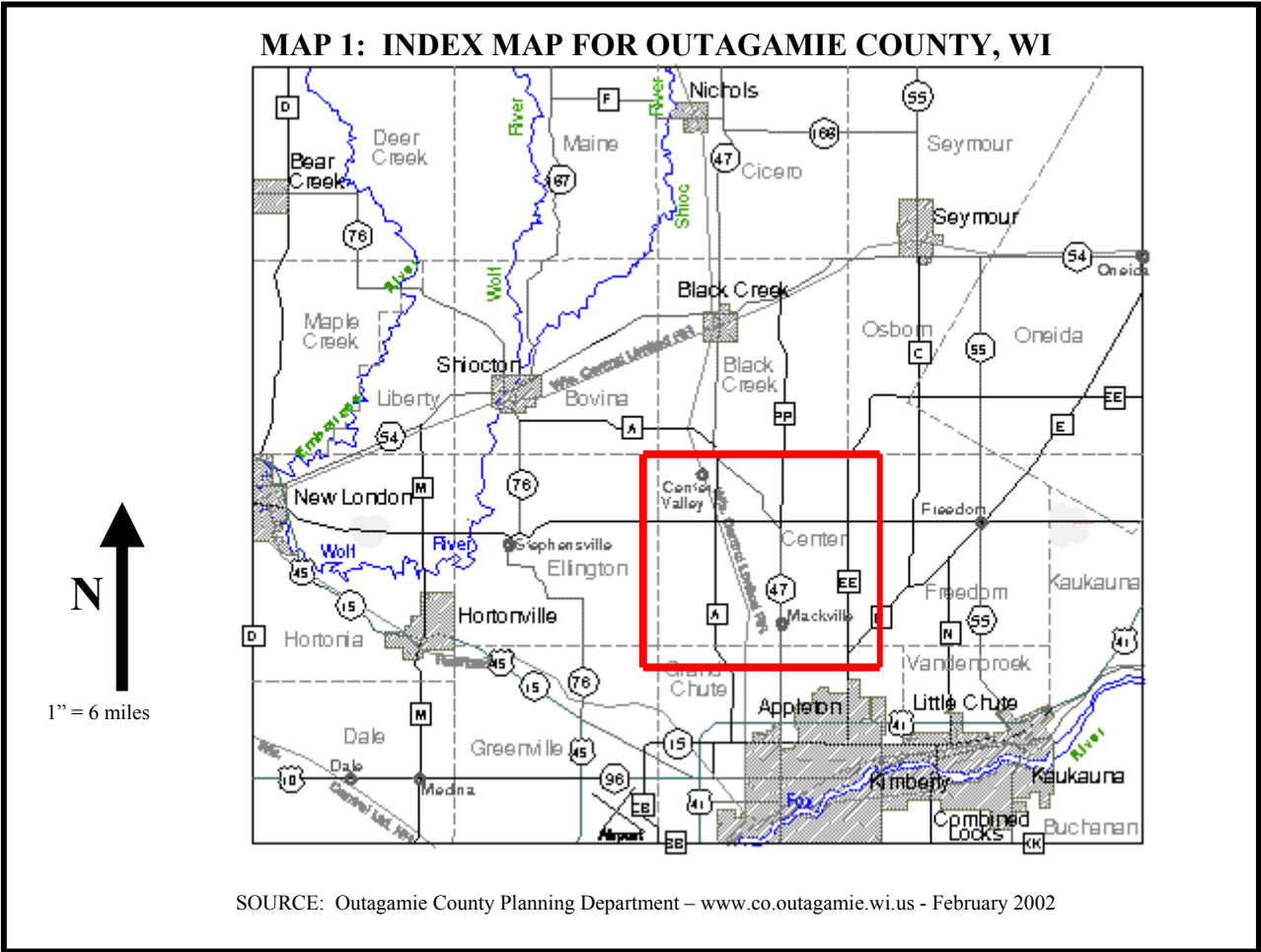


1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Local Setting

The **Town of Center** is located in **Outagamie County, Wisconsin**, immediately north of the City of Appleton. The town enjoys a blend of family farming operations, rural residential development, and two local community focal points - Mackville and Center Valley. In total, the township includes 36 square miles and is home to more than 3,000 people.

The Town of Center shares borders with: the Town of Ellington to the west, Town of Black Creek to the north, Town of Freedom to the east, and the Town of Grand Chute and City of Appleton to the south.



STH 47 traverses the town and provides easy access for residents to USH 41 and to nearby employment centers in the Fox Cities. CTY A, CTY O, and CTY S are also primary traffic routes through the town.

