

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

In November 2001, the East Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (East Central) submitted an application to the WI Department of Administration: Office of Land Information Services (OLIS) for a state planning grant to help fund the preparation of its regional comprehensive plan. In January 2002, a grant of \$175,000 was awarded to East Central. These funds are assisting with a project, which will result in the adoption of a regional comprehensive plan document for our 10-county area (Exhibit I-1). Working together with citizens, local governments and interest groups, East Central's mission is to develop a comprehensive vision for the future of the area through 2030, as well as to provide strategic policy guidance to help that vision become reality.

Background information on the region, the East Central Regional Planning Commission, the policy context, the 1999 comprehensive planning legislation, and the purpose and guiding principles underlying the regional comprehensive plan, was provided in *Milestone Report #1: The State of the Region, (2003)*.

East Central's goal, as it prepares its new regional comprehensive plan, is to ensure that all stakeholders have the opportunity to be involved in deciding how to deal effectively with the growth management issues that will face the region. It's your region, your choice. Working cooperatively, East Central's objective is to develop a comprehensive, policy framework for planning issues. This framework, which will address issues such as regional transportation, energy production and distribution, and coordination of land use and public services, will provide a regional infrastructure upon which local governments may build local land use policies. 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. Targets include consistent, balanced, and cost effective land use decisions that will promote the economic, social and environmental well-being of the region and all of its citizens, as well as helping communities to be smart about addressing growth management issues in both urban and rural areas, and balancing individual property rights with community interests and goals.

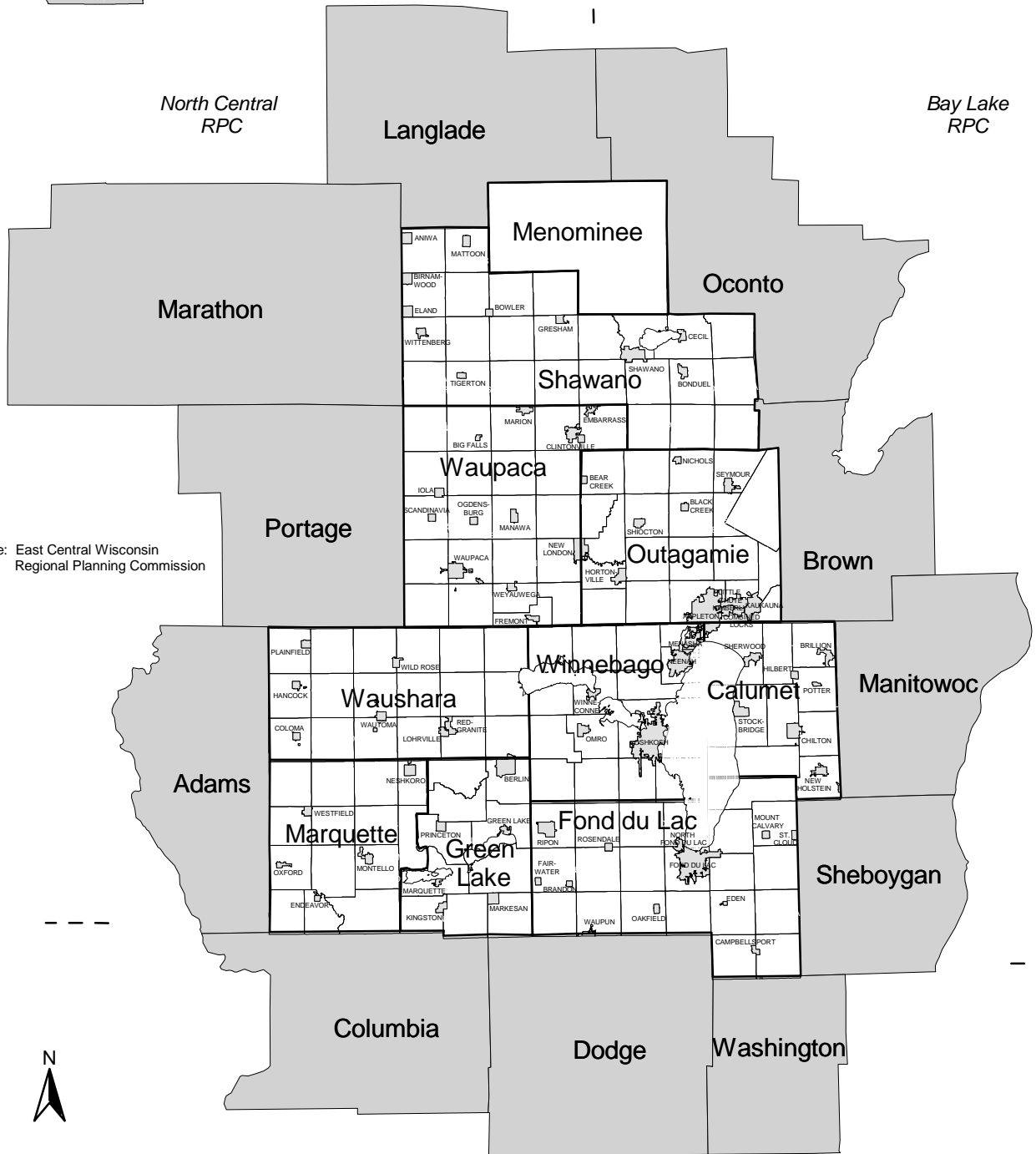
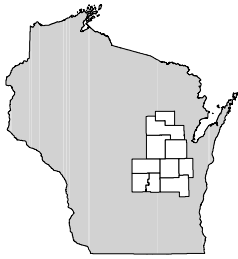
This chapter describes the regional comprehensive planning process, outlines the rationale and method adopted in the preparation of this report, and presents an introduction to the chapters that follow.

