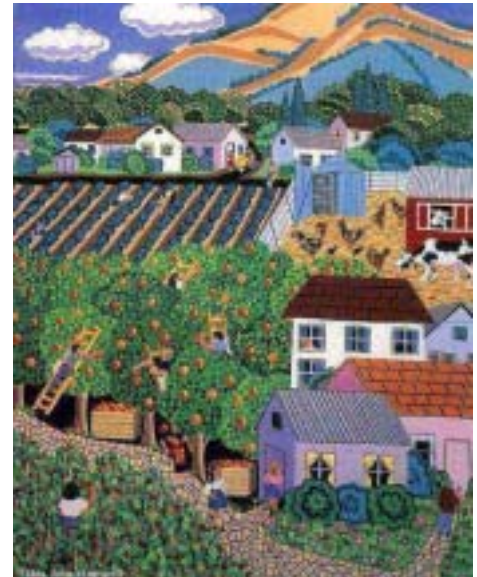


## 2.0 ISSUES & OPPORTUNITIES

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### Introduction

The Issues and Opportunities Element provides the background information on the town and the overall visions to guide future development and redevelopment over a 20-year planning period. Specifically, the Issues and Opportunities Element includes population, household and employment forecasts and demographic trends, age distributions, education levels, income levels and employment characteristics that exist within the local government unit. This chapter presents the overall vision for the Town of Buffalo, including a complete assessment of local strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT). The community characteristics and general background information that form the basis for the Issues & Opportunities Element, is included in Chapter 3 Community Profile.



### Visioning Process

To identify community issues and opportunities, a three-step process was utilized, which resulted in the development of individual vision statements for each of the nine required smart growth planning elements. This process included: community SWOT meeting, cognitive mapping and element vision development. What follows is a description of the activities and the major issues and opportunities identified through the issues and opportunities process.

### SWOT MEETING

What follows is a brief definition of a strength, weakness, opportunity, and threat as used in a SWOT exercise.

- Strength**     *Something that makes a community stand out when compared to other communities. Something that makes you proud to call the community home. A strength can be a physical asset, a program, an environmental condition or an impression or feeling (i.e. friendly community atmosphere).*
- Weakness**     *Opposite of a strength. Problem that needs to be addressed.*
- Opportunity**     *Something that could be done to improve the community. A potential.*
- Threat**     *A threat may be internal or external. A threat can be anything that could jeopardize the future success of a community.*

A SWOT meeting is a planning exercise used to get communities thinking about:

- where they have been;

- where they are;
- where they want to be in the future; and
- how they want to get there.

On March 19, 2002, the Town of Buffalo Planning Advisory Committee participated in a SWOT exercise. The objective of the exercise was to find out how the Planning Advisory Committee members viewed various aspects of the town. This could include their feelings on physical things such as roads, utilities, etc., and “quality of life” issues. OMNNI Associates, the town’s comprehensive planning consultant, facilitated the exercise.

At the meeting, each member of the Town of Buffalo Planning Advisory Committee was asked to share what he or she thought were the town’s strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. Anyone present could list as many items as he/she wished under each category. All ideas were recorded by OMNNI Associates. The table on the next few pages lists the responses given, by category.

At the meeting, participants collectively agreed that the Town of Buffalo’s primary *strengths* lie in its rural character and natural features. The most important *weakness* seemed to be the town’s lack of zoning control and resulting uncontrolled growth.

Participants agreed that the town’s greatest opportunities lie in its ability to protect its natural areas, rural character and farmland. Unplanned growth and uncontrolled development due to a lack of local zoning control was considered the greatest *threat* to the future of the Town of Buffalo.

