

# State Capitol Municipal Champions

Curt Witynski, Deputy Executive Director, League of Wisconsin Municipalities



Many members of the Wisconsin state Legislature, both Republican and Democrat, support municipalities generally and their own cities and villages in particular. The League is happy to work with all legislators and has constructive relationships with most. Several legislators, however, stand out when it comes to supporting cities and villages and deserve to be specially recognized for their efforts to advance municipal powers and resources. The legislators highlighted on the following pages worked closely with the League this session to advance legislation helpful to municipalities and to oppose bills interfering with municipal powers. The League enthusiastically thanks each of them for their hard work on behalf of cities and villages. *If they represent your community, please be sure to thank them.*

## Municipal Champions



**Senator Rob Cowles (R-Green Bay)** has throughout his long tenure in the Senate consistently supported municipalities and opposed efforts to infringe on local control and municipal home rule powers. This session, Sen. Cowles authored and guided through

the legislative process Act 137, the “Get the Lead Out Act,” allowing municipalities and their water utilities to create financial assistance programs for helping home owners replace private lead water service pipes. He also was the Senate lead author of Act 167, exempting from the competitive bidding process any improvements constructed by a private person and donated to the city or village. The League also worked closely with Sen. Cowles on drafting legislation clarifying legal title to formerly submerged shore line properties that are ripe for redevelopment. While the bill draft was not finalized for introduction before the session ended, the groundwork was laid for introducing it next session.



**Representative Rob Brooks (R-Saukville)** was our leader on the dark store and *Walgreens* reversal bills within the state capitol. He was the Assembly lead author for both bills. We also worked with Rep. Brooks on the introduction and passage of Act 51, allowing

municipal officials to forego executing a bond as a condition of taking office as long as the municipality has acquired employee

dishonesty insurance; Act 150, making the default standard for removing most appointed city officers from for cause to at pleasure; and Act 6, giving multiple jurisdiction health departments the flexibility to share the cost of the joint entity in any manner agreed upon by the participating communities. While we disagreed with him on the developer and landlord bills, we appreciated his approach to legislating. He welcomes all stakeholders to the table, listens to their concerns, and often makes changes to his bills to address those concerns if possible.



**Senator Duey Stroebel (R-Saukville)** was the lead Senate author of the *Walgreens* reversal bill and a co-sponsor of the dark store bill. We also worked closely with Sen. Stroebel and his staff on introducing Act 51, allowing city and village officials to forego executing a bond as

a condition of taking office as long as the municipality has acquired employee dishonesty insurance; and Act 6, giving multiple jurisdiction health departments the flexibility to share the cost of the joint entity in any manner agreed upon by the participating communities. Sen. Stroebel also worked with the City of Milwaukee to introduce and pass Act 286, allowing any municipality to enact an ordinance providing for the immobilization or towing, impoundment, and disposal of vehicles owned by habitual parking violators. Sen. Stroebel was also the lead Senate author of SB 236, increasing the public construction competitive bidding threshold to \$50,000, a bill the League supported, which passed the Senate but died in the Assembly. Sen. Stroebel additionally was the lead Senate author of a bill allowing cities to post meeting minutes on the city’s website instead of paying for newspaper publication. The Senator also co-sponsored the League’s TID territory subtraction bill, Act 223, allowing communities to obtain the same levy limit positive adjustment when subtracting territory from a TIF district as when the district is terminated.



**Senator Howard Marklein (R-Spring Green)** authored, at our request, a state budget amendment repealing the levy limit adjustment requirement for water utility fire protection fees. This change allows communities to shift from using the levy to pay the fire hydrant rental fee to directly charging utility customers without being

required to reduce the community’s allowable levy. Sen. Marklein was the Senate lead author of Act 232, allowing municipalities to erect within the right of way of any highway within the municipality a municipal welcome sign. He also co-sponsored the League’s dark store and *Walgreens* reversal bills. As chair of the Senate Revenue Committee, Sen. Marklein conducted a hearing and a committee vote on the dark store and *Walgreens* reversal bills.



**Representative Terry Katsma (R-Oostburg)** authored, at our request, Act 78, which removes the three-year maximum term on certificates of deposit and allows cities and villages to invest in time deposits with any length of maturity. He also worked with the City of Milwaukee

on authoring and guiding to passage Act 339, establishing minimum qualifications for third-party bidders seeking to participate in mortgage foreclosure sales. In addition, Rep. Katsma was an early co-sponsor of both the dark store and *Walgreens* reversal bills.



**Sen. Roger Roth (R-Appleton)** was the Senate lead author of the dark store bill and a co-sponsor of the *Walgreens* reversal bill. Sen. Roth worked hard to win support for the dark store bill within the Senate Republican Caucus. He spoke eloquently and passionately about the need for passing the bill at public hearings and media events. Sen. Roth was also the lead author of SB 794, a bill the League worked to have introduced restoring the ability of local governments to use eminent domain to acquire land for bike lanes and sidewalks.



**Rep. Thiesfeldt (R-Fond du Lac)** is a former member of the Fond du Lac city council who was the Assembly lead author of Act 137, the “Get the Lead Out Act,” allowing municipalities and their water utilities to create financial assistance programs to help homeowners cover the cost of replacing private lead water service lines. The League also worked closely with Rep. Thiesfeldt and his staff on the introduction of AB 70, enabling cities to publish governing body meeting minutes on the web instead of paying for publication in the newspaper.

