

1. Forward

Vilas County is at a critical juncture in its history. The counties of Vilas and Oneida together hold one of the highest concentrations of inland freshwater lakes in the world. The area is also located in the heart of Wisconsin's beautiful northwoods. Due to this abundance of lakes and forests, residential growth trends over the last 10 years lead many areas of the state. As land use development pressures increase, so do pressures to maintain the county's northwoods atmosphere. County leaders have the very difficult responsibility of addressing very complex issues concerning the demands for residential development and economic opportunity while maintaining balance with protection of the natural environment that stimulate such demands. The main goal is to balance growth, economic opportunity, and individual property rights without negatively impacting water quality, the environment, and community character.

In September of 1997 the Vilas County Board unanimously adopted Resolution 97-63 to "support the development of a comprehensive land use plan for Vilas County in cooperation with the local Towns and the City of Eagle River." The resolution also authorized applying for state grant funding to offset the costs of land use plan and ordinance development and allocated \$50,000 in the 1998 budget to initiate development of the plan. Vilas County's land use process began in 1998, in conjunction with a successful county Lakes Classification and Shoreland Management program. While the shoreland ordinance revision established dimensional standards for development, the process did not address the issue of compatible land uses. The County had utilized zoning regulation since the 1940s, yet had never done a land use plan to assess the viability of current land use decisions framed against the driving market forces that were developing both on- and off- water properties. The development link between County-level regulation and administration and local-level land use decisions suggested a planning approach that involved integrated and coordinated decision-making. To facilitate and strengthen intergovernmental relationships, the County decided that land use planning should be a "bottom-up" approach with planning done at the local level first, then the county level. Many land use issues are reviewed by the Towns first, then administered or regulated by the County.

In concert with this strategy, Vilas County applied for and received Lake Protection grant money from the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources to fund a significant portion of the land use planning process. In response, the County offered all local governments an opportunity to participate in the County planning process through development of their own land use plan. The basic premise was that local plans, coordinated by the County, would 'roll up' in combination to develop the County plan. Of the county's 15 local governments, six Towns and the City of Eagle River decided to participate including Winchester, Washington, Presque Isle, Cloverland, Plum Lake and Lincoln. The City of Eagle River and the Town of Lincoln commenced a joint planning process due to their proximity, municipal borders, and common land use issues. In addition, the Towns of St. Germain, Arbor Vitae, and Manitowish Waters either completed or were in a planning process of their own. Their respective plans, when adopted, would also help build the County plan.

The County helped with coordination of the process through securing and administering the grant funds and through contracting with a single planning consultant. Land use is often a difficult issue to address, especially when the decision making process and land use impacts cut

across differing political and social boundaries. Overall, the planning effort focused on continuity between community preferences for land uses and County zoning administration. To address plan development efficiently, a combination of Vilas County staff and one consultant was used through a five-phase planning process (see Appendix B) to simultaneously build data for town level plans (phases 1-4) and for the county level plan (phase 5). The sixth and final phase of the project is plan implementation, which is addressed in detail in the Implementation Chapter of this document. This document sets forth the plan recommendations and implementation strategy as defined through the planning process at both the town and county level.

Over four years later, many successes and accomplishments were realized. Leaders from involved jurisdictions leveraged significant time, resources and public involvement to develop plans that were based on public participation. A focused implementation strategy was developed that involved both separate (individual Town) and integrated (County/Town partnerships) implementation options. Significant effort was placed on developing data and maps, and linking the visual (maps and land related data) with both the County and Town political and administrative processes of land use and regulation. The questions of ‘what do we want’ and ‘how can we do it’ were evaluated by assessments to the potential impact, cost, time and responsibility of those decisions. The linkage of plan intent was measured against the existing conditions of a community to assess and evaluate those decisions.

Planning at every level included extensive public participation, involvement, and input into the direction of plan development. Citizens were enabled to gauge proposed future conditions as compared to the existing conditions, which allowed for the objective assessment of land use plans. Each participating community at a minimum held at least 13 meetings with the consultant (and typically held many more locally), held two public informational meetings and workshops, one public hearing, sent out direct mail poster plans (and some mailed optional community surveys) to local residents, and had very dedicated efforts from the local Planning Committees, Town Boards, and local residents. The County also spent significant effort in parallel with the activities described in the Public Participation chapter of this document. The planning process enabled the participating communities the ability to understand land use both locally and at the county level. For Towns, the value of a local plan with local control options, and being able to adopt their own individual plan, is of great value. For the County, having a coordinated and consistent plan development process resulted in plan recommendations that could be developed locally and implemented at the County level, creating efficiency in how those plans could be implemented.

