



# Planning Notes

## Portage County comprehensive plan

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## County Comprehensive planning effort begins

Representatives from Portage County's 17 towns, 9 villages, the City of Stevens Point, and the county began work in June to develop a comprehensive plan for the county—an adopted official statement of the local governments that sets forth (in words, maps, illustrations, and/or tables) goals, policies and guidelines intended to direct the present and future physical, social, and economic development within the county. The effort is a result of the State of Wisconsin's new Smart Growth Law, enacted by former Governor Thompson with the passage of the 1999-2001 state budget bill.

The budget bill contained language that overhauled Wisconsin's outdated land use laws. A major part of the new law is the definition of what a comprehensive plan must contain.

In order to comply with the new law, every community in the state must develop a comprehensive plan and modify existing land use related ordinances, like zoning and subdivision regulations, to be consistent

with the plan by January 1, 2010.

In order to take advantage of the unprecedented possibilities for cooperation created by the new law, and to build on cooperative efforts that have occurred in the county already, a single planning approach was agreed to by all of the county's municipal leaders.

The comprehensive planning effort in Portage County is unique and unprecedented in Wisconsin in its scale and scope. Total cost of the project is estimated at \$1,000,000. A grant from the state for \$504,000 has been awarded to the county to offset part of the project cost. The remainder will be paid for by the county and local units of government.

The planning project is based entirely on intergovernmental cooperation. The Portage County Planning & Zoning Department is the lead agency for the project, responsible for providing staffing for the various



committees and leadership to move the process forward. The committees responsible for drafting the plan contain representatives from each unit of government, working together toward consensus on planning issues. In the early stages of the process, all the representatives will work together to develop a long-range vision for the future of the county. After the vision is developed, the planning group will split into urban and rural components to formalize the development of the comprehensive plan.

The remainder of this publication focuses attention on the planning process and the many opportunities for citizens to participate in it.

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### ATTENTION!

#### Community Survey to Arrive at Your House - Week of September 24

What should life be like in Portage County in the not-so-distant future? Your answers to this question are very important.

Make your opinion count - fill out and return the survey by **October 5**.

Read more about the survey on page 4 of this newsletter.

# Portage County's Approach

Portage County has developed an eight step comprehensive planning process to address Wisconsin's new Smart Growth legislation. The approach builds on the strengths of prior methodologies for comprehensive planning while, at the same time, overcoming some of their shortcomings.

Step 1 in the process, completed in June of 2001, served to convene local elected officials in an effort to establish the planning committees, provide initial education about the comprehensive planning law, and explore opportunities to work together. In addition, it allowed local elected officials the opportunity to take a first look at ways to involve the public in this extensive planning process.

The purpose of Step 2 was to develop a

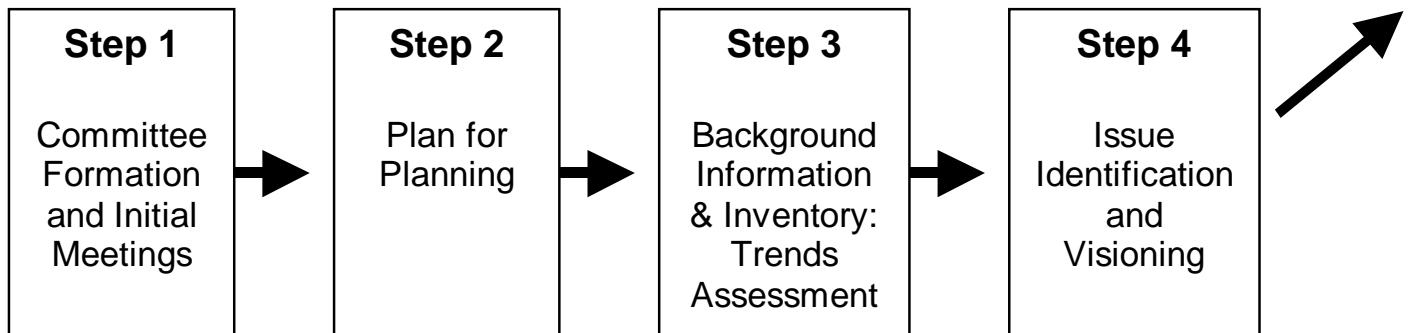
law provides for public participation at every step in the planning process, so a detailed plan for community involvement is necessary. An evaluation plan was also developed during Step 2. The evaluation plan develops mechanisms for assessing the planning approach and citizen participation effort throughout the project.

A final component of Step 2 was an Initial Publicity and Educational Process. The objective of this ongoing component is to increase public awareness and understanding of the comprehensive planning process, and to provide information related to opportunities for citizens to participate in the process. The bulk of Step 2 was completed in July of 2001.

