

# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

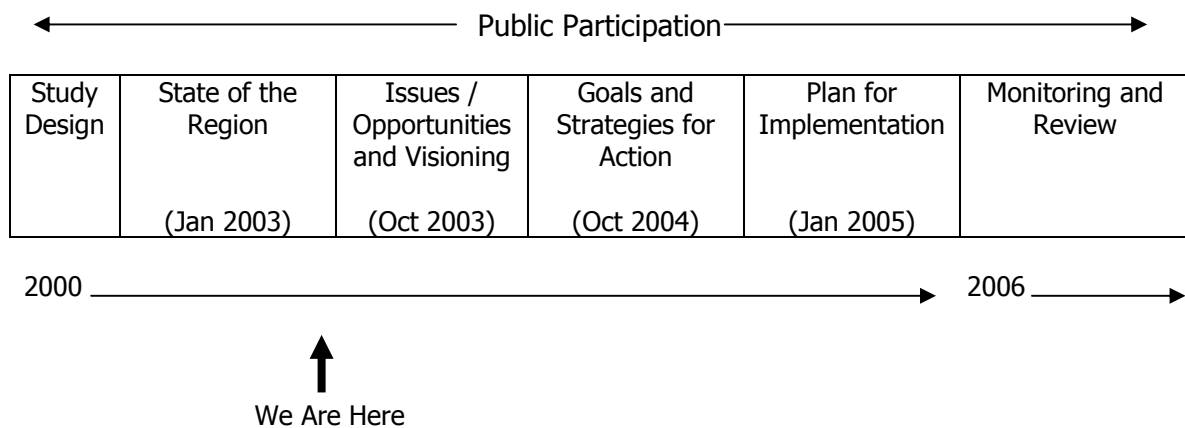
## Introduction

In November 2001, the East Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (East Central) submitted an application for a state planning grant to help fund the preparation of a regional comprehensive plan. In January 2002, a grant of \$175,000 was awarded to East Central. These funds will assist with the project, which will result in the adoption of a regional comprehensive plan document for a 10-county area (Exhibit I-1).

Working together with citizens, local governments and interest groups, East Central’s objective is to develop a comprehensive vision for the future of the area through 2030, as well as to provide guidance to help that vision become reality. The focus is on better planning, helping communities to be smarter about addressing growth management issues in both urban and rural counties, as well as balancing individual property rights with community interests and goals.

