



Planning and Development in your Community

How Can OMNNI Help?

OMNNI's certified planning staff is available to assist you with planning, zoning, grant application, specialty research and other services to make your job easier. We understand that in this rapidly changing environment, your staff may need assistance from time to time with special projects or simply to keep things moving forward. What follows is a description of services available from OMNNI to meet your needs.

Grant Acquisition and Funding Assistance

Our staff will locate grant and other funding opportunities to meet your community's needs. We will also prepare and submit applications on your behalf. We have strong track record of securing grants and other funding sources for our clients, including:

- ✓ Smart Growth Comprehensive Planning Grants
- ✓ Community Development Block Grants
- ✓ State Trust Fund Loan Program
- ✓ Stewardship Grants
- ✓ Lake Planning Grants

Zoning Ordinance and Administrative Services

OMNNI's Planning Staff has extensive experience developing and updating zoning ordinances for our client communities. Whether you need a new ordinance to address a particular issue (i.e. signs, landscaping, lighting, etc.), amendments to an existing zoning code, or an entirely new zoning ordinance, OMNNI can help. We specialize in making ordinances user friendly and effective.

At OMNNI, we understand the importance of effective zoning to protect public health, safety and welfare. More importantly, we understand that not all zoning issues are black and white. From time to time expert assistance is needed to review zoning applications and make recommendations for Planning Commission action. Our planners pride themselves on their ability to help client communities make defensible decisions. Our planners can provide you with a needed second opinion or we are prepared to handle applications on your behalf.

OMNNI's zoning administration services include:

- ✓ Researching and recommending stipulations for Conditional Use Permits
- ✓ Developing recommendations for rezoning actions
- ✓ Providing case summaries and recommendations for variances and special exemptions



Planning Development Services

OMNNI's planning staff is prepared to assist you in all of your planning needs. We are prepared to work with you to develop any or all of the following planning tools:

- ✓ Strategic Plans
- ✓ District Plans
- ✓ Master / Land Use Plans
- ✓ "Smart Growth" Comprehensive Plans
- ✓ Capital Improvement Programs and Budgets

Specialty Planning Services

In addition to our ability to assist you with grant applications, zoning, and plan development, OMNNI is capable of providing you with specialty planning services to meet your particular needs. Examples of specialty planning services offered by OMNNI include:

- ✓ Community Surveying (including questionnaire development and reporting)
- ✓ Educational Workshops for Plan Commission and/or Staff
- ✓ Public Meeting Facilitation
- ✓ Planning, Zoning and Land Use Research
- ✓ Site Plan Reviews
- ✓ Media Releases

For more information about OMNNI's planning services, please contact OMNNI's principal planner, Amy Emery, AICP, at (920) 735-6900.



Developing a Capital Improvements Program and Budget

Much has been debated and many ideas have been proposed for dealing with the reduction in the Wisconsin shared revenue program. For local governments, a reduction in a major source of revenue provides both an opportunity and a challenge to become more efficient in providing public services. Many communities have begun to work with their neighbors and share resources to reduce costs. Others have combined or eliminated staff positions. Still, others are taking a closer look at how they purchase equipment and services.

Finding new ways for local government to reduce costs without compromising service is a challenge, however, there are some options available that can help. One effective option, a Capital Improvements Program and Budget (CIP&B), allows a community to prepare for the future in an efficient, well-planned and cost-effective manner.

A CIP&B is a tool for understanding your major capital project needs by planning and budgeting for their implementation. This proactive approach can help your community focus more clearly on local priorities by directing funds to the programs and projects that best meet your needs and resources. Typical projects that fall into the capital expenditure category are: buildings, major equipment (e.g., fire trucks), roads, land purchases and park development.

A CIP&B identifies capital needs for a five to six-year period. These needs (or projects) are developed and prioritized by evaluating the remaining useful life of existing capital equipment and facilities and projecting future needs. A Capital Improvements Budget includes both project expenditures and revenue sources. The first year of the budget becomes this year's operating budget. At the end of the first year, another year is added to the CIP&B. The result is a continuous five to six-year budget that can be adjusted based on changing priorities, available funding, and new projects or programs.

There are many benefits that can be derived from a CIP&B, including:

- Compels the community to set realistic and affordable priorities to implement their plan
- Is a requirement for many state/federal funding applications
- Reduces crisis adjustments and management while improving the distribution of funds
- Provides efficiencies through setting priorities
- Promotes sound fiscal planning and improved bond rating
- Enhances decisions about community growth and development
- Helps focus attention on condition and replacement needs for existing facilities
- Provides a framework for public education and participation
- Fosters mechanisms for monitoring and revision
- Improves intergovernmental and regional cooperation

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Conservation Subdivisions

While helping our clients develop Comprehensive “Smart Growth” Plans, one common question has arisen:

“How can we promote desired residential development while preserving our high-quality natural resources?”

In developing a Comprehensive “Smart Growth” Plan that effectively blends growth and preservation, two specific plan elements come into play - Land Use and Agriculture, Natural & Cultural Resources. These elements define residential growth areas and preservation areas, while also establishing the visions, policies and programs to implement the plan. There are many ways for a community to provide for residential development while also protecting land from development. Options include developing zoning ordinances, establishing conservancy areas, and the use of “overlay” zones.

Another method for preserving land that is receiving renewed attention is the use of Conservation Subdivisions for new development. Conservation Subdivisions strike a balance between new development and preservation. In a Conservation Subdivision, residences are clustered on smaller lots surrounded by permanently preserved open spaces. This kind of design protects at least half of the original property from development.