Issue Identification and Visioning is Step 4. In this step, the fundamental questions and key challenges facing the county are determined. This step is aimed at focusing the county and local units of government on what is truly important for the prosperity, quality and effectiveness of the community at large.

A variety of public participation methods will be used in this step in order to identify issues and develop a vision statement.

A community survey will be utilized to help identify key issues throughout the county. The survey will be mailed to all property owners and residents in the county for their input. Focus groups will be used to further refine input gained on community issues identified through the survey document. Invited "experts" will



plan for planning. A plan for planning is an essential part of any planning effort. It is in this step that the planning system is designed. Agreement was reached by planning committee members on a number of important issues, including: purposes of the planning committees, leadership structure of the joint committee, methods for decision making, meeting logistics, and development of communication channels between the planning committees, local units of government and the public.

The Plan for Planning also identified likely outputs from the planning process and established a timeline for the project. Committee members adopted a public participation plan during this step as well. The new Smart Growth

Step 3 in the comprehensive planning approach looks at Background Information and Inventory, and develops appropriate Trends information. The purpose of this step is to provide pertinent and appropriate data that can help identify community issues. Information gathered in this step includes data on population and demographics, housing, transportation, utilities and community facilities, agriculture, natural and cultural resources, economic development, intergovernmental cooperation, and land use. The trends assessment stage in this step is intended to provide a transition from what has already happened in the community, to what is currently happening, and, finally, to what is likely to happen in the future. Step 3 is underway in September 2001.

be asked to address the planning committees on pertinent community issues, and Hopes and Concerns Workshops will be convened countywide to get direct input from the public on key issues and hopes for the future. Once the issue identification process is complete, a series of visioning sessions will be held throughout the county to develop an overall guiding vision for Portage County—what the county will look like in 20 years. After the vision has been developed and adopted by the joint planning committee, the urban and rural committee members will separate to their respective committees to develop vision statements for the urban and rural areas of the county—based on the overall countywide vision statement described above.

# To Comprehensive Planning

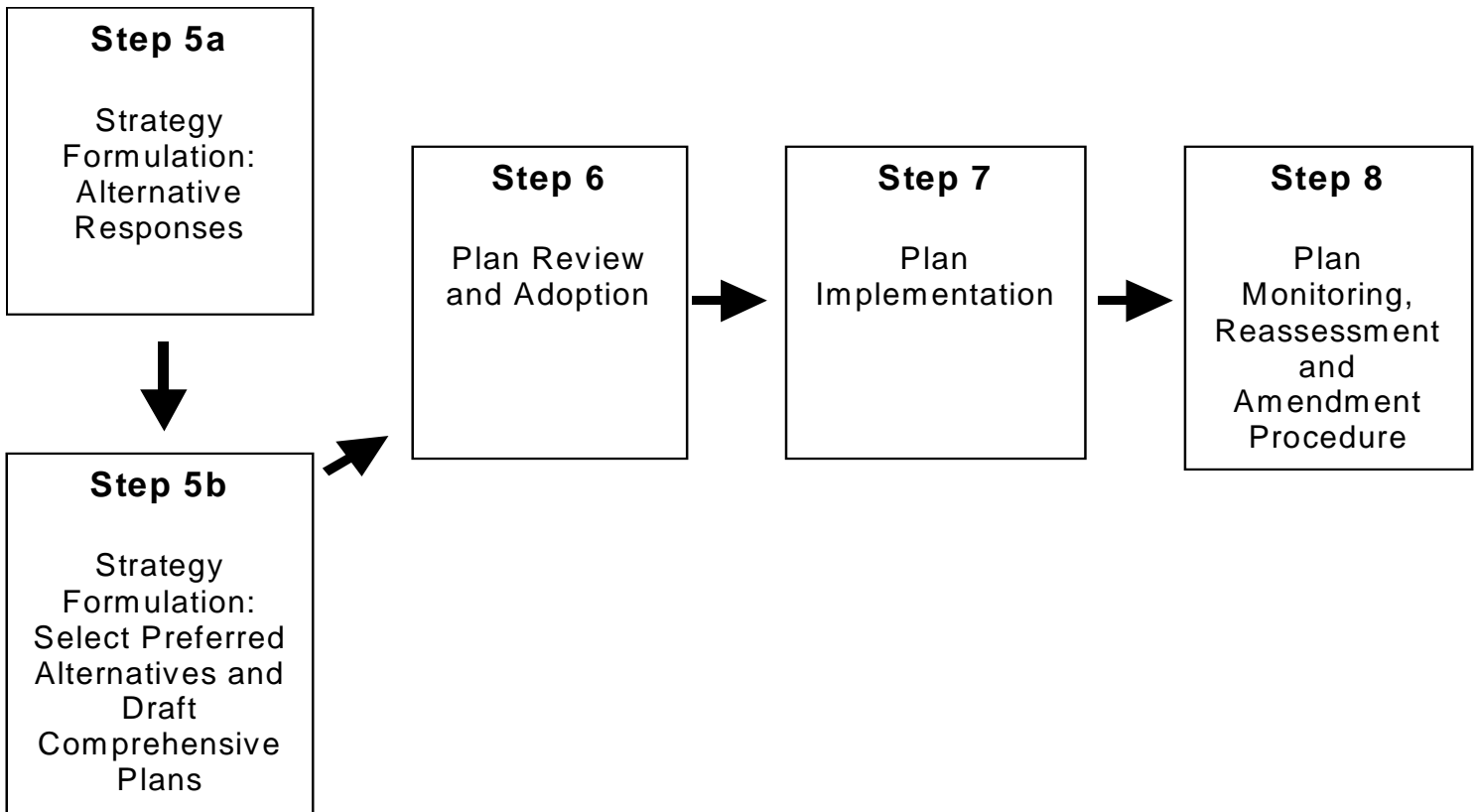
The identification of issues and development of vision drives the process to the next planning step.

