chamber of Commerce)

[Comments and Recommendations about the Proposed Zoning Code](#) (Chippewa Valley Home Builders Association)

Recent media coverage:

[Century Code Update nears adoption, but tree protections seen as too strict](#) (WQOW News 18)

[Proposal in Eau Claire Century Code Update growing into controversy](#) (WEAU 13 News)

[Homebuilders association says some zoning changes will impact homeowners](#) (Leader-Telegram \$)

The Chamber's position on housing supply and affordability

Our [Business Issues Agenda](#) supports the process to "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."

Please feel free to contact me if you have questions or feedback to share.

Sincerely,

Scott

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