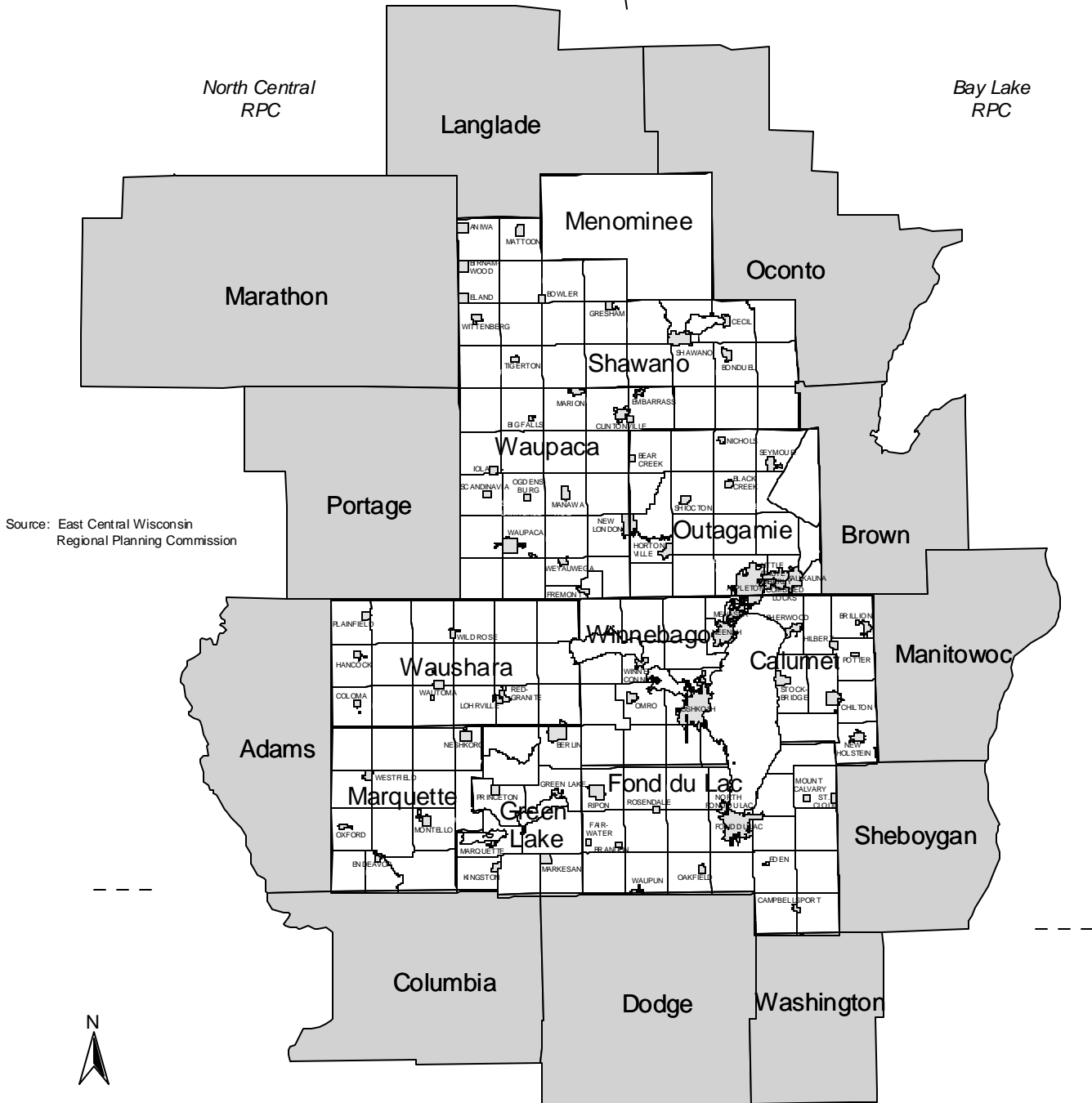
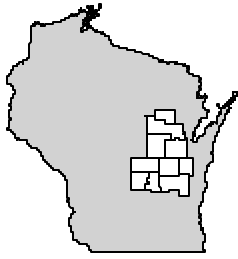
To make the planning process more manageable, East Central has divided the planning process into a number of stages, which will be reported upon as they are completed. This report, the State of the Region, is the first in a series of four milestone reports that East Central will prepare and adopt between now and 2005. The State of the Region report will be followed by Milestone Report 2: Issues, Opportunities and a Regional Vision (October 2003), Milestone Report 3: Goals and Strategies for Action (October 2004), and Milestone Report 4: A Plan for Implementation (January 2005). The final regional plan products will include a review of current policy, the four milestone reports, a report on the public participation process, and a regional poster plan.

Fig. I-1 Major Phases of the Regional Comprehensive Planning Process

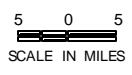


The purpose of this first milestone report is to provide a broad description of the current state of the region. Before we begin to plan for the future, we need a benchmark of where we are at the moment. Background information and data are provided on issues and opportunities, economic development, housing, transportation, utilities and community facilities, agricultural,

Exhibit I-1  
 East Central Region  
 (with adjacent Regional Planning  
 Commissions (RPCs) and counties)



Source: East Central Wisconsin  
 Regional Planning Commission



No RPC  
 Designation

Southeastern  
 RPC

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natural, and cultural resources, land use, intergovernmental cooperation and implementation. The data collection schedule has incorporated the 2000 census release timetable. Regional aerial photography was completed in the spring of 2000 to coincide with the census statistics. The data used to produce this report appear in interactive format (Microsoft excel) at the East Central Data Center at [www.eastcentralrpc.org/data\\_center](http://www.eastcentralrpc.org/data_center).

This chapter describes the region, the East Central Regional Planning Commission, and current policy. It discusses, briefly, the 1999 comprehensive planning legislation, outlines the regional planning process, and explains the structure of the remainder of this report.

## **The Region**

The region, which consists of 10-counties: Calumet, Fond du Lac, Green Lake, Marquette, Menominee, Outagamie, Shawano, Waupaca, Waushara, and Winnebago counties, encompasses approximately 5,900 square miles and has a population of over 600,000. As of 2000, 60.5% of the region's population was classified as urban.

