



OFFICIAL MINUTES
REGULAR MEETING

MEETING: Economic Development Committee
DATE/TIME: Tuesday, December 2, 2025 at 5:30 PM
LOCATION: Wausau City Hall – Council Chambers
407 Grant Street, Wausau WI, 54403

MEMBERS:
Carol Lukens (C) Chad Henke (VC)
Tom Neal Vicki Tierney
Terry Kilian

Members Present: Carol Lukens, Chad Henke, Tom Neal, Terry Kilian, Vicki Tierney
Members Not Present:
Members Excused:
Present 5, Not Present 0, Excused 0

Noting the presence of a quorum, the Chairperson called the meeting to order at 05:30 PM.

1 Public comment on agenda items and reading of the City of Wausau Public Comment Statement.

No public comment was given.

2 Consideration of the minutes of the preceding meeting(s).

November 4, 2025 Regular Economic Development Committee Minutes

Motion by Neal, seconded by Kilian, to approve minutes. Motion Carried 5-0.

3 Presentations.

- a.** Informational presentation to summarize City of Wausau for Older Adults Report 2025 prepared by the North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (NCWRPC)

Sam Wessel from North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission presented updated findings on housing needs for older adults in Wausau and Marathon County. The presentation reviewed demographic trends, noting significant growth in residents aged 75+ and 85+ through 2050. Research shows older adults are staying in their homes longer, carrying more debt, and increasingly needing affordable rental options, independent living units, and long-term care.

Key challenges identified include affordability, a shortage of staffing in care facilities, rising construction costs, gaps in public assistance eligibility, and growing demand from rural areas. Opportunities include strong local amenities, walkability, healthcare access, and emerging trends in aging-in-place and multi-generational housing.

Projected demand includes:

636 additional owner-occupied homes by 2030

402 renter-occupied units by 2040 771 independent living units by 2040

545 long-term care beds by 2040

The group reviewed 2022 housing recommendations and presented new strategies focused on recruiting older-adult housing developers, partnering with healthcare and workforce organizations, improving transit and public facilities, supporting rehabilitation and aging-in-place, and re-

purposing vacant sites for future housing needs.

Neal asked whether there is research on how successful communities are addressing older adult housing needs. Wessel responded that he will look into this further to identify potential models the City could consider.

Tierney responded that while the need for this type of housing is clear, the City does not have the financial capacity to fund such developments, and staffing would be a significant challenge given current shortages. She noted that housing and care for older adults is extremely costly, with monthly elder care expenses reaching several thousand dollars, and many facilities no longer accepting Medicaid. Cost remains the most significant barrier.

Lukens expressed strong interest in the topic, noting its importance for community awareness. She asked whether the trends presented reflect broader patterns, and Wessel confirmed that they do.

4 Discussion and possible action.

- a. Approve a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the City of Wausau and Idaho Housing and Finance Association d/b/a Finally Home!® to establish a partnership for homebuyer education and counseling services.

Stratz presented a request to partner with Idaho Housing and Finance Association's Finally Home!® program to provide homebuyer education and counseling for Wausau residents. The City's current HUD-certified counseling program is fully funded by CDBG and faces capacity challenges due to staffing limits, extensive HUD compliance, and administrative requirements. Most clients request counseling solely to obtain a down payment assistance certificate just one to two weeks before closing, which creates tight timelines and limits meaningful engagement.

Finally Home! provides high-quality, bilingual education that meets National Industry Standards. The partnership would include a Wausau-specific portal, quarterly reporting, and coupon codes for City of Wausau program participants to access the education and counseling at no cost, with the City's Community Development Division billed for the use of coupon codes. The City would pay only \$50 per participant, generating overall program savings and eliminating the \$3,500 annual CMS expense. There is no cost to establish the partnership.

Kilian asked how the partnership would support the Hmong community, noting that the course is currently offered only in English and Spanish. Stratz explained that the City works closely with the Hmong American Center to ensure residents have access to needed resources. Graff added that while anyone may use the partnership portal for homebuyer education and counseling, only participants eligible for City of Wausau programs receive a coupon code to access the service at no cost. If an eligible participant requires interpretation, the City would arrange for an interpreter. Individuals who are not program-eligible and access the portal independently would be responsible for securing their own translation services.

Kilian noted she would be interested in knowing what this organization would do to accommodate alternate languages. Graff said she would ask the organization and report back.

Motion by Kilian, seconded by Neal, to approve partnership with Idaho Housing and Finance Association d/b/a Finally Home!. Motion Carried 5-0.

- b. Extending the life of Tax Increment District Number 7 for affordable housing.

