

## 4.0 HOUSING ELEMENT

### Introduction

Traditionally, most rural towns have a high percentage of single-family homes, often with few other housing types available. As new residents move in and the population ages, other types of housing must be looked at to provide the variety needed to meet the needs of all residents. This is particularly true in towns where a large proportion of the population has been long-time residents. In such communities, there is a desire for these residents to remain in the town during their retirement years. In developing the 20-year Comprehensive Plan for the Town of Buffalo, the existing housing stock has been reviewed and recommendations made to meet the housing needs to the year 2020. This chapter includes specific goals and objectives to ensure that local housing choices exist for all stages and conditions of life, and the vision described below can be achieved.

### 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.

### Existing Housing Supply

In 1990, there were 342 housing units in the Town of Buffalo. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, there were **461 housing units in the town**. This translates to a 35% percent increase in the total housing stock in the last 10 years. Based on this information, on average, **12 new homes are built in the town each year**.

New housing in the Town of Buffalo is being developed along town and county roads throughout the town. There is no identifiable concentration of new housing development in a subdivision or otherwise in the town. Individual waste treatment systems serve all of the housing units in the Town of Buffalo. All residents depend on well water.

The housing supply in the town consists of **single-family homes**. However, single-family homes may not be suitable for everyone:

- Some people are not able to afford a single-family home.
- Others may not be able to physically handle the maintenance necessary to keep up a home and yard.
- Still others may simply prefer living in an alternative style of housing.

Unfortunately, due to limited infrastructure (i.e. no municipal water and sewer), suitable areas for condominiums, two-family attached and other higher density alternative residential developments are extremely limited. Currently, the only alternative housing option available in the town are mobile homes.

Currently, 10.2 percent of the Town of Buffalo housing supply is rental-occupied (2000 Census). This translates into **42 rental housing units**. From a planning perspective, to ensure diversity and affordability in an urban environment, it is recommended that a full third of a community's housing supply consist of rental units. Unfortunately, similar recommendations do not exist for rural areas like the Town of Buffalo. Given the limited support infrastructure available, **maintaining 10 percent of the area's housing stock as rental housing is recommended**. This recommendation assumes that the rental units are single-family detached homes and duplex units. Other alternative rental housing choices (i.e. higher density developments including condominiums and apartments) are not viable in the town. As a result, long-time residents and people with special needs may choose to move away from the Town of Buffalo to nearby communities that offer additional housing options.

#### Structural Assessment

During the planning process, the Town's consultant completed a "windshield survey" of the local housing supply to determine structural quality. The theory being that outside appearance relates directly to structural code compliance.

This survey revealed that a significant supply of the town's housing is seasonal. In some areas, the housing does not appear to be designed for year-round use (i.e. poor insulation, roofing materials, window quality, etc.). These units will require changes to support year-round use. Moreover, the age of the housing supply also indicates that structural maintenance is needed to maintain the safety and quality of the housing supply. Newer (post 1970s) development adheres to building code requirements and appears to be structural sound.



### Age and Quality of Housing Stock

A good indicator of the quality of the available housing is the relative age of the housing stock in a community. In the town, **137 housing units (28.6% of all housing) were built before 1959** (40+ years old). This does not necessarily mean that the units are in poor condition, but it does indicate that the need for repairs and maintenance is likely greater than in communities with a newer housing supply. **Table 11** lists the number of units and the corresponding percent of the county's and town's total housing stock by year built. Most homes in the town were constructed between 1970 and 1979. Most homes in the county were constructed prior to 1940.

TABLE 11 AGE OF HOUSING STOCK				
Year Structure Built	# of Units in Town of Buffalo	% of Total Town of Buffalo Housing Stock	# of Units in Marquette County	% of Total Marquette County
1990 to 2000	119	24.9%	1,725	20.0%
1980 to 1989	60	12.5%	1,248	14.4%
1970 to 1979	124	25.9%	1,839	21.2%
1960 to 1969	39	8.1%	916	10.6%
1940 to 1959	29	6.1%	1,002	11.6%
1939 or earlier	108	22.5%	1,934	22.3%
Total	479	100.0%	8,664	100.0%

Source: 2000 U.S. Census

## Occupancy

For a housing market to operate efficiently, there must be an adequate supply of available housing units for sale or rent. A housing market's supply of available housing units must be sufficient to allow for the formation of new households by the existing population, to allow for in-migration, and to provide opportunities for households to change their housing because of a change in size or status.