Town History

In the early 1800's, the Town of Center, together with the Town of Freedom, was known as Lansing. By 1850, after the Town of Freedom was established, the remaining portion of Lansing became known as the Town of Center. This name was taken from the place in Columbiana County, Ohio, where so many of the early Irish families living in the town had come from. The establishment of the Town of Center preceded the creation of Outagamie County, which separated from Brown County in 1851. Although the Town of Center is located in the center of Outagamie County, this location had no bearing on its naming.



From its beginnings, the Town of Center has been a farming community. Today, farming is still important, but faces several challengers. In more recent decades residential development has become more and more pervasive as people seek rural locations with easy access to the employment opportunities in the Fox Cities.

Background

In 2001, the Town of Center Board decided to initiate the comprehensive planning process. This decision was made to ensure that the town will continue to have a say in land uses decisions after 2010, as is stipulated in the Wisconsin Smart Growth Law (1999 Wisconsin Act 9). During this start-up period, town leaders sought assistance from OMNNI Associates, a consulting firm based in Appleton, WI. OMNNI's staff of certified planners was selected to facilitate a community-based planning program including visioning, town strengths and weakness identification, and the development of GIS-based maps. This community-based planning approach helped the town to identify and address important land use, resource protection and development issues facing the Town of Center.

Developing this plan sends a clear message that the Town of Center wishes to act proactively – to set its own ground rules for the types of development that will benefit the town, maintain a rural atmosphere and still provide flexibility for landowners.

Purpose and Scope of This Document

This 20-year *Comprehensive Plan for the Town of Center*, includes four major components:

- *A profile of the demographic, economic and housing characteristics of the town;*
- *An inventory and assessment of the environment, community facilities, and natural resources;*
- *Visions, goals, objectives and implementation strategies; and*
- *A land use map that depicts the future land use patterns in the town.*

This plan was developed under the authority of 1999 Wisconsin Act 9, Wisconsin’s “Smart Growth” Law. The law requires that a 20-year comprehensive plan be developed and adopted by all units of government that wish to have a role in land use decisions. The law authorizes municipalities to prepare and adopt comprehensive plans, singly or in cooperation with other communities, to serve as guides for the development of their communities.

The Smart Growth Law defines, for the first time, what is meant by a “comprehensive plan” in Wisconsin. It includes **nine (9) required elements**. These are:

- 1) **Issues and Opportunities**
- 2) **Housing**
- 3) **Transportation**
- 4) **Utilities and Community Facilities**
- 5) **Agricultural, Natural and Cultural Resources**
- 6) **Economic Development**
- 7) **Intergovernmental Cooperation**
- 8) **Land Use**
- 9) **Implementation**



In addition, the state requires that these elements be developed in concert with **Wisconsin’s 14 Goals for Local Planning**, which are:

- 1) Promotion of the redevelopment of lands with existing infrastructure and public services and the maintenance and rehabilitation of existing residential, commercial and industrial structures.
- 2) Encouragement of neighborhood designs that **support a range of transportation choices**.
- 3) **Protection of natural areas**, including wetlands, wildlife habitats, lakes, woodlands, open spaces and groundwater resources.
- 4) Protection of **economically productive areas**, including farmland and forests.
- 5) Encouragement of land uses, densities and regulations that **promote efficient development patterns** and relatively low municipal, state governmental and utility costs.
- 6) **Preservation** of cultural, historic and archeological sites.
- 7) Encouragement of **coordination and cooperation** among nearby units of government.
- 8) Building of **community identity** by revitalizing main streets and enforcing design standards.

- 9) Providing an adequate supply of **affordable housing** for individuals of all income levels throughout each community.
- 10) Providing **adequate infrastructure and public services** and an adequate supply of developable land to meet existing and future market demand for residential, commercial and industrial uses.
- 11) Promoting the **expansion or stabilization of the current economic base** and the creation of a range of employment opportunities at the state, regional and local levels.
- 12) Balancing **individual property rights** with community interests and goals.
- 13) Planning and development of land uses that create or **preserve varied and unique urban and rural communities**.
- 14) Providing an **integrated, efficient and economical transportation system** that affords mobility, convenience, and safety that meets the needs of all citizens, including transit-dependent and disabled citizens.

Public Involvement

The *Town of Center Comprehensive Plan* was developed in an environment rich with public input. To gain citizen understanding and support throughout the planning process, the public was provided with a variety of meaningful opportunities to become involved in the process. Public input was facilitated through several meetings and activities, including a community survey. Results of the survey, copies of meeting agendas and attendance sheets as well as the *Public Participation Plan and Adoption Procedures* are provided in the appendices of this document.



What follows is a description of some of the primary opportunities for public education and input in the planning program.

KICK-OFF MEETING

The Town of Center “kick-off” meeting was held on February 25, 2002 at the Town of Center Hall. At that meeting, OMNNI Associates presented an overview of the planning process, and provided general information to the public about smart growth planning and its importance to the Town of Center. The meeting concluded with a discussion of area values (presented at the end of this chapter).