Regional Comprehensive Planning Process

To make the planning process more manageable, East Central has divided it into a number of stages. Each stage is being reported upon as it is completed. Figure I-1 outlines the overall planning process.

The final regional plan products will include the *ECWRPC Regional Comprehensive Plan Study Design and Public Participation Plan (2001)*, a review of current policy; *East Central Policy (2003)*, which is currently available on line at www.eastcentralrpc.org, a report on the public

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



Source: East Central Wisconsin
Regional Planning Commission



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Fig. I-2 Major Phases of the Regional Comprehensive Planning Process



Milestone Report #1

East Central produced the *State of the Region (2003)* report for two main reasons. First, to provide useful, accessible information to citizens, elected officials, local government staff, and interest groups. Second, to collate baseline information that would enable us all to understand the basic make-up of the region and provide the foundation on which we could begin to plan for the future. The first milestone report, along with input from the public participation process enabled East Central to begin the process of identifying the key issues and opportunities facing the region. For ease of reference a summary of the first Milestone Report is provided in Chapter 2 of this report.

Milestone Report #2

The next step in the regional planning process is developing a vision of our preferred future for the region. And this is the focus of Milestone Report #2.

The current report has three objectives.

- Develop a preferred vision for the future of the region.
- Explore the impact of current and projected trends on all issues identified to date in the regional planning process, including those presented in the State of the Region Report.
- Identify core goals to help us work toward the future we envision for ourselves and the next generation.

The current report is being produced to help us bridge the transition between the envisioned regional future and where the region actually looks likely to be heading, given current and anticipated trends.

There have been four main steps involved in the preparation of this report.

Step 1: Envisioning the future

Working cooperatively, we have developed thematic vision statements for each of the substantive smart growth elements. This involved clarifying aspirations of how we want the region to look in the future. Three specific questions were addressed.

- What would you like to be preserved in the region?
- What would you like to be changed in the region?
- What would you like to be created in the region?

The vision statements have been developed taking into account the state local land use goals (see Appendix B), input from the public participation events, specifically the regional focus groups and public information meeting, comments from technical advisory committee members, and staff input. East Central considers it crucial to offer all stakeholders the opportunity of being involved in clarifying a preferred future.

Step 2: Clarifying the Issues / Opportunities that will be addressed in the regional plan

In terms of the issues and opportunities identified, we have made decisions about what will be addressed in our plan: the focus is on regional issues. Where we have made the decision that issues are better handled by an agency or organization other than ourselves, we have provided information on how those issues have been handed off. The objective is to ensure that all issues raised receive due respect and consideration.

Step 3: Match / Mismatch between envisioned and likely future

For the remaining issues, we have explored the identified trends in some detail and provided an assessment of the match / mismatch between the likely future, given current and projected trends, and the envisioned future. As we worked toward producing this report there were two primary approaches that we used to explore the impact that identified trends may have on the region.

- First, for the trends that are most likely, for example, an aging population (by 2020, Wisconsin will be one of five states in the country with 20% of its population over 65 years), an increasing number of households and a reduction in household size, we have asked how do we respond?
- Second, for the areas of greatest conflict, we have reexamined our basic assumptions about the issues and asked are there better ways to address these challenges?
 - New construction, reconstruction and expansion of highways, at considerable cost, seem to be the dominant current trend in transportation. How do we rethink how we deal with transportation issues relating to sprawl? How do we promote compact, mixed land use patterns that provide access, reduce social exclusion, and create livable communities while being cost effective?
 - The number of residential units in the region increased by 43% in the 20 years between 1980 and 2000, however the amount of residential land increased by

173%. How do we promote cost-effective redevelopment and development of land with existing or nearby community facilities, while continuing to provide both housing choice and affordability?

- Approximately 320,000 acres of farmland were lost during this 20 year time period, an area larger than the entire area of Winnebago County. How do we protect farmland and preserve rural character, while ensuring the continued economic vitality of the region?
- The region's natural resources, groundwater and surface water, lakes and open spaces are under increasing pressure from both the urbanization of our rural areas and greater than ever recreational use. How do we ensure the protection of our natural resources in the face of competing demands?

