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**Urban Towns Legislation Meets Stiff Opposition During Senate Hearing**

Recently, the Senate Committee on Transportation and Local Government conducted a hearing on Senate Bill 691 (SB 691), also known as the "Urban Towns" bill, as labeled by the bill authors and the Wisconsin Towns Association, the bill's leading advocate.

In essence, SB 691 proposes to allow certain towns that meet specific metrics outlined in the bill to reclassify themselves as "urban towns." To achieve this reclassification, a town must meet certain requirements and obtain approval through a vote at a town meeting. Some key requirements include:

* The town must have a population exceeding 5,000 and a population density of 750 persons per square mile.
* The town should provide law enforcement services.
* The town must have enacted a subdivision ordinance.
* The town should have enacted a zoning ordinance or be subject to county zoning.

If a town successfully votes to reclassify as an "urban town," it would no longer be subject to extraterritorial zoning or plat approval by a neighboring city or village. Additionally, any future "significantly developed territory" could only be annexed by a city or village with unanimous approval from the affected property owners.

A significant provision of the legislation would compel cities, villages, and sanitary or utility districts in cities and villages to allow urban towns to connect to their sewer systems. Notably, the bill authors, Senator Pat Testin and Representative Karen Hurd, announced the removal of the section related to water and sewer hookup from the bill.

The idea of establishing a different type of town, rather than incorporating into a village or city, has been in existence for nearly 30 years and has faced opposition from the Wisconsin Builders Association (WBA), viewed as a strategy to impede annexation and hinder future development. Previous attempts allowed for the creation of "charter towns."

WBA reached out to various developer members across the state, confirming their longstanding opposition to the policy goals of SB 691 in creating "urban towns."

The Senate committee hearing on SB 691 spanned approximately five hours, featuring testimonies from town officials supporting the bill and city/village officials opposing it.

In conclusion, WBA believes that finding middle ground on such a significant issue in the last few months of the 2023-2024 legislative session will be challenging. WBA has proposed the idea of establishing a Legislative Council Study Committee to review town, city, and village procedures on annexation, as well as the issue of extraterritorial zoning and plat approval. A deliberate and thoughtful conversation this summer could enable town officials, city/village officials, legislators, and WBA developer/builder members to review current state statutes and propose changes to streamline the development process, encouraging more single-family home construction statewide.