

## Chapter 1:

# INTRODUCTION

The Town of Washburn's land use history is similar to other Bayfield County towns in the Chequamegon Bay area. Its rural character, emphasized by its rather large forested areas, its natural and water resources, and its rural residential qualities helps define and influence the Town of Washburn. Concerns about future increases in population and associated residential development prompted the town to embark on the preparation of a Comprehensive Plan. Recently, the Town has experienced a gradual shift toward more residential development, and citizens have observed a much more rapid shift in some nearby communities. In spite of this, the Town of Washburn continues to be predominantly rural in character, and retaining that character is an important goal of many of its citizens.

## PURPOSE OF THE PLAN

This Comprehensive Plan is an assessment of the current conditions that prevail within the Town, a description of the kind of community its citizens would like it to be in the future, and a plan for realizing that future. The Plan is a tool to safeguard and improve the quality of life for the Town's current citizens, but even more so, it is a way to pass along to our descendents a chance to enjoy the quality of life that we enjoy today.

The Town of Washburn's Comprehensive Plan is a vision of what the Town wants to be. It is a guide to help the Town preserve what it values, enhance what it feels needs to be improved, and create what is desired. More specifically, the Plan serves the following purposes:

1. It will assist local and county officials implement recommendations relating to its goals, objectives, and actions and assist in making future land use decisions.
2. It will assist with development and management issues by addressing short-range and long-range concerns regarding growth, development, and preservation of the community.
3. It addresses physical planning matters such as land use, transportation, housing, utilities, and natural resources while also considering social and economic issues.
4. It ties together a variety of elements that affect a Town (i.e. land use, transportation, community facilities, and so on) into one integrated plan that reflects the interrelationship between these elements.
5. It conveys a long-term vision that can guide the Town through the year 2027, but it also provides specific policies and recommendations that address current issues.

6. It identifies key issues, sets goals and objectives, develops policies for achieving the objectives, and describes actions needed to implement the policies. It provides the legal basis for land use control and it provides a link to the Town's ordinances, in conjunction with the Bayfield County ordinances, all of which must be consistent with the Comprehensive Plan.
7. It guides the Planning Commission, the Town Board, landowners, and private developers in decisions related to environmental and cultural preservation, and future development in the Town.
8. It satisfies the requirements of Wisconsin Smart Growth legislation.

This comprehensive plan has been prepared under the Wisconsin's Comprehensive Planning legislation contained in Wisconsin Statute 66.1001. The plan is organized into nine chapters or elements (issues and opportunities; housing; transportation; utilities and community facilities; natural, agricultural, and cultural resources; economic development; intergovernmental cooperation; land use, and implementation) each addressing one element specified under the law.

The Comprehensive Plan is a general plan that brings together various elements of the Town into a comprehensive, "big picture" plan. It does not provide detailed plans for economic development, transportation, community facilities, and so on. Rather, the Comprehensive Plan provides a framework to guide the development of these more detailed plans in the future. It is a dynamic Plan that the Town should review and refine as the years pass and new issues and opportunities present themselves.

## PLANNING PROCESS

Throughout the planning process, the public was afforded several opportunities to participate directly in the development of the comprehensive plan. Notices of impending meetings of the planning committee were posted and citizens attending all planning related meetings were afforded an opportunity to speak and participate. Upon completion of the draft comprehensive plan, the plan committee formally recommended the plan to the Town of Washburn Planning Commission for review and final recommendation to the Town board.

The final draft of the comprehensive plan was circulated to all adjoining and overlapping jurisdictions and to others as required by law. Copies were made freely available to the public. A public hearing was held on the comprehensive plan, again affording an opportunity for public comment. Based on the recommendations of the Plan Commission and the public, the Town of Washburn will review and consider adopting the recommended comprehensive plan.

## TOWN'S PLANNING PROCESS

This Comprehensive Plan essentially updates the Town of Washburn's previous Land Use Plan, which was adopted by the Washburn Town Board on June 12, 2001, and provides additional information to fulfill the requirements of Wisconsin's comprehensive planning legislation. In addition to all who participated in this comprehensive planning process, the

Town and Planning Committee gratefully acknowledges the efforts of those who participated in the development of the Town's previous Land Use Plan.

