

WINNEBAGO COUNTY
COMPREHENSIVE
LAND USE PLAN

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INTRODUCTION

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A Comprehensive Land Use Plan guides future activities by providing a framework for public officials to make decisions. The Plan contains policies to provide for the harmonious and economical arrangement of land uses, the stabilization of investments and land values, and the development of needed public facilities. To fulfill this purpose, the Plan must be both functional and flexible. The following are general areas of implementation:

1. The Comprehensive Land Use Plan serves as: (1) a source of information; (2) a program for future growth patterns, as shown in the Future Land Use Map; (3) a device for coordination; and (4) a means for stimulating public interest and responsibility.
2. This Plan contains policies or recommendations for the preparation of new and/or revised enforcement tools, such as zoning and subdivision ordinances. Zoning, subdivision, and other similar regulatory ordinances are only tools that should implement the plans and objectives identified in this document and which reflect the environment residents wish to create.
3. This Plan bears an important relationship to the administration of land use ordinances. It should serve as a guide in the determination of zoning amendments, the consideration of proposed subdivisions, and the location and type of proposed public improvements.
4. In reviewing any zoning change, the Plan must be consulted to determine whether the proposal conforms to established patterns. If conflicts exist, a discussion should ensue regarding the pros and cons of the proposed change as it relates to established policy, goals, and objectives. The final result is either approval of the proposed change and an amendment to the Plan, or the rejection of the proposed change.

Plan flexibility is maintained by keeping a general theme, but the Plan provides a stable and reliable base for officials to determine public and private development policy and action. To remain reliable and realistic, the Plan must be adapted to reflect changes, not only in the physical layout of the County (its buildings, pavements and land areas), but also in the needs, values and means to carry out the Plan. As the County grows, as population increases or decreases, as new technologies develop, and as the people's interests and modes of living change, the Plan must be revised to reflect these changes.

Principal County Purposes of Growth Management

In Winnebago County, the principal purpose behind managing growth through this plan is to protect taxpayers from certain financial exposures and to provide equity to taxpayers. This will lead to the pursuit of efficient growth and development through growth management policies, which in turn protect and improve the quality of life through good planning.

SUMMARY OF THE COMPREHENSIVE LAND USE PLAN

To guide orderly development of the County, the Plan outlines objectives to be used by officials in making decisions regarding zoning, land use planning, and subdivision development. This Plan is principally intended to guide development of public and private activities by location and establish standards for that development.

The land use policy objectives to be used for Winnebago County are as follows:

1. To preserve, protect and enhance property values through land use locations that complement each other rather than providing conflicts;
2. To provide appropriate diversity and choice of location;
3. To maximize economic opportunities in Winnebago County;
4. To coordinate and match land uses with transportation facilities;
5. To preserve the agricultural land which is a principal economic value to the County.

With the above objectives in mind, the Plan then outlines the following implementation steps:

1. By outlining policy in terms of common objectives to be sought by each type of development;
2. By listing accepted principles which must be applied to fulfill these common objectives;
3. By designating the most appropriate locations for agricultural, residential, industrial, and commercial development;
4. By providing a mechanism for incorporating the input of communities into land use decisions that are within their extra-territorial borders;
5. By delineating the quality of circulation facilities needed to provide access to all parts of the area that provide for safe and efficient movements of people and goods;

6. By pointing out flood hazard and other environmentally sensitive areas and appropriate means to limit developments within these areas;
7. By specifying general locations of recreation areas and other public facilities.

***USE OF THE
COMPREHENSIVE
LAND USE PLAN***

USE OF THE COMPREHENSIVE LAND USE PLAN

Preparation and adoption of a plan are two essential steps toward assuring sound development of the County. While preparation and adoption are essential, they are not by themselves sufficient to assure sound development because the Plan merely provides a basis for guiding and coordinating future development. Therefore, the Plan's most important function is its role as a guide for the development of enforcement mechanisms of zoning, subdivision, and other public infrastructure regulation. The Plan's value to these purposes is that it:

1. Forces a long-range consideration when reviewing land use options. That is, when zoning changes are proposed that do not conform to the Future Land Use Plan, a discussion must ensue as to the long-term pros and cons of the proposed change. From this discussion, the County can then document the justification for either approving or denying the change.
2. Remains somewhat flexible as a variety of future development patterns are programmed. It does not specify the exact detail of how the County should grow, but suggests the broad objectives, principles, and standards which should be followed in future development.

