

Chapter VIII

ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES AND GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

INTRODUCTION

Before preparing the comprehensive plan, it is important to agree upon the goals and objectives which the plan should seek to achieve. As defined by the Wisconsin Department of Administration, goals are “broad and general expressions of a community’s aspirations, toward which planned effort is directed.” Objectives are defined as “more specific targets, derived from goals and necessary to achieve those goals.” This chapter presents a set of goals and objectives recommended by the Smart Growth Technical Advisory Committee as a basis for the comprehensive plan.

The goals and objectives presented in this chapter were developed based upon a consideration of the information on existing conditions and trends in the County, as described in Chapters II-VI of this report; the projections of population, households, and employment presented in Chapter VII; goals and objectives that have been included in prior plans; and public input received to date—including input obtained through the countywide public opinion survey,¹ input from the public informational meetings held throughout the County in December of 2007,² and public comments made at Smart Growth Technical Advisory Committee meetings.³ Generally, in this chapter, one broad goal is presented for each of the required elements of the comprehensive plan. The exception is the agricultural, natural, and cultural resources element, for which three goals—related to agricultural resources, natural resources, and cultural resources, respectively—are presented. Each goal is accompanied by one or more objectives.

¹*As part of the comprehensive planning process, a countywide public opinion survey was conducted to identify perspectives on a range of issues related to the future of Walworth County. The sample survey of resident households and non-resident owners of residential land was carried out in May-July of 2007. The results of the countywide public opinion survey and documentation of the survey methodology are presented in a report entitled “Walworth County Comprehensive Plan Public Opinion Survey,” dated October 2007.*

²*Four meetings were held to solicit public input on comprehensive planning issues in December 2007. Attendees at these meetings participated in an exercise designed to identify their perceptions of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats facing Walworth County. The results of these “SWOT” exercises (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) are summarized in a report entitled “Public Participation Meetings/SWOT Exercises of December 2007—for the Walworth County Comprehensive Plan,” dated December 2007.*

³*These are documented in the minutes of the Smart Growth Advisory Committee meetings.*

In addition to the goals and objectives presented in this chapter, a series of related policies and programs, will be presented for each of the required elements of the comprehensive plan in subsequent chapters of this report. Definitions of the terms “goals,” “objectives,” “policies,” and “programs,” established by the Wisconsin Department of Administration for comprehensive planning purposes, are presented in Table VIII-1.

This chapter begins with a discussion of issues and opportunities related to various elements of the comprehensive plan, drawing from the inventory findings and projections presented in previous chapters of this report and the public input into the planning process received to date. This discussion is intended to provide background and context for the comprehensive plan goals and objectives set forth later in this chapter.

ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Land Use

Urban land uses—including residential, commercial, industrial, recreational, institutional, and transportation—encompassed about 73 square miles, or 13 percent of the area of the County in 2000, having increased by about 30 square miles, or 69 percent, since 1963. For the most part, urban development in Walworth County remains concentrated in and around the County’s incorporated cities and villages and lake communities, although some scattered, isolated urban enclaves are evident. Large tracts of agricultural lands and natural resource areas remain intact, relatively free of the impacts of urban development.

With respect to the pace of future growth and development, most respondents to the 2007 countywide public opinion survey would prefer to have the County slow down with respect to its population growth, indicating a preferred agricultural/residential future. Just over half of all survey respondents indicated that development should be accommodated, but not encouraged, in the County; about one-quarter indicated that development should be discouraged; and about one-fifth indicated that development should be encouraged. Survey respondents indicated strong support for maintaining the County’s open spaces.

Opinions regarding the impacts of growth in the County, as expressed in the countywide public opinion survey, are mixed. Many respondents to the survey feel that growth has positively impacted the County in a number of ways (access to health care, availability of shopping, library system, sense of community) and negatively impacted the County in other ways (traffic volumes, cost of living, housing costs). When asked specifically and directly about the effect of population growth on the quality of life in the County, more responded negatively than positively. However, when asked a related question in a broader context about the local impact of past growth on the overall quality of life, more responded positively than negatively.

