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INTRODUCTION: ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

1.1 Plan Purpose and Use

The Waushara County Comprehensive Plan has been developed to establish a strategy for countywide development and preservation within the County. It serves as an umbrella document to the municipal comprehensive plans that have been created. The goals, objectives, and recommendations identified by the communities that comprise Waushara County were incorporated into this countywide document with some variation. For example, to better encapsulate the essential purposes and local desires of each municipality, statements in the countywide plan have been written with some ambiguity to account for slight variations among local municipalities. This was done to ensure that the countywide document supports local desires with general statements of support, rather than restating the local goal or recommendation. Each municipal comprehensive plan should be considered a support document for the policies outlined in this countywide plan. Specific policies for local jurisdictions are specified in local planning documents.

The purpose of this comprehensive plan is to provide direction to Waushara’s decision makers on matters related to the use and prosperity of regional resources. It has been prepared under the State of Wisconsin’s Comprehensive Planning Law under section 66.1001 of the Wisconsin State Statutes to meet all elements and requirements. The law requires that all County land use decisions be consistent with the plan. It is a working document that is intended to be reviewed and updated as necessary. The review serves as a checkpoint to ensure that the document is providing clear direction and that it remains consistent with both local and regional goals, values, and needs.

1.2 Comprehensive Plan Format

This plan is composed of two documents – Volume One and Volume Two. Together, the two volumes contain all information necessary to meet state regulations. The purpose of the two reports is to create a user-friendly plan that separates a majority of the required background material from the County’s goals, objectives, and recommendations. Generally speaking, Volume One serves as the “guide” for decision making whereas Volume Two provides data and support for actions detailed in Volume One. Specific details are provided below for each volume.

Volume One: “Comprehensive Plan (Goals, Objectives, and Recommendations)”. This volume contains issues, goals, objectives, and recommendations for each of the nine required comprehensive plan elements for implementation over the next twenty years. It describes actions and strategies to achieve the goals and objectives listed in each of the nine planning elements, or chapters, within the plan. This document should be consulted by the Planning & Zoning Committee and County Board when managing community resources. It will also be used by Waushara County on matters where a county land use control, such as zoning, is applied to a county-zoned town. Since no previous land management plan exists, all content was developed and/or assembled by the County and its consultants.

Volume Two: “Existing Conditions Report”. The second volume of this comprehensive plan contains an analysis of existing conditions within the County. It provides a series of Census and other empirical data available through local, regional, state, and national sources. These data reveal current findings within the County and how these compare to historical numbers within the County and the State of Wisconsin. These data were primarily used to identify challenges and opportunities in Volume One. The report is a companion document to Volume One and should be used to locate evidence of existing conditions that provide support for recommendations and strategies located in Volume One. Content was developed and/or assembled by East Central Wisconsin Regional Plan Commission.

1.3 Planning Process

Public input is a fundamental component of any planning process. Public participation is especially important for this document because this countywide plan is a composite of the ideas and concepts forged at the local level. This “bottom-up” approach is based on consensus building and plan preparation at the each of the local towns, villages, and cities within the county. The result is a stronger countywide plan because each locality within the county had the opportunity to identify the issues, needs, and goals that will drive the overall recommendations within the plan. The following formal public participation activities contributed to the development of this countywide plan. All public meetings and events were properly noticed.

1. Adoption of a Formal Public Participation Plan
2. Citizen Questionnaire
3. Public Information Meetings (Waushara County)
4. Public Meetings (Waushara County Land Use Committee, Village Committee)
5. Written Comments
6. Distribution of Planning Documents
7. County Fair Booth
8. Public Hearing

1.3.1 Public Participation Plan

The purpose of the Public Participation Plan is to outline the process and ways in which the public will be invited to participate in developing a comprehensive plan in accordance with 66.1001 of the Wisconsin Statutes. Waushara County adopted a Public Participation Plan on December 9, 2008. It is located in Appendix A.

1.3.2 Citizen Questionnaire

As part of the information gathering process, the citizen questionnaires that were previously analyzed for municipal land management plans were evaluated as part of the countywide comprehensive plan. The information was used to prioritize the state’s comprehensive planning goals for local and countywide application. Outcomes of the questionnaire were tested at the first Kick-Off meeting at each local government to ensure current desires still reflect the citizen questionnaire outcome.