According to *U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)*, an overall **available vacancy rate of 6.5%** (1.5% for the owned portion of a housing stock and 5.0% for the rented portion) **is required to allow for an adequate housing choice among consumers**. The overall available vacancy rate for Wisconsin is 4.75% for rentals and 1.14% for owner occupants (WI Dept. of Commerce, 2000 Consolidated Plan). Vacancy rates vary from one community to the next. High vacancy rates offer a degree of competition in terms of price. The available vacancy rate of a housing market is a good indication of the adequacy of the housing supply, which in turn helps dictate the cost of housing.

In 2000, the **vacancy rate in the Town of Buffalo for owner-occupied housing units was 0.3%**. The **rental vacancy rate was 2.3%**. The majority of vacant units in the Town of Buffalo consist of seasonal, recreational or occasional use cottages (37 units). For comparison, Marquette County had a 2.1% homeowner vacancy rate and a 6.2% rental vacancy rate in 2000.

## Cost of Housing

The available supply, age and condition of the housing stock are the basis for determining the demand for and cost of housing. The 1990 U.S. Census indicated that the median value of an owner-occupied home in the Town of Buffalo was \$47,900. This is above the 1990 median home for Marquette County of \$45,600. Table 12 compares the **2000 median home values** for all towns in Marquette County. The housing value in the Town of Buffalo ranked 8<sup>th</sup> of the 14 towns in Marquette County.



TABLE 12 MEDIAN HOME VALUES OF TOWNS IN MARQUETTE COUNTY		
Town	2000 Median Home Value	Rank
<i>Town of Buffalo</i>	<i>\$97,300</i>	<i>8</i>
Town of Crystal Lake	\$104,200	4
Town of Douglas	\$87,700	11
Town of Harris	\$91,600	9
Town of Mecan	\$98,200	5
Town of Montello	\$105,100	3
Town of Moundville	\$97,500	6
Town of Neshkoro	\$115,500	2
Town of Newton	\$86,900	13
Town of Oxford	\$97,400	7
Town of Packwaukee	\$90,400	10
Town of Shields	\$87,300	12
Town of Springfield	\$84,400	14
Town of Westfield	\$116,500	1
<b>Overall County Average</b>	<b>\$87,000</b>	

Source: 2000 U.S. Census

**Table 13** provides a detailed breakdown of the 2000 Census information pertaining to the value of owner-occupied housing units in the Town of Buffalo. Only 140 residents of the Town of Buffalo were asked to complete the Census Long Form. As a result, the information is specific to 140 housing units. However, the percentages should be indicative of the breakdown of all housing values in the town.

TABLE 13 2000 TOWN OF BUFFALO OWNER-OCCUPIED HOUSING VALUE		
Cost Range	Number of Units	% of All Housing
Less than \$50,000	7	5.0%
\$50,000 to \$99,999	70	50.0%
\$100,000 to \$149,999	55	39.3%
\$150,000 to \$199,999	4	2.9%
\$200,000 or more	4	2.9%

Source: 2000 U.S. Census

With respect to rental housing, there were 178 renter-occupied housing units in the City of Montello and 42 units in the Town of Buffalo in 2000. The median contract rent rate in the City of Montello was \$413 and in the Town of Buffalo **the median rent rate was \$457 in 2000**. These rates do not include utilities. These rates are competitive with the 2000 median contract rent rate for Marquette County (\$456). The Town of Buffalo rate is especially competitive when you consider that the rental market consists mostly of single family style homes and mobile homes, not apartments.

## Housing Affordability Analysis

*Does the cost of housing match the ability of residents to pay for it?* This is the fundamental question to answer when determining housing affordability. There are many ways to answer this question. One common technique comes from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). This method involves comparing income to housing costs. According to HUD, **housing is considered affordable when it costs no more than 30% of total household income**. Per HUD standards, people should have the choice of having decent and safe housing for no more than 30% of their household income.

