

Introduction

Welcome to the Town of Sharon 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 with an idea as to the direction the Town may move in the future, and helps to ensure that growth is not only anticipated, but planned for. The Plan functions as a practical guide to coordinate day-to-day decisions so they make sense in the future.

Portage County And Town of Sharon Comprehensive Planning

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). 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 are 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 Sharon also adopted the Public Participation Plan on August 8, 2001. **(See Appendix A-Public Participation Plan.)**

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 resident's feelings in the areas of: County trends and land use; housing; utilities and community facilities; agriculture, natural and cultural resources; commerce and employment; transportation; and quality of life within the County. The Town of Sharon was represented in the survey results **(see appendix B-Portage County Comprehensive Planning and Zoning Survey, December 2001, Town of Sharon)**. In order to follow up and build on the information gathered in the survey a series of Hopes and Concerns Workshops were held. A wide variety of County residents participated in the Workshops. To include as many groups as possible, workshops were scheduled in towns and villages across the County, as well as junior high and high schools, UW-Stevens Point (with both faculty and students), and the Lincoln Center.

After completion of the Hopes & Concerns workshops all of the response information was forwarded to the Portage County Comprehensive Planning Joint Steering Committee, who used a series of meetings to boil the information down to 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 (**See appendix C-Vision Statements from Town of Sharon Residents**) were used as a foundation for the Urban Area and Rural Area Comprehensive Plans, respectively.

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; agriculture, natural and cultural resources; economic development; intergovernmental cooperation, land use; and implementation*. The Town of Sharon has used the required elements as an outline for our plan document.

The Comprehensive Planning Process

The first step involves research. Activities include acquiring a thorough knowledge of the existing community setting, identifying problems that require solutions, and analyzing critical factors that need to be changed before progress can be made toward community goals, and establishing goals and objectives for growth and development. The second step involves the formation of a planning policy. Planning policies recommend a course of action that will accommodate expected change, produce desired change, and prevent undesirable change.

The next steps involve the development of different plan alternatives for guiding future growth. The Land Use Element relates how the Town is expected to grow, and generally identifies how development should proceed in the future to achieve community goals. It proposes the most efficient use of land within the financial capabilities of the community by identifying where residential, and other anticipated land uses should occur.

The final step involves implementation of the plan and programs that will influence the day-to-day decisions made by government officials, private enterprise, and individuals. Plan implementation provides the means by which community goals can be achieved. Three major tools of implementation are the zoning ordinance, subdivision regulations, and capital improvements program.

The Comprehensive Plan is the primary link between the past, the present, and the future, making it the resource for achieving continuity over a period of time. It is to be used as a guide by those making decisions with regard to the development of the community. The Comprehensive Plan must also remain flexible so that it can be modified to reflect the processes of actual development and the changing attitudes and priorities of the community. To maintain an updated Comprehensive Plan, new information must be continually gathered and studied to determine trends and re-evaluate projections, forecasts, and plans. Even policy recommendations, which are relatively permanent statements, may require periodic review to determine their appropriateness and suitability in relation to the direction and character of community development at that time. A well thought-out and updated Comprehensive Plan, with a solid base of public involvement, is one of the most fruitful investments a local government can make. As a collection of policies and plans designed to guide future growth and development, it will help ensure continuity over time as changes occur within the Town of Sharon.

Past Planning in Sharon

In 1981, the Town of Sharon Planning Committee began working with the Portage County Planning Department to draft the first land use plan for the Town of Sharon. The Town, due mostly to the increased development pressure the community had experienced over the past 20 years, requested this planning effort. The intent of the plan was to serve as a formal statement of Town/County policies regarding land use. In addition, the plan was intended to serve as a guide in updating the Town's 29 year old zoning map, to reflect changing conditions and needs. When the initial Town Land Use Plan was drafted, many acres that were not productive Ag Land were classified as Exclusive Ag for the purpose of allowing landowners to participate to the greatest extent in the Farmland Preservation Tax Credits Program. This created significant problems for farmers to realize full value of such properties either at retirement or dissolution of their farms.

In 1991, the Town did an extensive review of the Land Use Plan and made extensive changes to the Exclusive Ag category and 5,033.2 acres were removed from this category. They were allowed to be put primarily into A-2 zoning by request of landowners. The current planning thought process for the Town of Sharon is to take further consideration of the inequities in land use and value created by the program. Additional land may need to be re-classified out of A-1 exclusive agriculture category.

In 2001 the Town established a 7 member Plan Commission, appointed for various terms, to participate with the County multi-jurisdictional planning process, also know as "Smart Growth". A large number of Town of Sharon residents became concerned that the direction the planning was taking would result in the loss of property rights and of local control over land use. The Town residents petitioned the Town of Sharon Board to pull out of the multi-jurisdictional planning process. As a result, the Town terminated its participation in the multi-jurisdictional planning process, but continued planning on its own on September 10, 2003.

The Plan Commission held a series of public meetings beginning February 23, 2004.

The Town conducted another survey in January, 2005. (**See Appendix D-Town of Sharon Planning Survey Results.**) The results were presented at the next several meetings through July of 2005.

Current Planning in The Town of Sharon

After several meetings the Plan Commission and the Town Board worked together to go forward with an acceptable plan that takes into consideration the following:

1. Issues that impact the viability of agriculture and the best way to protect open space in the Town of Sharon is to protect agricultural operations and the support of businesses that provide their input and marketing needs.
2. Making land use decisions needs to be afforded to those who own the land and have been its stewards in the past and present with regard to neighboring properties and the town as a whole.
3. There are national, state, county and local laws and regulations to protect environmentally sensitive areas such as lakes, rivers and wetlands.
4. Landowners participating in the Farmland Preservation Program have the opportunity to request a potential change in their land use classification when their contract expires.

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