Unlike the Comprehensive Land Use Plan, specific development plans, codes, ordinances, and utility studies go into far greater detail. This Plan, however, is based on knowledge, review, and consideration of the following:

1. Physical features and natural resources of Winnebago County.
2. Economic factors and labor force.
3. Population trends.
4. Public facilities and transportation factors.
5. Visioning discussions.
6. Housing Needs Assessment and Action Plan – 1999.
7. Winnebago County Comprehensive Plan – 1977.

8. **Road Classification Ordinance.**

9. **Related infrastructure, nuisance regulations and ordinances.**

It is the intention of the Winnebago County Board of Supervisors to develop a plan that is basic, sound, and not overly cumbersome but is effective in guiding the County's future.

LAND USE OBJECTIVES

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Principal Goal

The primary, immediate need is to prepare a zoning ordinance. Currently, there is no zoning or other effective tool to implement good land use planning. Zoning in its initial stages should be a basic and simplified, yet effective, ordinance. It is further intended that the County develop a subdivision ordinance in order to better set standards for roadways and other improvements.

Based upon the existing land use, non-farm dwellings and other urban-type developments within the rural area of the County exist and will be controlled as follows:

1. Non-farm uses have been, and will continue to be, an important aspect of the County's land use pattern. There is no reason that they be totally eliminated, but some location criteria should be applied. In considering future land use patterns, agriculture deserves the same type of protection from non-farm uses as non-farm uses desire from agriculture. Therefore, the concept of development areas (or zones) where non-farm uses could be expected to locate should be utilized; the County should also consider defined agricultural areas where farming would be the primary desired use, not subject to intrusion by non-farm land use types. Generally, urban-type residential development and agriculture are not compatible.
2. Within development zones (defined as areas along major rivers and tributaries and adjacent to communities), the following should be considered:
 - A. Within areas zoned for development (residential, commercial, and industrial), lot areas would be permitted, provided they are located within organized subdivisions. Outside of platted subdivisions, larger minimum lot requirements should be utilized.
 - B. Development within recognized flood hazard areas, as defined by FEMA, must adhere to the County's flood hazard programs.

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2. Within development zones (defined as areas along major rivers and tributaries and adjacent to communities), the following should be considered:
 - A. Within areas zoned for development, building lot areas would be permitted, provided they are located within organized subdivisions. Outside of platted subdivisions, larger minimum lot requirements should be utilized; however, only when specific needs are present and the use is appropriate.
 - B. Development within recognized flood hazard areas, as defined by FEMA, must adhere to the County's flood hazard programs.

3. Outside of development zones:

- A. A large number of acres should be required before a non-farm use would be permitted. This large acreage would discourage, through financial considerations, small lot development from locating within these zones unless appropriate purposes and justification is present.
- B. Non-farm dwellings (commercial and industrial uses should be more restricted) may be located outside of development zones on larger parcels, provided that the site is an abandoned farmstead. "Abandoned farmstead" would be defined as a site that once housed a farm dwelling, where row crop or grazing agriculture has not reclaimed the home site, some trees may still be present, and some outbuildings or wells may still be present.
- C. The County has a number of rural subdivisions. This practice is not deemed to be negative, but in locating such developments the County should consider:
 - (1) Will the soils support a concentration of septic tanks and private wells?
 - (2) Will the subdivision substantially increase traffic on adjacent roads, and if so, can the road surfaces accommodate the traffic without major upgrading? Will the developer provide blacktop roads, and have covenants been put in place to assure maintenance if County ownership of the road is not achieved?
 - (3) Will the subdivision be compatible with adjacent land use patterns?
 - (4) Within the surrounding area are there physical features, such as the presence of a major road or railroad, that could attract land use types that would be counter productive to the subdivision?
 - (5) Is the subdivision located on prime agricultural land or within one of several development corridors?
 - (6) Have neighboring communities been consulted regarding the location of the subdivision?