Many participants in the SWOT exercises of 2007 cited agricultural and natural resources among the County’s greatest strengths and the potential loss or deterioration of these resources among the County’s weaknesses/threats. A number of participants cited lack of industry, lack of high paying jobs, and “brain drain” as weaknesses/threats facing the County, possibly signaling support for industrial or commercial development in response to these perceived weaknesses/threats.

As indicated in Chapter VII, significant increases are projected in the County’s population and employment over the coming decades, due, in part, to the County’s proximity to the rapidly developing northeastern Illinois region. Future growth in the population and in economic activity will result in additional urban and rural development. A major challenge of the comprehensive planning process is to determine how to accommodate future growth in a sustainable manner. Past planning by the County and towns provides important guidance in this regard. Collectively, such planning has sought to meet projected growth needs while maintaining the integrity of the County’s agricultural resource base and natural resource base, maintaining rural character, and promoting relatively compact urban service areas that are convenient, attractive, and efficiently provided with basic services and facilities.

Agricultural Resources

Nearly two thirds of the area of Walworth County was devoted to agriculture in 2000, with much of that land consisting of Class I, Class II, and Class III soils. Agriculture is an important component of the County's economic base, with the total value of agricultural products sold annually approaching \$90 million. The County's location in proximity to large metropolitan areas fosters the efficient distribution of its agricultural products. The growing demand for biofuels may be expected to increase the demand for the County's agricultural products and spur agriculture-related industry. In addition to the provision of food and fiber products, agricultural lands provide wildlife habitat, contribute to the ecological balance between plants and animals, and contribute to the maintenance of the scenic beauty and cultural heritage of the County.

Respondents to the countywide public opinion survey attached great importance to the preservation of farmland, with most saying that the County government should encourage farmland preservation as it plans for the future. Participants in the SWOT exercises of December 2007 listed agricultural resources among the County's top strengths, and many participants cited the loss of farmland as a threat/weakness. The County farmland preservation plan, the year 2020 County land use plan, and existing County zoning have been developed in a way that strongly supports the maintenance of the County's agricultural resource base.

While historically there has been strong support for the preservation of farmland in Walworth County, farmland preservation remains a difficult and challenging issue, one that involves balancing land preservation objectives with the economic realities faced by farmers. Historically, efforts to ensure the preservation of farmland have relied on zoning and other land use controls. Use-value assessment and tax credit programs have provided some relief to farmers. Purchase of development rights (PDR) programs and transfer of development rights (TDR) programs hold some potential to help ensure the preservation of farmland in selected areas.

Natural Resources

Walworth County has an abundance of natural resources, including 173 miles of perennial streams and hundreds more miles of smaller, intermittent streams; 27 major lakes and numerous smaller lakes and ponds; 42 square miles of wetlands; 49 square miles of woodlands; 77 natural areas having native plant and animal communities representative of the pre-European settlement landscape; and 23 other critical species habitat sites. Areas containing concentrations of natural resource features have been identified as environmental corridors. The largest of these—"primary" environmental corridors—are generally located along major stream valleys, around major lakes, and in the Kettle Moraine. "Secondary" environmental corridors are generally located along small perennial and intermittent streams. Existing natural resource features contribute to the overall environmental quality and natural beauty of the County, provide opportunities for recreational and educational pursuits, and are integral to the County's recreational/tourism industry.

Respondents to the 2007 countywide public opinion survey indicated that they highly value the County's natural resource features and strongly support their protection. Almost all respondents said that the natural environment positively influenced their decision to live, locate, or invest in the County, and most said that the County should actively pursue the protection of woodlands, wetlands, open spaces, groundwater recharge areas, and endangered species habitat. Participants in the SWOT exercises of December 2007 identified existing natural resource features as the County's top strength. SWOT exercise participants expressed concern about the potential loss of natural resource features, threats to water quality in general, and depletion of groundwater resources.

