



New League Conflict Management Resource

Jerry Deschane, Executive Director, League of Wisconsin Municipalities

WIPPS WISCONSIN INSTITUTE for PUBLIC POLICY and SERVICE

Conflict can get in the way of any organization's ability to get things done, and local governments are no exception. Communication failures, differing goals and agendas, and incomplete information are just a few of the ingredients that feed our 21st century stew of bad feelings among local elected officials. Unmanaged conflict on local elected bodies can sometimes lead to bad outcomes for the citizens of Wisconsin cities and villages. Those bad outcomes may cost taxpayers money or may cost a local economy a lost opportunity to create jobs or build social capital.

Many observers would say that unmanaged conflict is on the rise, particularly in the halls of government. It has been labeled many things including incivility and poor manners, and blamed on a variety of factors, most notably a consequence of our always-on, no-holds-barred social media communications blanket.

The League, in cooperation with League of Wisconsin Municipal Mutual Insurance, is introducing an important new resource for Wisconsin cities and villages that are dealing with conflict. The League and League Insurance are partnering with the Wisconsin Institute for Public Policy and Service (WIPPS) to provide training, information, and consultation for elected leaders in conflict management. The new training opportunities will begin later this year.

WIPPS is a well-respected public service organization that has a tremendous track record in conflict management. This service will be an important tool for local governing bodies where conflict is getting in the way of serving the community.

The new League-League Insurance-WIPPS partnership will start with a series of workshops, blogs, and other information tools offered later this summer. WIPPS will provide conflict management tips and ideas through those vehicles, and through regular articles in *The Municipality* magazine. (Look for the first article in July!) Conflict management workshops will be a key element of League training programs throughout the year, both in-person (when possible) and by video conference.

Founded in 2007, WIPPS is a unit of the University of Wisconsin System with a 12-year history of working with communities and local government to address issues that matter using the resources and expertise of the public university. WIPPS professionals work with local governments to do strategic visioning and planning; issue identification and prioritization; organizational culture change; group communication processes; mediation and conflict resolution; public engagement training; and other aspects of healthy governance and decision-making practices.

"There's a misnomer about conflict in local government," said WIPPS Executive Director Eric Giordano. "Conflict is an inevitable element of local decision making; it's unavoidable. The challenge is not to eliminate conflict, but to manage it in a practical and productive manner so that the public's work can get done. We are thrilled to be working in partnership with the League and League Insurance to bring this resource to all the cities and villages in Wisconsin."

WIPPS and the League will be using standard information outlets for this new conflict management resource, but they will also be piloting newer outlets, including blogs and short video clips that may be used for ongoing training at city and village meetings.

WIPPS will provide one-on-one consultation where a community has a complex or longstanding conflict management challenge. The cost of this consultation will be negotiated between WIPPS and the individual municipality, except in cases where League Insurance deems it advisable to support one of its insured municipalities. League Insurance CEO Matt Becker will determine where conflict is costing communities money and will underwrite the cost of WIPPS consultation for those communities. He anticipates recommending the service to four or five communities over the course of a year.

"Local legislative bodies often make critical decisions impacting many citizens and millions of dollars in public and private investment. While conflict among decision makers is what democracy is all about, we want to do everything we can

to help our policyholders work through those tough decisions fairly and efficiently,” said Becker.

League Insurance is a nonprofit mutual insurance company created by the League in 1987 to provide liability and casualty insurance products specifically designed for unique municipal needs. The company insures the majority of Wisconsin cities and villages, and through a partially owned affiliate, Municipal Property Insurance Company, insures the property of most cities and villages.

About the Author:

Jerry Deschane is the Executive Director of the League of Wisconsin Municipalities. He is the League’s fifth Executive Director since the League was founded in 1898. Contact Jerry at jdeschane@lwm-info.org



League Insurance Policyholders Share \$2.5 Million

Just in time to help with COVID-19 costs, League of Wisconsin Municipalities Mutual Insurance has begun distributing \$2.5 million in dividends to member policyholders. The annual dividend checks are funds being returned to the League’s more than 450 policyholders. The dividends are the result of lower claims and positive investment results.

“The safety of our employees and citizens is the highest priority, and we hope that these funds will make that a little easier to achieve,” said League Insurance President and Elm Grove Village Manager Dave De Angelis in a letter to policyholders.

The dividends are being distributed to policyholders now. In some cases, League Insurance’s team of independent agents throughout the state are delivering the good news, in others, communities will hear directly from League Insurance. Individual dividend amounts are determined by a formula that takes into account each policy holder’s overall premium payments and their claim experience. Despite being able to return tens of millions of dollars to policyholders over the years, League Insurance is a strong company, with a policyholder surplus that exceeds \$43,000,000. Policyholder

surplus is an important protection against major losses and is considered an important measure of a company.

“LWMMI is a reflection of its members – the municipalities of Wisconsin. It’s a small company that is overseen by a group of dedicated and pragmatic directors,” said League Insurance CEO Matt Becker. “Like the League, our mission is very simple: we are here to meet the needs of the cities and villages of Wisconsin.”

League Insurance is a mutual insurance company established by the League during a time when many for-profit insurance companies were turning their backs on local governments, considering them too risky. League Insurance, also known by the acronym “LWMMI,” provides workers’ compensation, liability, and vehicle insurance for members of the League of Municipalities, including special districts and municipal utilities. League Insurance is also a one-third owner of Municipal Property Insurance Company (MPIC), which insures the property of most of Wisconsin’s cities and villages. Becker said both companies are focused on long-term stability and meeting the unique needs of municipal government.

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