However, planning and land use also force discussion on issues that are not always easy or comfortable for communities to address. Planning takes time and typically extends through the course of local elections, so political changes may have an impact on the planning process. However, the true value of planning cannot be evaluated solely on the end result of an adopted plan. The purpose of the Vilas County Year 2020 Comprehensive Land Use Plan is to encourage the orderly use and development of lands within the county. At the same time, the planning effort also intended to promote and stimulate public participation and knowledge of land use issues by identifying local issues and coordinating adopted town land use policy with County administration. The planning process has achieved those intents. As a result, the effort encapsulated in these pages not only represents preferred conditions of the participating

communities, but also creates a format to enable any remaining Towns in Vilas County who do not have adopted plans (Conover, Boulder Junction, Land O' Lakes, Lac du Flambeau, and Phelps) to assess how other plans were built in the county, how past efforts and information can assist in plan development, benefit from established County-Town intergovernmental coordination, and experience a substantial cost savings due to data and mapping development.

The Vilas County Year 2020 Comprehensive Land Use Plan is an advisory plan document. The extent to which the County will be able to achieve the vision set forth in the plan is going to depend on the ability of Vilas County and the individual local governments to implement the plan recommendations as set forth in this plan and in the adopted local plans. The daily decisions of land use will continue to rely on both Town and County-level coordination. Sound land use and development policy and decisions will need to occur at all levels through a variety of implementation tools, including zoning and land division regulations, environmental regulations, capital improvements, facilities planning, and infrastructure management. By Vilas County initiating a lead role in planning, the County is being pro-active to the idea that even though things change, County-level coordination and local-level cooperation can achieve sound long-range planning goals through integrated implementation that protects the environment, serves for the betterment of the community, and treats landowners in a fair and equitable manner. Conversely, however, not incorporating the local plan recommendations at the county level, where applicable through zoning ordinance modification as an example, may force the Towns who wish to implement their respective plans into local administration. The effect is not of detriment to results, but of efficiency, cost, administration, and intergovernmental cooperation that the planning process helped strengthen.

Overall, the Vilas County planning process was a success as land use was a focus topic. Literally thousands of people were involved with, attended, and responded to well over a hundred local level meetings, issues identification & development, community surveys, public informational meetings, and public hearings. Few issues bring out more passion than land and the associated balance of property rights and land regulation. Land use will continue to be on the front burner, as all county residents have a stake and an opinion on how the county should or should not develop. That is indeed the essence of, and value received, from planning.

Cooperation certainly must follow understanding. Effective and efficient administration will need to be championed by both County and local officials. Indeed, there are tough choices ahead. Land owners should be free to develop their property, but the development should fit within the guidelines written and understood to be in the best interest of the larger community. Vilas County should refer to this document and to the documents of the locally adopted plans to find guidance for future development, rezonings, and land division decisions. It is through the utilization of this plan that Vilas County can work to achieve a coordinated land use vision.

Vision Statement

A vision statement is an expression of the direction the county would like to go over the next twenty years or so, and what it wants to look and feel like at the end of that period. It helps define the framework (where we want to be) for the more detailed goals, objectives, policies and plan recommendations (how we plan on getting there). As a key part of the county planning process, each of the seven participating communities (Towns of Winchester, Washington,

Cloverland, Plum Lake, Presque Isle, Lincoln and the City of Eagle River) developed their own vision statements. Vision statements and ideas were also developed in other Vilas County community plans (Manitowish Waters, St. Germain, Arbor Vitae and Phelps). The Vilas County vision was derived from review of these local vision statements and from other public participation efforts included in the countywide planning process.