Step 5 has two parts. The purpose of this step is to determine possible alternatives, major initiatives, programs, and actions that address the key issues and respond to the vision statement developed in Step 4. In Step 5a, possible strategy alternatives are identified—those ideas believed to work best to resolve the issues identified and

comprehensive plan document can be drafted. Separate draft comprehensive plan documents will be developed for the urban and rural areas, respectively.

Step 6 formalizes review of the draft comprehensive plans by local elected officials and the public. There will be ample opportunity to provide comment on the draft plans, and for the planning committees, working with planning staff, to make modifications to the plans. Each town, village, and the city will

comprehensive plan does not assure that the called for changes will take place. Revisions and updates to all land related ordinances and regulations must be made to ensure consistency with the new planning document. Linkages between the plan and the implementation process must be established, and specific action steps, roles and responsibilities must be identified for those implementing the plan.



to reach the vision. The strategy alternatives may be either graphic depictions of the strategy and its implications on the landscape, or narrative descriptions of how the strategy will work.

Step 5b allows planning committee members the opportunity to select preferred strategy alternatives. Once these preferences have been established for the nine individual element areas, a preliminary

individually adopt the planning documents, with the Portage County Board of Supervisors adopting the County Comprehensive Plan. The Urban Area Comprehensive Plan will be incorporated verbatim into the county plan. Grant funding received for the planning project is available through Step 6.

Activities in Steps 7 and 8 represent the next steps in the process. Step 7 is plan implementation. Just creating the

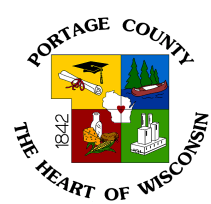
Step 8 calls for the monitoring, reassessment and amendment of the comprehensive plan. The purpose of this final step is to review and evaluate the effectiveness of the implemented strategies. This step provides an opportunity to maintain those strategies that are working, and, through an amendment process, modify or terminate those strategies that are not having intended results. Step 8 also defines a target date for updating the comprehensive plan.

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#### Schedule of Upcoming Events:

- **September 21, 2001**– Community Survey Sent to All Residents and Property Owners in the County
- **September 26, 2001**– Joint Planning Committee Meeting, 6:30 p.m. Courthouse Annex Building
- **October 5, 2001**– Community Surveys Due Back



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Click on "County Comprehensive Plan" Link

## Countywide survey to be sent to all portage county residents and Property owners

What should life be like in Portage County in the not-too-distant future?

Representatives from the towns and villages within Portage County, along with the City of Stevens Point, are working together with the Portage County Planning and Zoning staff to examine this question. The three year project is designed to take a look at how homes, farms, parks, open space and businesses should develop and evolve together over the next 20 years.

An important step in this process is to ask people living in or owning land in Portage County what they think about a variety of issues. To help reach as many people as

possible, the Portage County Comprehensive Planning Joint Steering Committee will be sending a "Community Survey" questionnaire to each resident and land owner in the county. The idea is to let people tell the Planning Committee just what they think is right or wrong with life in the county. You'll be asked to identify the things you like and what needs fixing.

The questionnaires will be arriving in your mailbox during the week of September 24, 2001. Included with the survey will be a postage pre-paid return envelope. Please take a few minutes to fill out the questionnaire and mail it back. And even though there will be many

ways for you to participate throughout the development of the comprehensive plan— at meetings, public forums or through written comment— this will be the only time that you will be contacted directly for your input.

Make your opinion count - fill out the survey and return it by October 5th!



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