

# **CHAPTER 1:**

## **INTRODUCTION**

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## PURPOSE OF THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

This comprehensive plan for the Town of Oconto was prepared to address the varied land use issues that will impact the town's efforts to preserve its productive agricultural lands and natural resources during the next 20 years. The plan is to serve as a guide to ensure consistent decisions are being made in regards to environmental protection, farmland preservation, transportation expansion, housing development, location of public services, and sound economic development. The *Town of Oconto 20-Year Comprehensive Plan* is a legal document that provides the policy framework from which the town officials will base their future land use decisions.

The cornerstone of this plan is the future land use map, referred to in this document as the General Plan Design (GPD), Map 3.1. This desired land use map will be achieved through the implementation of a number of goals with detailed objectives, policies, and programs that provide a roadmap for officials and residents to follow as they work to implement the town's comprehensive plan. The plan and GPD shall be used in conjunction with the Oconto County's zoning ordinances, local land use ordinances, supporting planning materials, and other implementation tools to guide future decisions on where and how the Town of Oconto should be developed as well as preserved during the next 20 years.

### **State Planning Legislation**

The *Town of Oconto 20-Year Comprehensive Plan* was prepared to appropriately address the following required nine elements of a comprehensive plan as outlined in s. 66.1001, Wis. Stats.

1. Issues and Opportunities
2. Housing
3. Transportation
4. Utilities and Community Facilities
5. Agriculture, Natural, and Cultural Resources
6. Economic Development
7. Intergovernmental Cooperation
8. Land Use
9. Implementation

Comprehensive Planning legislation s. 66.1001, Wis. Stats. further states:

“Beginning on January 1, 2010, if a local governmental unit engages in any of the following actions, those actions shall be consistent with that local governmental unit’s comprehensive plan:

- (a) Official mapping established or amended under s. 62.23 (6).
- (b) Local subdivision regulation under s. 236.45 or 236.46.
- (c) County zoning ordinances enacted or amended under s. 59.69.
- (d) City or village zoning ordinances enacted or amended under s. 62.23 (7).
- (e) Town zoning ordinances enacted or amended under s. 60.61 or 60.62.
- (f) Zoning of shorelands or wetlands in shorelands under s. 59.692, 61.351 or 62.231.”

## **HOW TO USE THIS PLAN**

The *Town of Oconto 20-Year Comprehensive Plan* consists of eleven chapters presented in two volumes along with an appendices. **Volume I: Town Plan** is comprised of Chapters 1 through 4. The content of these four chapters meet all the requirements outlined in s. 66.1001, Wis. Stats. The appendix to **Volume I** consists of planning materials generated during the preparation of the *Town of Oconto 20-Year Comprehensive Plan*. **Volume II: County Resources** contains Chapters 5 through 11, along with an appendix that details countywide background information and data.

**Volume I: Town Plan:** This volume describes how the Town of Oconto envisions itself developing during this 20 year planning period. It includes detailed background information and data, development strategies, land use projections, a General Plan Design (future land use map), and a plan implementation schedule.

**Chapter 1: Introduction** - contains an overview of the purpose of the plan; the planning legislation; plan development process; and vision statement.

**Chapter 2: Inventory, Trends, and Forecasts** - extrapolates town specific background information and data compiled at the county level in chapters 5 through 11; notes land use issues and conflicts; acknowledges continued land use trends; projects future land use allocations for residential, commercial, industrial, and agricultural needs; and identifies Smart Growth areas.

**Chapter 3: Future Land Use Plan** - illustrates a desirable future land use plan through a General Plan Design; and defines the characteristics of the future land uses through a series of land use recommendations.

**Chapter 4: Implementation** - details a work plan to implement the development strategies (goals, objectives, policies, and programs) of the comprehensive plan with identified stakeholders and projected dates for completion.

**Appendices: Town Plan** - contains town public participation materials; intergovernmental cooperation workshop results; detailed existing town land use inventory information; and a glossary of terms.

**Volume II: County Resources:** The volume contains countywide background information that served as a basis in the development of the town's development strategies and General Plan Design.

**Chapter 5: Natural, Agricultural and Cultural Resources** - provides a detailed description of the county's unique physical features.

**Chapter 6: Population and Housing** - presents countywide historic demographic information along with future population and housing projections.

**Chapter 7: Economic Development** – highlights labor force statistics; economic composition; and provides an analysis of existing and future economic conditions for the town and Oconto County.

**Chapter 8: Transportation** - describes the county's existing multi-modal transportation system.

**Chapter 9: Utilities and Community Facilities** - inventories all local and countywide utilities and facilities including schools and emergency services.

