

Chapter 1: Introduction

Welcome to the Dane County Comprehensive Plan!

This plan will guide Dane County's decisions on a wide array of issues over the next 20 years, but also has an eye on a much broader horizon.

Dane County has a strong tradition of planning for the future. Its thriving communities, unparalleled agricultural and natural resources, and the high quality of life long enjoyed by its residents are the result of an unwavering commitment to planning over many decades. The fastest growing county in the state, Dane County is now home to over 450,000 people. The glacial landscape of rolling prairies, fertile soils, and drumlins of the East, and the scenic bluffs, lush valleys, and cold-water streams of the West, have made Dane County a truly remarkable place. These environmental blessings, together with the county's economic, agricultural, and cultural assets, attract thousands of new residents each year. Dane County citizens, from all backgrounds, have joined together and committed their time, energy, and talent to helping Dane County seize the opportunities and meet the challenges that lie before it. This plan is the result of that effort. As Dane County looks to the future, the *Dane County Comprehensive Plan* focuses on development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs.

Chapter One provides an overview of the Dane County comprehensive planning process. It includes a discussion of the central role grassroots public participation played in developing the plan, as well as a description of the plan's structure and its relationship to other existing and ongoing planning efforts. It also includes a review of key planning concepts common to the Dane County planning context, in addition to those required by the state.

In 2000, the Wisconsin Legislature passed the most complete comprehensive planning legislation in Wisconsin's history. Often referred to as "Smart Growth," the law requires all Wisconsin communities that exercise land use authority to adopt a comprehensive plan by ordinance by 2010, and for land use decisions to be consistent with the adopted plan. In

2002, Dane County, along with 14 local municipalities, applied for and received a state grant to complete a comprehensive plan. The *Dane County Comprehensive Plan* was developed in accordance with the state legislation, and is comprised of nine required elements that significantly affect all communities.

The nine elements of the plan are:

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

Public Participation

To define a shared vision for the future, a comprehensive plan must rest upon a solid foundation of public participation. In January of 2003, the County Board adopted a *Public Participation Plan* (see Volume III of this plan) outlining the processes, procedures and tools used throughout the comprehensive planning process to encourage public awareness, education, interaction, input and partnership. The public participation plan seeks to harness the tremendous creativity and expertise of Dane County's citizens to design innovative and inclusive policies that effectively address the issues Dane County expects to face in the future. Early on, Dane County residents emphasized that they want a meaningful plan that maintains our high standard of living, conserves our agricultural and natural resources, and ensures the vitality of our diverse, distinct, and prosperous communities. The *Dane County Comprehensive Plan* reaffirms these overarching goals, and establishes measurable objectives and concrete policies to achieve them.

Between 2003 and 2006, over 120 citizens attended 105 meetings and volunteered thousands of hours of their time to develop the recommendations in the *Dane County Comprehensive Plan*. A project web page (www.daneplan.org) containing background data, online resources, and the latest drafts of the plan's goals, objectives, and policies received over 27,000 hits between 2002 and 2007. An innovative e-mail discussion forum, noticed on a continuing basis as a public meeting under the Wisconsin Open Meetings Law, included over 215 members. The public participation process also included:

- Dozens of educational sessions featuring local, and regional experts on a variety of topics;
- A statistically valid, random sample opinion survey of all Dane County residents, conducted by Chamberlain and Associates. (The complete text of the survey instrument, raw return data and a summary are contained in Volume III. Each chapter of Volume I also includes a summary of relevant survey results.), and;
- Direct outreach, focus groups, and other mechanisms to raise awareness of issues and solicit input from various sectors of the population.

This mix of strategies and opportunities helped achieve the *Public Participation Plan* goals of allowing Dane County's diverse population to participate in the comprehensive planning process at whatever level or by whatever means they felt appropriate.



Planning Process

Steering Committee

The County Board of Supervisors established a thirteen-member Comprehensive Planning Steering Committee (CPSC) to oversee the development of the comprehensive plan. The CPSC included Dane County elected officials, stakeholder groups, and individuals representing a diverse range of interests and expertise. Members of the CPSC included:

- Six Dane County Board Supervisors:
 - At least two of whom serve as members of the Zoning and Land Regulation Committee;
 - At least one of whom has an interest in housing issues;
 - At least two of whom serve as members of Environment, Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee, and;
 - At least one of whom has an interest in transportation issues.
- The president of the Dane County Towns Association, or his/her designee;
- The president of the Dane County Cities and Villages Association, or his/her designee;
- The Mayor of the City of Madison, or his/her designee;
- A representative of the Dane County Parks Commission;
- A representative of the builders and realtors, to be recommended jointly by the Realtors Association of South Central Wisconsin and the Madison Area Builders Association;
- A representative of the environmental community, to be recommended jointly by the Audubon Society, the Sierra Club, and the Natural Heritage Land Trust, and;
- A farmer, to be recommended jointly by the Dane County Farm Bureau and the Dane County Chapter of the National Farmers Organization.

