

April XX, 2024

Governor Tim Walz
130 State Capitol
75 Rev Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
St. Paul, MN 55155

Re: Retention of City Zoning Authority

Dear Governor Walz,

We, the cities of Ramsey, _____ are writing to you to convey our support and commitment ensuring every individual and family can find their home and hope it is within Minnesota. We do want to share our deepest concerns at what we see as the exceptionally ill-advised and harmful efforts presently circulating in the legislature that seek to eliminate or reduce the role of cities in zoning decisions.

We are the level of government that most impacts our citizens. We are the first level of government that protects the health and safety of Minnesotan, as well as their property and the livability of their communities. While we appreciate the efforts being made to address the housing crisis, we also believe the proposed legislation being considered does not align with the unique needs and challenges faced by local communities across the state.

We always have taken seriously our role in community planning. Our zoning codes and enforcement practices serve as models not only for other communities in our own state, but across the country. If passed in any form, the current proposed legislation will cause grievance and undue hardship for our cities by changing local control on setbacks, limiting parking requirements, mandating types of housing on residential lots, authorizing subdivision of residential lots, mandating local minimum densities, controlling replacement of affordable housing while simultaneously commandeering the use of private property, restricting the use of appliances and removing both the public and elected officials from the review process among many other detrimental items in the legislation.

The special interest groups, not answerable to any communities in the state, are seeking to reap unrestricted profits for themselves while ignoring the financial impact and potential danger their projects and their efforts will have on the citizens of a given community. This legislation does nothing to guarantee or increase affordable housing but may in fact increase the unaffordability and unattainability of home ownership by mandating and prioritizing efficiency over affordability.

For example, cities throughout Minnesota actively seek out and allow to be built multifamily units, have always been keenly aware of the need for affordable housing, and have engaged in careful planning and marketing for a rapidly developing regions or to address local needs. An increase in the development of commercial properties in our areas will greatly broaden the tax base now as it has in the past. Many of these properties have been provided with available sewer and water that has been carefully designed to address future capacity needs.

If the provisions we have seen circulating in the legislature were to come to pass, cities would be unable to prevent a multi-family developer to build on any or all of those sites. Not only would there no longer be a requirement for careful traffic studies to anticipate traffic and safety issues, but the resulting development would increase traffic levels as well as service calls for things like police and fire without creating sufficient tax revenue to offset those increase costs and infrastructure expansions. Worse, in some parts of the city where those services are not yet available, they could require the city to provide them without paying those costs.

This legislation would appear to be a case study of special interests and uninformed reformers seeking to impose a harmful outcome for most citizens in the cities we represent. Serving as stewards of our respective communities, we firmly believe in transparency throughout every aspect of the public process and that it is important to ensure that every resident has a meaningful opportunity to contribute to decisions made by their government. Limiting public hearings not only restricts the voices of constituents but removes the ability of public comment to affect positive change to development proposals that benefit both the proposed development and the existing community surrounding new development.

Our concerns about legislative bills HF 4009/SF 3964, HF 4010/SF 3980 and HF 1667/SF 1370 stem from our commitment to safety, environmental preservation, and stable communities for current and future generations. We strongly believe further pursuit of this legislation, or any modification thereof is detrimental to building resilient, safe, and thriving communities.

We would very much like to invite the members of the legislature prior to considering these measures to visit our communities and see how well cities with effective and active zoning and planning histories and practices operate to the benefit of all Minnesotans.

On behalf of the City Council and Ramsey Residents,

Mark E. Kuzma,
Mayor

Cc: Minnesota State Senators and Representatives