**Chapter 10: Intergovernmental Cooperation** - lists the results of three cluster level intergovernmental cooperation workshops as well as programs to facilitate joint planning and decision making processes with other government units.

**Chapter 11: Land Use Controls and Inventory** – provides a detailed inventory of existing land uses for each community and the county as a whole.

**Appendices: County Resources** - contains a countywide inventory of natural resources information; economic SWOT results; a detailed list of available housing, economic development, and transportation financial and technical resources; existing countywide land use inventory; a glossary of definitions; and other relevant input and materials generated or gathered during the plan development process.

## **PLAN DEVELOPMENT PROCESS**

The first comprehensive planning process which began in 2000 was completed in four stages. **Initially**, the Comprehensive Plan Committee, with help from Bay-Lake Regional Planning Commission mailed a community wide survey, to residents, in order to identify issues and concerns relative to land use and development within the town. The survey was based on a nominal group process which identified major themes of concerns within the town.

The **second stage**, inventory and interpretation, began with the collection of data on existing conditions within the community. The data was then analyzed to identify existing and potential problem areas. Using results from the community wide survey, as well as background data compiled during the inventory stage, the Comprehensive Plan Committee developed an overall vision statement as well as goals, objectives, policies and programs for each of the nine elements required in the comprehensive plan under "Smart Growth".

The **third stage**, was the development of the General Plan Design. The first two stages were combined to create a recommended land use plan to guide future conservation, growth and development within the town over the next twenty years. The preliminary General Plan Design was presented to the citizens of the community as well as nearby municipalities and government organizations for their review and comment. The comments were considered and included in the final General Plan Design map and document.

The **fourth stage**, established the tools necessary for implementation of the plan. Recommendations for regulatory techniques including zoning, and an action plan were established to ensure that the intent of the plan will be achieved.

The Town of Oconto 2020 Comprehensive Plan was adopted January 30, 2002.

### **Plan Amendment**

The first major amendment of the Town of Oconto 2020 Comprehensive Plan began in 2018. This amended plan entitled the Town of Oconto 20-Year Comprehensive Plan was adopted in 2021. The focus of this amendment was to completely revise the plan layout and to update all components of the plan including existing land use data, general plan design, land use

recommendations, goals, policies, and implementation steps.

## **Public Participation Process**

### **Public Participation Plan**

The key to drafting and adopting a comprehensive plan that fits the town's future planning needs is gathering input from residents and landowners at all plan development stages. In accordance with s. 66.1001(4), Wis. Stats., the Town of Oconto approved a public participation plan in 2001 entitled "Procedures for Public Participation for Adoption or Amendment of the Town of Oconto Comprehensive Plan". As part of the major plan amendment which began in 2018, the town adopted an updated public participation plan entitled "Procedures for Adoption or Amendment of the Town of Oconto Comprehensive Plan". This updated public participation plan was adopted by the Town Board on April 9, 2018. The intent of this public participation plan is to maximize the opportunities to gain valuable public input. A resolution adopting the written procedures for public participation is included as Appendix A of *Volume I: Town Plan*.

The Public Participation Plan details the individual steps that were designed to encourage and gain involvement from town residents and landowners throughout the planning process. Planning meetings, posted and open to the public, were held to review background data, finalize the individual plan elements, and create the General Plan Design.

### **Community Survey**

In 2001, the town completed a community survey with the total number of community surveys mailed being 645. The number of surveys returned was 341 for a total response rate of 53 percent. Also, because the survey format allowed two persons per household to fill out the survey another 149 responses were received in addition to the 341 that were returned. A number of key issues included that town residents support preserving prime farmlands, wish to further protect natural resources within the town, wish to work cooperatively with the city of Oconto in the future on planning, would like additional access to the Oconto River, and are in support of the USH 41 "near west" bypass. According to the [Survey Research Handbook](#), authored by Alreck and Settle, response rates for mail surveys normally average 20 percent or less and response rates greater than 30 percent are rare. Thus, the town of Oconto Community Survey can be considered highly successful in terms of participation. Results to each of the survey questions are located in a compiled document presented to the town titled *Town of Oconto, Oconto County, Wisconsin, Town Wide Survey Results, 2001*, prepared by BLRPC. This document is available through the town clerk.

### **Nominal Group Exercise**

In August 2006, the Town participated with surrounding municipalities in a Nominal Group Exercise to identify issues and concerns regarding future development in the Town of Oconto and the southern portion of Oconto County. The following are the priority planning issues generated during the discussion. Relevant issues were considered during the development of the goals, objectives, policies, and programs for the town's comprehensive plan. Top issues from the nominal group exercise include:

- Preservation of agriculture and forestry
- Protection of groundwater and wetland resources

- Development of business/industrial parks
- Maximize industry and promote highway corridor for development
- Offer tax incentives to attract businesses and industry

As part of the plan amendment process that began in 2018, the town reviewed and discussed these prior nominal group results. These results and the additional discussion assisted the town in the plan update process.

