

Wisconsin Should Adopt the International Residential Code

The Most Feasible Option

June 3, 2020

In 1976, the Wisconsin State Legislature, and Governor Patrick J. Lucey, enacted Chapter 404, Laws of 1975, which directed creation of the Wisconsin One- and Two-Family Dwelling Code and Wisconsin Modular Home Code.

The stated purpose of those actions was to establish statewide construction standards and inspection procedures for one- and 2-family dwellings, and for the manufacture and installation of modular homes, and to promote interstate uniformity in construction standards.

Chapter 404, Laws of 1975, provides direction to the Department of Safety and Professional Services to utilize model codes, such as the IRC, where feasible. That direction is found in Sections 101.63 and 101.73, Wisconsin Statutes, concerning the dwelling code and modular home code, respectively. Both of those sections read in part: “Where feasible, the standards used shall be those nationally recognized...” [Emphasis added.]

The Alliance for Regulatory Coordination (ARC) believes that adoption of the International Residential Code (IRC) as the foundation for the Wisconsin Uniform Dwelling Code is feasible. In fact, the ARC believes the IRC is the most feasible option available to Wisconsin.

The Wisconsin Uniform Dwelling Code (UDC) has historically been a “home grown” code written by state employees with input from the Uniform Dwelling Code Council, a statutorily created 11-member council generally made up of persons involved in dwelling design, construction and regulatory services.

Updating a home-grown code is resource intensive for the DSPS and the UDC Council. The last comprehensive update of the UDC, effective January 1, 2016, took 20 months, and an estimated 800 hours of staff time to develop.

The IRC is a nationally recognized model code developed by the International Code Council. It is updated every three years with the input of national experts in building design, materials, and regulatory services from across the nation.

Within the United States, the IRC is in use or adopted in 49 states, the District of Columbia, Guam, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. The IRC is adopted for statewide application by the states of Michigan and Minnesota. Iowa has adopted the IRC for state owned and rented residential buildings, and 62 Iowa communities, including the City of Dubuque, have adopted the IRC. In Illinois, 355 communities, including the City of Rockford, have adopted the IRC.

Wisconsin stands alone as the only U.S. state in which the IRC is not in use or adopted. This is in stark contrast to the stated purpose of Chapter 404, Laws of 1975 – to promote interstate uniformity in construction standards for homes.

The ARC believes current widespread use of the IRC throughout the country proves its feasibility and its utility in promoting interstate uniformity in construction standards. Adoption of the IRC is the most feasible option available to promote safety of Wisconsin residents while saving time and money associated with code development.

The Alliance for Regulatory Coordination is a consortium of 21 organizations involved in building design, construction and regulatory services. Alliance membership consists of business, labor, advocacy, professional and governmental groups; numbering thousands of members, all committed to promoting more coordinated and efficient regulatory services for citizens and businesses of Wisconsin. Learn more about the Alliance at www.4ARC.org.