2025-2027 Budget Talking Points
Economic Development Initiatives

Wisconsin's cities and villages strive to find ways not only to maintain the services needed for a thriving community for their existing residents and businesses, but also to grow that community through partnerships that capitalize on the expertise and initiative of municipal officials. These efforts enhance the quality of life for Wisconsin residents and make our communities attractive places to live and work.

With Wisconsin's expected population decline of nearly 200,000 residents by 2050, promoting growth is more important now than ever before. The initiatives to promote economic development across our municipalities vary as widely as their demographics, which is why an all-of-the-above approach at the state level is pivotal to help ensure every community can continue to prosper in a changing world.

Partnerships with the state allow municipal leaders to continue creating the spaces and places that everyone from young professionals to retirees want in the communities they call home. By continuing to foster the shared state and local approach to economic development, Wisconsin can help sustain long-term economic growth and prosperity and flip the projected population trends in our favor.

Childcare

League's 2025-2027 Budget Request - Provide an Investment in Childcare Partnerships

2025-27 Executive Budget - $442 million+ *2023-25 State Budget - $15 million+*

From 2016 to 2022, there has been a 34% reduction in childcare programs. Presently, nearly 60% of childcare providers are operating below their licensed capacity due to insufficient staffing while 48,000 children are on waitlists for childcare slots around the state. Childcare deserts exist in communities of all sizes, impacting workforce participation and business productivity and forcing residents to consider moving as an option for their family. Meanwhile, those families who have childcare slots are having an increasingly difficult time affording the high cost.

Wisconsin municipalities do not traditionally have a role in providing childcare services. But cities and villages are responsive to their residents, and with childcare being an increasing concern for many young families, municipalities are looking for ways to help address those concerns.

In Sun Prairie, the city's $20,000 Child Care Worker Credentialing Scholarship Program is paying for the initial credentialing and ongoing education of childcare workers. In Sheboygan, the city helped fund and cleared regulatory hurdles for the A Million Dreamz' 24-hour childcare center. In Prairie du Sac, the village partnered with the school district and chamber of commerce to break ground on a 168-slot state-of-the-art childcare center. In Hillsboro, the city partnered with a developer and church to create a joint childcare and senior recreation center. In La Crosse, the city provided $1.2 million to The Parenting Place to create the Together We Can program, allowing employers to get up to a 50% reimbursement when they partner with local childcare programs.

Addressing childcare is a workforce issue, and until it is addressed, it will continue to stunt our economic growth. Wisconsin municipalities stand ready to help foster partnerships and solutions to address growing childcare needs but require state assistance to be able to continue their work. Grant funding targeted for creative childcare solutions like those above would assist municipalities.

Homelessness, Mental Health, and Substance Abuse

League's 2025-2027 Budget Request - Provide an Investment in Homelessness Prevention

2025-27 Executive Budget - $24.1 million *2023-25 State Budget - Base Funding*

Homelessness, largely driven by mental health and substance abuse disorders, is a growing concern throughout the state. While homelessness was falling from 2014 to 2021, the number of homeless individuals rose from 2021 to 2023. 65% of the homeless population is outside Dane and Milwaukee Counties. This is an urban AND rural issue. It is also an economic issue in Wisconsin communities.

Providing appropriate care and services for homeless individuals requires a partnership between the state who provides resources, counties who administer the services, and municipalities whose public safety officials are most likely to encounter those suffering from a crisis. Investments in homelessness prevention, substance abuse prevention, and mental health treatment ensure that our downtowns of all sizes continue to be attractive places to live, work, and visit, ensuring that all our residents can prosper.

Stewardship Program Reauthorization

League's 2025-2027 Budget Request - Reauthorize Stewardship at $33.25 million Per Year

2025-27 Executive Budget - $100.0m/yr *2023-25 State Budget - $33.25m/yr*

The Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program has been a vital tool for Wisconsin municipalities to fund greenspace projects that attract new residents and visitors. Local parks, funded through Local Unit of Government (LUG) Subprogram, and local boat and kayak launches, funded through Recreational Boating Aids, are incredibly popular projects for community members. Reauthorizing the Stewardship Program will assist in the continued development of new parks, trails, ballfields, and boat launches in Wisconsin's cities and villages, helping to foster attractive places and spaces for prospective residents.

WEDC Community Assistance Programs

League's 2025-2027 Budget Request - Provide a $5.0 million One-Time Increase for WEDC Grants

2025-27 Executive Budget - Base Funding *2023-25 State Budget - Base Funding*

Three of the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation's (WEDC) grant programs continuously turn away worthy projects due to a lack of funding, leaving blight and contamination in place while municipalities grow out, not up. The Community Development Investment Grant Program, budgeted for $7.8 million in Fiscal Year 2024-2025, the Brownfields Grant Program, budgeted for $3 million, and the Idle Sites Redevelopment Grant Program, budgeted for $2.5 million, combine for $13.3 million, but the projects funded through these programs provide astronomical returns in economic development.

Every community, large and small, has blight issues they'd like to address from a closed big box store, a shuttered factory, or a decrepit warehouse. Often, contamination and demolition issues pose the biggest redevelopment challenges. Municipalities are able to advance new in-build growth, but often times grant assistance is needed to begin site assessment and preparation work.

Department of Tourism Programs

League's 2025-2027 Budget Request - Provide $2.0 million for Rural Creative Economy Grants

2025-27 Executive Budget - $1.0 million *2023-25 State Budget - No Action*

League's 2025-2027 Budget Request - Provide $453,300 for Office of Film and Creative Industries

2025-27 Executive Budget - $453,300 *2023-25 State Budget - No Action*

Promoting all forms of economic growth attracts new residents and retains existing residents. The Rural Creative Economy initiative would promote our state's beauty, capturing the majestic nature of Wisconsin, and reviving small cities and villages with new visitors who leave their money behind at local businesses. The Office of Film and Creative Industries will help promote Wisconsin on the big screen, showing everyone across the nation and world all our state has to offer.