The region contains two distinct geographical areas. Portions of the four eastern counties (Calumet, Outagamie, Winnebago, and Fond du Lac) form an urbanized area around Lake Winnebago and support a well-developed industrial base. Three of these counties (Calumet, Outagamie, and Winnebago) comprise the Appleton-Oshkosh-Neenah Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA), the third largest metropolitan area in Wisconsin, with a 2001 population of approximately 361,591. This is a major manufacturing center for Wisconsin and the Midwest, focusing on paper products and machine manufacturing.

The four urban counties surrounding Lake Winnebago accounted for approximately 75% (459,518) of the region's population in 2001. The area along the Lower Fox River between Lake Winnebago and Green Bay contains the largest concentration of urban development, including the Fox Cities. The latter is comprised of seven contiguous, incorporated municipalities and adjoining urbanizing towns and has a combined 2001 population of about 202,097. Appleton, with a 2001 population of 70,623, is the largest of the Fox Cities and the largest city in the region. Other major urban centers include Oshkosh on the west shore of Lake Winnebago and Fond du Lac on the south shore.

The outlying portions of the four urban counties surrounding Lake Winnebago are more rural in character and, therefore, share many similarities with the six rural counties to the north and west: Menominee, Shawano, Waupaca, Waushara, Marquette, and Green Lake. The northern and western counties contain many lakes and forested areas providing recreational and tourism activities. Shawano, Waupaca, and Waushara counties have a number of motor vehicle body and part manufacturing firms. The two largest cities outside of the urban area include the City of Shawano, in Shawano County and the City of Ripon, located in western Fond du Lac County.

The Fox-Wolf River Basin serves as a common orientation for both the rural and urban counties. Each of the ten counties in the region are wholly or partially within the 6,400 square mile drainage area, which includes the Winnebago pool lakes, the largest inland water body in the state of Wisconsin.

In the 20 years, between 1981 and 2001, the 10-county area has changed considerably.

- 83,000 new jobs have been created;
- an area larger than the entire area of Winnebago County has been taken out of agricultural production;
- 60,000 new homes have been built, that is 8 new homes everyday; and
- as of 1997, the price of many of these homes was out of reach of one-third of workers in the region who earn low-level wages.

### **East Central Regional Planning Commission**

In May 2002, East Central celebrated 30 years as a regional planning agency. The East Central mission continues to be the preparation of a regional plan and the provision of advisory services to member governments.

East Central has had a regional planning approach since the early 1970s. Since its adoption in 1978, the regional plan has been expanded and refined through the adoption of a series of project specific plans. These include the Fox Cities Long-Range Transportation and Land Use Plan for the Fox Cities, Oshkosh, and Fond du Lac urban areas.

East Central has promoted and implemented its regional plan by providing assistance and advice consistent with the plan to local government units, as they develop local plans for their respective areas. Providing planning assistance to local governments in respect of land use, housing, transportation, open space, economic development and environmental management has been and, remains a core function of East Central.

The benefits of adopting a regional approach have long been recognized in Wisconsin. Indeed, the regional planning commissions, established throughout the state in the early 1970s, were created in order to promote and facilitate greater intergovernmental cooperation in dealing with issues spanning individual jurisdictions. Regionalism continues to grow in relevance as we come to terms with the global economy and the need to ensure better value for tax dollars. The challenges that we face today, such as, economic development, transportation, environmental quality, and social inclusion, stretch across traditional political boundaries and jurisdictions. It is therefore important that these types of issues are examined on a regional level, where economic, environmental and social issues come together.

In the absence of specific performance indicators, East Central's success has been judged on the basis of major work efforts that resulted in implemented projects of area wide significance and area wide program recommendations that have been implemented by local government.

The most significant accomplishments leading to the development of areawide projects include the following. The construction of STH 441 (Tri-County Expressway) and CTH CB (Westside Arterial) in the Fox Cities; inclusion of Winnebago County service from the Wisconsin Southern (shortline) Railroad; construction of the Grand Chute-Menasha West Sewerage Treatment Facility; transfer of the Fox River locks from Corps to state authority; and acquisition and development of the Tigerton Dells ATV Park.

