

SEWRPC Community Assistance Planning Report No. 301

A MULTI – JURISDICTIONAL COMPREHENSIVE PLAN FOR RACINE COUNTY: 2035

Chapter VIII

ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES ELEMENT

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the issues and opportunities element is to define the desired future of Racine County for 2035 through a vision statement and general goals. The vision statement provides a clear sense of direction for the County and its communities. The goals serve as broad statements of desired outcomes supporting the vision. The vision statement and goals were developed based upon a careful consideration of the County's built and environmental conditions, current and projected future population, households, and economic conditions, and public input; they also reflect the 14 State Smart Growth comprehensive planning goals.

This chapter begins with a description of the visioning process, which incorporated the inventory findings, projections, and public participation efforts. The visioning process section is also intended to provide context for the sections that follow: issues and opportunities, and development of the County goals.

VISIONING PROCESS

The purpose of the vision statement is to articulate what the County and its communities strive to build on and/or become in the future. The Racine County Multi-Jurisdictional Advisory Committee (MJAC) was responsible for preparing and recommending the following County vision statement:

Vision Statement

Racine County will work to preserve and enhance a vibrant, healthy, environmentally and economically sustainable community that enables opportunities for people of all ages, income levels, ethnicities, and cultural heritages.

The underlying theme of the vision statement is the increasing importance of addressing the environmental, social, and economical sustainability of Racine County in the future. Sustainability is commonly defined as the capability to equitably meet the critical needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. While the definition of sustainability may vary from community to community, the concept in the vision statement refers to finding a balance among environmental stewardship, economic development, preservation of agriculture, and recognition of individual rights. The movement toward a more sustainable community will make Racine County residents more perceptive in safeguarding the environment, protecting the quality of community life, and recognizing positive social and economic benefits for future generations.

The process of creating a vision statement, the identification of issues and opportunities, and the development of the County goals discussed later in this chapter, were based on the key findings from the following:

- Data collected and mapped during the inventory phase of the comprehensive plan;
- Population, household, and economic projections; and
- Public participation efforts, including a countywide comprehensive planning public opinion survey conducted in Spring 2007, results of three Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) Analysis activities, and MJAC meetings.

Inventory Data

The identification of issues and opportunities, as well as the development of goals and objectives, as part of the Racine County comprehensive plan must take into consideration key inventory information. Essential information regarding the population, economic base, natural and man-made environment, and existing plans and ordinances were provided in Chapters II thru VI of this report. Specifically, information provided in each chapter was as follows: Chapter II – historic and existing population, housing, and economic base; Chapter III – agricultural, natural, and cultural resources; Chapter IV – land use and transportation facilities and services; Chapter V – utilities and community facilities; and Chapter VI – existing plans and ordinances.

Population, Household, and Economic Projections

The State comprehensive planning law requirements for the issues and opportunity element include forecasts of population, households, and employment. Chapter VII of this report presents projections of population, households, and employment through the year 2035. The chapter provides projections prepared by the Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (SEWRPC) and used in the preparation of the year 2035 regional land use plan. The chapter also provides trend-based projections which assume that each community would continue to grow as it has in the past. These projections were intended to provide a frame of reference for Racine County and all of the cities, villages, and towns participating in the planning effort in their selection of community-level population, household, and employment projections that best represent their expectations for the year 2035. The selected projections relate directly to the future demand for land, housing, transportation facilities and services, and other community facilities that the comprehensive plan must address.

Public Participation Efforts

To ensure community input, the public participation¹ efforts included, but were not limited to, a countywide survey, four public informational meetings, and three SWOT analyses. The values, hopes, and concerns that residents and other stakeholders expressed through these efforts helped shape the County vision statement, issues and opportunities, and goals.

