

1 Forward

Vilas County is at a critical juncture in its history. The counties of Vilas and Oneida together hold the highest concentration of fresh water lakes in the world. The area is also located in the heart of Wisconsin's beautiful northwoods. Because of the abundance of lakes and forests, residential growth trends over the last ten years have surpassed many areas of the state. As pressures increase both to develop the north woods and maintain its rural atmosphere, county leaders are faced with the responsibility of addressing a complex issue: meeting the demand for residential development and economic opportunity while maintaining the natural environment that stimulates this demand. The need is to balance growth, economic opportunity, and individual property rights without negative impacts to the quality of the environment and community character.

Vilas County Land Use Planning

In early 1998, riding the successful conclusion of a county lakes classification and shoreland management program, the focus turned to land use planning as the next step in countywide growth management. With significant county financing and a Lake Protection grant from the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, Vilas County undertook development of a countywide comprehensive plan. The county felt, however, that planning and land use decisions should be addressed at the local level. To that end, the county gave municipalities the option to develop their own land use plans. The premise was that local land use plans would "roll-up" to develop the county plan. The Town of Winchester decided to participate in this process.

Town of Winchester Characteristics

The Town of Winchester, located in the northwest corner of Vilas County, is bound by the Town of Presque Isle to the east, the Upper Peninsula of Michigan to the north, Iron County to the west, and the Town of Manitowish Waters to the south. The town covers 34,665 acres and has an estimated year 2000 population of 396 permanent residents, with an estimated peak seasonal population of 2,600. The town's population grew by 11.9% during the 1990's from 354 to 396 persons, exceeding year 2015 state population projections. For the past 19 years, the town has averaged 11 new homes a year. One hundred twenty-six new residences were built between 1990 and 1998, also exceeding state growth projections. The town is expected to continue this growth trend, although the percentage gain may not be as high as the last decade.

The Town of Winchester is a rural community with concentrated lakeshore development, especially on the Turtle Chain of Lakes. Low density residential uses radiate from the lakeshore areas. Approximately 60 businesses are spread throughout the town, most of which are home-based or intended for local service. County Highway W serves as the main travel corridor and acts as the town's "main street", with several businesses and residences located in near proximity. The town does not have a concentrated commercial district, although many locals refer to the old Town Center area on the west shore of South Turtle Lake as the town's "downtown". The old Town Center area houses the library and Winchester Community Park, which add significantly to

the community character. Approximately 11.4% (3,950 acres) of the town is covered by lakes, including 34 named and 29 unnamed. Expansive wetland areas are spread throughout the town, comprising 24% or 8,175 acres of land. Seventy-nine percent of the town is wooded, with a large portion (26.2%, 9,098 acres) held as industrial forest. More than 6,000 acres, or 17.5 %, is public land primarily held by the state of Wisconsin in the Northern-Highland American Legion State Forest.

Town Land Use Planning

The Town of Winchester has seen much change over the past 100 years, as the historical summary in Appendix 1-1 documents. Today, the town's land use patterns are more a reflection of the private real estate market, predicated on lakeshore development than local regulation. Because the town has never planned for the long term use of land within its jurisdiction, existing land use is inconsistent with existing regulations. The *Town of Winchester Year 2020 Comprehensive Land Use Plan* addresses this issue by encouraging the orderly use and development of land within the town. At the same time, the planning effort is intended to promote public participation and coordinate adopted town land use policy with county growth management initiatives. As a result of 13 meetings with Foth & Van Dyke, many additional meetings of the Land Use Planning Committee, three public informational meetings and one public hearing, the *Town of Winchester Year 2020 Comprehensive Land Use Plan* evolved.

Implementation of the plan will need to be championed by local officials with the cooperation of town citizens. Tough choices lie 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. The Town of Winchester should refer to this document, specifically Sections 12 and 13, to find guidance related to future development, rezonings, and land division decisions. It is through the utilization of this plan that the town hopes to achieve its land use vision.

A vision statement was developed by the Land Use Planning Committee as one of the initial tasks to guide the planning effort. The vision statement projects where the town wants to be at some future time and helps determine the course of action defined through plan goals and objectives (how it intends to get there, as discussed in Section 3). The vision statement incorporates ideas and issues identified through the public participation process as well as direction from the Land Use Planning Committee on how the town should grow and develop over the next 20 years. The intent of the vision statement is to capture not only what makes the Town of Winchester a special place to live, work, and recreate, but also what needs to be done to secure these characteristics.

Vision Statement

The Town of Winchester in Vilas County will have developed a spirit of cooperation focused on the preservation and enhancement of its unique northwoods character. Lakes, rivers and streams will be clean and fishable. Most of the town will remain forested, with wetlands remaining intact.

The town will reflect a system of planned and orderly development, guided by the Town Board, and will respond to the needs of people while protecting the quality of the environment.

