

1 Forward

The counties of Vilas and Oneida together hold the highest concentration of fresh water lakes in North America. Located in southern Vilas County, the town of St. Germain is nestled in the heart of Wisconsin's northwoods. St. Germain is a rural, developing town that covers 40.2 square miles of land area and is home to 19 named lakes, 4,475 acres of surface water, approximately 42.8 miles of lake shoreline, 17,000 acres of woodlands, and friendly people who care about the future of the community.

The purpose of the *St. Germain Year 2020 Comprehensive Land Use Plan* is to encourage orderly use and development of land in the town of St. Germain. At the same time, the preparation of the plan is also intended to promote and stimulate public participation in the planning process by bringing local issues to the forefront. The plan is based on an analysis of existing conditions, market trends, public input, and determination of future needs.

The town of St. Germain faces significant challenges to its environment as town officials prepare for managing growth and change into the next century. Blessed with an abundance of lakes and over 8,450 acres of public land, most of which is within the Northern Highland-American Legion State Forest, town officials chose to address the inherent responsibility of balancing the demand for the town's natural amenities with the need to provide basic economic opportunity and services to a growing population in an area which experienced tough economic times decades before.

Due to the relatively low population and concentration of people, it would be a stretch to say St. Germain is facing a sprawl crisis as witnessed in the populated southeast area of the state. However, growth and population pressures are impacting the landscape in a dramatic fashion. A permanent population of nearly 1,500 persons swells to nearly 11,000 in the peak of seasonal activity. Pressure to develop lake and river front property and the fragmentation of larger forest tracts are forces driven by a market demand that has facilitated unprecedented growth. In 1990 there were 21 permits issued for the construction of new dwelling units. In 1998, the number of residential permits more than doubled to 59. During the past five years a total of 252 permits have been granted for new houses in the town, an average of 50 permits per year. Another indicator of development pressure is the increase of the town's equalized value which saw the 1991 value of \$104 million increase to more than \$266 million in 1998. There were 9.1 million dollars of assessed value increases through the third quarter of 1999 alone.

The fact that forested, lake and riverfront properties are valuable and limited resources adds to the need to manage the use of property. Balance between growth, economic opportunity, and individual property rights without major negative impacts to water quality and the environment becomes the challenge. In fact, one of the primary forces that focalized the need for long-term planning in St. Germain was a controversial, high-density lakeshore development on Big St. Germain Lake in 1996. In response to public demand, the town commissioned the services of Vilas County University of Wisconsin-Extension Community Resource Development Agent Bryan Pierce to facilitate a planning

and development survey to address several issues and concerns related to the physical development, character, and long-term direction of growth. The issues were identified as follows:

1. The quality and character of the town was being affected by development. Residential and commercial uses were occurring throughout the town, without relation to a coordinated plan or uses that were inappropriate relative to size, location, or type of use.
2. Demand for lakefront property and lake access had caused increased development pressure on lakes throughout the town (and Vilas County), threatening many of the smaller lakes with overcrowding and the problems associated with overuse: pollution, health hazard, property damage, adverse affects on public recreational experiences, and adverse affects on riparian rights and property values.
3. The general aesthetic character, attractiveness, and appeal of the community was a concern. The type and location of commercial development, northwoods character issues including signs, building materials, site design regulations for new commercial uses, and downtown area planning and development needed to be addressed.
4. The lack of land use controls and guidance had allowed a development pattern to occur that was threatening many of the reasons people chose to live and own property in the town. Zoning was the predominant land use control, but was not coordinated with the development pattern resulting from high growth rates brought on by the increasing demand for northwoods real estate.

There were other motivational factors the town of St. Germain was aware of as well, which pointed to the need for local government involvement. At the state level, the State Interagency Land Use council assembled under the direction of Governor Tommy Thompson, published the report *Planning Wisconsin* on July 1, 1996. The report had numerous recommendations but primarily focused on giving each level of government, including towns, greater responsibility and interlocking role in land use planning. Likewise, the Wisconsin towns Association (WTA) advocated for town government to become more active in the development of local land use plans. In fact, during the WTA's 1996 and 1997 district tours, the association strongly encouraged that towns develop land use plans as a tool to manage growth and change.

The WDNR also published *Northern Initiatives: A Strategic Guide for DNR Management in Northern Wisconsin in the Next Decade- 1996-2006*. The report was based on the guiding principle: Keeping the North the North. As a follow-up to the *Northern Initiatives* report the WDNR published *Northern Wisconsin's Lakes and Shorelands: a report examining a resource under pressure* in January 1996. The report was conducted to address public response stemming from the need to better understand the development pressures on northern Wisconsin lakes. The report revealed the following interesting facts:

- ◆ Since the 1960s, about two-thirds of previously undeveloped lakes 10 acres and larger have been developed (had one or more dwellings built on their shores);
- ◆ The average number of dwellings on shorelands not in public ownership has more than doubled over the same time period; and
- ◆ All undeveloped lakes not in public ownership could be developed within the next 20 years--at the latest-- if the present development rates persist.

