



MEMO

PLANNING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

To: Common Council

From: Dave Kittel, Director of Planning and Community Development

Date: 9/24/2025

Re: Discussion on Continuation of Rooming House Licensing Under Ordinance 19.22

Background information:

The purpose of this memo is to initiate a discussion regarding the continued allowance and regulation of rooming houses within the City under Ordinance 19.22. Given evolving housing needs, enforcement challenges, and community feedback, it may be appropriate to re-evaluate whether rooming houses remain a viable and beneficial housing option. At this time there is one licensed rooming house in the city. The definition of a rooming house is:

Roominghouse means any building or any part thereof containing rooming units in which space is let by the owner or operator and having common bathroom facilities.

Ordinance [19.22](#) outlines the requirements for operating a rooming house, including licensing, inspections, minimum facility standards, and sanitary maintenance. Key provisions include:

- **Annual Licensing** through the City Clerk's office with a \$25 fee.
- **Inspections** by the Building Inspector to ensure compliance.
- **Minimum Standards** for bathroom facilities, floor area, window coverings, and exits.
- **Sanitary and Safety Requirements** for operators.
- **Enforcement Mechanisms** including suspension and revocation of licenses.

Rooming houses have historically provided low-cost housing options, particularly for individuals with limited income or transitional housing needs. However, concerns have been raised regarding:

- **Code compliance and enforcement capacity**
- **Safety**
- **Neighborhood impacts and compatibility**

Staff did look to see what other communities have similar provisions and found three other communities ([Waukesha](#), [Medford](#), and [Milwaukee](#)). The language for all were similar in nature but had additional provisions to restrict the location of a rooming house, where currently the City's doesn't.

To guide the council's discussion, consider the following:

1. Housing Need & Equity

- Do rooming houses still serve a critical housing need in our community?
- Are there alternative housing models that better meet those needs?

2. Regulatory Effectiveness

- Is the current ordinance sufficient to ensure safe and sanitary conditions?
- Are inspections and enforcement adequately resourced?

3. Neighborhood Compatibility

- Have rooming houses contributed to complaints or conflicts in residential areas?
- Are there zoning or location-based considerations that should be addressed?

4. Policy Options

- Should the City continue to allow rooming houses under the current ordinance?
- Should the ordinance be amended to strengthen standards or limit locations?
- Should rooming houses be phased out in favor of other housing types?

Staff recommends the council discuss the above points and provide direction on whether to:

- Maintain the current ordinance as-is
- Propose amendments to Ordinance 19.22 to include more guidance on where these can be located
- Initiate a broader housing policy review to assess alternatives

Staff are in favor of keeping the provision with amendments to require Plan Commission review and a public hearing with final action by the Common Council for rooming houses in a single or two family zoning district, the same as a special exception, and allowed in residential multifamily by right. This would give opportunity for some areas to provide additional housing options while balancing the characteristics of a neighborhood and concerns of residents.

Staff can prepare additional analysis or draft ordinance revisions based on council feedback.

Strategic Plan:

This item is not directly linked to the strategic plan, but having a variety of housing options is apart of the strategic plan with objectives to add housing and diversification of housing in the community.

Budget:

Not applicable

Recommendation:

This item is up for discussion and direction.

