

June 24, 2025

To: The Eau Claire Zoning Policy Advisory Committee (ZPAC)  
From: Housing Our Neighbors Planning Collaborative  
Re: City of Eau Claire proposed zoning code update

Congratulations on the ample effort that has gone into updating the city of Eau Claire's zoning code update. Many of the proposed zoning changes would significantly add to Eau Claire's housing supply and make housing more affordable. The city is to be commended for working hard to address those significant community housing needs.

The Chippewa Valley Housing Task Force noted a shortage of housing overall in our region at all price points as well as a lack of housing that is affordable to many residents, especially those who earn incomes that are less than Eau Claire County's median income. Changes in public policy, including alterations to Eau Claire's zoning regulations, are necessary to increase housing supply and to remove barriers to additional housing development.

A significant number of proposed new policies ZPAC has included in its proposed zoning code update appear to advance efforts to boost available affordable housing. Among the notable changes to the zoning code we support that should reduce housing costs are:

- Smaller lot sizes
- Reduced setbacks
- The allowance of additional housing types in revised zoning districts that allow for increased density.

We are aware of communications ZPAC has already received related to updating the city's zoning code from the Chippewa Valley Home Builders Association, The Eau Claire Area Chamber of Commerce, the city of Eau Claire Housing Opportunities Commission, and the JONAH Affordable Housing Task Force. Each of those letters expresses support for policies that increase affordable housing along with concerns about the impact of some proposed policies that would seem to impede affordable housing efforts.

Among the areas of concern to our group are:

- Aesthetic standards that would add to the cost of home building and would run counter to building affordable housing. These costs would be recovered in the building price or rental rates, adding to the cost of housing.
- Tree preservation standards, as proposed, would add significant fees, especially for smaller infill developments. A more balanced approach could use incentives to encourage tree cover rather than adopting a policy that would seem to discourage infill development.
- Proposed requirements for multifamily development, such as requiring balconies and social gathering spaces, would add to the costs of housing, not make it more affordable.
- While some parking regulations are needed, current rules should be amended to require less parking as they add costs to building projects. Local governments across the U.S. are reducing parking minimums in an effort to better address affordable housing.

Updating the city's zoning code is of vital importance to assisting the city of Eau Claire in better addressing its goal of providing affordable housing for our community. We urge city officials to adopt policies that will best help accomplish this important mission.

Sincerely,  
Housing Our Neighbors Planning Collaborative

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