The Town of Washburn depended heavily upon the dedicated and diligent service of its Comprehensive Planning Committee members and the public participation throughout the planning process. The following provides an overview of Washburn's public participation plan:

1. **Town of Washburn Comprehensive Planning Committee.** The Town Board appointed a comprehensive planning committee of residents representing various perspectives within the Town. The Committee was created to assist the consultant to inform and educate the community about issues and potential courses of action and helped foster a forum for open discussions during the development phases of this plan. The Committee also consisted of individual sub-committee groups or "element committees" and provided draft element statements, objectives, goals and policies for the consultant's use. The planning committee met monthly throughout the planning process. The Town officials posted public notices for all planning committee meetings and encouraged residents and members of the media to attend the meetings.
2. **Town (Resident's) Survey.** The Town prepared and mailed a community survey to all landowners of record in the Town of Washburn. Additionally, if multiple members of a household wished to respond, they were permitted to do so, along with renters and others who did not receive a survey. Of the 319 survey questionnaires distributed, 117 were returned (a 56% response rate). The survey results are referred to throughout the Comprehensive Plan and can be found in **Appendix A.**
3. **Direct Mail Announcements.** The Town Board sent direct mailings to its residents that included information about the development of the comprehensive plan and invitations to future Planning Committee meetings and Open House.
4. **Media Release, Articles and Programs.** The Planning Committee arranged for special news coverage of the newsworthy activities at critical stages of the plan development process.
5. **Displays at Town Hall.** The Committee helped organize and set-up displays on committee findings and recommendations for public information and education at Town Hall events or meetings.
6. **Community Open Houses.** The Town held an open house at key times throughout the planning process to seek public input.
7. **Website.** The Committee collaborated with the Bayfield County Community Development agent with the University of Wisconsin Extension office to provide a means of posting the draft comprehensive plan on the Bayfield County Website at (<http://www.bayfieldcounty.org>).
8. **Town of Washburn Plan Commission.** Prior to presenting the DRAFT Comprehensive Plan for public comment, the Washburn Town Board created a five member Town of Washburn Plan Commission to oversee public hearings on the draft plan; completed the final plan with a recommendation to the Town Board. Upon completion of the adoption by the Town Board, the Plan Commission will

oversee the implementation of the plan. The Commission will review development proposals and ensure that all recommendations are based on the consistency with the adopted plan.

9. **Distribution of Proposed Plan.** Upon the submittal of the draft plan, the Plan was distributed to the Washburn Town Board, the City of Washburn, the Town of Barksdale, the Town of Bayview, the Town of Bell, the Town of Clover, the Town of Port Wing, the Town of Orienta and Bayfield County for review and comments. After receiving all comments submitted from the surrounding jurisdictions, the Plan Commission prepared a final draft of the comprehensive plan for presentations the Town Board.
10. **Comment Period and Written Response Summary (form the Public).** Upon the completion of the draft plan, and after written comments have been received from the surrounding communities, the Plan Commission made copies available to the public at the Town Hall on \_\_\_\_\_, 2007 and the Planning Committee/Plan Commission Chair's personal residence, located at \_\_\_\_\_, and on the Bayfield County website. Whereupon the completion of 30-days, the comments were summarized and submitted for further consideration or action by the Plan Commission on \_\_\_\_\_, 2007. The Plan Commission prepared the final draft plan for presentation to the Town Board on \_\_\_\_\_, 2007.
11. **Public Hearing and Plan Adoption.** On \_\_\_\_\_, 2007, the Town of Washburn Plan Commission held a public hearing and by a unanimous vote of the Plan Commission recommended approval of the Comprehensive Plan. On \_\_\_\_\_, 2007, the Town Board of Washburn adopted an ordinance that formally adopted the Comprehensive Plan.

## HISTORY & BACKGROUND

People are to varying degrees shaped by the land in which they live, and the character of the land in turn is shaped by the actions of the people. Knowledge about our community, our history and our land can help us want to become better citizens. In the words of Aldo Leopold, "It is inconceivable to me that an ethical relation to land can exist without love, respect, and admiration for land, and a high regard for its value." By learning more about our collective history and that of the land around us, we help to nurture that love, respect and admiration.

