

Milwaukee Tax Incremental Financing District Guidelines

Tax Incremental Financing (TIF) is an important tool with which government can assist development, improve public infrastructure and expand the local tax base, with repayment of the TIF expenditures coming from the increased tax base resulting from the development. In Milwaukee and other municipalities throughout the state, TIF is targeted toward eliminating blight, increasing property value and promoting job growth and economic development. State statutes permit TIF districts only when development would not occur “but for” City assistance. TIF assistance should be utilized for developments that implement City and neighborhood plans and for developments that are consistent with the overall government goals of job creation and sustained economic development in Milwaukee.

Each project that receives TIF assistance must demonstrate sufficient need such that, without the City’s financial assistance, the proposed project would not take place. Other financial alternatives should be considered and utilized, if possible, before TIF assistance is employed, such as state and federal funds, tax-exempt bonds, tax credits, loans and foundation support.

Since its approval by the Wisconsin Legislature in 1975, the Tax Incremental Finance Law has been applied more than 60 times in the City of Milwaukee. In 2004, the State Legislature enacted changes in the Statutes governing TIF that increased the expenditure period, changed the maximum percentage of equalized value that can be placed in TIF districts and generally encouraged wider use of this economic development tool. While each specific application of TIF assistance will have unique characteristics, a well-reasoned and articulated set of guidelines will help residents, taxpayers and the development community understand the issues generally involved in the City’s consideration of TIF assistance. At the same time, guidelines should be considered a framework for policy decisions, recognizing that the City must retain the flexibility to make exceptions in appropriate circumstances.

Goals for Projects Supported by Tax Incremental Financing

- I. Attract and retain family-supporting jobs in the City of Milwaukee.
- II. Increase the City’s tax base by facilitating development of underutilized properties or promoting development in emerging neighborhoods.
- III. Improve blighted properties or clean up brownfields in the City by making their redevelopment economically feasible.
- IV. Support City planning initiatives by advancing catalytic projects identified in neighborhood plans, providing public amenities or infrastructure, and strengthening neighborhoods in need of investment and increased home-ownership.

Guidelines for TIF

I. General Guidelines

- a. Each application for TIF assistance will be evaluated based on short term and long term economic development impacts, adherence to the City's plans, priorities and goals, public benefits provided, amount of public assistance compared to private investment, term of public assistance and risks associated with the project. Priority will be given to development projects that facilitate increased permanent employment with family-supporting wages in the City of Milwaukee.
- b. TIF assistance will generally not be considered for market rate housing in the downtown area. In addition, the City should work toward a goal of establishing the downtown office market as being self-sustaining without TIF assistance.
- c. TIF assistance will be evaluated for its impact on the existing market.
- d. The expected payback period for TIF assistance will be determined by evaluating the goals to be achieved and the type of development proposed (e.g., projects that create jobs may allowed a longer payback period).
- e. The City's Emerging Business Enterprises (EBE) and Residency Preference Program (RPP) requirements will be considered mandatory for projects that receive TIF assistance. The City will also consider additional requirements such as prevailing wages, mentoring, training, apprenticeships and first source recruitment.
- f. The City will require guarantees from developers where appropriate.
- g. The City will be mindful of the impact of TIF on the City's credit rating.
- h. The City will consider developer-financed TIF districts, where appropriate, provided the City retains the right to pre-pay the debt with lower cost funds.

II. Guidelines for Specific TIF districts

- a. TIF financing will be used as gap financing. TIF assistance will be limited to the amount necessary to make a project financially feasible. In certain instances, the City may use TIF to create developable land by providing infrastructure or conducting environmental remediation.
- b. TIF assistance cannot be used for project operating costs, and developer returns in projects that receive TIF assistance will be limited to no more than a reasonable market return.
- c. All TIF expenditures should generally be made within 10 years of the district's creation.
- d. Consideration should be given to TIF-supported loans that include participation in cash flows, ultimate residuals on sales or proceeds of refinancing.

TIF Application Process

- I. Parties seeking TIF assistance shall communicate their interest and lay out their project to Department of City Development (DCD) staff before an official TIF application is submitted. DCD staff will undertake a preliminary analysis of the potential economic impact of the proposed development and its consistency with City plans, priorities and TIF goals before the submission of an official application.
- II. If the proposed project appears to be consistent with the City's plan, priorities and goals, DCD will provide the party seeking TIF assistance with an official application for TIF assistance.
- III. Parties seeking TIF assistance shall submit the information required in an official application for TIF assistance to the DCD Commissioner. This application must be accompanied by a non-refundable fee of \$5,000. DCD staff will then engage in deeper analysis of the financial viability and economic impact of the proposed project based on the information included in the application.
- IV. At the conclusion of that analysis, if the project warrants further exploration, DCD will collect an additional fee of \$10,000 to compensate for staff time required to complete a full analysis, underwriting, and presentation of the proposed TIF assistance. In addition, if DCD engages an independent consultant to review the application, the applicant will pay for all third-party costs incurred. If the TIF district is created, the \$10,000 fee and third-party costs may be refunded by the TIF district.
- V. The Comptroller shall have a minimum of 21 days to analyze each TIF application and make comments and recommendations before any action by the Common Council.