Future growth and development will be managed by establishing compatibility of uses, location and density of property. Implemented land use policies will guide the location of compatible development and preserve environmentally sensitive areas for wildlife. Design review standards will ensure that new commercial and light industrial businesses reflect the northwoods values and small town feel. Shoreline development and vegetation will be managed to preserve the high quality of water resources and visual attractiveness for generations. The town's commitment to provide quality services, such as good roads, fire protection, library services, and year-around recreational opportunity will continue to be the foundation from which to grow. These things will offer both residents and visitors a desirable environment by being aesthetically pleasing, safe, and environmentally sound.

By pro-actively directing growth and development, the Town of Winchester will continue to provide residents and visitors with a sense of northwoods beauty, a variety of recreational experiences, and appealing residential and commercial opportunities. The town's planning, in conjunction with the surrounding abundant natural beauty, will provide residents and visitors alike with an exceptional quality of life.

2 Public Participation Process

The public participation process was a key element in the development of the *Town of Winchester Year 2020 Comprehensive Land Use Plan*. Plan direction was driven by the opinions and participation of town residents and landowners. The numerous techniques used to obtain public input to the planning process are summarized below.

The land use meetings listed in the following section were facilitated by Foth & Van Dyke. The Winchester Land Use Planning Committee also met on numerous other occasions. Appendix 2-1 contains Town of Winchester Land Use Planning Committee Meeting Agendas and Minutes.

Town Planning Survey (August 1995)

The Winchester Town Board worked with Vilas County UW-Extension Agent Bryan Pierce in 1995 to develop a Town of Winchester planning survey. The survey solicited input on a variety of town policies related to planning for the future of the community.

A total of 920 surveys were mailed first class to the Town of Winchester property taxpayers. A total of 225 surveys (24.5%), representing 285 respondents, was compiled. The Executive Summary can be reviewed in Appendix 2-2 of this document.

The Town Planning Survey was a key element driving the issues and concerns addressed in the Land Use and Planning Issues Workshop discussed in Meeting 3. No other public involvement tool can solicit and leverage public opinion as well as a direct-mail survey. The survey was also referenced to guide plan development. The culmination of public response and support from the Land Use and Planning Issues Workshop, Town Planning Survey and participation at public meetings built the foundation and framework upon which the plan was constructed.

Meeting No. 1 (February 17, 1999) Project Orientation

Foth & Van Dyke met with the Town of Winchester Land Use Planning Committee and with Vilas County Land Use Plan project coordinator Bryan Pierce at the Winchester Town Hall to discuss the planning process, discuss time lines, and identify with Winchester's progress, issues, ordinances, and planning related documents and reports. Foth & Van Dyke and Bryan Pierce discussed the role of Vilas County, project coordination, and how the town plan was to "roll-up", or facilitate the Vilas County Land Use Plan. A preliminary schedule and time line was drafted, and a meeting summary list was presented.

The Land Use Planning Committee also discussed the 1995 Town Planning Survey. As the top priority issues were already identified, the Planning Committee, et al discussed the opportunity to conduct a public issues meeting that combined an issue identification workshop with review and discussion of the survey issues. A planning issues workshop was scheduled for Saturday, June 12, 1999.

Meeting No. 2 (March 24, 1999)

The Land Use Planning Committee met with John Williams of Foth & Van Dyke to discuss the draft time line, review the revised summary meeting schedule, and review population and housing summary information. The Committee discussed the upcoming issues meeting and reviewed the Town of Winchester 1999 Existing Land Use Map.

Meeting No. 3 (June 12, 1999) Land Use and Planning Issues Workshop

The Town of Winchester Land Use Planning Committee hosted a Community Land Use and Planning Issues Workshop scheduled as the second phase of public input for plan development.

The workshop was conducted at 10:00 a.m. on Saturday, June 12, 1999 at the Winchester Town Hall. The purpose of the meeting was to obtain from the participants their perceptions on how the Town Planning Committee should address a variety of land use issues within the community. The workshop was facilitated by John Williams of Foth & Van Dyke, Ken Jaworski of Foth & Van Dyke, Tiffany Lyden, Vilas County Lake Conservation Specialist, and Bryan Pierce, Vilas County University of Wisconsin-Extension. A total of 38 workshop participants registered on sign-in sheets for the session.

Williams explained the land use planning process in a slide presentation titled: "What is a Comprehensive Land Use Plan?" Pierce presented a brief summary of the most significant results from the Town of Winchester 1995 Community Planning Survey Report conducted by the Town Board. Williams then described the process that would be used to generate additional input for the planning process using questions focused on major issue categories.

The major issue categories were derived from the Community Planning Survey and subsequent Land Use Planning Committee discussions. Participants were asked to write their suggestions or recommendations on how to address these issues using stick-on note pads. The notes were then placed by the participants onto flip chart sheets for each major issue category. Duplicate recommendations were pooled together by the facilitators and numbered.

