



SHAWANO COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLANS
ANSWERS TO COMMONLY ASKED QUESTIONS
 SPRING 2008

Question 1: What is a Comprehensive Plan?

A comprehensive plan helps guide the type, location, and appearance of growth and preservation in a community. The time horizon for planning is generally 20 years. A comprehensive plan represents the goals, policies, and intentions of the local government which adopts it. Comprehensive plans include policies and recommendations within several different elements which together describe the physical growth of the community. These elements include land use, transportation, housing, utilities and community facilities, natural resources, agricultural resources, cultural resources, economic development, and intergovernmental cooperation. An adopted comprehensive plan provides the foundation for later development-related decisions, including rezonings, conditional use permits, zoning and subdivision ordinance text changes, utility extension, parks, and roads.

Question 2: Why are local communities preparing Comprehensive Plans?

Shawano County and the participating communities decided to prepare comprehensive plans to:

- Lead to more consistent and defensible decision making on land development issues.
- Manage growth so that it does not occur in a haphazard pattern.
- Help the County and local communities spend money wisely and grow effectively so that service costs do not result in a heavy tax burden on property owners.
- Help preserve the local character and natural resources of the area.
- Meet the requirements of the state's comprehensive planning legislation.

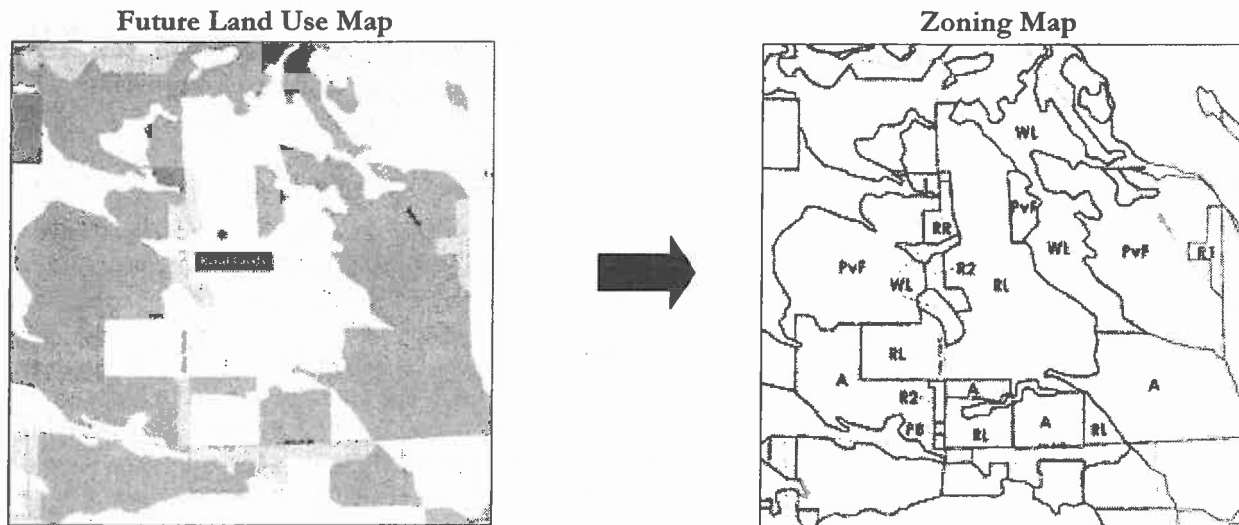
To help offset the cost to prepare these comprehensive plans, the County, Stockbridge-Munsee Reservation, and 25 other local communities got together and applied for a State of Wisconsin multi-jurisdictional comprehensive planning grant. The state awarded Shawano County and its local partner communities a grant to help each jurisdiction prepare their own comprehensive plan. This award was granted largely due to the extensive effort volunteers have already put into setting the stage for the project.

Question 3: What's the difference between a Future Land Use Map in a Comprehensive Plan and a Zoning Map?

While similar in appearance, the Future Land Use Map in a comprehensive plan is different from a Zoning Map.

A Future Land Use Map...	A Zoning Map...
...is a policy document that provides guidance to local officials and property owners on desirable and/or allowable changes of use.	...is the law. A zoning map specifies which permitted uses and other rules currently apply to a property.
...advises land uses over the next 20 years.	...identifies land uses allowed today.
...divides the community into land use designations reflecting desired future uses.	...divides the community into zoning districts with different allowed uses.
...guides future zoning and subdivision decisions.	...must be used to make zoning decisions.
...allows for more consistent and defensible decisions on future changes to Zoning Map.	...is easier to prepare or change when backed by a Future Land Use Map.
...may be prepared or revised as the community sees fit.	...may be adopted or revised (through rezoning) as the community sees fit.
...requires a public hearing before any change.	...requires a public hearing before changes.