Countywide Survey

The primary means of obtaining public input was a random, mail out countywide survey. In Spring 2007, a countywide comprehensive planning public opinion survey was prepared by UW-Extension with assistance from the MJAC, the Racine County Planning & Development Department, and SEWRPC. The survey was designed to encompass all nine required elements of the comprehensive plan, and therefore, it included a wide range of questions on topics such as quality of life, housing, agricultural and natural resources, land use, transportation, and economic development. Approximately 4,000 surveys were mailed to a random sample of registered voters in Racine County; they were also available at all

¹ *A public participation plan was adopted by the Racine County Board on November 9, 2006, as a basis for public involvement in the comprehensive planning program.*

municipal buildings and public libraries, and through the Smart Growth website hosted by Racine County. The sample was stratified by community in an effort to create a representative cross-section of County viewpoints and gain an accurate representation of the population. A report detailing the full results of the survey can be found in a document entitled, “*Countywide Public Opinion Survey of Racine County Residents*,” November 2007, and is available at County and community offices.

Public Informational Meetings

From September through November 2007, a series of four public informational open house meetings at various locations in Racine County about the County’s multi-jurisdictional comprehensive plan inventory phase was conducted. The purpose of the meetings was to provide interested community members with background information about the comprehensive planning process and legal requirements, as well as to provide an update on the plan’s progress in Racine County and to present key findings from the inventory chapters. These meetings included a wide range of participants, such as governmental officials, residents, and representatives of interest groups.

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) Analyses

Public informational open house meeting participants and MJAC members were also invited to take part in a SWOT Analysis workshop, which is a strategic planning tool used to identify a community’s current assets and liabilities, as well as trends that might have a positive or negative impact on its future. Participants identified and discussed the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats that they perceived in Racine County; when appropriate, they were then asked to prioritize the issues by identifying the issues they believed were most important. Information collected through the three SWOT analyses have been used, along with results from the countywide public opinion survey, to help the Racine County MJAC develop the comprehensive plan’s vision statement, issues and opportunities, and goals. The SWOT analysis issues identified as top priorities in the County are listed below. The entire SWOT analyses findings are provided in Appendix VIII-I.

Top Priorities from the SWOT Analyses

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality of people • Good schools • Good fire/rescue services • New businesses in the County • Rural character • Proximity to interstate (I-94) • Improved inter-governmental cooperation • Water resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Traffic congestion • Lack of affordable housing for seniors • Loss of agricultural land and natural resources • Perceived crime in inner city • Lack of funding for redevelopment projects • Too much unemployment • Certain types of development pressures

Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commuter rail • Cooperatives services between neighboring municipalities • Good leadership • Planning – smart growth • Find mutually beneficial balance between urban and rural uses • Legislature back in control of state departments especially the Department of Natural Resources • Preserve and restore existing housing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loss of farmland • Runaway health care costs • Ability to maintain services within budget • Job-population mismatch • Threats to the water table • Lack of public education and awareness • Higher taxes • Elimination of rural character and loss of farmland • Increase in crime – perceived and actual

ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

The following general County planning issues and opportunities were identified during the visioning process described in the previous section.

- **Community Character and Identity:** The concept of community character and identity includes a broad range of quality of life factors, such as livability and quality of schools. In addition, a community may express a desire to maintain and/or enhance its character and identity through planning efforts, such as growing in a sustainable manner by preserving more open space. In Racine County, one of the main concerns has to do with an increase in crime—real or perceived—which surfaced repeatedly during the public informational meetings. Results from the survey indicated that preserving small town character and open space ranked as a high priority for land use character. Overall, Racine County residents share a common connection as being environmental stewards of the abundant natural resources, recreational-related amenities, and residential development that is sensitive to the landscape. These commonly held values of environmental sustainability help convey a sense of Racine’s history and reinforce a sense of place and identity.
- **Planning for Coordinated and Sustainable Future Growth:** There is an extensive history of planning in Racine County. This includes the development of land use plans by a majority of the communities, as well as strong countywide planning for parks and open spaces and land and water resource management. Most of these plans emphasize concentrating urban development within the planned urban service areas. Results from the survey and SWOT analyses indicate that citizens are concerned about the rate of development in the County. In particular, a large majority of survey respondents preferred either the current rate of growth for Racine County, or slower growth. At the same time, the SWOT analyses results revealed that many residents want to see planned growth that considers the impacts of growth on efficient residential land development patterns and infrastructure, traffic congestion, environmental and economic sustainability of agricultural and natural resources, long range school facilities planning, and other quality of life issues. Other survey responses reflect a desire for residential development with more parks and green space.
- **Agricultural Resources and Historic Preservation:** Over half of the area of Racine County consists of agricultural land uses. In addition, there is a rich abundance of nationally and state registered historic sites and districts scattered throughout the County and particularly in the City of Racine. In both the countywide survey and the SWOT analysis, concerns were raised