Work Groups

The CPSC designed an open and inclusive planning process. Three citizen-led work groups were established to address interrelated elements of the plan. The work groups consisted of eleven appointed and numerous volunteer advisory and resource members representing a broad cross-section of Dane County citizens and organizations. A complete list of work group members is contained in the Acknowledgements section in Volume I.

The CPSC tasked the three work groups with developing goals, objectives, and policies for closely related elements of the plan. The work groups included:

- Agricultural, Natural, and Cultural Resources (ANCR);
- Housing and Economic Development (HED), and;
- Transportation, Utilities, and Community Facilities (TUCF).

The CPSC granted the work groups a significant degree of autonomy to determine their direction and workflow, stipulating only a set of basic “ground rules” requiring that the groups use an open, consensus-based decision making process. The open structure of the work groups allowed for a free flow of participation as the groups proceeded from one topic to the next. This enabled individuals and stakeholder groups interested in a particular subject area to participate at select points in the process. The workgroups also invited “resource members” with knowledge and expertise in subjects under consideration to present information and participate at almost every meeting. This helped foster a better understanding of topics and provided context for the groups’ discussions. Educational sessions contributed further to raising awareness of historical trends and emerging issues.

While the workgroups were charged with digging into very specific subject areas, the CPSC addressed broad, overarching elements of the plan, including land use, inter-governmental cooperation, and implementation. The CPSC had the additional responsibility of synthesizing the large volumes of work generated by the workgroups, and ensuring that the many goals, objectives, and policies of the plan were internally consistent and complementary.

The Comprehensive Planning Steering Committee owes a debt of gratitude to the many Dane County residents who volunteered countless hours to create this plan.



Plan Structure

Under the state comprehensive planning law, each of Dane County’s 61 municipalities must adopt and implement a comprehensive plan. In addition to its own comprehensive plan, Dane County also maintains a variety of other plans, each designed to meet specific administrative, funding or policy goals. The *Dane County Comprehensive Plan* is intended to support, not supplant, these ongoing planning efforts. One of the greatest challenges of the process was avoiding duplication of efforts and ensuring that the plan would complement, rather than compete with, other county plans.

The *Dane County Comprehensive Plan* utilizes an overarching, “umbrella” structure that acknowledges the importance and continuing role of existing plans by incorporating them by reference where appropriate. For example, the county’s *Parks and Open Space Plan*, *Farmland Preservation Plan*, and *Water Quality Plan* are all incorporated into the *Dane County Comprehensive Plan* by reference. Other plans are similarly incorporated throughout the individual element chapters of the plan. The umbrella structure also helped to focus efforts on covering gaps in the existing fabric of countywide plans and leveraging the county’s unique position to address regional issues that cut across political boundaries.

The structure of this plan recognizes and respects the statutory authority granted to different units of government. This is reflected throughout the plan in the formation of goals, policies, and objectives as they may relate to the county's jurisdiction in any given area. For example, state law limits the county's zoning authority to unincorporated areas, and requires joint decision-making with town governments. So, while this plan may include goals and objectives aimed at influencing land use decisions in cities and villages, inclusion in the plan alone will not yield the desired results. Rather, it will take concerted inter-governmental cooperation efforts to achieve them. In fact, achieving and implementing many of the goals, objectives, and policies of this plan will require a significant degree of coordination among different units of government.

Fortunately, the county has some valuable cooperative planning experience to build on. The county's *Farm-land Preservation Plan*, for example, is a useful model of how local and regional plans can work together. The county portion of the plan includes an organized framework with generalized policies while implementation detail is provided by locally adopted town plan components. The *Farm-land Preservation Plan* is a critically important document that is used on a daily basis to inform individual land use decisions at both the town and county levels. The comprehensive plan will utilize the same cooperative model.

Organization Of The Plan

This plan is organized in three volumes to promote readability and easy reference. Volume I is the substantive portion of the plan and includes eight of the nine elements that will guide the county's decision making over the 20 year planning horizon. Volume II constitutes the "issues and opportunities" element of the plan and includes the majority of background information and data that informed the overall development of the plan. Volume III is a compilation of various appendices and supporting materials, including the plan survey, public participation plan, and fact sheets.

Each subsequent chapter of Volume I corresponds to a required plan element. Beginning with a brief introductory narrative and a summary of relevant survey results, each element and sub-topical area includes broad goal statements, supporting objectives, and actionable policies and programs. This consistent organization should promote ease of reference as well as an understanding of how implementing a particular policy will help achieve a particular goal or objective.

