



WATERWAYS BUREAU  
PROGRAM GUIDANCE

Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources  
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**ACT 175 (s. 87.30 (1d)(d) Stats.) Guidance**

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This document is intended solely as guidance and does not contain any mandatory requirements except where requirements found in statute or administrative rule are referenced. Any regulatory decisions made by the Department of Natural Resources in any matter addressed by this guidance will be made by applying the governing statutes and administrative rules to the relevant facts.

APPROVED:

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Mike Thompson  
Waterways Bureau Director

10/25/2021

Date

## ACT 175 (s. 87.30 (1d)(d) Stats.) Guidance

The WDNR floodplain model ordinance includes the acceptable regulatory standards required in Ch. NR116, Wis. Admin. Code with supplemental wording intended to ensure that the minimum requirements for participation in the National Flood Insurance Program (44 C.F.R. §§59-72) are met or exceeded in all circumstances. The floodplain model ordinance now includes language for communities choosing to adopt changes consistent with 2019 Act 175.

Act 175 was enacted March 2020 and created § 87.30 (1d) (d), Wis. Stats. This Act changes how Ch. NR116, Wis. Admin. Code may require local governments to regulate nonconforming structures in the floodplain. To participate in the National Flood Insurance Program, however, communities must still adopt and enforce regulations that meet the NFIP's minimum standards, which are unchanged. § 87.30 (1d) (d) creates an exception to the state's "50% rule" for structures in the floodplain. The state's "50% rule" says no modification or addition to any nonconforming structure or any structure with a nonconforming use, which over the life of the structure would equal or exceed 50% of its present equalized assessed value, shall be allowed unless the entire structure is permanently changed to a conforming structure with a conforming use in compliance with the applicable requirements of the local floodplain ordinance.

Essentially, in a floodplain zoning ordinance that has incorporated Act 175, if a nonconforming structure is altered to meet the federal minimum standards applicable to new construction and substantial improvements, and the living quarters in the nonconforming building are elevated to be at or above the flood protection elevation, then the Department is prohibited from imposing cost-based regulation or restrictions to the structure (i.e., "50% Rule"). It is important to note that structures modified to meet the requirements of § 87.30 (1d) (d) are not transformed into conforming structures. They are still considered nonconforming structures and are subject to all other non-cost-based regulations and restrictions applicable to nonconforming structures.

The NFIP minimum standards require a participating community to regulate all development, including all improvements to all structures in special flood hazard areas. The appropriate minimum standards must be applied to substantial improvements, modifications, additions, and repair or other improvement of substantially damaged buildings, without regard for whether such buildings are "nonconforming" with regard to ordinances adopted to meet Ch. NR116 regulations or other state or local zoning regulations.

Act 175 did not change any city, village, or county floodplain ordinance authority and communities are able to maintain their current ordinance and incorporate higher standards into their floodplain zoning ordinance.

Communities should decide whether to incorporate Act 175 into the floodplain ordinance or maintain their current framework for regulating nonconforming structures based on an assessment of local flood risks. Once the local flood risks are identified and an appropriate zoning approach is determined, some communities may choose to maintain existing floodplain zoning and implement higher standards, while others may modify their ordinances to adopt this new minimum standard. (see [WDNR floodplain model ordinance.](#))

1. When Act 175 is incorporated into an ordinance there is a potential for the community to allow modifications, additions, substantial improvements, maintenance and repairs to existing nonconforming structures in excess of the State's 50% Rule once the minimum requirements of **Appendix A** are met. This creates two classifications of nonconforming structures:
  - a. Class 1: Nonconforming structures that do not meet Appendix A minimum requirements and continued to be subject to the State's 50% Rule.
  - b. Class 2: Nonconforming structures meeting Appendix A minimum requirements and no longer subject to the State's 50% Rule.
  
2. For ordinances without Act 175 – repair/maintenance/modification/substantial improvement of structures in the floodplain is limited by the 50% rule as expressed in NR116.
  - a. No modification, addition, maintenance, or repair can be made on a structure in the floodway if the cost exceeds 50% of the present equalized assessed value of the structure;
  - b. If a structure in the floodway is substantially damaged by a flood, it must be removed from the floodway;
  - c. No modification, addition, maintenance, or repair can be made on a structure in the floodfringe if the cost exceeds 50% of the present equalized assessed value of the structure unless the structure is modified to conform to the floodplain ordinance;
  - d. In addition all standards for nonconforming structures in the floodplain, listed in Nonconforming Uses in Section 6.0 of the state model, must be followed.

## Appendix A

For communities incorporating Act 175 into its ordinance, non-conforming structures not subject to the State 50% Rule must meet the following minimum standards:

- (1) Any living quarters in the nonconforming building are elevated to be at or above the flood protection elevation;
- (2) The lowest floor of the nonconforming building, including the basement, is elevated to or above the regional flood elevation;
- (3) The nonconforming building is permanently changed to conform to the applicable requirements of the general standards applicable to all floodplain districts;
- (4) The building is permanently changed to conform to all applicable requirements in the community's floodplain zoning ordinance such as Hydraulic and Hydrologic Analyses (H & H), lowest floor elevations, anchoring, mechanical and utility equipment elevations, floodproofing standards, and must not obstruct flow of floodwater or cause any increase in flood levels.

NOTE: Incorporating Act 175 into the local ordinance still requires the zoning administrator to carefully review and apply applicable portions of Nonconforming Uses in section 6.0 of the model ordinance because the structure is still a nonconforming structure.