Different zoning districts may be mapped on a Zoning Map to realize land use desires previously expressed in a Future Land Use Map. An example of this transformation is shown below.



Question 4: If the Future Land Use Map shows a change from the existing use for a property, will the change affect current property taxes or zoning?

No. The Future Land Use Map will have no effect on the current valuation or assessment of the property for tax purposes, nor does it change the zoning or affect the legal status of the current use in relation to the existing zoning.

Question 5: Will my property be rezoned following adoption of the comprehensive plans?

The adoption of the local and county comprehensive plans will not automatically result in changes to zoning districts, zoning maps, and zoning standards. The County's zoning ordinance, adopted nearly 40 years ago, is applicable in most towns (but not in cities or villages). County staff and its consultants believe that there will be a need to update the County zoning ordinance following adoption of the comprehensive plans, to best implement the visions and desired future land use patterns expressed in these plans. This type of update may include changes to zoning standards, amend existing zoning districts, create new zoning districts, and change zoning maps. The process to update the County's zoning ordinance would be very public, would include heavy local government and property owner involvement, and would probably take at least a year from start to finish. During that proposed zoning update process, the County and towns would further identify and make recommendations on which properties may be rezoned to implement adopted comprehensive plans. Again, this would be done only through another open process involving community and property owner involvement.

Question 6: Can the Future Land Use Map force owners to change the use of their land?

No. Land owners can decide if and when to propose changes to the current use of their property. If and when an owner does propose to change the use of a given property, he or she can use the Future Land Use Map to determine whether or not the change of use will conform with the community's Future Land Use Map, and subsequently determine the likelihood that the change of use will be approved. The town, village, city, and/or county will use the Future Land Use map to help make decisions on changes such as rezonings, special/conditional use permits, and subdivisions. Beginning in 2010, local government decisions on changes to a given property must not conflict with the Future Land Use Map and other elements of the Comprehensive Plan.

Question 7: What is the purpose for having one menu of future land use categories for the Future Land Use Maps?

While each community will prefer different types, locations, and densities of planned land use, the categories have been standardized for all participating Shawano County communities to allow better communication among plans of neighboring communities; greater understanding from the public, developers, and local officials; and a good foundation for possible future zoning changes.

Each Future Land Use Map has different categories to depict where desired future land uses should be located over the next 20 years. That range of proposed categories relate to town, village, and city settings and apply to the full range of desires that we have heard from the different communities, and relate to existing zoning districts to the extent possible. None of the participating communities will use all of the categories—using about ½ or fewer is more typical.

Question 8: What is the does the term “Density” mean?

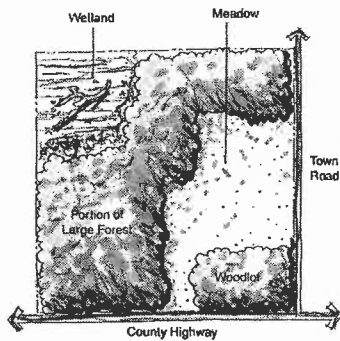
Density refers to the number of homes allowed in a given area. In rural settings, the maximum density is typically lower (fewer homes in a given area) than in villages or cities. For example, one common standard in Exclusive Agricultural areas is a maximum density of 1 home per every 35 acres. This density reflects a land use pattern where the vast majority of land is kept open for agricultural use or resource protection. In rural areas where open areas need not be as large, but preservation of significant opens space is still a goal, a maximum density on the order of 1 home per 10 acres may be sufficient. In villages and cities with sanitary sewer facilities and where closer proximity between homes is advantageous, a density of 3-4 homes per acre is more typical. Using desired land use densities in land use planning not only helps show the desired types of development but also which levels of density are appropriate for a given area.

Question 9: What is the difference between “Density” and “Lot Size”?