about protection and/or loss of farmland and the built environment history as well as ways to balance rural, urban, and historic uses for agricultural production and economic development. That is, agriculture is perceived as an important contributor to the sustainability of the economy and has potential to grow, particularly in light of new agriculture-related technologies and products, such as bio-fuels. In addition, preservation of prime farmland, the farming business, and historic buildings and districts are viewed as essential to the rural character lifestyle and sense of history in the County. A large majority of the survey responses cited that the County and State should address how to implement a variety of financial tools and incentives to preserve farmland while balancing the rate of land development and property rights. Other survey responses indicated that cultural resource preservation is strong in the County, but has yet to be utilized to full advantage for tourism purposes.

- **Natural Resources and Recreational Preservation Opportunities:** Southeastern Wisconsin has a progressive history of taking advantage of natural resources, open space, and parks preservation opportunities. Results from the existing conditions inventory, survey, and SWOT analyses indicate that the protection of these invaluable resources is important not only for aesthetic and wildlife purposes, but also for water resource quality and management. For instance, the loss of natural resources due to development is viewed as a threat to the County. In addition, major concerns also include the depletion of groundwater supplies and a decline in water quality, as well as deteriorating air quality. Survey respondents placed a high priority on protecting forested lands, wildlife habitats, Lake Michigan, inland lakes, parks, and open spaces. Land conservation, expansion of bike and walking trails, and redevelopment of urban areas as an alternative to “greenfield” development were considered as opportunities to protect and enhance the remaining natural resources in the County.
- **Built Environment – Housing Options, Land Use, Transportation, and Economic Development:** The type, mix, and design of existing housing and residential densities vary across all jurisdictions in the County. The common concern raised in the public informational meetings was: how can a diversity of housing choices (e.g., size, type, cost, rental vs. owner occupied) link with the potential mix of new land uses, balanced transportation system, and economic development? Residents in Racine County recognize that housing concerns are integrated with other planning issues. For instance, a particularly noteworthy issue in the projections chapter indicated that the aging of the baby-boom generation may be expected to have a major influence on the age composition, housing, and labor force out to the year 2035. This well documented trend may be the reason why a majority of survey respondents indicated that future housing should be designated to meet the needs of elderly residents. Survey respondents also expressed the need for more owner-occupied single-family homes and affordable housing. Survey respondents in towns were less supportive of affordable housing; although a majority indicated that additional affordable units were needed, this was less of a concern than those from the villages and cities. In relation to types of land uses, transportation and economic development, results from both the survey and SWOT analyses indicate that residents prefer more mixed residential lot sizes, mixed use developments, appropriate balance of housing and jobs, and expansion of the pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly transportation network. That is, they would like to see future development in which housing, working, shopping, and school uses mixed together in the same neighborhoods with accessible walking and bicycle trails.
- **Transit and Transportation Services:** Concerns about improving transit services and accessibility and providing more multi-modal transportation options are considered important in Racine County, particularly in light of changing demographics and rising energy costs. The

creation of transit services in the western portion of the County (especially services for seniors and youth), as well as the expansion of transportation facilities and services between eastern and western Racine and the Kenosha-Racine-Milwaukee (KRM) commuter rail were seen as opportunities.