Key Terms and Ideas That Most Local Vision Statements Highlighted

- ◆ Northwoods Character
- ◆ Rural Character/Rural Identity
- ◆ Lakes, Streams, Rivers & Water
- ◆ Friendly People
- ◆ Forests
- ◆ Balance (between property rights and regulation)
- ◆ Community Identity
- ◆ Coordination & Participation
- ◆ Lakeshores
- ◆ Downtown Areas
- ◆ Natural Resources
- ◆ Beauty
- ◆ Planning for Development (type and location)
- ◆ Density
- ◆ Shorelands
- ◆ Community Services
- ◆ Outdoor Recreation
- ◆ Tourism
- ◆ Trails
- ◆ Vacation
- ◆ Resorts

Vilas County's Vision Statement

Over the next 20 years and beyond, Vilas County is known as a special place in the heart of Wisconsin's northwoods lake country. The county's rural character is defined by its world-class lakes and abundant rivers, streams and wetlands; its small towns and large hospitality; its friendly people and spirit of community; its abundant fish and wildlife; its schools and institutions; its year-around recreation and relaxation; its shoreland development that protects and enhances the quality of the lakes; its careful placement and design of commercial and light industrial development; its balance of natural resources and planned housing, economic development, and community services; its balance of community goals and regulation with private property rights; its internationally recognized snowmobile and cross-country ski trails; its hiking and biking trails connecting communities and recreation areas; its expansive public and private forests and sustainable forestry; its small, quaint downtowns and large open spaces; its splendor through the changing seasons; its tree-lined roads of pine and birch with aesthetic views of the scenic northwoods. It is the intent of Vilas County to seek this vision in close partnership with the local towns, the City of Eagle River, and the permanent and seasonal residents who are interested in the long-term health and success of this special place.

2. Planning Process

The Vilas County Year 2020 Comprehensive Land Use Plan development process involved five distinct phases. The phases were set up to define project tasks and delineate responsibility. The tasks were designed to work in parallel tracks with Phases 1-3 beginning prior to phase 4, and Phase 4 nearing completion as Phase 5 initiated. The concept behind plan development (Phases 1-5, Appendix B) was to conclude with Phase 6, Implementation, which has yet to be authorized by Vilas County. In general, the following accounts for the planning methodology used to develop the Vilas County Year 2020 Comprehensive Land Use Plan:

2.1 Plan Phases

Phase 1 Project Orientation

- ◆ Hold initial meetings with participating local municipal land use plan committees.
- ◆ Refine project organization.
- ◆ Develop/establish local planning committees.
- ◆ Orientate to local issues, plans, processes.
- ◆ Develop timelines and project schedules incorporating all five phases into the planning process.
- ◆ Coordinate all local project schedules with County for data, mapping, and scheduling

Phase 2 Background Inventory

- ◆ Development, editing, and conversion of digital mapping products for local and county level.
- ◆ Coordination of GIS database development with Vilas County Mapping Department, North-Central Regional Planning Commission, Wisconsin Departments of Transportation and Natural Resources.
- ◆ Printing of paper maps and overlays for local and county level plan development.
- ◆ Land Use Workshop with County and local planning committees to inventory land uses.

Phase 3 Trend Analysis

- ◆ Demographic Data Development and Analysis
- ◆ Natural and Environmental Resources Inventory and Analysis
- ◆ Land Use Analysis
- ◆ Community Facilities, Services, and Utilities Inventory
- ◆ Transportation Facilities Inventory
- ◆ Economic Development Inventory and Analysis
- ◆ Development of Growth Trends and Projections
- ◆ Assembly and analysis of existing plans, ordinances, processes.
- ◆ Background analysis, trends, and projections reports for County and participating Towns.

Phase 4 Local Community Planning Process

- ◆ Local Issues Identification Workshops: Issue Identification and Analysis
- ◆ Community-Wide Comprehensive Land Use Planning Surveys (not required, but conducted by Cloverland, Presque Isle, Joint City of Eagle River & Lincoln, Washington)
- ◆ Development of Vision Statements, Goals, Objectives
- ◆ Development of Proposed Local Land Uses and Alternative Development Scenarios
- ◆ Identification of Implementation Tools and Strategies
- ◆ Conclusion and Plan Adoption

Each Local Plan included a Base Package of Services Including

- ◆ Maps, Data, and Reports
- ◆ Assistance with Community Planning Surveys through UW-Extension
- ◆ 13 meetings with the Foth & Van Dyke planner
- ◆ One Land Use Inventory Workshop
- ◆ One Issues Identification Workshop
- ◆ Two public informational meetings
- ◆ One Public Hearing
- ◆ Development of Poster Plan, Public Meeting Posters, Advertisements, & Notices
- ◆ Coordination of Plan Document production and printing (20 copies each of Inventory and Trends Report, Pre-Final Plan [Recommended Draft], and Final Plan)

