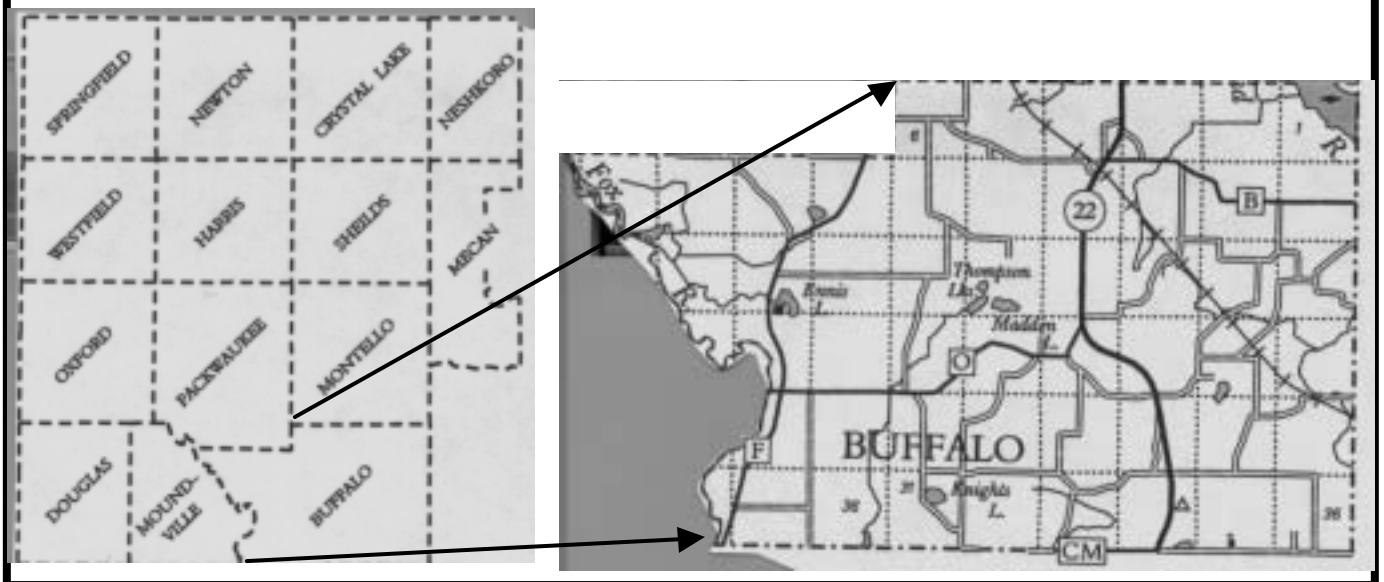


1.0 INTRODUCTION

Location

The Town of Buffalo is located in southwestern Marquette County, Wisconsin, immediately south of the City of Montello. The town is bounded by the Fox River, Green Lake County, Columbia County and the Towns of Montello and Packwaukee. The Town of Buffalo covers approximately 50 square miles of land area. Ten municipal jurisdictions (including counties) neighbor, and three school districts are within, the town.

FIGURE 1: Town of Buffalo, Marquette County, WI



Background

In 2001, the Town of Buffalo Board decided to initiate the comprehensive planning process. This decision was made to provide for orderly development, protect farmland, preserve open space and 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. 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 Buffalo.

Developing this plan sends a clear message that the Town of Buffalo 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 Buffalo*, 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 Ch. 66. 1001(4)(a), Wis. Stats.. 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 issues. The law authorizes municipalities to prepare and adopt comprehensive plans to serve as guides for the development of their communities. The law also authorizes multi-jurisdictional planning efforts.

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 Buffalo 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. 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 Buffalo “kick-off” meeting was held on Tuesday, March 19, 2002 at the Buffalo Town Hall. At that meeting, OMNNI Associates (the town’s planning consultant) presented an overview of the planning process. Discussion was held about

methods to keep the public informed about the comprehensive planning process and a draft of the *Public Participation Plan and Adoption Procedures* was reviewed. Also, at this meeting, OMNNI Associates facilitated a strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) workshop to begin to establish goals and objectives for the town. This workshop allowed the Planning Advisory Committee and public to identify specific concerns and issues facing the town. Likewise, this exercise allowed for the identification of community assets and priorities. The information obtained at this workshop help to direct research and direct priorities for planning.