A complete list of the Nominal Group Exercise can be found in Appendix B of *Volume I: Town Plan*.

## **Intergovernmental Cooperation Workshop**

An Intergovernmental Cooperation Workshop was conducted on April 16, 2008 for communities located in the southern region of Oconto County. Representatives from each of the communities within the planning cluster were invited to attend the workshop, along with neighboring municipalities, school districts, civic and recreational clubs, Oconto County staff, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, Wisconsin Department of Transportation, and other entities and departments that have an interest in and/or direct impact on the implementation of the area's comprehensive plans.

The goal of the workshop was to gather input on any current land use issues or conflicts that need to be addressed during the development of the local comprehensive plans as well as the county's plan. Some examples of positive working relationships and current and future issues and conflicts are listed below. Those in attendance were also asked to provide potential resolutions to those land use problems. Examples of some of the resolutions discussed during the meeting are also listed below. A comprehensive list of positive working relationships, current or future land use issues and conflicts, and potential resolutions are attached as Appendix C of *Volume I: Town Plan*.

### **Positive Working Relationships**

- Shared services (emergency-mutual aid)
- Extra territorial planning area between Oconto Falls and Stiles
- Trans-county and town agreements for road maintenance and snow plow
- Agreements for joint sanitary with Little Suamico and Pensaukee and Oconto (future)
- Cluster meetings – good source of information-education
- Mar-Oco landfill – good working relationship with Marinette County
- County recently updated 911 system – has mutual aid with surrounding communities/ counties to help with disaster response
- Coordination between county and local zoning
- Economic Development: countywide and county funded OCEDC
- Mutual aid agreements on wildland fire suppression between WDNR and many town and village fire departments
- Support summer recreation programs

### **Existing or Potential Land Use Conflicts**

- Potential conflict of town ordinances with county ordinances
- Surrounding agricultural land (possibility of rezoning/annexation)

- Increased residential development can negatively impact important environmental features
- Increased recreational demands may lead to conflicts
- This region is extremely important environmentally and future development should be planned with that in mind
- Development of Hwy 141 corridor
- Keep water ways free (keep housing off water ways)
- Enforcement of ordinances and/or conditions in conditional use permits
- Initiatives/incentives for commercial to locate in town but yet, promote preservation of farmland – some type of incentive
- No central government building results in communication barrier. Residents seeking information on planning, information being given, information not properly communicated to town planning

### **Resolutions**

- Sharing of information between communities (e.g. meeting minutes)
- Informal get-togethers to share information between towns and county
- Information discussions between incorporated communities and towns re: extraterritorial planning areas
- Inter and Intra communication
- Shared planning
- Standardize ordinances – consistency with county – remove duplication and unnecessary items
- Sharing information on troubles between neighbors – local meetings
- Locate funding sources – to continue these meetings and planning processes
- Communities place own ordinances on a website so public can access
- Get town websites out to public – make people aware that they are out there – also promote county websites – utilize newspapers to promote
- Coordination between towns and county to find more efficient ways to implement and enforce ordinances – let county help as much as they can

As part of the plan amendment process that began in 2018, the town reviewed and discussed these prior intergovernmental cooperation workshop results. These results and the additional discussion assisted the town in the plan update process.

### **Open Houses**

Open Houses were held during the planning process leading up to the plan adoption in 2002. As part of the plan amendment process, open houses were held to provide residents and any interested persons an opportunity to review the updated plan materials and give input as to its contents and scope. Plan update materials were also made available on the Oconto County website throughout the plan update project.

## **VISION STATEMENT**

The following is the town's 20-Year Vision Statement as prepared by members of the Plan Commission:

"The Town of Oconto is a rural agricultural community, which has adapted with well planned residential developments, at the same time, offering its residents a quiet life style. Our town has many benefits, such as clean air, clean water, and wildlife habitats, which all contribute to the preservation and continuation of the area's resources. Accessibility to the Oconto River, parklands and trail ways enhance the quality of life for visitors and residents alike. Citizens of the town have supported planning efforts for current and future generations. The Town of

Oconto has been a cooperating partner with neighboring townships and has a working relationship with the City of Oconto, which provides necessary amenities of fire protection and ambulance service. In addition, the Oconto County Highway Department has maintained and serviced roads throughout the township. All of these provisions offer an economic convenience for the residents. The centralized location of our township to Green Bay and Marinette, presents a mix of job opportunities, along with a variety of social activities for inhabitants, while living in harmony with the scenic beauty of Northeastern Wisconsin."