The people who live in the Town of Washburn today, like all people in the world outside of a relatively few in Africa, are descendents of a small group of people who left Africa about 50,000 to 60,000 years ago.<sup>1</sup> Over the next several tens of thousands of years, the descendents of these earliest pioneers populated most of Asia and Europe. Sometime within the last 20,000 years, some of their Asian descendents made it into the Western Hemisphere. Nobody knows for certain when or how this migration occurred, but the genetic, archeological and linguistic evidence strongly point toward two major waves of migration, both from the area today known as Siberia. These folks probably made the crossing using a land bridge that existed then because of lower sea levels. The seas

were lower because water was tied up in the glaciers of an ice age. Glaciers have advanced and retreated through northern Wisconsin many times during the past 2 million years, but the last retreat did not occur until about 10,000 years ago<sup>ii</sup>. So, for as much as 100 centuries after the migration from the Eastern Hemisphere, northern Wisconsin was occupied by a thick sheet of ice rather than by people. Finally, some time soon after the ice retreated the last time (for now), the first residents of the area moved in from areas that had not been glaciated. These first residents of the area were not likely the direct ancestors of the Ojibwa who were here when the first Europeans arrived, but could be thought of as their “cousins”. Their identity and fate are for the most part lost to history. Only with recent advances in genetic research techniques have we come to know that when the first Europeans in the area met the Ojibwa, this meeting actually represented a reuniting of two branches of the same human family – branches that simply took different paths some 1000 generations earlier.

Prior to European explorations, the Ojibwa people lived in small groups along the edges of the forests and waterways and fished, trapped, planted corn, and built birch bark wigwams and canoes. In 1662, Frenchmen fur traders Grouvelles and Radisson landed at Fish Creek, just south of Washburn and established the first permanent settlement of Europeans in Wisconsin. Marquette built a trading post on Vanderverter Bay at the mouth of Thompson Creek, present day City of Washburn, in 1669-71. Father Claude Jean Allouez arrived in 1795 to carry out missionary work; his chapel was believed to be near Boyd Creek, and he noted Native American villages at Fish Creek(Ottawa) and Bono Creek(Huron). The British assumed control of this region in 1763. After the American Revolution, land was acquired by the federal government from the Ojibwe(Chippewa) with the Treaty of 1854 , sold to the state, then to railroads and land companies.

Two stagecoach trails and mail routes crossed the Town of Washburn from 1850 to the mid 1880's. These were the Bayfield to Superior Stage and Mail Route and the Bayfield to St. Croix Stage Trail. They intersected at Moose Lake where travelers often stopped. A road house and relay station stood at Pine Lake on the 80 mile long Bayfield – Superior route, along which much fish from the Bayfield fisheries was transported to market. Antoine Dennis walked this route once a week to deliver the mail, carrying a frying pan to cook fish that he would catch on the Brule River.

The first permanent white settler in Washburn, probably in the 1870's, is believed to be Mr. Vanderverter who homesteaded in the vicinity of Thompson's Creek, once named Vanderverter's Creek.

Just as fur trading waned around 1870, the lumbermen moved into the Midwest. The Chicago St. Paul, Minneapolis and Omaha Railroad was built into Ashland, Washburn, and Bayfield in 1883. From 1885 to 1914 the huge white pine in Washburn and vicinity were intensely logged by A.A. Bigelow, C.C. Thompson, Hines, Stearns, and others. These trees were 200 feet tall and 300-400 years old. Bayfield County built it's own railroad, the Washburn, Bayfield and Iron River Railroad, commonly known as the Battle-Ax, in 1895 to facilitate farming. It was named for a chewing tobacco given to the workers to placate them when their pay was delayed. It ran from Washburn south for two miles, then westward parallel to Engoe Road, where there was a station stop. It went bankrupt and was acquired by Northern Pacific in 1904 and abandoned in 1916. Two logging railroads passed through town- the Washburn and Northwestern Railway and the Ashland, Siskowit & Iron River Railroad. All three rails intersected at Grand Junction, just west of the end of Engoe Road.