The workshop participants generated over 100 specific statements or recommendations on how to address these major issues. After numbering the various statements, all participants then rated their level of support for each by indicating if they Strongly Agree, Agree, or Neutral, Disagree, or Strongly Disagree with the recommendation. The ratings for all questions were tabulated and an average score calculated for each issue as a comparison (based on 5pts.-Strongly Agree, 4pts.-Agree, 3 pts.-Neutral, 2 pts.-Disagree, 1 pt.-Strongly Disagree). Note that not everyone rated each issue. The full list of statements/recommendations and the rating results can be found in Appendix 2-3.

The results of the workshop were compiled in a report for the Town of Winchester by Bryan Pierce, Vilas County UW-Extension, with assistance from Janet Christianson. The lists of issues generated by the workshop participants were used by the Land Use Planning Committee to

develop a vision statement, define goals and objectives, map preferred land uses, and develop alternative implementation strategies for the land use plan.

Meeting No. 4 (July 28, 1999)

The meeting was held at 7:00 p.m. at the Winchester Municipal Building. Foth & Van Dyke reviewed the draft goals, objectives and vision statements with the Winchester Land Use Planning Committee. The Planning Committee reviewed and discussed the information length as to how the Community Planning Survey and Issues Identification Workshop results were to be addressed in plan development. The Planning Committee also reviewed maps and discussed the format and timing of the planned public informational meeting. The public informational meeting date was set for Monday, August 30, 1999, at 7:00 p.m. at the Town Hall.

Meeting No. 5 (August 30, 1999) Public Informational Meeting

A public informational meeting and open house was held at the town hall from 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. An open house was held from 7:00 - 7:30 p.m., followed by a 45 minute presentation by Foth & Van Dyke. The meeting was attended by 27 town residents and landowners and the Planning Committee. Foth & Van Dyke presented an overview of the 1995 survey, plan goals, objectives, and vision statement; highlights, trends, and projections of population, housing, transportation and economic factors; results of the planning issues workshop; and GIS mapping, including land use, zoning, land and resource protection, water feature data, Vilas County lakes classification data, and topography. In general, the public comments were complimentary to the work effort. There were many questions relative to zoning and land use, lakeshore development, and ways the plan will address use, location, and density of future development.

Meeting No. 6 (September 29, 1999)

The Planning Committee met at 7:00 p.m. to begin the process of developing the preferred land use plan. The Committee discussed in general the process that would be used to draft the preferred map, including: 1) review existing maps and acetate overlays to assess the existing conditions that affect property in the town, 2) discuss the existing development pattern to review where uses occur and what uses are allowed, 3) review completed plans to learn from others, 4) discuss preliminary preferred land use classifications and how they will be used to build the map, and 5) analyze the town to determine the appropriate future use, location, and density of property. The Committee also discussed general policies, related to the goals and objectives, that would help define map boundaries. Foth & Van Dyke presented examples of land use classifications, and the committee discussed at length the relationship between the existing land use map and preferred land use classifications.

Meeting No. 7 (October 13, 1999)

The Planning Committee met at 7:00 p.m. at the town hall to work on the preliminary draft of the preferred land use map. The Committee again reviewed examples of preferred land use classifications, with each classification based on consistency of uses between the existing and preferred uses, the location in which uses would be preferred, and the associated density of the development that would be recommended in the classification. Discussion occurred relative to how the preferred land use classifications would relate to the Vilas County Zoning Ordinance and what types of uses should be allowed within each land use classification. The Committee drafted the preliminary preferred land use classifications and the preferred land use map based on the public input from the Winchester Community Planning Survey, the Land Use and Planning Issues Workshop, the plan goals and objectives, public road policies, existing ownership patterns, and reference to town maps.

Meeting 8 (October 26, 1999)

The Planning Committee met at 7:00 p.m. at the Town of Winchester Public Library to refine the preferred land use map and classifications. The Committee finalized the map and discussed in detail the language associated with the preferred land use classifications. The Committee decided on six preferred land uses, including lakeshore residential, forestry and recreation, rural residential, CTH W commercial, CTH W clustered commercial, and parks. The Committee also decided to meet on its own on November 10, 1999 to discuss permitted and conditional uses within the preferred land use classes and then convene again with Foth & Van Dyke December 8, 1999 to finalize the preferred land use map and classification language, then set a meeting and strategy for a public informational meeting.