Participants in the SWOT exercises also consistently cited recreational opportunities and resources among the County's strengths. Some cited as an opportunity the fact that there is still open space in which to create parks. Conversely, participants at one of the exercises cited less parkland than surrounding counties and less park acres per person as a weakness—presumably referring to County parks. At the same exercise, inaction on existing plans, particularly natural area and park/open space plans, was also cited as a weakness.

Prior regional, County, and local planning efforts have identified the various features of the natural resource base with considerable precision and set forth recommendations for their preservation, including through public-interest acquisition and conservation easements. Prior planning also provides recommendations for future parks

and outdoor recreation facilities. Such planning provides a good framework for the preparation of the natural resources element of the multi-jurisdictional comprehensive plan. The regional water supply system plan, expected to be completed in 2009, will provide guidance with respect to the protection of important groundwater recharge areas.

Cultural Resources

Walworth County has many sites of historic and other cultural significance. The most important of these are listed on the National Register of Historic Places, which includes 39 listings in Walworth County. In addition, the Wisconsin Architecture and History Inventory includes more than 3,000 properties in Walworth County. The State Archaeological Site Inventory includes 399 sites in the County. A total of seven local historical societies in Walworth County, along with the Walworth County Historical Society, function to increase general awareness and understanding of the County's historic and cultural resources.

Respondents to the 2007 countywide public opinion survey ranked historic features on the lower end of the spectrum of the positive factors that influenced their decision to live, locate, or invest in Walworth County. Nevertheless, about 70 percent of the respondents indicated that the County should actively pursue the protection of historic sites.

More generally, it should be recognized that the County's agricultural and natural resources are an important part of the County's cultural heritage. The preservation of these resources helps to maintain the rural heritage of the County. Likewise, the preservation of traditional downtown areas, including their central public squares, helps to maintain yet another component of the County's cultural heritage.

Housing

There was a total of 43,800 housing units in the County in 2000. Of this total, about 83 percent was year-round housing, while about 17 percent was held for seasonal or other occasional use—reflecting a strong second home market, attributable to the County's outstanding natural and recreational resources. The median value and median rent of housing in the County, as reported in the 2000 census, was about the same as that for the seven-county Southeastern Wisconsin Region. Walworth County has a somewhat higher percentage of single-family detached housing (72 percent) than the Region (57 percent).

Housing policies should attempt to ensure that the future housing stock in the County is adequate to meet the needs of the County population. An increase in the need for senior housing can be expected as the population ages; the number of persons age 65 and over in the County is expected to double between 2000 and 2035. In addition, a range of housing types will be necessary to accommodate workers who will fill the new jobs projected for the County in coming decades.

Among respondents to the countywide public opinion survey, about one-quarter felt that there is a shortage of affordable housing in the County, just over two-fifths felt that there was not a shortage, while the balance was neutral. About two-fifths of survey respondents felt there is a shortage of housing for seniors, less than one-fifth felt there was not a shortage; while the balance was neutral. With respect to the preferred location of housing within the County, considerably more respondents felt that residential growth should take place in urban areas than in rural areas.

It is important to recognize that the land use and housing elements of the comprehensive plan are inherently linked. In developing the comprehensive plan, housing policies will have to be properly coordinated with recommendations in the land use plan element regarding the location and intensity of residential land use and the provision of urban services and facilities.

Transportation

Walworth County is served by an extensive system of arterial streets and highways and local collector and access streets. There was a total of 1,507 linear miles of public streets and highways in the County in 2005, including 213 miles of State trunk highways, 173 miles of County trunk highways, and 1,121 miles of local streets and

highways. Public transit service in the County is limited to the County Transportation Program—which provides rides for medical care, nutrition, and shopping for seniors and the disabled, and rides, primarily for medical care, to clients of the County Department of Health and Human Services, residents in the Lakeland Health Care Center, and those receiving medical assistance; and the shared-ride taxicab service provided by the City of Whitewater. There is a limited system of designated bicycle routes within the County. There are five public-use airports in the County.

Some participants in the SWOT exercises of December 2007 listed a good street and highway system among the County's strength, although two-thirds of the respondents to the countywide public opinion survey indicated that growth in Walworth County in recent years has had a negative impact on traffic volumes. Some participants in the SWOT exercises cited a lack of public transportation as a weakness. Some participants cited existing railways among the County's opportunities.