- **Environmental and Economical Sustainable Infrastructure Planning – Public Utilities and Community Facilities:** The urbanization of Racine County has placed increasing demands on public utility and services systems. The results of the SWOT analyses indicate that County residents would like to see more consideration of the impact of proposed developments prior to development. This includes consideration of potential impacts on fire/police protection, schools, sewer and water utilities, recreation facilities, open space preservation, and agricultural land. As previously mentioned under “Planning for Coordinated and Sustainable Future Growth,” the rate of development has been a recurring issue throughout the beginning phase of the comprehensive plan process. Indeed, stakeholders recognize the inevitability of growth, but also foresee the opportunities of encouraging more energy efficient lifestyles and sustainable development practices by promoting urban infill and redevelopment and energy conservation practices and alternatives to help control utility and service costs. At the same time, results of the survey and SWOT analyses indicate that maintaining high-levels of education, both secondary and post-secondary technical colleges, developing incentives for alternative energy sources such as wind and solar power, and expanding telecommunication service opportunities are important to Racine County.
- **Economic Development:** Long range economic development planning has become an increasingly important function as a partnership between County and local agencies. To date, through the private-public sector partnership RCEDC, the County has updated its countywide economic development plan four times. Many of the current economic development concerns are documented in the most recent version, such as the impacts of installing sewer and water along I-94 resulting in potential job creation, more available tax increment finance districts (TIFs), more brownfield redevelopment and main street revitalization projects, and economic perspectives becoming more global especially with goals of producing environmentally conscious products. Results from the public informational meetings also indicate that concerns about economic development were widespread, and centered predominantly on how to increase and diversify industries in Racine County. For example, the loss of manufacturing jobs since the 1980s has fueled concerns about how to attract employers to the County. Survey respondents seemed inclined to support most types of industry, but most particularly, they were in favor of developing jobs in health care services, industrial and manufacturing, and emerging technology. In addition, although Racine County residents are perceived to have a strong work ethic, there are concerns that the workforce does not have the education or training to “match” current or potential job opportunities. Overall, Racine County residents recognize that the health and sustainability of the economy involve addressing a broad range of issues: quality of jobs, housing, education, health care, and access to resources and services.
- **Intergovernmental Cooperation and Communication:** One of the underlying goals of the State Smart Growth Law is to increase cooperation among local units of government. Two or more communities may establish intergovernmental agreements to share information and resources, as well as communicate visions and coordinate plans, goals, objectives, policies, and programs. In the survey and SWOT analyses, a lack of community awareness, understanding, and participation, as well as general public apathy and a perception that officials ignore public input were identified as threats to the intergovernmental cooperation

process. Residents want Racine County to strike a mutually beneficial balance between the diverse strengths and needs of its urban and rural communities, and they viewed improvements in intergovernmental cooperation as a good start to building towards that future before issues become conflicts or crises. Also, Racine County residents recognize that building multi-jurisdictional cooperation between government agencies and the private sector can lead to long term benefits ranging from coordinated planning on issues that affect the entire County to local infrastructure cost savings, provision of needed services, a healthy environment, strong schools, and sustainable economy.

- **Implementation Strategies:** The implementation strategies of the comprehensive plan bring all of the elements together to make the goals, objectives, policies, and programs consistent with zoning ordinances, official mapping, and other regulations. Successful implementation strategies requires the support of elected officials, County and local government staff, citizens, and other stakeholders in making decisions that are consistent with the comprehensive plan. While the concept of implementation was not directly addressed in the survey and SWOT analyses, the results of the survey and SWOT analyses indicate that residents would like to see the County prioritize and take a more direct approach to the following:
 - preserving agricultural, natural, water, and cultural resources;
 - promoting sustainable energy sources such as renewable energy;
 - cooperating across boundary lines with neighboring jurisdictions and other stakeholders;
 - encouraging more housing choices for people of all ages, income levels, and special needs; and
 - linking land use, economic, and transportation decisions.

RACINE COUNTY GOALS DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

The general County goals were developed by the MJAC using the same inventory data, projections, and various forms of public input used to identify the vision statement and general planning issues and opportunities. In addition, the County goals correlate to the 14 State Smart Growth goals defined in the *Wisconsin Statutes* and listed at the end of this chapter. The recommended MJAC County goals are the basis for the comprehensive plan. Since many of the County goals are inter-related, the goals may be addressed in multiple comprehensive plan chapters.

Furthermore, a series of more specific objectives, along with related policies and programs, are provided within the element chapters of the comprehensive plan. Although not defined in the Smart Growth *Wisconsin Statutes*, the Wisconsin Department of Administration has provided the following definitions of the terms “goals,” “objectives,” “policies,” and “programs”:

Goals: Broad and general expressions of a community’s aspirations, towards which planned effort is directed. Goals tend to be ends rather than means.

Objectives: More specific targets, derived from goals and necessary to achieve those goals. While still general in nature, objectives are more precise, concrete, and measurable than goals.