The report stated those serene, idyllic lakes where people seek to "get away from it all" are rapidly disappearing as cabins, piers, boat shelters, and other developments increasingly line their shores. Vilas County responded with lakes classification and revised shoreland zoning. However, there was little direction at that time for general land use planning from the county or the state.

With the extent and knowledge of the local, regional and state issues well in hand, the town of St. Germain sought to "do their part" to help address local land use issues and set their course into the next millennium. The town, in attempting to put the necessary tools in place to guide its growth and development in an orderly and efficient manner, took action on local land use planning by executing an agreement with the consulting firm of Foth and Van Dyke in April 1997 to assist in the development the town's first land use plan.

Town officials took five major steps to launch the development of the plan:

1. The town submitted and was successful in obtaining a WDNR Lake Protection grant to offset the cost of developing the plan and ordinances necessary for plan implementation.
2. The town established the Town Planning and Zoning Committee (Committee), a five member advisory committee, to guide the development of the plan.
3. The town adopted a moratorium on the development of multiple family dwellings and the subdivision of land in May 1997.
4. The town held an Issues Identification Workshop on May 19, 1997 before the plan commenced to encourage local input into the planning process.
5. The town commissioned a community planning survey in August 1997 to every town property owner to solicit input on a variety of town issues and policies related to planning for the future of the community.

As a result of 15 meetings with Foth and Van Dyke, five public informational meetings, and many St. Germain Planning and Zoning Committee meetings, the *St. Germain Year 2020 Comprehensive Land Use Plan* evolved. The plan was developed per the dedication and hard work of the Planning and

Zoning Committee, town officials, and residents who contributed unselfishly to developing a plan per which they would be proud.

Cooperation certainly must follow understanding. The need to understand and to administrate falls most heavily on the local officials. Indeed, there are tough choices ahead. The landowners must be free to develop their property, but the development must fit within the guidelines written and understood to be in the best interests and overall good of the larger community. Reasonable growth guidelines create sensible land use choices; the opposite will be harsh in the long-term effect of character, coordination, and potentially to the cost of providing services.

The town of St. Germain will refer to this document to find guidance for future development, rezoning, and land division decisions. It is through the utilization of this document that the town hopes to attain its land use vision.

2 Public Participation Process

The public participation process was the key element to the development of the *Town of St. Germain Year 2020 Comprehensive Land Use Plan*. Plan direction was driven by the opinions and participation expressed by town residents and landowners. Numerous techniques were utilized to gather public input in the plan development process. The public input tools utilized and their representative results are summarized as follows.

It must be noted the meetings listed in the following section were facilitated by Foth & Van Dyke. The St. Germain Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee (Town of St. Germain Planning and Zoning Committee) met on numerous occasions not listed below, and by no means is the entire plan development process effort encapsulated by the following summary description.

Meeting No. 1 (May 19, 1997) Issue Identification Workshop

The Town of St. Germain Planning Committee contracted with Foth & Van Dyke to prepare a land use plan for the community. The Community Planning Issues Identification Workshop was scheduled as the first phase of public input gathering for the development of the plan.

The workshop was conducted at 5:30 p.m. on Monday, May 19, 1997 at the United Church of Christ facility, STH 155 North in St. Germain. The purpose of the meeting was to obtain from the participants their perceptions on the following question: *“In your opinion, what do you feel are the most important land use management issues facing the town of St. Germain in the next two decades?”*

A total of 122 workshop participants registered on sign-in sheets for the session. The workshop was facilitated by Ken Jaworski, Pete Harris and Jim Loreti from Foth & Van Dyke, and by Bryan Pierce, Vilas County University of Wisconsin-Extension and Tiffany Lyden, Vilas County Lake Conservation Specialist.

Foth & Van Dyke presented a slide show describing the components for the St. Germain Comprehensive Land Use Plan. Foth & Van Dyke also described the following for the input gathering session. The ground rules included the following:

1. *This is your plan! Everyone's ideas are important. There are no “dumb” or “stupid” ideas.*
2. *Think long range (20 to 30 years into the future).*
3. *Think in terms of the “common good.” Your personal self-interests are important, but they should not dominate.*
4. *Be willing to compromise.*
5. *Be committed to developing a successful plan.*

Following this introductory session, the participants were divided into five groups. Each group followed the same sequence of activities using a nominal group process. First, each person was asked to write down on note cards their own reaction to the primary question. Next, group members shared their issues in a round robin fashion, while the facilitators recorded the responses on flip chart paper.