The year 2035 regional transportation plan includes recommendations pertaining to public transit service, accommodation of bicycle and pedestrian facilities, transportation system management, travel demand management, and arterial streets and highways. Adopted by the Regional Planning Commission in 2006, this plan is designed to meet travel demands in the County and throughout the Southeastern Wisconsin Region through the year 2035. By law, the regional transportation system plan must be incorporated into the County comprehensive plan. The comprehensive plan must also incorporate the regional airport system plan.

Utilities and Community Facilities

As indicated in Chapter V, Walworth County and local units of government in the County collectively provide a set of basic public facilities and services—ranging from sheriff/police protection to public education to sewer and water supply services. The private sector also plays an important role in the provision of certain community facilities and services—such as health care facilities, child care facilities, and nursing homes and other assisted living facilities—and in the provision of electric, natural gas, and telecommunication services. The focus of the comprehensive plan is on public sector services and facilities. It is, nonetheless, important that the County and local units of government ensure that needed private sector community facilities and services are accommodated as appropriate.

Given budgetary constraints facing all levels of government, efficiency in the provision of public facilities and services is more important than ever. Policies that promote compact urban service areas and the full use of existing infrastructure can help achieve efficient service provision. Moreover, service sharing and other forms of increased cooperation among local units of government in the provision of basic services may result in cost-savings and/or a higher quality of service. At one of the SWOT exercises of December 2007, participants cited cooperation between governments for efficiency and cost savings as one of the County's top opportunities.

Economic Development

Many factors enhance the County's ability to retain and attract businesses including: the availability of public utilities; a good road system within the County and good highway connections beyond the County; freight rail lines; good schools; a balanced mix of existing businesses and industries; quality of life factors, such as an abundance of recreational opportunities, that make the County a desirable place to live and work; a strong agricultural base—a combination of the large tracts of farmland, productive soils, farming operations, and food/grain processors; and existing groups and organizations that foster economic development in general or that support sectors of the County economy.

The County does face challenges in attracting and retaining businesses. These include maintaining a work force with the training and skills that employers need; maintaining existing roads and other infrastructure that support economic activity; and accommodating additional business and industries without sacrificing the quality of the environment. The size of the County's workforce will be affected by the retirement of the baby-boom generation (persons born from 1946 through 1964) in the coming decades—a phenomenon which will affect the available workforce throughout the Southeastern Wisconsin Region, the State, and the Nation.

Among respondents to the countywide public opinion survey, roughly one-fourth favored policies encouraging commercial and industrial development; roughly one-fourth favored discouraging such development; and roughly one-half favored a neutral approach. There was little support for using property taxes to fund a program to encourage commercial and industrial development. About two-thirds of all respondents indicated that employment opportunities were important in their decision to live, locate, or invest in Walworth County.

Economic development matters were not among the top strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, or threats facing the County identified by participants in the SWOT exercises of 2007. However, a number of participants in the SWOT exercises did cite economic development-related concerns. Some participants cited high taxes, lack of industry/lack of high paying jobs, and “brain drain” as weaknesses or threats to the County. Many participants cited the County’s agricultural base as a strength/opportunity. Some cited tourism as a strength.

Intergovernmental Cooperation

One of the underlying goals of the State comprehensive planning law is to increase cooperation among local units of government. The law encourages the resolution of intergovernmental conflicts and the joint planning and provision of public services and facilities.

A number of participants in the SWOT exercises of December 2007 cited a lack of cooperation between local units of government in one form or another as a weakness facing the County. At the same time, a number of participants cited improved cooperation between local units of government as an opportunity in the County—including cooperation through intergovernmental boundary agreements and other cooperative efforts to realize efficiency and cost savings.