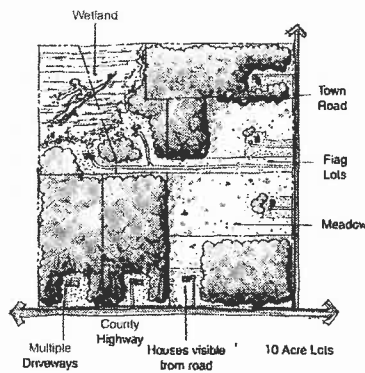
It is critical to understand the difference between density and lot size. A maximum density of one home per 10 acres, does not necessarily mean a minimum lot size of 10 acres. Minimum lot size requirements set how big individual lots have to be. Maximum density requirements determine how many lots can be divided from a larger parcel, regardless of how big individual lots are. Establishing maximum density standards is often referred to as “density-based zoning”. The figure below illustrates two alternative approaches to dividing land for development under a density-based zoning approach using a “one home per 10 acre” standard. The picture in the middle shows a minimum lot size of 10 acres. The picture on the right shows a minimum lot size of roughly 1 acre. Under density based zoning, the smaller minimum lot size allows the same maximum number of lots (8) on an 80 acre parcel but also retains a large part of the original site as uninterrupted open space. This is why the density based approach is also referred to as “conservation development” or “clustering” It has been up to each community to decide if it wants either, both, or neither option to be available.

Examples of Conventional and Conservation Development

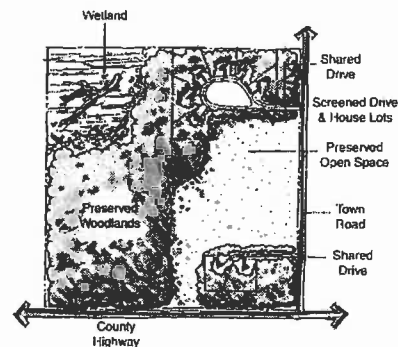
10 Acre Density (e.g. “Open Lands, Agriculture, and Residential” Future Land Use Category)



Predevelopment Site Conditions
80 Acre Site



Conventional Development Option
10 Acre Minimum Lot Size
8 Houses



Conservation Development Option
1 House per 10 Acres (with Smaller Lots)
8 Houses



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Question 10: Why is it important to prevent the fragmentation of forests?

Allowing forests to be segmented through ill planned land division, development, and clearing is potentially harmful in number of ways. Fragmentation can disrupt, alter, or destroy habitat suitable for local plant and animal species, and allow encroachment by invasive species. Clearing and/or development that is not sensitive to terrain can contribute to soil erosion and loss of the forest's ability to regenerate and diminish water quality. Too much development can create land use conflicts between different land uses (e.g. home owners and hunters) and make commercial timber harvesting less efficient and more costly, and consequently a less attractive use of land than selling for development. Finally, forest segmentation can undermine community's natural character, and the reasons people chose to live in the area in the first place.

To encourage preservation of forest lands for wood production instead of development, the State of Wisconsin has established the Managed Forest Law (MFL) Property Tax Program. Any private land owner of at least 10 acres of wood or forest lands and meeting certain other criteria is eligible to enroll their land in the MFL program. The program provides reduced property taxes and tax deferrals in exchange for establishing and implementing a Forest Management Plan for 20-25 years. The focus of the program is sustainable timber production, but additional incentives are available if the owner makes a portion of the land accessible to the public for hunting, fishing, hiking, skiing, and/or sightseeing. Communities interested in preserving forest lands for timber harvesting, hunting, recreation, and natural habitats can express this through their Future Land Use Map by showing a maximum density standard of one home per 10 or more acres in appropriate areas and by adopting corresponding regulations. Other methods of preserving forest lands include forest co-ops and Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) programs)

Question 11: Why is it important to minimize residential development in farming areas?

Allowing residential uses to develop in close proximity to farms can be detrimental to both uses. For residential owners, the odors, dust, machinery noise, and level of slow moving farm traffic associated with modern farm operations can result in the loss of enjoyment and value of their property. For farmers and farms, the conflicts can be even more costly. Residential neighbors can contribute to a rise in traffic and complaints that make farming more difficult. Allowing residential development close to farms tends drive up land prices, as non-farmers compete with farmers for acquisition of land. Increasing conflicts with neighbors and land prices contribute to a sense of impermanence, and some farmers who would have otherwise remained in farming may instead choose to sell their farms for other uses. If allowed to occur over a wide area, the loss of farms can lead to the loss of supporting businesses and services, which in turn leads to an even greater sense of impermanence for any remaining farms. Preserving large, contiguous blocks of farmland and limiting non farm residential development to other, less productive land is therefore a crucial strategy for preserving the agricultural economy and rural character.

Question 12: How can I learn more about the comprehensive planning process?

Additional information about Shawano County's planning effort is available from other sources. For those with Internet access, try www.co.Shawano.wi.us for County land use information and www.doa.state.wi.us/olis for information on Wisconsin's comprehensive planning law. The Wisconsin League of Municipalities and the Wisconsin Towns Association also have information.