

## **Introduction**

Welcome to the Town of Amherst Comprehensive Plan. This Comprehensive Plan is the centerpiece of the community planning process, stating our community's development goals and outlining public policies for guiding future growth. It establishes an identifiable destination that allows both the governing body and private interests to plan and budget for the future to ensure that anticipated growth is managed and controlled. Additionally, the Plan functions as a practical guide to coordinate day-to-day decisions.

### **The Portage County Comprehensive Planning Process and the Town of Amherst**

The Town of Amherst Comprehensive Plan has been completed as a part of a larger, county-wide planning project. In November of 2000, the Portage County Planning and Zoning Department submitted an application for a State of Wisconsin planning grant to help fund the creation of County-wide Comprehensive Plans that would meet the newly enacted State Statute requirements for long range planning (see SS 66.1001 in Appendix C). The Statute stipulates that by January 1, 2010, all Towns, Villages, Cities, and Counties that make decisions regulating land use will need to base those decisions on an adopted comprehensive plan. In January 2001 grant funds totaling \$504,000 were awarded to Portage County to assist with the project. Two separate "large area" plan documents were to be developed: an Urban Area Plan which encompasses the City of Stevens Point, Villages of Park Ridge, Whiting and Plover, and a portion of the unincorporated Towns of Hull, Stockton, Plover, Linwood and Carson; and, the Portage County Comprehensive Plan, which includes each of the seventeen unincorporated Towns (Alban, Almond, Amherst, Belmont, Buena Vista, Carson, Dewey, Eau Pleine, Grant, Hull, Lanark, Linwood, New Hope, Pine Grove, Plover, Sharon, Stockton) and six incorporated rural Villages (Almond, Amherst, Amherst Junction, Junction City, Nelsonville, Rosholt) that make up the rest of the County. In addition to the large area plans, the project includes the adoption of a Comprehensive Plan for each of the County's 27 individual units of government.

In June of 2001, a committee made up of representatives from each unit of government within Portage County was appointed to draft these plan documents. The *Portage County Comprehensive Planning Joint Steering Committee* adopted a "Public Participation Plan" on July 25, 2001. The Participation Plan detailed the different ways that residents of the County would be invited and encouraged to participate in the formulation of the Comprehensive Plans. The Town of Amherst adopted the Public Participation Plan on August 9, 2001 (Appendix A).

The first step in soliciting public involvement was a County-wide opinion survey, which was conducted in the second half of September 2001. Over 30,000 surveys were mailed, with an intended target of one for every household within the County. Over 6,600 of the households responded, a return rate of approximately 22%. The survey responses provided information on residents' feelings in the areas of: County trends and land use; housing; utilities and community facilities; agricultural, natural and cultural resources; commerce and employment; transportation; and quality of life within the County. The Town of Amherst was well represented in the survey results (see Appendix B). In order to follow up and build on the information gathered in the survey, a series of Hopes and Concerns Workshops were held in various locations around Portage County. A wide variety of County residents participated in the Workshops.

After completion of the Hopes & Concerns workshops all of the response information was forwarded to the Portage County Comprehensive Planning Joint Steering Committee, which used a series of meetings to create 44 summarizing "issue statements". This list then became the basis

for a series of six visioning sessions held across Portage County during the spring of 2002. Again, all of the public input was returned to the Joint Steering Committee for review and discussion. An Urban Area Vision Statement and a Rural Vision Statement were approved in the fall of 2002. These Vision Statements were used as a foundation for the Urban Area and Rural Area Comprehensive Plans respectively, and their ideas resonate throughout the individual local unit plans.

State Statute 66.1001 defines minimum requirements for what content should be included within a Comprehensive Plan. These requirements include nine “elements” or chapters describing: *issues and opportunities; housing; transportation; utilities and community facilities; agricultural, natural and cultural resources; economic development; intergovernmental cooperation, land use; and implementation.* The Town of Amherst has used the required elements as an outline for its plan document.