1.3.3 Public Information Meetings (Waushara County)

Local residents, interested parties, and non-committee members were encouraged to participate as equals and attend county public information meetings throughout the process. This was the primary public participation method for disseminating progress made on the countywide comprehensive plan. These meetings occurred at key benchmarks in the planning process with one meeting held in each sub area.

Phase 1 began with a Public Information Meeting in each of the three sub areas. This meeting was used to test the results of the citizen questionnaires that were administered in most of the municipalities prior to development of existing land management plans. Meetings also included a discussion about the opportunities and assets within the county – specifically, what sorts of conditions added to, or detracted from, the quality of life within Waushara County. After these meetings were completed, there was a Local Kick-Off meeting held for each community participating in the countywide plan development process.

At the mid-point of the countywide plan development process, a second Public Meeting Information meeting was held in each sub area to discuss the progress of the countywide plan. These meetings discussed countywide policies and possible ordinances for development based on local plans and countywide needs.

When all comprehensive plan elements were finalized, a third Public Information Meeting was held in each of the three sub areas to present the countywide Land Use Plan and Implementation Tools.

All meeting dates were listed on the Waushara County UW-Extension website and announced in local media including press releases published at least two weeks prior to the meeting date. General informational brochures on planning and public participation produced by UW-Extension were available at the meetings. A summary of the events and outcomes at each PIM will be posted to the website.

1.3.4 Public Meetings (Waushara County Land Use Committee)

A representative from each of the participating municipalities was invited to sit on the Waushara County Land Use Committee. The intent of having local representatives on the Committee was to ensure local goals and priorities were being addressed in the countywide document.

The County Land Use Committee was the steering committee that led the development of the countywide plan. This was accomplished through review of local plans used to guide preparation of the countywide document. Members of the public were encouraged to attend meetings of the County Land Use Committee. These meetings were advertised in accordance with county protocol.

1.3.5 Written Comments

Written comments were solicited throughout the process. Members of the public who had comments were asked to submit them to any local or county official, the UW-Extension agent assigned to this process, or the consultant. Comments received were provided to committee members for review and discussion.

1.3.6 Distribution of Planning Documents

Drafts of the plan were available to the County Land Use Committee for review after each cluster of elements was written. Drafts were also available electronically on the Waushara County UW-Extension website. Members of the public were encouraged to attend County Land Use Committee meetings where elements are reviewed. Extra copies of comprehensive planning elements were available at the meeting by request. Distribution of planning documents for participating municipalities included identification of document recipients and direct mailings to these individuals. Elements of local comprehensive plans were also available online.

1.3.7 Booth at the County Fair

Comprehensive plan components were on display at the Waushara County Fair (August 13-16, 2009) for public review and comment.

1.3.8 Public Hearing

A formal public hearing on the proposed Comprehensive Plan Ordinance was held by the County Board prior to recommendation and approval of the Plan. The hearing was held on November 19, 2009 to solicit comments pertaining to the content of the Waushara County Comprehensive Plan.

A public notice containing a summary of the Comprehensive Plan was published in two of the County's official newspapers, including the Berlin Journal and the Waushara Argus. Notices were published at least 30 days prior to the public hearing.

The entire proposed Comprehensive Plan was available for public review at the Waushara County Courthouse 30 days prior to the public hearing. Additionally, plan copies were sent to the parties identified in State Statute 66.1001 4(b). These include all adjacent and overlapping jurisdictions, nonmetallic mineral extraction operators, and local libraries. Copies were sent in digital format unless otherwise specified by the County Land Use Committee.

1.4 20-Year Vision

The following 20-Year Vision Statement has been developed to guide future development and resource management activities throughout Waushara County over the next twenty-year planning period.

Waushara County is a unique and vibrant rural community set amid active agriculture and scenic forests. Within this setting are valuable natural, agricultural, cultural, transportation, and economic resources. These resources provide residents, businesses, and visitors access to distinct urban amenities and small-town livability. Preserving these resources and strengthening the connections between them is the foundation for maintaining and enhancing quality of life and economic opportunity.

1.5 Key Demographic Findings and Projections

The following section identifies the key demographic findings and projections for Waushara County. A complete listing of demographic information can be located in the *Waushara County Comprehensive Plan Volume Two: Existing Conditions Report*.

