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**Brad Boycks, Executive Director**

**Support for Hearings Held on Workforce Housing Package**

On Thursday, May 18, the Senate Committee on Housing, Rural Issues, and Forestry and the Assembly Committee on Housing and Real Estate held public hearings on a package of workforce housing bills that we have been working on for the past several months. WBA President Mike Howe, WBA Outside Legal Counsel Robert Procter, and WBA Executive Director Brad Boycks testified in favor of the package of bills and took questions from committee members.

The bills that make up the workforce housing package are:

* **Senate Bill 296 (SB 296),** relating to judicial review of local governmental decisions related to certain land development, local approval of residential housing development, and amendment of zoning ordinances
* **Senate Bill 297 (SB 297),** relating to housing rehabilitation loans awarded by the Wisconsin Housing and Economic Development Authority
* **Senate Bill 293 (SB 293),** relating to residential housing infrastructure revolving loan fund and revolving loan program
* **Senate Bill 294 (SB 294),** relating to a main street housing rehabilitation revolving loan fund and loan program
* **Senate Bill 295 (SB 296),** relating to commercial-to-housing conversion revolving loan fund and loan program

For the past several months, we have been working with Senate Housing, Rural Issues, and Forestry Chair Quinn and Vice-Chair Jagler, Assembly Housing and Real Estate Chair Brooks, the Wisconsin Realtors Association, the Wisconsin League of Municipalities, the Wisconsin Towns Association, and the Wisconsin Counties Association on the policy items contained in SB 296, 297, 293, 294, and 296.

SB 296 will help streamline the approval process for residential housing and also assure that only a simple majority is required to rezone land and establishes that only those that have an owner interest in the property that is subject to approval, or will sustain damages and has provided a statement or has testified at a previous public meeting, may seek review of the land use proposal.

SB 297 is a follow up to 2021 Act 221 which created a loan program for the remodeling of existing workforce homes administered by the Wisconsin Housing and Economic Development Authority (WHEDA). SB 297 makes some changes to the homes that may qualify for these loans in addition to including work done for the remove of asbestos and the repair or replacement of interior walls, ceilings, or floors.

SB 293, SB 294, and SB 295 all create zero interest loans to create more workforce, single family homes, workforce multifamily housing, and senior housing, and requires municipalities to show changes that they have implemented to reduce the cost of housing in the projects being considered for a zero-interest loan from WHEDA. Those cost saving items include “voluntarily revising zoning ordinances, subdivision regulations, or other land development regulations to increase development density, expedite approvals, reduce impact, water connection, and inspection fees, or reduce parking, building, or other development costs with respect to the development of residential housing supported by the project.”

WBA believes that passage of SB 293 will be beneficial to spur the additional development and construction of single-family workforce homes. When we have surveyed our membership over the past several years asking them what can be done to bring down the cost of workforce housing, we have learned the main costs drivers can be traced to the cost of residential infrastructure and the requirements passed by local units of government (impact fees and minimum lot sizes to name a few).

SB 293 addresses both of these issues by requiring a local unit of government to work with a developer to find ways to make changes on the local level to voluntary reduce the cost of housing and provide a zero-interest loan at an amount that does not exceed 20 percent of the total cost of the project including land.

Finally, SB 296 establishes a zero-interest loan program that can be used for the remodeling or demolition of vacant commercial buildings that can then be used for workforce multifamily housing or senior housing.

According to our National Association of Home Builders, excessive and outdated regulations add over $93,000 to the final price of a new home, increasing the total by nearly 24 percent.

Additionally, in a 2019 report titled Falling Behind: Addressing Wisconsin’s Workforce Housing Shortage, Wisconsin has created 75 percent fewer lots and 55 percent fewer new homes than pre-recession averages, in just the last 11 years. This scarcity has been compounded by a series of other factors, such as lot and other local government restrictions, volatile interest rates, and inflated costs of materials. These bills will go a long way in assisting the many challenges faced in the creation of workforce housing.

WBA will now be working with bill authors to determine if any of the bills need slight changes prior to them being voted out of each housing committee and then being made available for a vote before the full State Assembly and State Senate in June.