Area-wide program recommendations include the regional outdoor recreation plan; sewer service area plans; Fox River Heritage Tourism program; Economic Disaster Plan; local bridge

replacement priorities; multi-jurisdictional pavement management system; major highway corridor plans; and non-metallic mining program administration.

Intergovernmental cooperation continues to be the basis for the organization and structure of East Central. The region consists of 10 counties, 27 cities, 29 villages and 156 towns. In addition to the local units of government there are, within the region, 60 school districts (elementary & secondary schools), 6 institutions of higher education, 7 vocational technical and adult education districts, and 66 sanitary districts. In terms of neighboring jurisdictions, the region is bordered by 3 regional planning commissions, North Central; Bay Lakes; and South Eastern, and by 11 counties: Langlade; Oconto; Brown; Manitowoc; Sheboygan; Washington; Dodge; Columbia; Adams; Portage; and Marathon.

East Central works cooperatively with a wide range of federal, state, regional and local organizations. East Central staff work routinely with federal agencies such as the US Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration and the US Department of Transportation: the Federal Highway Administration and the Federal Transit Administration. Staff also work closely with state agencies such as the Departments of Commerce, Natural Resources, Transportation and Administration. Specific memoranda of agreement have been entered into with various area-wide and state agencies for cooperative planning efforts. These include four manpower planning districts, an area agency on aging, two rural conservation and development districts, three community action programs, the Wisconsin Rural Housing Cooperative, and the State Clearing House.

East Central has various planning responsibilities that are multi-jurisdictional and address area-wide issues. East Central is a designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for the Appleton and Oshkosh Urban Areas. East Central is also a designated Economic Development District (EDD). As such, it prepares a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) that addresses economic issues and qualifies the region for federal assistance. In addition, East Central prepares, by agreement with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, sewer service area plans that delineate future growth areas for major urban areas throughout the region. Finally, East Central is also a designated regional clearinghouse (E.O 12372) for various federal and state grant programs and reviews approximately 500 applications a year for consistency with the regional and local plans.

Over 80% of the East Central commissioners are elected officials. All county executives and county board chairs are commissioners. Towns and cities are also represented. One commissioner from each county is appointed by the Governor to represent state interests.

## **Policy Context**

The basic goals, objectives and policies developed in the late 1970s by East Central have not changed dramatically over the last 30 years, rather they have evolved to address federal and state guidelines as well as local development trends and concerns. There have been two major policy initiatives in the history of East Central.

The process of developing goals and objectives began in the early 1970s. The initial goals, *Goals for East Central Wisconsin (1976)*, were revisited in 1978 when they were linked with a detailed study of land use patterns and their impacts on the east central area. This plan, *New*

*Directions for Growth and Development (1978)*, became the basis for East Central's comprehensive regional land-use planning program – the means by which the adopted goals and objectives were to be implemented. The plan included functional planning programs for housing, economic development, environment, open space, and transportation. Urban service area delineations, which were regarded as the main planning tool for achieving more compact growth in the region, were developed.

Since 1978 various minor refinements to land use policies have been undertaken. Perhaps the most significant policy effort took place during the 1990s. Prompted by the requirements of the Inter-modal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act 1991 (ISTEA), East Central initiated a comprehensive course of action in 1993 to revise its policies for urban land use planning. A set of updated goals, objectives, and policies, *The Long-Range Transportation / Land Use Plan: Goals, Objectives and Policies (1995)*, intended to serve as yardsticks by which progress toward plan implementation could be measured, was adopted.

It is important to highlight that these policies related specifically to the metropolitan planning area consisting of the Fox Cities, Oshkosh, and Fond du Lac urban areas. *The Long Range Transportation / Land Use Plan Addendum* was produced in 1996 and revised in 2000 to address some of the more complex land use issues. Specifically, it refined and supplemented the growth management and urban service delivery policies adopted by East Central in 1995. In addition, it included rural development policies, for rural areas within the defined urban boundary, and comprehensive plan guidelines.

The goals, policies and objectives adopted in 1995 and amended in 1996 and 2000 provide the context within which various functional plans produced by East Central are updated. These include sewer service area plan updates every 5 years, the annual updates of the comprehensive economic development strategy; and the production every five years of the long-range transportation/land use plan for the Fox Cities and Oshkosh urbanized areas.