Step 4: Identification of Goals

In addressing these questions, we have begun to identify the core goals that will enable us to achieve the envisioned future. To achieve real progress, we realize that goals for the various elements will need to be pursued in an integrated manner. Consequently, we have focused on identifying the links and interaction between the different elements of the plan. For example, transportation and land use planning will have to be taken forward together. There will need to be close links between housing and economic development. To preserve the environment, farmland, and rural character there will need to be a good understanding of the interaction between urban and rural goals etc.

Technical Advisory Committees

East Central established a number of Technical Advisory Committees to guide the preparation of this report. Each committee focused on a specific element of the regional comprehensive plan. Intergovernmental co-operation is considered to be fundamental to each of the elements. For three areas: housing, utility and community facilities, and natural resources, it was considered appropriate given the breadth of topics to be covered, to form a number of sub-committees. The committees and sub committees are listed below along with the name of the staff facilitator.

- Economic Development – Elizabeth Runge
- Regional Housing – Betty Nordeng
 - Rural Housing Policy
 - Urban Housing Policy
- Transportation/Land Use – Ann Schell
- Utilities and Community Facilities – Kathy Thunes
 - Education
 - Health and Childcare
 - Local Park and Recreation
 - Public Safety
 - Solid Waste
 - Telecommunications, Electric, and Gas
- Agricultural Resources – Harlan Kiesow
- Natural Resources - Eric Fowle
 - Geologic Resources
 - Groundwater and Water Supply

- Open Space, Recreation and Regional Character
- Regional Ecology
- Watershed and Wastewater
- Cultural Resources – Ed Kleckner

Approximately 300 individuals were invited to serve on the advisory committees. Key objectives have been to ensure a wide representation from public, private, and voluntary sectors at the state, regional, county, and local levels, as well as Tribes and citizens. Additionally, we wanted to guarantee a reasonable urban-rural balance. Detailed information, including members, meeting notices and summaries of proceedings relating to each committee is available on-line at www.eastcentralrpc.org.

We invited committee members to take a broad, long term, proactive approach. This included being aware of the broader context of our decisions, as well as being conscious of the forces of change, many of which may not originate within the region.

Structure of the Report

Chapter 2 provides a summary of Milestone Report #1: The State of the Region. Chapter 3 presents a summary of the vision statements for each of the elements: economic development, housing, transportation, utilities and community facilities, agricultural, natural, and cultural resources, and land use.

A chapter is devoted to each of the substantive topics listed above. Each chapter is divided into five main sections. After a brief introduction, each chapter describes the cooperation between the private, public, not-for-profit sectors and citizens during the second phase of the regional comprehensive planning process, outlines the interaction and links between the different elements of the plan, and presents the thematic vision statements.

The centerpiece of each chapter is a series of issue based fact sheets. For each issue that will be addressed in the regional plan we provide information on the "Key Facts". This is followed by a section called "So What!" This is an explanation of why the issue matters: the key objective of this section is to communicate consequences. The aim is to heighten public awareness and begin to influence public opinion, which is crucial if we are to generate action. The "Current Action" section describes the main programs currently in place to address the problem and highlights possible gaps. The fact sheet concludes by identifying "Core Goals".

The purpose of the fact sheets is to tell a good, solid story about the issues, complete with examples. The focus is on persuading a wider audience of the need for action. For example, a school district may take the position that the location of a new school is entirely a matter for the district based primarily on the acquisition of cheap land. However, when the potential consequences of a new school location are discussed from the perspective of the local government: the fact that sewer and water services may need to be expanded, that the existing road network may be inadequate thereby requiring major improvements, that the public transportation system may need to be expanded, that new schools in the countryside inevitably leads to new homes and possible sprawl, etc, it becomes apparent that there may be a number of wider considerations. The school district may begin to recognize that it may be useful to have an information sheet that would, for example, outline considerations to be borne in mind

and a list of people / agencies that it may be worthwhile to consult, which may lead to more cost effective decisions for the community. It is emphasized that while East Central cannot make peoples' decisions for them, what we can do is to provide concise, quality information that highlights the possible consequences of particular decisions, which will help facilitate informed decision making.

Each chapter concludes by presenting the thematic vision statement, summarizing issues and opportunities, identifying the match and/or mismatch between the likely and envisioned future, and the associated core goals that will enable us to overcome the mismatch.

These core goals will provide the starting point for *Milestone Report 3: Goals and Strategies for Action*. Given that we have identified what we want to achieve, the focus in the next report will be on determining how to achieve what we want. There will, of course, be many different ways to achieve the goals that we have set in this report: there is no one answer. The next stage of the planning process will be to discuss all the possibilities, affording each the same respect, and ultimately to reach a common way forward, to reach a conclusion on the preferred policies and strategies for action.