Meeting 9 (December 12, 1999)

The Planning Committee met at 7:00 p.m. at the town hall to finalize the preferred land use map and classifications. The preferred land use map was presented in detail. The Committee decided to add two additional classifications, including rural mixed use and government, and discussed preferred use in detail. The Committee also discussed the November 10, 1999 meeting in which the preferred use matrix (Appendix 12-1) was developed. The Committee felt it necessary to schedule the next public informational meeting on May 20, 2000 to involve as many property owners as possible. The town will coordinate a mailing to all property owners in March 2000 to notify landowners of the land use planning process and to solicit as much public participation as possible at the May public informational meeting. The Committee discussed the public informational meeting process and started to build the implementation strategy. The Committee set a meeting date for January 26, 2000, to review the map changes and work on implementation.

Meeting 10 (February 23, 2000)

The Winchester Planning Committee met at 7:00 p.m. at the town hall to finalize the preferred land use map and classifications, permitted and conditional use table, public informational meeting details, and to discuss plan implementation strategy. The committee revised the public meeting schedule to June 10, 2000 at 10:00 a.m. The town will coordinate a mailing to all property owners in early April 2000 to notify landowners of the land use planning process and to solicit as much public participation as possible at the June public informational meeting. The committee discussed the public informational meeting process in detail and decided on information to include in a public mailing. The committee set a meeting date for March 22, 2000 to review the draft implementation strategy, action plan, and informational packet.

Meeting No. 11 (May 10, 2000) Public Informational Meeting

The Town of Winchester hosted a community public informational meeting at the Winchester Town Hall from 9:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m. 97 people attended one of the largest public meetings in the history of the town. 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 Winchester property tax payer was sent a packet of information prior to the meeting which included a poster plan, survey, Permitted and Conditional Use matrix and an introductory explanation letter. Meeting participants also had available the Year 2020 Preferred Land Use Map and a survey asking for their input. The plan was presented for an hour, followed by an open question and answer session. All maps were also on display. There were many comments for and against the plan as presented. The Planning Committee was directed to review the RR class along Rock Lake Road, review areas of potential conservancy or actually designating lands as a conservancy area, including mapping wetlands on the Preferred Land Use Map, discuss the issue of moving the forest boundary line to include all of the Town of Winchester, change the lakeshore areas to buffer the lakeshores and have the inland areas that were LR redesignated to RR, make sure the Planning Committee investigates use of PDR (purchase of development rights), discuss the possibility of more commercial uses suggested in the Rural Residential class, keep the Forestry classification minimum lot size as proposed with 10 acres/lot, change the cluster commercial on east side of Bucks Road, assess cluster commercial only to "Old O", review use/idea of mini-parks in town, and address public participation and how the town should handle the next public meeting.

Meeting No. 12 (September 19, 2000)

The Winchester Land Use Planning Committee met at 6:30 P.M. at the Town Hall to review the proposed revisions to the preferred land use map, set time lines to finalize the Year 2020 Preferred Land Use Map and Pre-Final draft report, review new classification language for conservancy and forest preserve, and discuss the public notification strategy and final meeting date for the public hearing. The Planning Committee discussed the results of prior meetings and reviewed the map revisions. It was decided to proceed with the recommendations to adjust the Lakeshore Residential areas to include areas within 300' of the lakeshore or to the nearest road,

whichever nearer, with the Rural Residential class used as infill areas between the boundary of Lakeshore Residential and areas beyond 300', up to the nearest road or natural boundary. The Planning Committee decided on Tuesday, October 31, 2000, 7:00 PM for the public hearing. The public notification strategy was also discussed in detail. Due to budget considerations, the town decided that a postcard mailing to all property taxpayers was too expensive in addition to the requirements of holding a public meeting. The town published a class 1 notice in the official paper 30 days and 15 days prior to the public hearing. The Pre-Final draft and maps were displayed at the library and town hall in the Town of Winchester. The meeting adjourned at 8:45 PM.

Meeting No. 13 (October 31, 2000) Public Hearing

The Town of Winchester held a public hearing at the Winchester Town Hall to discuss the plan. The formal Public Hearing was held from 7:00-7:45; 7:45 to 9:45 included an open public discussion. Thirty-four people attended the meeting, not including the Planning Committee. Only 15 signed the registration sheets. Seven people registered to speak, six of them were opposed to the plan. Two others registered in favor.

A large majority of discussion concerned commercial use(s)- either the location of where it should occur or the proposed permitted and conditional uses associated with the classifications. The following issues were raised at the hearing:

1. There were several comments relative to the lack of commercial uses allowed in the Rural Residential and Forestry & Recreation classes, i.e. eating and drinking establishments in the Rural Residential class as an example.
2. The CTH W and CTH O intersection was discussed, specifically on the corners potential to attract commercial uses and the map's lack of support for that idea.

Overall the general consensus was the Year 2020 Preferred Land Use Map was on track to guide the town's long term growth management. A few specific property issues needed to be resolved, but the general intent had been met. It was the intent of the Planning Committee and Town Board to review the meeting directives, address the individual property issues, and proceed with Plan approval in early 2001.