East Central's current goals in respect of its five functional planning programs are outlined below.

- Economic Development – to expand employment and income opportunities, develop and maintain public facilities and infrastructure, and build and retain a skilled labor force while ensuring prudent use of natural resources.
- Housing – to establish a process of identifying and meeting the housing needs of the current and future residents of the region. Specifically to encourage adequate housing suitable to the needs and within the means of all residents of the region and to promote convenient, safe, and aesthetic living environments.
- Environment – to provide a safe, healthy, and enjoyable environment for present and future residents of the region. In particular, to manage, preserve, and protect the natural environment, including agricultural and forested lands, while encouraging efficient land use and development patterns in both urban and rural areas.
- Open Space – to protect, conserve and enhance the natural, historic, cultural and economic resources of the area while designating land and encouraging the provision of facilities to meet the existing and future needs for active and passive recreational activities.

- Transportation – to achieve a safe, efficient and environmentally sound transportation system that provides personal mobility for all segments of the population and supports the economy of the region.

For a more in depth description of current goals, policies, implementation, and preliminary policy analysis please refer to *East Central Policy (2003)*, available online at [www.eastcentralrpc.org](http://www.eastcentralrpc.org). The policy paper compiles the existing goals and policies of East Central, currently found in over 120 publications, into one document. Consequently, it is an important starting point for the revision of the regional comprehensive plan.

## **Comprehensive Planning Legislation**

While East Central has had a regional plan since the early 1970's, recent legislation, s. 66.1001 and s. 16.965 Wis. Stats. have established new comprehensive and smart growth standards that will require a major regional plan revision and update. This report represents the first step in meeting the new requirements.

Governor Tommy Thompson signed Wisconsin's new Smart Growth initiative into law in 1999. The new law includes a list of nine elements that make up a comprehensive plan:

- issues and opportunities
- economic development
- housing
- transportation
- community and public facilities
- agricultural, natural and cultural resources
- intergovernmental cooperation
- land use
- implementation

The law requires that beginning January 1, 2010, any program or action of a local government unit (county, city, village, town or regional planning commission) that effects land use must be consistent with an adopted comprehensive plan. The current comprehensive planning status for the communities within the region is illustrated in Exhibit I-2.

The new legislation emphasizes the importance of intergovernmental cooperation and promotes smart growth. The latter is defined as development and redevelopment of land with existing infrastructure and municipal, state and utility services, as well as new development located contiguous to existing development at densities which have relatively low municipal, state governmental and utility costs.

The legislation also provides a set of 14 local comprehensive planning goals which communities must consider when preparing a comprehensive plan with state aid.

- Promotion of the redevelopment of lands with existing infrastructure and public services and the maintenance and rehabilitation of existing residential, commercial and industrial structures.
- Encouragement of neighborhood designs that support a range of transportation choices.



- Protection of natural areas, including wetlands, wildlife habitats, lakes, woodlands, open spaces and ground water resources.
- Protection of economically productive areas, including farmland and forests.
- Encouragement of land uses, densities and regulations that promote efficient development patterns and relatively low municipal, state governmental and utility costs.
- Preservation of cultural, historic and archaeological sites.
- Encouragement of coordination and cooperation among nearby units of government.
- Building of community identity by revitalizing main streets and enforcing design standards.
- Providing adequate infrastructure and public services and an adequate supply of developable land to meet existing and future market demand for residential, commercial and industrial uses.
- Promoting the expansion or stabilization of the current economic base and the creation of a range of employment opportunities at the state, regional and local levels.
- Balancing individual property rights with community interests and goals.
- Planning and development of land uses that create or preserve varied and unique urban and rural communities.
- Providing an integrated, efficient and economical transportation system that affords mobility, convenience and safety and that meets the needs of all citizens, including transit-dependent and disabled citizens.

East Central's primary goal, as it prepares its new regional comprehensive plan, is to ensure that all local government units, interest groups, and citizens have the opportunity to be involved in deciding how to deal effectively with the growth management issues that will face the region. Working cooperatively, East Central's objective is to develop a policy framework for planning issues. This framework, addressing issues such as regional transportation, energy production and distribution, and coordination of land use and public services, will provide the regional infrastructure upon which local governments may build local land use policies to promote consistent and cost effective land use decision within the region. It is anticipated that county and local governments will benefit from the regional planning effort with savings in the cost of data collection, public participation, and broad policy development.

