

March 21, 2025

Representative Kristi Purcell
District 58A, Assistant DFL Floor Leader
Minnesota House of Representatives
5th Floor Centennial Office Building
St. Paul, Minnesota 55155

RE: HF 2542 (Pursell) Bridgewater Affordable Housing Community public infrastructure funding provided, bonds issued, and money appropriated.

Dear Representative Purcell:

This letter is in support of HF 2542. I am, and have been since 2007, the chair of the Bridgewater Township Planning Commission. During that time, I have seen a steady decline in the number of families staying in the Township while farms are consolidated into larger tracts of land and, unfortunately, the shortage of farmers grows. Additionally land and home prices, especially in neighboring Northfield, continue to rise out of reach of many working families. Recent housing studies conducted by Rice County label the situation a “housing crisis.” This is no understatement.

With these facts as background, the Township is proposing to build approximately 100 units of mixed-market housing (the majority as affordable, workforce housing) on a 40-acre tract of land independent from the high infrastructure costs of the city nearby. These infrastructure costs include land cost, water and sewer connections, HOA fees, and other built-in costs that drive the cost of housing up and up before even one shovel of dirt is turned over.

Our proposal seeks to address those costs by negotiating with the landowner for a lower land cost, drilling a neighborhood well for water, including cutting edge on-site water and solid waste treatment, and managing storm water on-site through other innovative processes. In other words, we seek to level the playing field with innovation. This is why funding through HF 2542 is so important to this project.

With the infrastructure funding potentially available through this funding source we can ensure the up front costs described above are low enough to allow for affordability. Currently housing is extremely difficult to find for working families in Rice County. If successful, we plan to replicate this development idea in other parts of the county and beyond. This will allow hard working families the security of a safe and affordable place to live close to where they work. Once this prototype neighborhood is developed and up and running, the next iteration can be even more cost effective for families as the process is streamlined.

The 100 housing units will include duplexes, tri-plexes, four-plexes, single family affordable homes, and market rate homes creating a new neighborhood of both mixed income families and mixed densities. This is really an old idea of invigorated neighborhood living in models reminiscent of the post-World War II era that some have labeled the “missing middle.” This mixture of families will help ensure that this development idea does not become stigmatized with unfair economic labels. Amenities like park lands, open green space, sidewalks, front porches, as well as bike and hiking trails will also be included in this new neighborhood creating a very desirable location for families to live together comfortably and safely.

We believe this model for new neighborhood development can begin to address housing shortages that are leading to challenges with local school districts and employers as a real, economic issue. With potential employees unable to find suitable housing they become reluctant to move into an area reducing the number of candidates to fill job openings. With fewer young families moving into an area, school enrollment drops leaving local school districts with funding shortfalls. This is not to say that the availability of safe, affordable housing is a panacea for all economic woes. Instead, it can readily be said that safe, affordable housing does ease the burden of shrinking demographics on local businesses and institutions. It is one piece in the full range of economic stability and prosperity.

Thank you for taking the time to review this letter and the reasons that HF 2542 is so important to this potentially, life-changing housing boost for Rice County. We are optimistic that if funding can be secured to help offset these start-up, infrastructure costs, this development idea can be a true difference maker for our communities both now and into the future.

With kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Klockeman", with a stylized, flowing script.

John Klockeman, FAIA, LEED AP
Chair, Bridgewater Township Planning Commission