<b>Strengths</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rural Character</li> <li>• Natural Beauty</li> <li>• Wetlands</li> <li>• Historical Amenities, particularly related to John Muir – Homestead &amp; Park</li> <li>• Location – The Town is close enough to larger cities and developed areas to have access to health care and shopping.</li> <li>• Abundant Wildlife</li> <li>• Traffic is Limited</li> <li>• Safe Community – Low Crime Rate</li> <li>• Quality Schools</li> <li>• Low Population Density</li> <li>• Water Quality and Quantity is Good</li> </ul>
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<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);"><b>Weaknesses</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Spiraling (Rising) Taxes, particularly in the southern half of Marquette County</li> <li>• Unplanned Growth <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Lack of Land Use Plan</li> <li>* No Zoning</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Tax Structure for Tree Farms / Forestland</li> <li>• Outdoor Storage - Junkyards</li> </ul>
<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);"><b>Opportunities</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preserve Existing Natural Areas</li> <li>• Preserving Farmland</li> <li>• Preserve Rural Character</li> </ul>
<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);"><b>Threats</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DNR Land Acquisition</li> <li>• Permits issued for septic systems through COMM 83 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Development open anywhere</li> <li>* No Zoning</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Unplanned Growth <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Uncontrolled Development</li> <li>* Attract Development because nearby communities have plans and zoning in place that Buffalo does not, so people believe it is easier to develop in Buffalo</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Railroad Bridges – Need to Be Repaired – Who Pays?</li> <li>• “Unguarded” Railroad Crossings – No gates or lights</li> <li>• Draining and Loss of Wetlands</li> <li>• If restrictions are placed on development (i.e. home businesses), impacts on Amish Community?</li> <li>• Narrow Roadways – Concerns over conflict with Amish</li> <li>• Noxious Weeds</li> <li>• Wind farms</li> <li>• Factory Farms – Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs) – Not in existence today, but potential threat</li> </ul>

## COGNITIVE MAPPING

A cognitive map, or mental map, is a map drawn by a person that geographically locates his or her memories, ideas and thoughts of a particular place. Since cognitive maps are based on individual's preferences and opinions there are no "right" or "wrong" maps. Cognitive maps are used to delineate geographic areas of a community people like, dislike, frequently visit, feel are important, travel through regularly, feel safe, etc.

As part of the June Smart Growth Meeting, the members of the Planning Advisory Committee and other residents in attendance were provided a map of the Town of Buffalo. On that map, participants outlined those areas where they would like to see new commercial/industrial development, new residential development, new recreation areas, open space and farmland in the Town of Buffalo.

These maps were used extensively in the development of the Future Land Use Maps presented later in this plan. This approach helped to ensure that the Future Land Use Maps accurately reflect community concerns and priorities for the future. A consensus map, which combines the results of the individual maps drawn by the committee members is provided in the Land Use Element Chapter of this plan.



## VISION DEVELOPMENT

In March 2002, a vision assignment was distributed to the Planning Advisory Committee. The assignment asked the committee members to individually answer a series of questions about what they would like to see in the Town of Buffalo in 20 years.

**Prior to beginning the Cognitive Mapping Exercise, committee members worked in groups to update land use maps of the Town of Buffalo.**



Committee members discussed their vision of the future of the Town.

At the May 2002 meeting, the committee members and residents worked in small groups to review their individual answers to each of the questions and arrive at a single best answer for each. These answers were then shared with the entire Planning Advisory Committee to arrive at a consensus-based answer to each question. OMNNI then used these collective responses to draft vision statements, which the Planning Advisory Committee reviewed in July 2002. Each of the final vision statements is provided at the end of this chapter.

## Community Survey

As part of the Marquette County Comprehensive Planning Process, of which the Town of Buffalo was a participant, in June of 2002, a community planning survey was distributed to 621 residents of the Town of Buffalo. Of that amount, 178 surveys were returned for a response rate of 29%.

For additional information about the Marquette County Plan, visit the Marquette County Internet web site at [www.co.marquette.wi.us](http://www.co.marquette.wi.us).

The survey asked a series of questions related to resident quality of life, public services, housing, economic development, environmental quality, and plan development and implementation. The survey results are included throughout this plan to illustrate resident opinions.

According to the community survey results, town residents believe the following major problems and concerns are facing the Town of Buffalo. These items must be addressed in this comprehensive plan and supporting ordinances.

Increase in Taxes (71.3%)	Lack of New Businesses (15.7%)
Uncontrolled Development/Urban Sprawl (42.1%)	Increasing Crime (15.2%)
Lack of Job Opportunities (29.8%)	Lack of Activities for Youth (11.8%)
Increase in Land Prices (27.0%)	Vacant Buildings – Unattractive Business District (4.5%)
Unattractive Housing/Property Conditions (24.7%)	Lack of Available Housing (2.8%)
Low Wages (23.6%)	Inadequate Labor Supply (1.7%)
	Other (5.1%)

The survey also asked residents to identify important future planning issues. The results reveal that the following are the major planning issues in the Town of Buffalo:

- Protecting Groundwater
- Protecting Private Property rights
- Attracting Good Paying Jobs
- Protecting Agricultural Land
- Protecting Lakes/Rivers/Streams
- Improving the local quality of life for children and grandchildren

## Visions

Rather than develop a series of policy statements, the Planning Advisory Committee participated in an extensive visioning process to establish a framework from which to make future planning decisions for the Town of Buffalo. The result of this process was a vision statement for each of the nine required plan elements, including an overall vision statement. This process was critical to establish a unified vision for the Town of Buffalo and provide a direction and focus for the planning effort.