## **The East Central Regional Comprehensive Plan 2030**

### **Purpose**

Working together with citizens, local governments and interest groups, East Central's objective is to determine a comprehensive vision for the development of the region over the next 20 years: taking into account the economy, the environment, and the community. And to provide the strategic policy guidance that will help to make that vision a reality. The main objectives are to:

- promote informed, consistent and cost efficient land use decisions throughout the region, as well as with neighboring jurisdictions;
- provide the mechanism by which the state and local comprehensive planning goals are interpreted and applied at the regional and local levels;

- provide a coordinating regional framework for local comprehensive planning efforts as well as for planning by special districts, such as sanitary districts, school districts etc;
- identify potential conflict areas between state, regional and local plans, and work cooperatively towards resolution;
- identify smart growth areas; and
- facilitate public participation in the planning process.

### **Guiding Principles**

A number of principles underpin the decisions that East Central has made in relation to the proposed scope and process for producing the region's comprehensive plan.

- Public Participation: A major concern of East Central is to put in place arrangements that ensure openness as well as increase regional ownership of both the issues and of the policies that are adopted for their resolution. To facilitate this, a public participation plan has been developed which aims to involve interest groups, citizens, and local governments throughout the planning process.
- Intergovernmental Cooperation: East Central recognizes that unless there is coordination between the different levels and departments of government, the process of preparing plans is likely to lead to considerable duplication, conflicting priorities, consultation fatigue and a loss of credibility with the public. East Central is, therefore, committed to adopting a planning process that emphasizes intergovernmental cooperation by fostering frequent and open communication.
- Framework Policy Plan: There is no desire to over plan or force a top-down approach. Rather, East Central takes the view that it is crucial, given that comprehensive plans will be produced by the majority of local government units, to give careful consideration to the most appropriate level for dealing with particular issues and priorities. East Central has concluded that the objective of the regional comprehensive planning process is the preparation of an integrated, strategic policy framework plan.
- Consistency: The regional comprehensive framework plan will provide the policy foundation on which other planning efforts in the community may build. East Central will work to identify potential conflict areas between state, regional, and local plans and to provide a forum in which those differences can be articulated, mediated, and, where possible, resolved. As new local plans are developed, East Central will work to ensure that the local comprehensive goals and recommendations of the regional comprehensive plan are incorporated within those local planning efforts. Education, communication and negotiation will be key. East Central takes the view that existing and ongoing plans should be reviewed to ensure consistency. The process for ensuring consistency is yet to be determined, current thinking suggests that it could involve East Central in a role similar to the clearing-house review process.

- **Precedence:** As comprehensive plans are to be produced at the regional, county, and local levels, it seems almost inevitable that there will be occasional inconsistencies. This in turn may mean that zoning ordinances at the county and local levels may be inconsistent. The process for determining precedence is yet to be determined.
- **Advisory:** It is important to note that the new comprehensive planning law supplements the planning requirements of prior municipal planning law, it does not change planning authority. East Central does not have implementing authority.

**Process**

During 2000 and 2001, East Central staff produced a draft study design and a draft public participation plan for the regional comprehensive plan. As the regional comprehensive plan will help to guide the future shape of the region it was considered appropriate to submit East Central’s proposed planning approach to a peer review. Comments were received over a three-month period from June 1<sup>st</sup> to August 31<sup>st</sup> 2001. A number of amendments were made to the planning approach on the basis of comments received. The regional planning process and schedule, as well as the public participation process are shown in Fig. I-1 and Fig. I-2 respectively.