- (5) If the nonconforming building is in the floodfringe, the building is permanently changed to conform to the applicable requirements of the floodfringe district.
- (6) New construction and substantial improvements of residential buildings in zones A1-30, AE, and AH must have the lowest floor (including basement) elevated to or above the base flood elevation.
- (7) New construction and substantial improvements of non-residential buildings in zones A1-30, AE, and AH must have the lowest floor (including basement) elevated to or above the base flood elevation, or (together with attendant utility and sanitary facilities) be designed so that below the base flood elevation the building is watertight with walls substantially impermeable to the passage of water and with structural components capable of resisting hydrostatic and hydrodynamic loads and effects of buoyancy.
  - a. Where a non-residential structure is intended to be made watertight below the base flood elevation, a registered professional engineer or architect must develop and/or review structural design, specifications, and plans for the construction, and must certify that the design and methods of construction are in accordance with accepted standards of practice for meeting the provisions of paragraph vii above.
  - b. The community must maintain a record of such certification including the specific elevation to which each such structure is floodproofed.
- (8) Fully enclosed areas below the lowest floor of new construction and substantial improvements in zones A1-30, AE, and AH that are usable solely for parking of vehicles, building access, or storage, must be designed to adequately equalize hydrostatic forces on exterior walls by allowing for the

entry and exit of floodwaters. Designs for meeting this requirement must either be certified by a registered professional engineer or architect, or meet the following criteria:

- a. A minimum of two openings into each enclosed area must be located below the base flood elevation and provide a total net area of not less than one square inch for every square foot of enclosed area;
  - b. The bottom of all openings must be no higher than one foot above the adjacent grade;
  - c. Openings may be equipped with screens, louvers, valves, or other coverings if they permit the automatic entry and exit of floodwaters.
- 9) Manufactured homes that are placed or substantially improved within zones A1-30, AE, and AH outside of a manufactured home park or subdivision, in a new manufactured home park or subdivision, in an expansion to an existing manufactured home park or subdivision, or in an existing manufactured home park or subdivision on which a manufactured home has incurred substantial damage as a result of flood, must be elevated on a permanent foundation such that the lowest floor of the manufactured home is at or above the base flood elevation, and be securely anchored to an adequately anchored foundation system to resist flotation, collapse, and lateral movement.
- 10) Manufactured homes that are placed or substantially improved within zones A1-30, AE, and AH on existing sites in an existing manufactured home park that is not undergoing expansion and on which a manufactured home has not incurred substantial damage as a result of flood must be elevated so that either the lowest floor of the manufactured home is at or above the base flood elevation, or the manufactured home chassis is supported by reinforced piers or other foundation elements of at least equivalent strength that are no less than 36 inches in height above grade, and be securely anchored to an adequately anchored foundation system to resist flotation, collapse, and lateral movement.
- 11) Recreational vehicles placed on sites within zones A1-30, AH, and AE must either
- a. Be on site for fewer than 180 consecutive days; or
  - b. Be fully licensed and ready for highway use (a recreational vehicle is ready for highway use if it is on its wheels or jacking system, is attached to the site only by quick disconnect type utilities and security devices, and has no permanently attached additions); or
  - c. Meet the elevation and anchoring requirements for manufactured homes in paragraph ix above.
- 12) In a regulatory floodway that has been delineated on the FIRM in zone A1-30 or AE, encroachments, including new construction, substantial improvement, or other development (including fill) must be prohibited unless it has been demonstrated through hydrologic and hydraulic analyses performed in accordance with standard engineering practice that the proposed encroachment will not result in any increase in flood levels within the community during the occurrence of the base flood discharge.
- 13) In zone A, the community must obtain, review, and reasonably utilize any base flood elevation and floodway data available from a federal, state, or other source as criteria for requiring new construction, substantial improvement, and other development to meet paragraphs (6) through

(12) (inclusive) above. If floodway data are available, the community must select and adopt a regulatory floodway based on the principle that the area chosen for the regulatory floodway must be designed to carry the waters of the base flood without increasing the water surface elevation of that flood more than one foot at any point.

- 14) In zones A1-30 or AE where a regulatory floodway has not been delineated on the FIRM, no new construction, substantial improvement, or other development (including fill) may be permitted unless it is demonstrated that the cumulative effect of the proposed development, when combined with all other existing and anticipated development, will not increase the water surface elevation of the base flood more than one foot at any point within the community.
- 15) Notwithstanding the requirements of paragraphs (12) and (14) above, the community may permit certain development in zones A1-30 and AE where a floodway has not been delineated, which will increase the water surface elevation of the base flood by more than one foot, or in a regulatory floodway, which will result in an increase in base flood elevations, if the community first obtains a Conditional Letter of Map Revision (CLOMR) from FEMA and fulfills the requirements of Section 65.12 of Title 44, Code of Federal Regulations.
- 16) In zone AO, new construction and substantial improvements of residential structures must have the lowest floor (including basement) elevated above the highest adjacent grade at least as high as the depth number specified in feet on the FIRM (at least two feet if no depth number is specified).
- 17) In zone AO, new construction and substantial improvements of nonresidential structures must have the lowest floor (including basement) elevated above the highest adjacent grade at least as high as the depth number specified in feet on the FIRM (at least two feet if no depth number is specified), or (together with attendant utility and sanitary facilities) be structurally dry-floodproofed to that level according to the standard specified in paragraph vii above.