Many of the participants in the SWOT exercises expressed concern over the stronger powers available to cities and villages relative to towns. Numerous participants cited the annexation practices of cities and villages at the expense of towns when identifying weaknesses and threats in the County. Some cited city and village extraterritorial zoning, plat review, and tax incremental finance powers as a weakness from the towns’ perspective. It is important to recognize that the State Smart Growth law did not “level the playing field” for towns relative to cities and villages; their respective powers are essentially unchanged. This situation reinforces the need for towns to pursue cooperative efforts, such as entering into cooperative boundary agreements, with adjacent cities and villages in efforts to identify and achieve common objectives.

As the comprehensive plan was developed, conflicts between local units of government, particularly with respect to planned future land uses, were identified and addressed to the extent practicable. Potential opportunities for cooperation in the provision of public facilities and services were noted.

Implementation

While the State comprehensive planning law specifies that comprehensive plans include nine distinct elements, the nine plan elements should be internally consistent, and, following adoption, be implemented in an integrated manner. Following adoption, the plan should be considered in County- and town-government decision-making on matters addressed in the plan. Zoning and land division ordinances must be administered in a manner consistent with the plan.

Each of the plan elements set forth in subsequent chapters of this report includes policies and programs that indicate how the goal and objectives for that element can best be achieved. In developing the comprehensive plan, every effort was made to ensure that the recommended implementation policies and programs for the various plan elements are internally consistent with, and reinforce, one another. The implementation element, the final element of the comprehensive plan, provides a summary of the various plan implementation tools and of their relationship to the respective plan elements.

While the comprehensive plan constitutes a long-range “blueprint” for the County and towns, there must be flexibility to accommodate reasonable amendments that do not jeopardize the basic structure and integrity of the plan. Procedures and guidelines for the consideration of, and action on, proposed amendments to the plan will have to be established. In addition, a schedule for the general updating of the comprehensive plan should be established; the State Smart Growth law requires an update no less than once every 10 years.

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Land Use

Goal

- A sustainable land use pattern that meets the social, economic, physical, ecological, and quality-of-life needs of the County and all of its communities, maintaining a sense of place in urban and rural areas.

Objectives

- Land identified for future urban and rural uses that is properly related to anticipated growth in population and economic activity and that is consistent with the above goal.
- Spatial distribution of urban and rural development that is properly related to the natural and agricultural resource base.
- Spatial distribution of urban development land uses that is properly related to, and maximizes the use of, existing public utilities and facilities.
- Compact urban service areas, enabling the efficient provision of urban services and facilities and moderating the overall amount of open space developed for urban use.
- Conservation and revitalization, as appropriate, of existing urban areas.
- Maintenance of the rural character of areas of the County located beyond planned urban areas.
- Compatible relationship between urban and rural land uses.

Agricultural Resources

Goal

- Preservation of the agricultural resource base of the County.

Objectives

- Preservation of farmland with the most productive soils, generally comprised of soils in Capability Classes I, II, and III, as identified by the U.S. Natural Resources Conservation Service.
- Preservation of large blocks of farmland, to promote more efficient farming and minimize conflicts between farming operations and urban-type uses.
- Maintenance of agriculture as an important component of the economic base of the County.
- Maintenance of the County's farming heritage, including the scenic values associated with rural farming areas.
- Maintenance of strong connections between agricultural and natural resource areas.
- Use of best management practices to minimize the impacts of farming activity on the environment.

Natural Resources

Goal

- Preservation and conservation of the County's natural resources.

Objectives

- Preservation of the County's primary and secondary environmental corridors and isolated natural resource areas in natural, open use, including agricultural use where permitted by applicable regulation. These areas include most of the County's best remaining wetlands, woodlands, wildlife habitat areas, prairies, and other natural features.
- Preservation of natural areas and critical species habitat sites, as identified in the regional natural areas and critical species habitat sites inventory.
- Preservation of the floodwater conveyance and storage capacity of 100-year recurrence interval floodlands.
- Preservation of wetlands.
- Maintenance and improvement of water quality.
- Protection of important groundwater recharge areas.
- Restoration of marginal farmland and other open land to a more natural condition, resulting in the re-establishment or enhancement of wetlands, woodlands, prairies, grasslands, and forest interiors.
- Appropriate consideration of sand and gravel resources and needs in decision-making on future land use.