Demographic Trends

- Over the past fifty years, the population within Waushara County has seen a substantial increase. The population decreased from 1950 (13,920) to 1960 (13,497) before starting a steady increase to a year 2000 population of 23,066.
- Recent Waushara County growth trends from WDOA indicate that between 2000 and 2005 population increase has slowed but continues to outpace the East Central Region and Wisconsin.
- Migration has played a greater role in population change in Waushara County than natural increase between 1950 and 2005. Furthermore, the rate of net migration in Waushara County has exceeded the overall Wisconsin net migration rates each decade since 1980, which indicates that Waushara County is attracting residents from other parts of Wisconsin.
- Since natural increase rates were negative, the entire increase in population in Waushara County since 1990 can be attributed to in-migration.
- As the County's population ages, an increase in demands or desires may exist for a wider variety of housing, healthcare, support services and transportation options than are typically available in rural communities.
- The average population density in Waushara County was 37 persons per square mile in 2000.
- The change in population by age cohort between 1990 and 2000 indicates that the County's population is aging.
- Between 1990 and 2000, the median age increased by 3.5 years in Waushara County, as a result the county (42.1) continued to have a higher median age than the state (36.0).

Interpretation: The County's population has been increasing over the past fifty years. The population increase is mostly due to older people moving into the County from other parts of Wisconsin and, anecdotally, other States. This will result in an increased demand for services in the future.

Household Structure

- Household size for Waushara County has been decreasing since 1970. Waushara County had an average household size of 2.5 in 1990 and 2.4 in 2000.
- In 1990 and 2000, the majority of households in Waushara County were family households, and the majority of family households were married couple families.
- The population in Waushara County is less diverse than that of the state. In 2000, whites comprised 96.8 percent of Waushara County's population compared to 88.9 percent of the state's population.

Interpretation: Household size is decreasing and the population is aging in the County. These two factors generally coincide as older populations often live as couples or singles after their offspring move out of the home.

Income Levels

- At this point in time, telecommuting (use of technology to work outside of the traditional office or workplace setting) occurs very infrequently in Waushara County.
- Access to earning opportunities is a strong determinant in meeting the income needs of residents in both Waushara County and Wisconsin.
- The State of Wisconsin maintains higher median household, family and per capita incomes than Waushara County overall.
- 2000 Census information indicates that in 1999 Waushara County had 779 (8.4%) households with incomes below \$10,000. The income range with the largest number and share of households was between \$45,000 to \$59,999 with 1,558 households or 16.7 percent. There were 175 households (1.9%) with incomes of \$150,000 or more.
- About eighty-eight percent of households in Waushara County reported incomes below \$75,000 in 1999.
- Between 1989 and 1999, both the number and percentage of persons living below the poverty threshold declined in Waushara County and Wisconsin. In spite of the decline in poverty, 9.0 percent of Waushara County residents and 8.4 percent of Wisconsin residents still lived below the poverty line in 1999.
- In 1989, 20.1 percent of children in Waushara County lived in poverty, compared to 13.9 percent of the elderly. By 1999, the share of children living in poverty in Waushara County had decreased to 10.9 percent, while the share of elderly living in poverty had decreased to 10.8 percent.
- Between 1989 and 1999, the number of families in poverty declined in both Waushara County and the state.

Interpretation: The number of persons living in poverty in Waushara declined between 1989 and 1999, yet Waushara County has a lower median household, family, and per capita income than that State average. These data do not indicate there is a lower standard of living in Waushara County based on income because the costs of many items, such as housing, are also lower.

Population Forecasts

- Population growth in Waushara County will result in an increase in demand for services and land consumption.
- Waushara County is expected to grow by 21.6 percent between 2000 and 2030.
- Waushara County population projections by age cohort¹ indicate that the number of county residents age 65 and older may double between 2000 and 2030 (from 1,306 to 2,811), while the number of children may decline by 21 percent.

¹ WI DOA, 2004

Interpretation: As the population continues to increase and grow older, there will be a need for more services that support an aging population. At the same time, as the population of children decreases, the focus of community programming will need to shift focus to meet the demands of shifting demographics.

Household Forecasts

- Based on projected growth patterns and smallest average household size assumptions, the number of households in Waushara County is expected to increase by 28.8 percent between 2000 and 2030 (from 9,336 to 12,023).

Interpretation: As population increases and the number of people living in each housing unit decreases, more housing units will need to be constructed.