Policies: Rules or courses of action necessary to achieve the goals and objectives they are derived from. They are precise and measurable.

Programs: A system of projects or services necessary to achieve plan goals, objectives, and policies.

Racine County Comprehensive Plan Goals

The following Racine County goals are listed in order of plan elements in the subsequent comprehensive plan chapters.

- Guide future growth in a manner that preserves and enhances the quality of life and character of urban and rural communities.
- Encourage development patterns that promote efficient and sustainable use of land, that can be readily linked by transportation systems, and utilize existing public utilities and services.
- Maintain the agricultural base, preserving productive farmland and related environmentally sensitive areas.
- Maintain the environmental assets of the community and develop methods to protect and preserve valuable natural features, including wetlands, wildlife habitats, lakes, woodlands, open spaces, groundwater resources, and floodplains.
- Preserve open space to enhance the total quality of the environment, maximize essential natural resource availability, give form and structure to urban development, and provide opportunities for a full range of outdoor recreational activities.
- Protect and enhance cultural structures, historic sites and districts, and archaeological sites.
- Provide opportunities for an adequate housing supply that will meet the needs of all residents and a broad range of choice among housing designs, sizes, types, and costs, recognizing changing trends in age-group composition, income, and household types.
- Promote the coordination between land use and housing design that supports a range of transportation choices.
- Provide a multi-modal transportation system that provides appropriate types of transportation needed by all residents of the County at an adequate level of service, provides choices among transportation modes, and provides inter-modal connectivity.
- Provide adequate infrastructure and public services and an adequate supply of developable land to meet existing and future market demand for residential, commercial, industrial, and institutional uses.
- Promote the expansion or stabilization of the current economic base and the creation of a range of employment opportunities.
- Promote redevelopment and infill in areas with existing infrastructure and services, enhancing existing residential, commercial, and industrial areas.
- Review, revise, or create the regulatory ordinances necessary to ensure consistency with the comprehensive plan and implementation of the objectives, including zoning ordinances, land division ordinances, and official mapping ordinances.
- Encourage a public participation process that provides equity and fairness to landowners and other stakeholders, balanced with responsible land use.

- Reevaluate the comprehensive plan regularly (at least once every ten years) to ensure that it continues to reflect current County and community objectives.
- Encourage intercommunity planning efforts to make effective use of resources and to resolve conflicts.

CONCLUSION

This element is a critical component of the comprehensive plan. The vision statement, issues and opportunities, and goals presented in this chapter reflect existing inventory findings, as well as citizen and MJAC input. While the vision statement and goals provide the foundation for the objectives, policies, and programs, the issues and opportunities will continue to evolve to reflect new trends and concepts. Each of the subsequent elements in the comprehensive plan will include appropriate goals and more specific objectives, policies, and programs through the year 2035. As required by the State of Wisconsin Smart Growth Comprehensive Planning Law, the County goals address the following 14 State Smart Growth comprehensive planning goals:

1. Promotion of the redevelopment of lands with existing infrastructure and public services and the maintenance and rehabilitation of existing residential, commercial, and industrial structures.
2. Encouragement of neighborhood designs that support a range of transportation choices.
3. Protection of natural areas, including wetlands, wildlife habitats, lakes, woodlands, open spaces, and groundwater resources.
4. Protection of economically productive areas including farmlands and forests.
5. Encouragement of land uses, densities and regulations that promote efficient development patterns and relatively low municipal, state governmental and utility costs.
6. Preservation of cultural, historic, and archaeological sites.
7. Encouragement of coordination and cooperation among nearby units of government.
8. Building of community identity by revitalizing main streets and enforcing design standards.
9. Providing an adequate supply of affordable housing for individuals of all income levels throughout each community.
10. Providing adequate infrastructure and public services and an adequate supply of developable land to meet existing and future market demand for residential, commercial and industrial uses.
11. Promoting the expansion or stabilization of the current economic base and the creation of a range of employment opportunities at the state, regional, and local levels.
12. Balancing individual property rights with community interests and goals.

13. Planning and development of land uses that create or preserve varied and unique urban and rural communities.
14. Providing an integrated, efficient, and economical transportation system that affords mobility, convenience, and safety that meets the needs of all citizens, including transit-dependent and disabled citizens.