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Testimony in Favor of Assembly Bill 661

Assembly Committee on Local Government

December 14th, 2023

Thank you, Chairman Novak and committee members, for allowing me to testify before you concerning Assembly Bill 661, which would establish three updates that only pertain to town governments and will allow towns to operate more efficiently. I would also like to thank Senator Quinn for his leadership on this legislation.

First Update: Appointed Clerk Flexibility

Current law allows towns with a population of 2,500 or more to move from an elected to an appointed clerk and/or treasurer by vote of the electors at a town meeting. Towns with a population under 2,500 may only move from an elected to an appointed clerk and/or treasurer by referendum. This bill would create consistency and allow all towns, regardless of population, to move to an appointed clerk and/or treasurer by vote of the electors at a town meeting.

This bill would also allow towns to move to an appointed clerk and/or treasurer position in the middle of an elected term if the office is vacant or becomes vacant after the affirmative elector vote.

Second Update: Budget Notice Consistency

Current law requires towns, cities, and villages to conduct an annual public hearing regarding its proposed budget. Cities and villages must provide a summary of their proposed budget and notice of the budget public hearing by publishing a class 1 notice under ch. 985. This allows a city or village to publish the summary and notice in a newspaper, post it in three locations, or post it in one location and on its official website. Current law requires towns to post the summary and notice in three locations. This bill would create consistency across all municipality types and allow towns the same notice options as cities and villages by requiring that towns also provide notice of the budget public hearing as a class 1 notice under ch. 985.

Third Update: Unfinished Town Highways

Current law provides that a town highway that has not been opened, traveled, or worked within 4 years from the date it was laid out ceases to be a highway. This means that a planned but never opened or worked town highway remains a highway if any vehicle travels along it, shifting ultimate highway planning authority from the town to any individual that may drive along the planned highway. This bill would keep highway planning authority with the town by examining only whether the highway was opened or worked when determining if the highway ceases to be a highway.

Thank you again, Chairman Novak, for the opportunity to testify before this committee today and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.