Gatterman reviewed options for TID 7. The District is scheduled to close but could be extended for one year (through 2027) for housing purposes, with 75% of the increment allocated to Affordable Housing. If an extension is approved, the city must adopt a resolution specifying the use of these funds by January 10, 2026. The three potential outcomes presented were:

1. **Close TID 7** – Approximately \$424,502 would be available for the operating budget (firefighters).
2. **Keep TID 7 open for affordable housing** – \$1,966,623 would be available for housing, with \$69,343 for the operating budget.
3. **Keep TID 7 open for affordable housing and authorize a one-time transfer from reserves** – \$355,158 could be used for the operating budget (firefighters), with funds for the 2028 and future budgets available when the TID closes. With state aids included, \$424,502 would be available for the 2027 operating budget and beyond.

Kilian stated she is not in support of extending the TID, noting that she contacted the DNR who shared several redevelopment funding sources the City could pursue for these projects. She also noted she spoke with a Congressional representative who also identified additional funding opportunities for non-industrial sites, including properties like Cleveland Avenue. She emphasized that the Staff should explore and present alternative funding sources rather than rely solely on TID.

Neal asked the Finance Director, Maryanne Groat, what the City might lose by extending the TID. Groat responded that she does not believe the City would lose anything by doing so and reiterated that housing—particularly affordable housing—remains a significant challenge for many communities.

Fifrick added that extending the TID would allow the City to use the funds more broadly throughout the community rather than be limited to the specific district.

Groat stated she's looking for guidance from the committee on priorities should the TID be extended, such as affordable housing, mixed-use development, and rehabilitation or expansion of the housing stock. She noted a list of potential goals could be developed.

Neal shared ongoing constituent concerns about the need for affordable housing, stating that the available \$2 million represents an important piece of the overall solution and he supports Option 3.

Henke made a motion to keep TID 7 open for one year for affordable housing purposes, consistent with Option 3, seconded by Neal.

Kilian clarified that her “no” vote on extending the TID does not reflect opposition to affordable housing efforts, but rather her interest in pursuing other funding sources that she believes are readily available.

Neal responded that approving the extension would not prevent the City from seeking other state or federal funding sources and that all available tools will be needed. Lukens agreed with Neal's comments.

Gatterman added that TID funding is just one component of a broader capital stack and that staff consistently seek additional funding for demolition, cleanup, and redevelopment work.

Kilian emphasized that references should highlight a diverse range of funding sources rather than presenting TID as the primary option, ensuring its clear that reliance on TIF alone is not assumed when requesting extensions or other uses of public funds.

The motion carried 3–2, with Tierney and Kilian dissenting.

- c. Approval to Proceed with Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation Certified Sites Program

Gatterman presented the opportunity to certify roughly 99.5 acres on Innovation Way through the WEDC Certified Sites Program, which identifies industrial-ready properties that meet specific standards for size, zoning, utilities, infrastructure, environmental readiness, and documentation.

The City will conduct required site preparation, including environmental assessments, archeological and historical reviews, geo-technical studies, and surveys, with total costs estimated at \$50,000. A new grant opportunity through WEDC provides funding to cover half of these expenses, with the City funding the remainder through TID 11. Additional mapping work will be completed internally, and WEDC will provide global promotion of the site. A Site Selector Company will visit Wausau on February 18, 2026, to evaluate the site and provide recommendations on marketing it to potential investors.

Motion by Neal to approve certified sites program, seconded by Kilian. Motioned Carried 5-0.

5 Discussion.

a. Update on Commercial Rehabilitation Loan Program

At the November 2024 meeting, the Economic Development Committee approved updates to the Commercial Rehabilitation Loan program policy, authorizing staff to underwrite, approve or deny, and close applications, with semi-annual reporting to the Committee. No applications had been received prior to the first report.

In September 2025, staff received two applications, both of which were approved and closed on November 15, 2025. The first loan provided funding for façade improvements, signage, and parking lot upgrades, covering 9.5% of project costs. The second loan provided funding for exterior renovations, roof replacement, lighting, and awning updates, covering 30% of project costs.

The City currently has eight other loans in repayment: six are current, one is making interest-only payments, and one is severely delinquent, with late fees assessed and the Attorney's office involved in efforts to resolve.

6 Closed Session.

Adjourn to Closed Session pursuant to Wisconsin State Statute § 19.85(1)(e) for deliberating or negotiating the purchasing of public properties, the investing of public funds, or conducting other specified public business, whenever competitive or bargaining reasons require a closed session in regard to the sale of 424 Burns Street, Wausau.

Neal motioned to move to closed session, seconded by Kilian. Roll Call Vote. Motion Carried 5-0.

Reconvene into Open Session, if necessary, to take action on Closed Session items.

Meeting adjourned in Closed Session.

7 Adjournment.

Neal motioned to adjourn, seconded by Tierny. Motion carried 5-0.
Meeting adjourned at 7:26 PM.



City of Wausau
(715) 261-6500 | clerk@wausauwi.gov
wausauwi.gov