► p.16

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Unfortunately, the bill failed to advance owing to opposition from the Newspapers Association. Rep. Thiesfeldt also cosponsored AB 421, allowing municipalities to impose residency restrictions on city and village managers.



**Rep. David Steffen (R-Howard)** is a former trustee for the Village of Howard. This was his second term in the Legislature and as in his first, he unfailingly supported League bills and consistently opposed bills limiting municipal authority. Rep. Steffen was a particularly strong

and vocal supporter of the dark store and *Walgreens* reversal bills. He participated in our Dark Store Day news conference in Ashwaubenon. As chair of the Local Taxation and Funding subcommittee of the Assembly Ways and Means Committee he reached out to the League and other local government associations and welcomed our ideas and proposals for improving the state local financial relationship.

**Other Strong Allies of Municipalities**

**Rep. Todd Novak (R-Dodgeville)** also currently serves as mayor of Dodgeville. This was his second term in the Legislature and he has consistently advocated for local control

and protection of home rule powers. At our request, Rep. Novak authored AB 495, making it clear that a municipality may present as evidence in defending against assessment challenges appraisals from other appraisers and the court may not reject any such appraisal solely because the valuation determined by the expert was higher than the actual assessment. As the bill was advancing, a Wisconsin Supreme Court decision resolved the issue addressed by the bill and the bill was subsequently dropped. Rep. Novak was also a co-sponsor of the dark store bill.

**Sen. Jerry Petrowski (R-Marathon)** was the Senate lead author of Act 223, legislation sought by the League allowing municipalities to make the same levy limit adjustment when subtracting territory from a TIF district as allowed when closing a district. He also was co-sponsor of the League’s dark store and *Walgreens* reversal bills.

**Rep. John Macco (R-De Pere)** worked with the League to author Act 167, exempting improvements constructed by a private person and donated to a municipality from the competitive bidding process. Rep. Macco was a strong and vocal supporter of the dark store and *Walgreens* reversal bills.

► p.17

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As chair of the Assembly Ways and Means Committee, he conducted a public hearing on both bills. Rep. Macco also used the Ways and Means Committee as a forum to explore alternative methods of funding local government services.

**Rep. Mike Rohrkaste (R-Neenah)** worked closely with a coalition of stakeholders, of which the League was a member, to introduce and successfully guide through the legislative process an increase in the historic building rehabilitation tax credit. Act 280 increases the per-parcel cap on the state's historic tax credit program from \$500,000 to \$3.5 million. The League also worked closely with Rep. Rohrkaste and his staff to draft AB 967, restoring the ability of local governments to use eminent domain to acquire land for bike lanes and sidewalks. Rep. Rohrkaste also was a co-sponsor of the dark store and *Walgreens* reversal bills.

**Rep. Mark Born (R-Beaver Dam)** is a former city council member from Beaver Dam. He is a frequent supporter of municipalities in the Legislature. Rep. Born co-authored, at our request, a state budget amendment repealing the levy limit adjustment requirement for water utility fire protection fees. This change allows communities to shift from using the levy to pay the fire hydrant rental fee to directly charging utility customers without being required to reduce the community's allowable levy.

**Rep. Paul Tittl (R-Manitowoc)** is a former member of the Manitowoc city council who authored and guided through the legislative process Act 50, modernizing how mayors may notify city council members of a special meeting that has been called. He also was a co-sponsor of the dark store and *Walgreens* reversal bills.

**Representative Mark Spreitzer (D-Beloit)** is a former Beloit city council president serving his second term as a state legislator. He consistently advocated for local control and home rule powers. Rep. Spreitzer worked with the League to introduce AB 421, a bill restoring the ability of municipalities to impose residency requirements on city and village managers.

**Representative Gordon Hintz (D-Oshkosh)** has been a long-time supporter of cities and villages within the legislature. The last three sessions he has served on the Joint Committee on Finance, where as a vocal member of the minority he consistently advocated for more funding of municipal programs and against reducing municipal powers. Rep. Hintz was a strong and vocal co-sponsor of the dark store and *Walgreens* reversal bills.

► p.18

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**Representative Lisa Subeck (D-Madison)** served on the Madison city council before being elected to the Assembly. This is her second term. She was the Assembly lead author of Act 351, allowing a person holding a local public office to be appointed to serve as an election official without having to vacate their public office. The League worked closely with Rep. Subeck on the introduction and passage of this bill. As a member of the Assembly Committee on Local Government, Rep. Subeck dependably opposed efforts to reduce municipal powers. She also was a cosponsor of the dark store and *Walgreens* reversal bills.

**Senator Janis Ringhand (D-Evansville)** served as mayor of Evansville before being elected to the Legislature several sessions ago. Throughout her tenure she has been a dependable defender of local control and a strong advocate for municipalities. She co-sponsored and was a vocal supporter of the dark store and *Walgreens* reversal bills.

**Representative Amy Loudenbeck (R-Clinton)**, at the League's request, authored Act 223, allowing municipalities to make the same positive levy limit adjustment when subtracting territory from a TIF district as allowed when closing a district.



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