After all of the issues were recorded, there was discussion within the small group to clarify statements and consolidate duplicate issues. Then members were asked to privately select and vote for their top five issues on note paper. The votes were recorded on flip chart paper. The 10 issues with the most votes in the small group were then listed on a summary sheet.

The top issues from each of the five groups were then presented by the facilitators to the full group. Obviously duplicated issues were consolidated. All participants were then asked to vote a second time among the final list of priority issues. Each person wrote their top five issues on note paper. The final results of priority issues were tabulated by the facilitators.

The results of the workshop were compiled in the Town of St. Germain Comprehensive Land Use Planning Issue Identification Workshop report for the St. Germain Planning and Zoning Committee by Bryan Pierce, Vilas County UW-Extension with assistance from Janet Christiansen. The lists of issues generated by the workshop participants were used by the Planning and Zoning Committee and UW-Extension to prepare questions for a Community Planning Survey. This mail-out survey was used as the second phase of public input for the comprehensive land use planning process, which is subsequently discussed in this section.

The final top 10 priority land use management issues for the town of St Germain can be seen in Table 2-1.

Table 2-1
Final Top 10 Priority Land Use Management Issues for the
Town of St. Germain, Vilas County, Wisconsin
May 19, 1997

In your opinion, what do you feel are the most important land use management issues facing the town of St. Germain over the next two decades?

Rank	No. of Group Votes	Issue
1	57	Provide strict ordinances to control condos/multi-family unit development to prevent high density, protect the environment and address safety concerns.
2	53	Lakeshore development needs to be environmentally friendly. Water quality, fisheries and wildlife ecology need to be preserved.
3	42	Develop municipal ordinances to prevent the type of density development proposed for the Bradford property.
4	36	Keep preserving the quality of lakes and other natural resources.
5	24	Be careful to maintain the tourism industry for the financial stability of this community.
6	23	New ordinances need to be specific and not left to interpretation of future government.
7	19	Maintaining and replacing resorts/rental properties to maintain tourism. Keep lakes zoned as recreational.
8	18	Need for zoning districts and allowable uses within each district - focus on location.
9	16	Ordinances that do not prohibit the future growth of the town, yet without over development or creating environmental problems.
10	15	Prevent over-development of the lakes.

Town Planning Survey (August 1997)

As the second phase of the public participation process, the Town of St. Germain Planning and Zoning Committee worked with Vilas County UW-Extension Agent Bryan Pierce to develop a community planning survey. The survey solicited input on a variety of town policies related to planning for the future of the community.

A total of 2005 surveys were mailed to St. Germain property taxpayers. A total of 1,074 surveys (52.9%) were compiled. The Executive Summary and survey results can be reviewed in Appendix 2-1 of this document.

The Community Planning Survey was a key element in drafting the *Town of St. Germain Year 2020 Comprehensive Land Use Plan*. No other public involvement tool can solicit and leverage public opinion as a direct-mail survey. The culmination of public response and support from the Issue Identification Workshop and Community Planning Survey built the foundation and framework upon which the plan was constructed.

Meeting No. 2 (February 5, 1998)

The meeting was held at 7:00 p.m. February 5, 1998 at the St. Germain Community Center. Bryan Pierce gave a presentation on the results of the Community Survey and entertained questions. Foth & Van Dyke presented the project timetable and relative components of the comprehensive land use plan. Approximately 54 people attended the presentation. Copies of the survey summary report were distributed to all who attended. Feedback from the audience was very positive.

Meeting No. 3 (April 3, 1998)

Foth & Van Dyke presented draft goals, objectives and vision statements to the St. Germain Planning and Zoning Committee. The committee reviewed and discussed the information length as to how the Community Planning Survey and Issue Identification Workshop results were to be addressed in plan development. Much discussion concerned lakeshore development, multi-family housing, and ordinance regulation.

Meeting No. 4 (July 17, 1998)

The St. Germain Planning and Zoning Committee reviewed and finalized the plan goals, objectives and vision statement. Foth & Van Dyke presented and discussed inventory and analysis data highlights, trends, and implications on land use. The Committee reviewed the draft land use map. The Committee also approved an expanded scope related to GIS mapping and planning services to include focus on the "downtown" area, environmentally sensitive areas, natural resource protection programs and ownership patterns, community facilities and services and transportation analysis.