Below are the community vision statements, which represent the broad interests of town residents, elected/appointed officials, business leaders and property owners. These visions establish the planning framework and a direction for subsequent planning efforts and decisions in the town.

Supporting goals, objectives and program initiatives are described in Chapter 12 of this plan.

## **ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES (OVERALL VISION)**

*The Town of Buffalo is a quiet community. Farmlands and woodlands dominate the landscape. Residential development is located and designed to preserve and protect open space and farmland to maintain the Town's rural character. Year-round and seasonal residents, enjoy the Town's scenic vistas and relaxed lifestyle. Children benefit from the nurturing environment offered by the rural school districts. Seniors live independently, with assistance from family, friends, neighbors, and the county. (The primary threat facing the community is a lack of enthusiasm, staff support and funds to implement the plan.*

## **HOUSING VISION**

*Quality single-family housing is available in the Town of Buffalo as a result of effect local zoning. These choices include a balance of rural residences and a few scattered conservation subdivisions. To maintain the Town's rural character, single-family residences are located to blend in with the Town's natural features and farmland. All residential development in Buffalo is attractive, well maintained, and aptly suited for raising a family. Neighbors support neighbors, especially seniors.*

## **TRANSPORTATION VISION**

*Well-maintained local roads and county trunks serve the Town of Buffalo. Residents enjoy easy access to nearby communities via STH 22 and other connecting highways. Residents depend on their own vehicles to meet their transportation needs and use the Town's interconnecting bike trails in good weather. Residents without vehicles rely on the kindness of friends, families and neighbors. Volunteer groups (i.e. churches, etc.) and the county provide transportation opportunities for seniors and other transit dependent residents. Conflicts between vehicles and the Amish have been minimized through effective signage and education programs.*

## **UTILITIES & COMMUNITY FACILITIES VISION**

*In 2020, The Town of Buffalo continues to provide all the basic Town services it has provided since 2002. The Town works with neighboring communities, to provide residents with efficient, cost-effective regional services that reduce the tax burden. All basic service needs are met by traveling to nearby communities like Montello, Pardeeville and Portage. Residents in need of specialized services travel to Portage and Madison. All residents rely on private well water and individual waste treatment systems.*

## **AGRICULTURAL, NATURAL & CULTURAL RESOURCES VISION**

*In 2020, the Town of Buffalo has successfully maintained more than 90 percent of the farmland that existed in 2002. This achievement was the result of dedicated farmers, the actions of Town government, the consolidation of several small family farms, and the use of conservation subdivisions. Farming operations in the Town consist of a balance of family farming operations and rented cropland. Contiguous areas of woodlands, wetlands and other natural areas have also been permanently protected from development. Farmland and natural areas enhance the rural character of the Town by maintaining open vistas and providing buffers between residential areas to maintain the low, rural density of development desired by residents. Recreational opportunities, including fishing, hunting, biking along Town roads, camping, cross-country skiing and snowmobiling are abundant.*

## **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT VISION**

*Economic development in the Town of Buffalo is in harmony with the Town's natural environment. Farming is the foundation of the local economy. Residents also enjoy access to a few new businesses (i.e. restaurant and gas station) that have developed along the STH 22 corridor. These businesses respect the town's "dry" alcohol policy.*

## **INTERGOVERNMENTAL COORDINATION VISION**

*The Town of Buffalo works cooperatively, through shared service agreements, with neighboring towns, the City of Montello, Marquette County and State agencies to provide Town residents with needed cost-efficient, non-duplicative services. Town leaders keep residents informed on all matters pertinent to Town operations and land development issues. The Town continues to pursue opportunities to provide coordinated, cost-effective services with neighboring communities and the county.*

## **LAND USE VISION**

*Actions taken by Town of Buffalo, through its Comprehensive Plan and supporting regulations, have ensured that the overall appearance of the landscape will not change significantly. While new residences have been built in the Town, they are well planned to protect the town's natural resources, farmland and aesthetic appeal.*

## **IMPLEMENTATION VISION**

*The Town of Buffalo continues to recognize the value and importance of comprehensive planning as a tool to guide development. Plan success relies on zoning to prevent incompatible land uses and creative design solutions (such as conservation subdivision). Development decisions and provision of public services are determined based on their impact on Town resources.*