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Reducing Alcohol Beverage Licensing Fees in Response to COVID-19 Pandemic

League of Wisconsin Municipalities

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The League of Wisconsin Municipalities has received many questions relating to whether municipalities may reduce alcohol beverage licensing fees for the upcoming 2020 licensing renewal period or take other steps to help restaurants and bars hurt by the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting “Safer-at-Home” order.

Reducing Licensing Fees. Municipal governing bodies may reduce alcohol beverage licensing fees for the 2020 licensing renewal period. Licensing fees are determined locally but must be within the maximum and minimum ranges specified by state law.

Maximum and Minimum license fees under state law:

Class “A” beer – no state maximum or minimum; the amount is determined by the municipality

Class “B” beer -- \$100 maximum; no minimum

“Class A” liquor -- \$500 maximum; \$50 minimum

“Class B” liquor -- \$500 maximum; \$50 minimum

Reserve “Class B” liquor renewal -- \$500 maximum; \$50 minimum

“Class C” wine license -- \$100 maximum; no minimum

A community could, at its discretion, reduce the 2020 renewal fees for Class “A” beer, Class “B” beer, and “Class C” wine to zero. The fees for “Class A” liquor, “Class B” liquor, and Reserve “Class B” liquor renewal licenses could be reduced to \$50 each. Restaurants and bars typically hold Class B licenses and restaurants without an intoxicating liquor license may have a Class C wine license. Class A licenses are typically held by stores and sell for consumption off premise.

In communities that set license fees by ordinance, governing bodies wishing to reduce fees will need to adopt an ordinance modifying the alcohol beverage licensing renewal fees for the July 1, 2020 to June 30, 2021 licensing year. In communities with ordinances specifying that fees are amended by resolution of the governing body, the governing body will need to adopt a resolution modifying the fees.

Waiving Late Fees for Alcohol Beverage Renewal Applications. Another step communities might consider taking to provide partial relief to restaurants and bars hurt by the COVID-19 pandemic is to waive any late fees the municipality imposes when applicants file their alcohol beverage renewal applications after the deadline for submittal.