The Town of Washburn, created in 1884, was probably named for Cadwaller C. Washburn, governor of Wisconsin from 1872-1874 and founder of Gold Medal Flour. The original township included the present City of Washburn, but in 1904 the city was incorporated and the town formed its own government. O.L. Rowe was the first Chairman with Supervisors C. O. Dahl, J. Bartness, A.H. Hosmer, Clerk Allen Butterfield, and Assessor H.P. Swanby. Postal service began in 1883 under Postmaster F.E. Wyman.

When most of the timber had been cut, the people remaining in the area needed new opportunities. Land company agents promoted the agricultural potential of the area and many small farms were established through the 1920's. Immigrants from Scandinavia and other European countries arrived during the late 1880's through the early 1900's in search of land, which was scarce in their homelands. Washburn reminded many of them of home. One of the earliest settlers to the current town was Erick Westling who came to the U.S. from Sweden in 1893, and after stays in Bibbon, City of Washburn, and Ashland, built a log cabin on Church Corner Road near Four Mile Creek around 1895. In 1897, he built a larger house and a dam to power a saw-mill to make rough cut timber planks and boards. By 1900 other settlers were arriving, including the Hove family in 1902 who walked from Bayfield to Washburn with all their worldly goods. The Stones arrived in 1904. That same year, a fire raged through the countryside destroying bridges and trestles on the railway grade, necessitating the town to build new roads, mostly straight up and down the hills. The Westlings built a new, larger dam nearer the house and produced cedar shingles. The dam was removed in 1985 after a long battle to exempt it from DNR regulations.

Another historic town site was developed in 1909 when the Betania Evangelical Lutheran Church was built at the northeast corner of Church Corner Road and Wannabo Road by the families of the area: Prestgard, Hirsch, Bergquist, Overby, Moland, Berge, and Anderson. A stable and Grange Hall were also built there. After the church was torn down in 1932, the Grange Hall was moved and torn down and became the Progress School on the corner of Nevers and Chequamegon Roads. Only four graves remain on the corner, including Beret Hove.

Farming became the main occupation of the folks who lived in the Town up through the 1930's. Over the years new technology supported larger farms and many small farms were abandoned. The land where the National Forest now lies was particularly poor and most farms that were located in this area failed after one generation. In 1929, the Federal Government purchased these lands under the Weeks Act of 1911, and later proclaimed them part of the Chequamegon National Forest. Aldo Leopold studied sharp tail grouse in the Moquah Barrens here in 1930. Meanwhile, the Civilian Conservation Corps was established in 1933 to provide employment during the Great Depression and restore natural resources. The first CCC camp in Wisconsin was established on Ora Brinks' home site on the far western edge of the Town in April of , and hundreds of young men from the camp planted rows of jack pine in an effort to restore the forest. Work there continued until 1941. No buildings remain on the site but one was moved to the old A. Zifko farm on Engoe Road.

There were seven one room school houses in the town, which were named McKinley, Four Mile Creek, Three Switch, Long Lake, Arbutus, Wilson, and Maple Hill. The McKinley was built on County C in 1905 and used until 1939. Today McKinley School serves as the Washburn Town Hall. The town hall was upgraded with new lap-board

siding and fitted with new replica windows in 2006. The Maple Hill and Wilson schools were moved to other locations in the Town. The remaining school buildings were razed and removed from their sites.

The population of the Town has fluctuated through the years, but has shown steady growth since the 1970's. Many changes have taken place as the area has become favored for homes in a rural setting. Many old barns still dot the landscape, but most are used for hobby farms now. The area is known for its many artists including painters, fiber crafters, musicians, soap-makers, wood workers and others.

The Landmarks Commission for the Town of Washburn was formed in 1983 to designate and help preserve historic sites in town. The Westling Dam, Church Corner Cemetery and the Town Hall are currently listed as landmarks.

The Town of Washburn remains blessed with much natural beauty and a wealth of natural resources. People are to varying degrees shaped by the land in which they live, and the character of the land in turn is shaped by the actions of the people. Knowledge about our community, our history and our land can help us want to become better citizens.

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<sup>i</sup> Wade, Nicholas. *Before the Dawn. Remembering the Lost History of our Ancestors.* The Penguin Press. New York, NY. 2006. P. 71. Much of the prehistoric history in this document is based on information in this book.

<sup>ii</sup> <http://www.nps.gov/archive/iatr/expanded/history.htm>