INFORMATIONAL MEETING AND VISIONING

The Planning Advisory Committee hosted this special public meeting in May of 2002, early in the planning process, to provide background information to all residents about the towns demographic, economic, and housing history and trends based on available census data. Also at this meeting, participants had the opportunity to discuss the town's vision for the future. The information obtained at this meeting was used to develop vision statements for each of the nine required plan elements.

PLANNING ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETINGS

The Planning Advisory Committee, which included members of the Town of Buffalo Land Use Commission and other town residents, met quarterly to review draft text, maps, establish goals and establish priorities for plan implementation.

MID-COURSE MEETING

At the mid-point of the planning process, the Planning Advisory Committee hosted an informational meeting to share with the public the progress of the planning program and what was yet to be done. At the meeting, OMNNI gave a presentation to provide an overview of progress on the planning program, share the vision statements developed by the Planning Advisory Committee and invite the public to participate in the process to provide additional input.

Also at this meeting, participants were asked to participate in a cognitive mapping exercise. This exercise asked participants to delineate geographic areas of the town people like, dislike, frequently visit, feel are important, travel through regularly, would encourage development, etc. These maps were then used by OMNNI Associates to develop the Future Land Use Plan Maps for the *Town of Buffalo Comprehensive Plan*. This innovative approach allowed for direct public input related to future development, preservation, and conservation in the Town of Buffalo.

MAP FORUM

The Map Forum provided town residents the opportunity to review all plan maps in an informal setting. This special opportunity allowed residents to examine each of the plan maps to understand how the maps were developed and see how the plan will impact their

property. The result of the Map Forum was a great exchange of ideas about the plan maps. More importantly, this special meeting allowed ample time for the maps to be amended to address concerns that would likely not have otherwise been raised until the public hearing.

INTERGOVERNMENTAL MEETINGS

As part of the planning program, the Planning Advisory Committee facilitated two (2) intergovernmental meetings. At the first meeting, the draft 20-year Town of Buffalo Land Use Plan Map was presented for initial comment and feedback. Existing or anticipated plans from neighboring units of government, school districts, Marquette County, the East Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission, WDNR and WisDOT were discussed in relation to the draft map.

At the second meeting, OMNNI Associates presented a summary of potential conflicts between existing and proposed area plans as compared to the *Town of Buffalo Comprehensive Plan*. Moreover, steps taken or proposed in the *Town of Buffalo Comprehensive Plan* to address these conflicts were discussed. Based on the conversations and suggestions received at this meeting, the *Town of Buffalo Comprehensive Plan* includes recommendations to continue to resolve intergovernmental planning issues and conflicts over the 20-year planning period.

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 served to effectively inform the public.

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 Advisory Committee 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 there had only been a formal public hearing.

PUBLIC HEARING

Immediately following the Open House, the Planning Advisory Committee hosted a formal public hearing in accordance with the requirements of the Wisconsin Smart Growth law.

Town Values

During the “kick-off” meeting, residents in attendance were asked to identify the values that influence people to vacation and live in the Town of Buffalo. More importantly, participants were asked what makes residents remain, take pride in, and become actively involved in the community. 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 Buffalo Comprehensive Plan*. Moreover, these values clearly indicate that residents of the Town of Buffalo share a strong sense of community identity and pride closely associated with the rural character and natural areas that make the Town of Buffalo a desirable place to live.

- ✓ *We value our rural character.*
- ✓ *We value our natural areas and wildlife habitat.*
- ✓ *We value our farmland.*
- ✓ *We value our town roads.*
- ✓ *We value our town government.*
- ✓ *We value our low crime rate.*

As part of the Marquette County Planning Survey (See Chapter 2 for more information), town residents were asked about the most valued aspects of the Town of Buffalo. Residents overwhelmingly indicated the quiet and peaceful atmosphere (82.6%) and small town/rural living (82.0%). Closely following this was “lakes/rivers/streams –wildlife/beautiful scenery” with 64.6% of respondents indicating it was of value.