Fig. I-2. Regional Comprehensive Planning Process

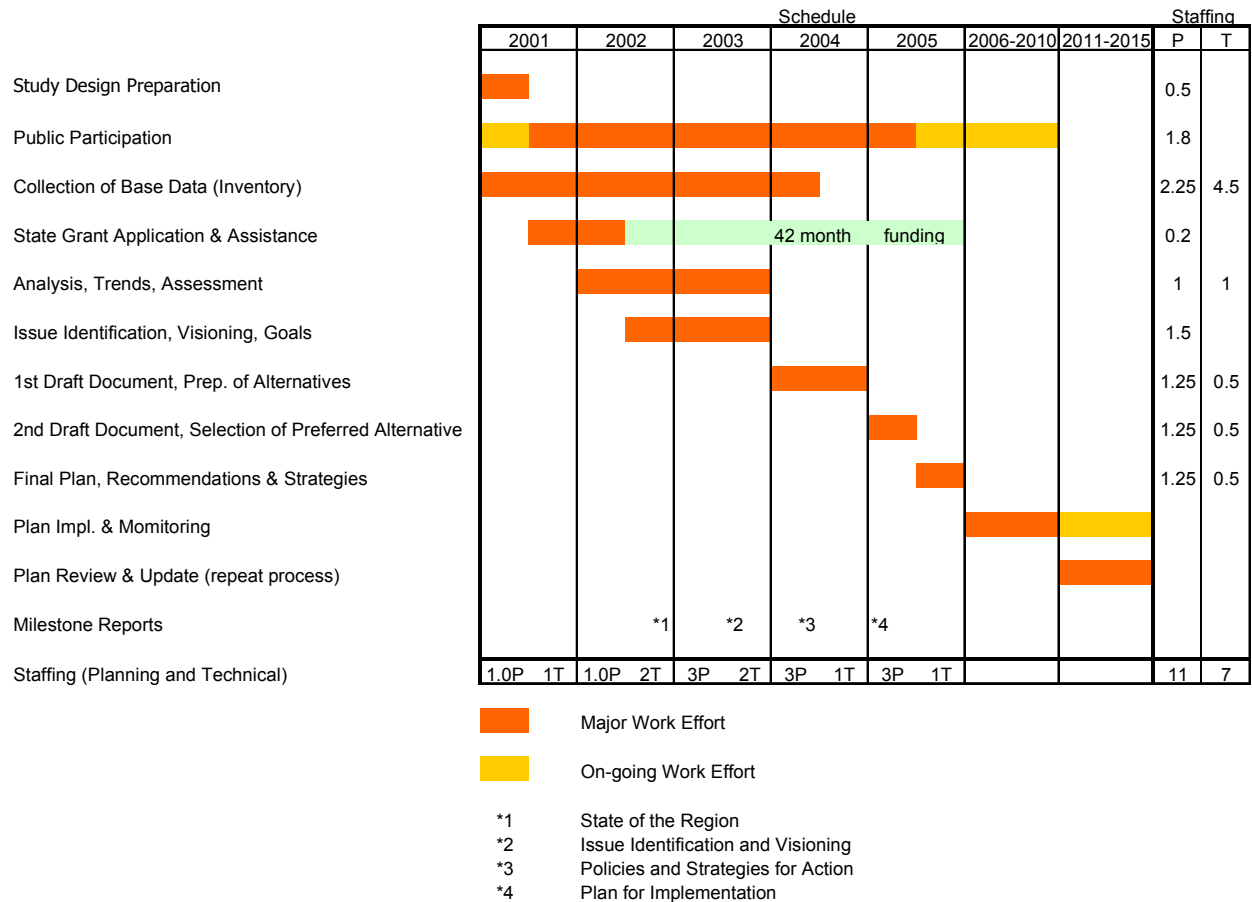
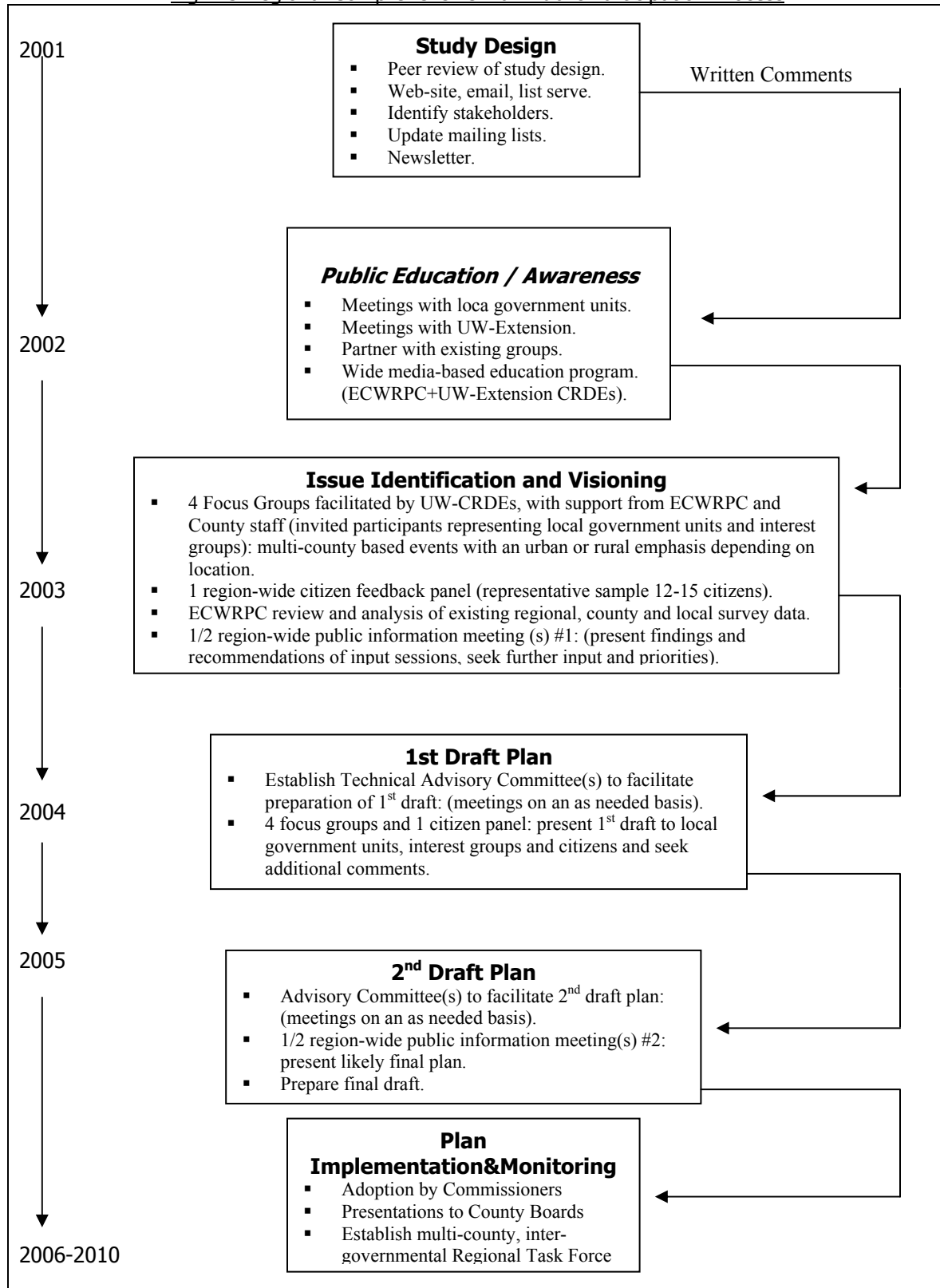


Fig. I-3 Regional Comprehensive Plan Public Participation Process



## **Structure of Report**

The State of the Region report is intended to provide the baseline information that will enable Commissioners, staff, advisory committee members, interest groups, and citizens to understand the basic make-up of the region. This report will provide the foundation on which we will begin to plan for the future.

The report provides background information on the following: issues and opportunities (demographic trends and socio-economic conditions), economic development, housing, transportation, utilities and community facilities, agricultural, natural, and cultural resources, and land use.

A chapter is devoted to each of the topics listed above. Each chapter is divided into five main sections. After a brief introduction, each chapter describes the broad policy context for that particular area, and presents a statement on current intergovernmental cooperation. The presentation of background information, the assessment of current and future conditions, is the main focus. Each chapter concludes by summarizing current and future trends and presents a preliminary identification of the issues and opportunities, which the data analysis and public participation process indicate will need to be addressed in the regional plan.

The data inventory along with the public participation process are considered to be crucial in providing the input necessary to identify the key issues and opportunities facing the region. These issues and opportunities will be addressed in much greater detail in Milestone Report 2: Issues, Opportunities, and a Regional Vision, which is scheduled for adoption in October 2003.

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