The County will contract with cities in the County, when requested, to provide professional administration of a two-mile or lesser jurisdictional area through Chapter 28E, Code of Iowa. This would allow cities to directly utilize control over adjacent lands which are a critical part of their future development. Further, City and County zoning district maps will be coordinated where at all possible and subdivision standards will also be consistent.

Agriculture is an extremely important part of the County's economic base. As this land develops, the economic base may also be reduced. Conversion of this land should be protected from premature development and removal from the agricultural inventory.

Agricultural resource lands are the least dependent on services and because they nonetheless contribute revenue to support County services, recent studies have shown that they net fiscal benefits to taxpayers.

In removing agricultural land for development, the County will consider the following principles:

1. Urban uses are generally incompatible with agricultural uses. When agricultural land is converted to residential uses, urban residents often object to noise, dust, smoke, hours of operation, spraying, and fertilizer applications.
2. A loss in property values may develop from such incompatibilities.
3. Efficient development patterns may be restricted by premature sprawl if it is allowed.

Value-added agriculture is recognized as an important consideration in land use planning; however, it has distinctive characteristics also.

1. County policies should be developed that respect the rights of agriculture as well as non-agricultural uses. That is, agriculture should be provided with definite zones in which the location of non-agricultural uses is severely restricted and separations should exist.
2. Site distance clearances should be provided from the animal confinements to the nearest neighbors, consistent with the Code of Iowa requirements.

3. Consideration should be given to assure that value-added agricultural businesses are located in proximity to quality roads.
4. A buffer zone should be placed around each city and along the river corridors and major tributaries.
5. Value-added agricultural uses should be located only when specific characteristics exist which are not available on other sites within the County and when conflicts can be adequately mitigated.

HOUSING

HOUSING

Overall Goal for Housing Development

The overall housing development goal is to preserve and create living areas that are compact and identifiable, offering overall security and affording freedom of choice for types of residential dwellings, social opportunities, and creative individual living. This goal should be accomplished in an efficient manner while not prematurely taking agricultural land out of production and causing increased service costs.

Principles for Housing Development

Residential growth should be channeled to development zones and the use of subdivisions encouraged. New residential subdivisions outside of these zones are discouraged unless as an expansion of current residential areas or as part of a larger planned complex. This arrangement would provide the least conflict with expanding agricultural enterprises. Non-farm dwellings outside of the development zones would only be allowed by Board of Adjustment action or unless the site is an abandoned farmstead or meets corn suitability criteria of the County Zoning Ordinance.

Rural housing within subdivisions in residentially zoned areas and on existing farmsteads should be single-family. The more intensive multi-family uses should be prohibited because of increased traffic and general lack of utility services in the predominately rural area. Housing built in subdivisions should provide roads within the subdivision and connections to paved roads if warranted by the level of traffic created.

Standards to Facilitate Housing Development

Through the zoning administrative process, the County Future Land Use Map should reflect a targeting of non-farm land uses to development zones. Concepts for this strategy are:

1. Outline around each incorporated city a development zone with a radius of two miles, more or less. Within these zones the County would encourage planned developments, subject to the normal location factors of infrastructure, provision of highway access and the need to avoid "string" type developments, and sound separation of urban land use types.