PLANNING COMMISSION MEETINGS

The Planning Commission convened every month to review draft text, maps, establish goals and establish priorities for plan implementation. Each of these meetings was duly posted and open to the public.

INFORMATION MEETING / COMMUNITY ISSUES WORKSHOP (SWOT)

This workshop provided the Planning Commission and interested residents with background information about the town's demographic, economic, and housing characteristics. Participants at this workshop were also given an opportunity to identify and evaluate community strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. This information was used to develop draft goals for the *Town of Center Comprehensive Plan* and to complete the Issues and Opportunities Element.

MID-COURSE MEETING

At the mid-point of the planning process, the Planning Commission hosted an informational meeting to share with the public what had been happening in the planning program and what was yet to be done. At the meeting, OMNNI presented an overview of progress on the planning program, shared the value statements developed by the Planning Commission and encouraged the public to participate in the process to provide additional input. Participants also completed three exercises to identify and rank area strengths and weaknesses, express what makes Center a great place to live, and develop their own future land use maps.

MAP FORUM

At the map forum, a preliminary set of plan maps was displayed for residents, property owners and business owners to review and comment upon. This opportunity allowed residents to find "their property" and comment on what they liked or didn't like about the maps they saw. This was also the first opportunity the Town Board and Planning Commission had to see the first *Draft Future Land Use Plan Map*.

OPEN HOUSE

The purpose of the plan "open house" was to display the plan maps and text in an informal setting. At the "open house," there were no formal presentations, minutes, or voting. Rather, the maps and plan text were on display for interested residents to review at their own pace. The atmosphere was as casual as possible with refreshments being served. Members of the Planning Commission and OMNNI staff were available to answer questions as needed. This meeting was a success in that it allowed the participants to share their ideas in a setting that was much less formal than the public hearing. As a result, more people were able to react to the plan than would have otherwise done so, if only a formal public hearing had been held.

INTERNET WEB PAGE

The planning program was profiled on an interactive web page hosted on the OMNNI Associates Web Site. The page included meeting schedules, summaries of past meetings, draft maps and plan chapters, and general education materials about the Smart Growth law. The site was updated on a monthly basis to ensure that the information was current and would effectively inform the public.

COMMUNITY SURVEY

The Town of Center Planning Commission developed, distributed and analyzed a community survey as part of the planning program. The purpose of this survey was to obtain direct resident input about existing and potential future development in the town. The survey was sent to every town resident in a mass mailing in the fall of 2002. Data from the survey has been highlighted throughout this plan to reflect resident concerns and desires.

INTERGOVERNMENTAL MEETING

As an integral part of the planning program, the Planning Commission hosted an intergovernmental meeting with representatives from neighboring units of government, the school districts, Outagamie County, the East Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission, WDNR and WisDOT. This discussion at this meeting not only focused on the existing plans of these neighboring jurisdictions and agencies to identify potential conflicts that may exist with the proposed *Town of Center Comprehensive Plan*, but also on ways in which these plans could be coordinated.

At the meeting, participants from the neighboring units of government, county, state agencies, regional planning and school district were given the opportunity for mutual exchange of ideas and recommendations to address any conflicts. Based on the conversations and suggestions, the *Town of Center Comprehensive Plan* was modified to include recommendations to continue to resolve intergovernmental planning issues and conflicts over the 20-year planning period.

Town Values

During the Kick-Off Meeting, residents in attendance were asked to identify the values that influence residents to remain, take pride in, and become actively involved in the community. At the Mid-Course Meeting participants were also asked to complete the same activity. The complete list of those values is provided below. These value statements provided a clear direction for the development and implementation of the *Town of Center Comprehensive Plan*. Moreover, these values clearly indicate that residents of the Town of Center share a strong sense of community identity and pride closely associated with the rural character and natural areas that make the Town of Center a desirable place to live.

- *We value **our location** in the Greater Fox River Valley.*
- *We value **open spaces and large open lots**.*
- *We value our **low crime rate**.*
- *We value our **great local eating establishments**.*

- *We value **farmland**.*
- *We value our **quality roads** – Ballard, CTH S, CTH A, STH 47 and Town Roads.*
- *We value our **low tax rate**.*
- *We value our **small town government** that allows everyone to be heard.*
- *We value our **friendly town atmosphere** and residents.*
- *We value our **town hall** facility.*
- *We value our **schools**.*
- *We value our **privacy and rural environment**.*
- *We value our **light industrial park** (Jeske Drive).*
- *We value our long standing **churches** and their congregations.*
- *We value our excellent **fire protection** and **first responders**.*
- *We value our **clean air**.*
- *We value our **wildlife**.*
- *We value our **ability to safely walk and ride a bicycle** in the community.*
- *We value our **woods and wetlands**.*