Phase 5 Development of County Land Use Plan

- ◆ Compatibility and Recommendations Assessment of Local Issues and Plan Implementation to County Regulations and Administration
- ◆ Three Focus Groups on Countywide Issues
- ◆ Countywide Vision, Goals, and Objectives
- ◆ Identification of Development Scenarios Based on Analysis of Existing Zoning Pattern and Local Preferred Land Uses
- ◆ Identification of Implementation Tools, Strategies & Proposed Modifications to Existing County Regulations Based on Integrated Local Plan Recommendations
- ◆ Four Public Informational Meetings
- ◆ Public Hearings and Public Review & Comment
- ◆ Plan Document Conclusion and Plan Adoption
- ◆ 12 meetings with Vilas County Land Use Planning Committee

2.2 Public Participation

The focus of public participation during the County planning process was driven at the local level. In fact, the public participation process was the key element to the development of local plans, which in essence developed the County plan. Plan direction was driven by the opinions and participation expressed by town residents and landowners as facilitated by the local Planning Committees and Town Boards. Numerous techniques were utilized to gather public input in the plan development process, as can be referenced in any of the final plan documents produced by participating governments. Likewise the County also utilized public participation during the construction and coordination of Phase 5 as noted above.

Vilas County Land Use Planning Committee

The Vilas County Land and Water Planning Committee was appointed by the County Board in 1998 with two subcommittees, a Lake Classification subcommittee and a Land Use Planning subcommittee. Upon completion of the Lakes Classification project, the committee structure was revised to a single Land Use Planning Committee. The Committee was authorized to manage the project and guided the work effort through administration of Vilas County staff and the planning consultant, Foth & Van Dyke. The County Land Use Planning Committee consisted of elected County Board Supervisors who were responsible for project administration, reviewing data, selecting preferred development scenarios and land use policy, and for making a recommendation to the full Vilas County Board of Supervisors. The Board of Supervisors has the final plan approval authority.

Local Planning Committees

Following project authorization, Vilas County assisted the local participating communities to advertise and appoint their local Planning Committees, under authority of the local Town Board. The Planning Committees consisted of volunteers of various backgrounds that were responsible for the local plan development in concert with the Town Board. The Committees were facilitated through the local base package of services as described in section 2.1 and as detailed in the local plans.

Local Government Participation

The concept behind the Vilas County Year 2020 Comprehensive Land Use Plan was to coordinate County policy and regulation through integrated local government recommendations. To this end, all the local governments were contacted to determine involvement interest. Vilas County UW-Extension facilitated the discussions. Six Towns and the City of Eagle River decided to join the effort and paid a \$1,500 cost share to participate. Participation meant the local unit of government would receive the base package of consulting services, with additional consultant services negotiated independently of the County.

Public Meetings and Public Involvement

As discussed throughout this section, a central idea behind the County planning process was to extensively involve and utilize input and opinion of county citizens and taxpayers throughout the plan development process. The approach proved fruitful as public participation was a highlight in many local plan processes. The approach to involve citizens in key decisions, not tell them what the decision had been, was positively received through comment and plan approvals. Several Towns also set attendance records for public meetings during plan development. The County element, Phase 5, focused on pulling the local plans together, integrating the plan recommendations to address feasible County implementation strategies.

Public Involvement for Phase 5 Included:

- ◆ Three focus groups that studied Residential and Commercial Cluster Development, Home Based Business, and Sustainable Forestry in Vilas County.
- ◆ Four public informational meetings to allow public review and input on the County effort, two in Conover (August 5, 2002) and two in Manitowish Waters (August 6, 2002). The meetings also included public input questions relating to the possible development scenarios that were based on the analysis of the existing zoning pattern and local preferred land uses.
- ◆ A countywide land use summit was held on May 8, 2003 with all Town officials invited. As a result of the summit, a series of three intergovernmental planning/coordination meetings were held with the Vilas County Land Use Planning Committee. The meetings were held on June 30, August 11, and September 5, 2003. Please refer to Chapter 11, Preferred Land Use Management Strategy to review the Local Plan Integration process.
- ◆ An officially noticed public hearing and comment period for draft plan review (anticipated, in January-February of 2004).
- ◆ All meetings of the local and County Planning Committees were open meetings and complied with the Open Meetings Laws of Wisconsin.