2. Outline development zones along the rivers and streams or other woodland areas.
3. Outside of the development zones, the presence of non-farm uses should be discouraged through tools such as large lot size zoning and prohibition of subdivisions. The exception would be the location of a non-farm dwelling on an abandoned farmstead. Abandoned farmsteads would be defined as a site that once housed a farm dwelling, where row crop or grazing agriculture has not reclaimed the home site, some trees may still be present, and some outbuildings may still be present.
4. Within the development zones around each incorporated city, the zoning administrative process should permit the incorporated city to comment on or review each request for a subdivision and zoning change or give authority to each city via 28E Agreements.
5. All subdivisions shall include publicly dedicated roadways built to appropriate standards.

General Residential Land Selection Factors

Land for residential use is open typically to more options than land for industrial and commercial uses. Having the wrong land, however, can be costly to an owner and may prove to be a long-term liability.

The following is general listing of site factors that provide the best sites; however, these criteria do not preclude the principal purpose in preserving agricultural land.

1. Land can be of varying slopes, with soil of such composition that it is capable of bearing foundation loads or can be made capable with a reasonable financial outlay.
2. The land should be well drained and absolutely free from flooding.
3. The site should be located in such a manner that it can be generally served by utilities. This does not always mean that the site must be near the City, but attempts should be made to avoid long distances in providing water, sewage, gas and electrical services.
4. The land should be served by all-weather roads.

5. The land area can exist in varied parcel sizes.
6. The land should be priced in a range that is reasonable compared with other land in the immediate area. In today's market this means that capability needs to exist to provide improved land at reasonable cost.
7. Sites should be protected by zoning laws which preclude incompatible agricultural, commercial or industrial encroachment near the site.
8. Access to and from the area should be through well-serviced areas of the County. The perception of the area as a good place to live and raise a family is important to maintain.
9. Maintenance and appreciation of property values are extremely important characteristics of the area when considered as a residential area.
10. Existing established tree growth can be very valuable.

***ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
(Commercial/Industrial Uses)***

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT (Commercial/Industrial Uses)

Overall Goal for Economic Development

The overall economic development goal is to provide an adequate supply of land for non-agricultural and value-added agricultural development. Conversely, an effort will be made to avoid the blighting of land as the result of allowing sporadic commercial and industrial development in residential areas. Specific subgoals for accomplishment are:

1. Encourage a maximum utilization of existing community/commercial districts and industrial parks through the promotion and establishment of healthy, stable commercial/industrial concentrations.
2. Assure the inclusion of adequate public services and facilities to existing commercial and industrial areas.
3. Prevent the encroachment by commercial and industrial uses upon residential and agricultural areas.

Principles for Economic Development

1. New commercial/industrial developments should be in the form of unified and concentrated planned developments. Spot development in residential areas and the stringing out of other development along roads should be discouraged.
2. Prior to the establishment of zoning for commercial/industrial centers, road rights-of-way should be of sufficient width to ensure adequate circulation in the vicinity. New establishments, either individually or collectively, should be required to assure traffic safety by providing safe, convenient access, adequate off-street parking and loading facilities for pedestrians and customer and service vehicles. Frontage roads should be provided along major arterials.
3. Existing commercial areas should be encouraged and assisted to the fullest extent possible to correct deficiencies that will assure traffic safety and convenience.

4. Any adverse influences resulting from commercial/industrial activities upon adjacent non-commercial areas should be minimized by appropriate buffers such as physical screens and use of open space.
5. Availability of public utilities, including power, water, fuel, and waste disposal, should determine the type and extent of industrial activities that can be supported.
6. Industrial areas should be protected from the encroachment of incompatible land uses which would restrict plant development.
7. Local development efforts should include a strategy for working with entrepreneurs within existing vacant buildings.
8. The location of industrial areas in the land use pattern should first be determined by external performance characteristics such as noise, vibration, smoke, odor, radiation, heat, glare, and other objectionable influences.
9. The number, height, size, and placement of billboards and signs should be regulated in industrial areas with consideration of development and adjoining areas.
10. All open areas used for storage or production should be screened so as to enhance adjacent land uses.
11. Tourism should be recognized as economic development.