Benefits of Conservation Subdivision design include:

- Preserves farmland, woodlands, scenic views and other natural areas.
- Requires less infrastructure (roads and utilities) than traditional subdivision design.
- Maintains and enhances the rural character of the community.
- In many cases, property values increase due to access to open spaces.
- The open space is protected in perpetuity through the use of conservation easements, deed restrictions, and other legally binding mechanisms.
- Reduces stormwater impacts when compared to traditional subdivision design.

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Zoning Ordinances: Effective Growth Management Tools

What do you think of when you hear the word zoning? Many people think of establishing zoning districts and setback requirements. But today's zoning ordinances are a complex and powerful land use tool that can be used to protect property values, neighborhoods, scenic views, historic areas, natural areas and community character. They address a variety of community issues in order to protect public health, safety and welfare. For example, does your zoning ordinance:

- Establish standards for signs and billboards? How about site lighting?
- Protect your community's character?
- Address cellular tower co-location and stealth technologies?
- Require landscaping in parking areas, as buffers between conflicting land uses, and as a shield for outdoor storage?

To be effective, zoning ordinances must be regularly amended to reflect new uses and technological advances. The need for zoning ordinances to keep pace with new land uses and requirements is a challenge for many communities. It's too easy to let a year, or two, or five pass before conducting a review of your zoning ordinance. If left unchecked, your ordinance will become dated— leaving you with minimal control over unwanted land uses. For instance, in the last few years, many communities have updated their zoning ordinances to include provisions related to home occupations and cellular towers.

Your zoning ordinance can help or harm your community. Overly restrictive requirements can be difficult to enforce or may restrict economic development. Conversely, relaxed or poorly defined standards may not provide the control you need to protect your community's character. In the same sense, ordinances that are difficult to understand, or have conflicting passages, present additional challenges. Therefore, it is important to review your zoning ordinance regularly, include illustrations to explain requirements, and define key terms.

Here's where we can help. OMNNI has experienced planners on staff specializing in zoning ordinance issues related to residential, commercial and industrial development. We can help your community by reviewing and updating existing zoning and subdivision ordinances. We can also help you develop new zoning and subdivision regulations. Or, we can provide planning advice on specific projects you are facing. Our goal is to ensure that our clients are protected from nuisances and provided with effective growth management tools.

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What you should know about Cellular Towers

I recently attended a planning workshop about cellular towers and the issues communities face with respect to their location, height, and visual impact. I know this is an issue many communities struggle with. Let me share with you a few of the things I learned at the workshop that you may want to consider before the next tower application comes to your community.

Background. The Federal Telecommunications Act of 1996 deregulated the cellular communications industry in an effort to foster competition between providers. The principal goal of the Act is to establish competitive networks of cellular service across the country. Under Section 704 of the Act, local governments do have the power to regulate the placement, construction and modification of personal wireless facilities, as long as the rules do not unreasonably discriminate between providers or prohibit service.

How Many Towers will be Needed in your Community? Many factors determine the number of towers that will eventually be located in your community. Generally, the number of towers erected in any community depends on the coverage area of individual towers and the number of licenses granted by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to cellular carriers. There is no set minimum or maximum number of towers to be located in a particular community.

Coverage areas vary with topography, tower height, and frequency. When cellular phones and pagers first became popular, analog towers could provide coverage up to a five-mile radius of the tower. Today, new digital technologies, PCS, and the wireless Internet operate at higher frequencies than the older analog towers. This increased frequency reduces the coverage radius. As a result, there is a need for more towers to serve the same area.

Cellular communication carriers must have licenses from the FCC to build a cellular coverage network (i.e. towers). Currently, there are seven licensed carriers in Wisconsin. Since each carrier's network started at a different location in the country, their coverage needs (i.e. desired tower locations) are usually different in each community. As a result, simply providing cellular coverage in your community is not enough; communities must accommodate networks of competing carriers licensed in your area. The result is often additional towers in many locations to meet the particular location needs of individual carriers. Ultimately, the number of towers in your community will depend on the demand for service, topography, frequency, tower height, and requirements you may enforce related to co-location, stealth technologies, etc.

Stealth Technologies - Making Towers Disappear. Communities across the country are working with cellular providers to minimize the impact of towers. Successful uses of "stealth" or camouflage technologies are proving to be a popular solution in many communities. For years, companies have been able to locate antennas on water towers, tall buildings, and silos to minimize their visual impact. More recent stealth locations include flagpoles, fence posts, streetlamps, and cell trees. These alternative locations are not perfect in every situation, but are an attractive alternative to freestanding towers in many areas.



Regulating Towers - What Can You Do? There are many different approaches to regulate towers. Some communities embrace towers and encourage their location on municipal property in order to benefit from the lease income. Others impose moratoriums to temporarily block construction efforts.

Probably the most common method for addressing towers is a local zoning ordinance. In the years since the Telecommunication Act was approved, communities across the country have drafted detailed ordinances, which include specific height, separation distance, materials (lattice, monopole, guyed), and co-location requirements. As technologies change, it is important that these ordinances are periodically reviewed and updated to ensure that the requirements are still practical and provide opportunities for innovations like stealth technologies.

Plans (regional, master, comprehensive) are another important tool to regulate towers. The Smart Growth Comprehensive Planning Law actually defines telecommunications facilities as a component of the Utilities and Community Facilities Element. Tower issues will also likely be addressed in the Land Use and Intergovernmental elements of Smart Growth Comprehensive Plans.

OMNI Can Assist You. A combination of quality zoning and planning tools are critical to protect your community's character. These tools will help you to make decisions about the quantity, location, height, and style of towers in your community. If you'd like to discuss how you can address this issue, give us a call at (800) 571-6677.

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