Cultural Resources

Goal

- Preservation of the historical and cultural heritage of the County.

Objectives

- Preservation of significant historic sites and historic districts.
- Preservation of the County's agricultural and natural heritage.
- Preservation of traditional downtown areas and their central public squares.

Housing

Goal

- The housing goal is to provide housing that meets the needs of the County's current and future population.

Objectives

- Matching housing to changing household characteristics and needs.
- Provision of housing opportunities for those with special needs: low income households, persons with disabilities, the homeless, and the elderly.
- Provision of housing opportunities for workers close to their place of work.
- Restricting housing density to levels that are appropriate for available sanitary sewer service, water supply, and basic urban services and facilities.
- Maintaining and enhancing the character of existing urban and rural environments.

Transportation

Goal

- The provision of an integrated, efficient, safe, and convenient transportation system meeting the anticipated travel demand generated by existing and future land uses.

Objectives

- The development and maintenance of an arterial street and highway system that is efficient, safe, and convenient.
- The development of local access and collector streets that are efficient, safe, and convenient, and properly related to the arterial street and highway system.
- Provision of safe opportunities for bicycling and walking as an alternative to vehicular travel and to promote a healthy lifestyle.
- Provision of transportation opportunities for the elderly and persons with disabilities.

Utilities and Community Facilities

Goal

- The provision of high quality community facilities and services and utility services in the most cost-effective manner possible.

Objectives

- Maintenance and expansion, where needed, of existing public facilities and services, commensurate with growth in population and economic activity.
- Increased cooperation in the provision of basic public services and facilities, resulting in cost reductions and/or increase in the quality of services provided: police, fire and emergency medical services, sewer and water supply, and other services and facilities.
- Full utilization of existing public facilities and service systems—through land use policies that direct most new intensive urban development to urban service areas.
- Strengthened capabilities for estimating the cost of providing public services for proposed developments.
- Accommodation, as appropriate, of community facilities typically provided through the private sector, such as child care facilities, nursing homes and other assisted living facilities, health care facilities, and cemeteries.
- Accommodation, as appropriate, of alternative energy sources.

Economic Development

Goal

- Economic growth within the County that is consistent with its natural, infrastructure, financial, and human resources—and consistent with the other goals and objectives of this comprehensive plan.

Objectives

- A range of employment opportunities for current and future County residents.

- A County work force with the knowledge and skills required for present and future businesses and industries.
- A balanced County tax base.
- Economic development that is consistent with the land use element and other elements of this comprehensive plan.

Intergovernmental Cooperation

Goal

- Increased cooperation among the various County and local units and agencies of government.

Objectives

- Increased cooperation between towns and cities/villages in land use planning and decision-making.
- Increased cooperation between towns and the County in land use planning and decision-making.
- Increased sharing of, or joint provision of, local public facilities, staff, and services by neighboring communities.
- Increased consideration of the impacts of proposed developments on public school system facilities.

Implementation

Goal

- Maintenance of the comprehensive plan as a living document.

Objectives

- Coordinated implementation of the various elements of the comprehensive plan.
- Integration of the comprehensive plan into the broad range of decision-making by the County and local units of government.
- Sufficient flexibility to accommodate needed amendments to the comprehensive plan without jeopardizing the basic structure or integrity of the plan.

CONCLUDING REMARKS: A VISION FOR THE COUNTY

While the foregoing objectives do not constitute a plan, collectively they embody a vision for Walworth County in the years ahead. At the heart of this vision is a sustainable land use pattern, served by efficient public facility and service systems, that meets the social, economic, physical, ecological, and quality-of-life needs of the County. This vision includes relatively compact urban service areas providing basic urban services and facilities; a safe, efficient transportation system; a strong agricultural resource base closely connected to resource-rich open spaces; a clean, sustainable water resource; and abundant public and private recreational opportunities—all while retaining the County’s cultural heritage and rural character.

Table VIII-1

DEFINITION OF 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.

Note: The Wisconsin Department of Administration published the above definitions as "common understanding of these terms."

Source: Wisconsin Department of Administration.