General Commercial/Industrial Land Selection Factors

Land, and land in the right location, is even more essential for commercial and industrial uses than for other uses. Land that is flat and available is not enough. Having the wrong land is not only costly, but may well prove to be a long-term liability, which will detract from the overall recruitment/development efforts.

The following is a general listing of industrial site factors that provide the best sites:

1. Land should be fairly level, with soil of such composition that it is capable of bearing foundation loads or can be made capable with a reasonable financial outlay.

2. The land should be well drained and free from flooding.
3. The land should be served by high traffic highways or all-weather roads for commercial development. It is desirable to have ready access by pedestrians and vehicles. Lack of adequate access to an otherwise developable site is a common cause of project failure.
4. The site should be located in such a manner that it can be served by utilities. This does not always mean that the site must be near the City, but attempts should be made to avoid long distances in providing water, sewage, gas and electrical services.
5. The land should be served by highways or all-weather roads and, if possible, located near rail service.
6. The land area must be of such magnitude that it can be broken into parcels of different sizes capable of accommodating various-sized plants and their parking requirements.
7. The land should be priced in a range that is reasonable compared with other land in the immediate area. In today's market, this means that capability needs to exist to potentially provide improved land at no cost.
8. Commercial and industrial sites should be protected by zoning laws which preclude gradual residential overgrowth and possible future restrictions especially to industrial expansions.
9. There should be certain restrictions on an industrial site which will insure compatibility among the various industries that would possibly locate. Landscaping, parking areas, setbacks, building construction standards, restrictions, if necessary, on open air storage and other aesthetic restrictions will establish the character of a larger site. Individual land holdings for specific industries not located in conjunction with other sites will not, of course, be restricted to the same degree. As an example, locating a meat packing plant near an electronics firm on the same industrial site would not, in all probability, be in the interest of either firm. Restrictions should be reasonable and established in such a manner that they promote rather than inhibit industrial growth.
10. All uses should be compatible with city plans where adjacent and agricultural uses are appropriate.

PUBLIC FACILITIES

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Overall Goals for Public Facilities

1. To make available facilities and services which are necessary for the public well-being. To develop and expand the quality and quantity of facilities and utilities to adequately meet the needs of the current and future population.
2. To provide each citizen with choices for the types and amounts of recreational activities desired. To coordinate with State, Federal and County programs to ensure the most effective utilization of public and private recreational funds. To preserve resources that have special historical, scientific, scenic, or recreational value.
3. To develop and maintain a transportation system which is planned, located, and designed to enhance the efficiency of movement of both people and goods, and which supports and promotes all areas of the County in a cost-effective and design-efficient way. This includes precluding infrastructure support for uses better served in urban settings.

Principles for Public Facilities and Utilities

1. Recreation:
 - A. Those areas having terrain unsuitable for development should be maintained as a conservation classification.
 - B. The development of passive recreational uses should be encouraged in appropriate areas.
2. Surface Water and Storm Drainage:
 - A. Principal watersheds and their drainage courses should be protected against encroachment by incompatible uses.
 - B. Land subject to inundation should be utilized for parks and recreation, utility easements, wildlife refuges, and other uses which suffer little damage from occasional inundation.

3. **Roadways:**
 - A. Trafficways should be appropriately built and planned to identify and unify land use areas as desirable patterns of living or working.
 - B. Trafficway planning and improvement should be correlated with the planning and development of other elements of the County, including public utilities, public facilities, commercial and industrial areas.
4. **Public Facilities:**
 - A. The quality of service provided for the County should continue to be upgraded by both expansion and remodeling of existing facilities.
5. **Utilities:**
 - A. The current needs should be monitored, with regular assessments made, as to the adequacy of each system. Needs should be scheduled into timely replacement programs. Existing detailed engineering studies should be updated regularly.

Standards to Facilitate Public Facilities and Utilities

1. Review existing roads to determine whether roads may be closed or converted to a minimal maintenance status.
2. Implement a roadway improvement program as determined.
3. Develop incentives to promote passive recreational activities such as trail development and use of natural settings in the County.