Meeting No. 5 (August 26, 1998)

The Planning and Zoning Committee met at 3:00 p.m. to review the additional maps drafted by Foth & Van Dyke, and to discuss the downtown conceptual design plans to be created with Dean Proctor Design, a Foth and Van Dyke subconsultant specializing in landscape architecture and urban design. The Committee decided to focus on the design and development pattern in the downtown and how that could be improved for the benefit of the town.

Meeting No. 6 (August 26, 1998)

A public informational meeting and open house was held at the town offices from 4:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. The meeting was attended by 34 town residents and landowners and the town Planning and Zoning Committee. Foth & Van Dyke presented an overview of the Community Survey, plan goals, objectives, and vision statement, inventory data highlights and trends, and GIS mapping. In general, the public comments were complimentary to the work effort.

There were many questions relative to lakeshore development and how the plan would address the issue.

Meeting No. 7 (October 12, 1998) Downtown Focus

The Planning and Zoning Committee met with Foth & Van Dyke and Dean Proctor of Dean Proctor Design to discuss the St. Germain Downtown District located along the STH 70 and STH 155 intersection (see Maps 13-1, 13-2). Meeting discussion identified perceived downtown strengths and weaknesses, and focused attention to particular areas or "zones" for analysis and recommendation (see Section 13.3). The effort captured the Planning and Zoning Committees perspective on the "state of the downtown" and how and what could be done to improve it.

Meeting No. 8 (December 3, 1998)

The Planning and Zoning Committee met at 5:00 p.m. to discuss preliminary land use plan development scenarios. The committee reviewed town GIS map acetate overlays and discussed how the preferred plan would be developed. Foth & Van Dyke then presented draft land use classifications relative to type, location and density of proposed land uses. The committee also reviewed preliminary downtown development concepts provided by Dean Proctor.

Meeting No. 9 (December 3, 1998) Downtown Focus

A public informational meeting was held at 7:00 p.m. at the town of St. Germain town hall. Twenty-eight business owners from the Downtown Business District attended. The Planning and Zoning Committee and John Williams of Foth & Van Dyke presented meeting participants with planning progress to date and explained the draft development concepts developed by Dean Proctor Design, including a preliminary plan for a new St. Germain Boulevard Commercial Area, design concepts

related to parking, landscaping, pedestrian access, building architecture and materials, lighting, trail development, economic development, signage, and land use (see Section 13.4). Open debate and discussion facilitated positive comments in favor of the plans, and generally endorsed Committee progress relative to downtown development planning. The Committee was encouraged and proceeded to work and revise conceptual design.

Meeting No. 10 (January 18, 1999)

The Committee met to draft the Year 2020 Preferred Land Use Map. The Committee reviewed proposed land use classifications that identified the type of use proposed, the location in which that use would be preferred, and the associated density of the development that would be recommended in the classification. Much discussion occurred relative to implementation of the town of St. Germain Zoning Ordinance and how the preferred land use map would facilitate and manage change in the town.

Meeting No. 11 (March 24, 1999)

The Committee met to review and discuss the Year 2020 Preferred Land Use Map. The draft map and associated implications were discussed at length. Table 12-1 was also discussed at length. The Planning and Zoning Committee noted additional time for review and discussion was necessary prior to public presentation. The Committee noted it would meet as many times as necessary to refine the plan and preferred land use classifications prior to the next public informational meeting. The Committee chose June 2, 1999 for a public informational meeting to discuss the Year 2020 Preferred Land Use Map and classifications.

Meeting No. 12 (June 2, 1999)

The St. Germain Planning and Zoning Committee hosted a community public informational meeting at the St. Germain Community Center from 7:00-9:00 p.m. Eighty-five people attended. A brief overview of the planning process and progress to date was summarized, and the Year 2020 Preferred Land Use Map was presented in detail. Each meeting participant was handed a Year 2020 Preferred Land Use Map, preferred land use classifications and a survey asking for their input. The presentation lasted for one hour, followed by an open question and answer session. All maps were on display, including the downtown development and design concept plans.

Meeting No. 13 (August 25, 1999) Public Hearing

The Town of St. Germain Planning and Zoning Committee hosted a public hearing at the St. Germain Community Center at 7:00 p.m. Twenty-six (26) people attended. A brief overview of the planning process and progress to date was summarized, and the Year 2020 Preferred Land Use Map was presented in detail. Each meeting participant was handed a Year 2020 Preferred Land Use Map and a copy of the preferred land use classifications. Meeting participants offered testimony, either spoken or

written, relative to their opinion of the plan document and Year 2020 Preferred Land Use Map. Fifteen people spoke, 14 were in favor, one in dissent.