

# Introducing *Enabling Better Places: A User's Guide to Neighborhood Affordability*

Curt Witynski, Deputy Executive Director, League of Wisconsin Municipalities



practical – for the makeup of modern households. It is critical to make the process of adapting existing housing stock and building smaller and more varied housing easier.

The *Enabling Better Places* guide recommends a menu of changes to local zoning codes that Wisconsin communities should consider making and explains how best to accomplish the changes, including ways to convince a skeptical public. The guide includes tools to assist in the process of code reform such as sample ordinance language.

Examples of code changes the guide recommends include the following. Doing any of these will put your community in a better position for offering more housing options:

- Allow multi-unit housing as permitted uses in single-family zoning districts which have historically included two-family and multifamily.
- Realign lot widths and areas to match historic patterns favoring narrower lots.
- Reduce setbacks to historic distances to allow greater use of existing lots.
- Allow accessory dwellings by right for all single-family zoning districts.
- Permit residential uses within downtown and Main Street zoning districts.
- Permit residential uses, including multi-family, in commercial districts.
- Manage residential density with building types not units per acre in each district.
- Reduce or eliminate parking minimums.
- Assess and streamline the subdivision and workforce housing application process, including standards that direct development outcomes and a time limit on municipal response.

We are pleased to announce a new Wisconsin-specific League tool to help communities adjust their zoning code and remove obstacles to the development of more affordable housing. Last year, the League partnered with the Congress for the New Urbanism (CNU) and a broad group of Wisconsin organizations<sup>1</sup> to develop a new guide for making small zoning changes to better enable the creation of more workforce and “missing middle” housing within a community.

The guide, *Enabling Better Places: A User's Guide to Neighborhood Affordability* will be posted to our website in mid-February here: <https://lwm-info.org/1473/Housing>

Municipal officials in Wisconsin, like community leaders across the nation, are struggling to make more affordable housing options available in their communities. The availability and pricing of housing is not meeting the needs of people working in jobs that are vital to the success of Wisconsin communities, such as: teachers, firefighters, small business owners, and service industry workers.

There are many reasons for a lack of affordable housing in Wisconsin communities. One cause that local policymakers can address is outdated local zoning regulations and policies that inadvertently restrict the housing market. Much of the existing housing stock in Wisconsin cities and villages consists of large, single-family homes which may not be affordable – or

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1. The League thanks the following organizations for contributing financially and/or offering technical advice on the development of *Enabling Better Places: A User's Guide to Neighborhood Affordability*: Wisconsin Realtors Association, Wisconsin Builders Association, AARP-Wisconsin, Wisconsin Housing and Economic Development Authority (WHEDA), National Association of Industrial and Office Parks (NAIOP)-Wisconsin, and the American Planning Association - Wisconsin

**Training on How to Use the Guide.** CNU faculty will be in Wisconsin this month to provide training for municipal elected officials, staff, and private planning consultants interested in using the guide. Join us for our in-person training:

**February 21 – Eau Claire,** Morning Session 9:00–11:30 a.m.  
Afternoon Session - 1:00–4:00 p.m.

**February 22 – Plover,** Morning Session 9:00–11:30 a.m.  
Afternoon Session - 1:00–4:00 p.m.

**February 23 – Oshkosh,** Morning Session 9:00–11:30 a.m.  
Afternoon Session - 1:00–4:00 p.m.

Both the morning and afternoon sessions will focus on the methodology of incremental code reform and the process and implementation described within the guide. The training will cover how to use the documents in the guide, navigating the steps to amending a code, and determining where to start. The **morning session** will include content geared for elected municipal officials, city and village administrators/managers, builders, and advocates. The **afternoon session** will be geared toward municipal planning staff and private planning consultants. You may attend both sessions.

The goal of the guide and the training is to show that bite-sized zoning code changes are possible and can have an immediate impact on removing obstacles to the development of workforce and missing middle housing.

**Register for Training Sessions:** Register for training sessions on how to implement the recommendations made by the *Enabling Better Places: A User's Guide to Neighborhood Affordability* here: <https://lwm-info.org/1569/Using-the-Leagues-Zoning-Guide>

#### About the Author:

Curt Witynski is the League's Deputy Executive Director. He joined the League staff as assistant legal counsel in 1987. Before becoming Deputy Executive Director, Curt served as the League's Legal Counsel for eight years. Contact Curt at [witynski@lwm-info.org](mailto:witynski@lwm-info.org)

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