In 2000, the median annual household income in the Town of Buffalo was \$38,594. Therefore, the median monthly income was \$3,216. Thirty (30%) percent of the median monthly income yields \$965 or less to be used for housing costs (including taxes and insurance). The 2000 median monthly mortgage payment in the town was \$781 with the median rent contract at \$457. According to the 2000 Census, **24.2 percent of town homeowners paid more than 30% of their household income on housing costs** and no renters reported paying more than 30% of their household income on housing costs.



Photo Above is Example of Undesired Mobile Home Development

Based on this information, it appears that available housing in the town is quite affordable. However, a significant share of homeowners pay a disproportionate amount of money for their housing. This reflects both modest income levels of town residents and a desire of residents to have sizable homes on large parcels of land.

One strategy to promote affordable housing is to encourage quality manufactured housing in the Town of Buffalo. It is important to point out that manufactured homes are not mobile homes. Likewise, it must be clearly stated that the Town of Buffalo does not encourage mobile home park development or additional mobile homes on individual lots.

Manufactured housing is considered a viable affordable housing choice only if units are compatible in size, appearance and quality of area stick-built housing. Any manufactured housing unit must be constructed in accordance with local building and zoning restrictions. The manufactured home, once located on a property, should be virtually indistinguishable from 70 percent of site built housing located within a half mile of the home. Therefore, manufactured housing should have a similar roof pitch, garage facilities, and be located on a foundation, basement, or crawl space as a site built home would be required. Manufactured homes may even be two stories.

Manufactured housing is far more affordable than stick built housing because homes are built in a factory, which eliminates delays and costs associated with weather and the factory approach improves efficiencies. These conditions result in significant cost savings. Manufactured housing costs are typically around \$40 a square foot, compared to \$90 or \$100 per square foot for site built housing.

## **Opportunities for Housing Choice - Barriers to Affordable Housing**

Opportunities for elderly, disabled, and low-income housing are limited in the Town of Buffalo. The existing housing supply consists primarily of single-family dwellings. There are no assisted living or group facilities located in the town. Therefore, seniors and disabled persons who reside



Two Photos Above are Examples of Desirable and Affordable Manufactured Housing with attached garages, appropriate roof pitch, front porches, and located on a foundation, crawl space or basement.

in the Town of Buffalo must be able to live independently, have assistance available to them, or seek residency in nearby communities that can provide needed services. As a result, assistance from friends, family members and neighbors is very important to senior and disabled persons living in the Town of Buffalo.

The fundamental reason for limited housing choices in the Town of Buffalo is the fact that the community is still rural in nature. The town's residential development is extremely low density. The overall density is approximately 1 units per 70 acres. This density is not anticipated to change significantly during the life of this plan given historic building permit trends. Consequently, the supply of jobs, public transportation and other services and opportunities that are necessary to accommodate low-income, elderly, and disabled populations are either unavailable or extremely limited in supply.

There are many possible ways to incorporate alternative housing styles (i.e. apartments, senior housing, duplexes, condominiums, etc.) in the Town of Buffalo. The first priority when considering alternative housing should be to ensure that units are adequately served with water, sewer, and other basic infrastructure needs. Therefore, it will be necessary to locate alternative housing in areas that can accommodate alternative treatment systems permissible through COMM 83. COMM 83 is a portion of Wisconsin's Administrative Code that permits the use of proven alternative, on-site wastewater treatment technologies in areas that cannot accommodate traditional treatment methods (i.e., septic tanks). The specific needs presented by multi-family residences may be able to be addressed by these technologies. Of course, any new alternative development should be compatible with surrounding housing. Therefore, special consideration should be given to parking, signage, landscaping and facade requirements. It should be understood that given past market trends, it is not expected that alternative housing will be developed in the Town of Buffalo. However, if a development were proposed, these considerations should be addressed.

## Future Housing Need

According to the Marquette County Community Planning Survey, conducted in June 2002, residents of the Town of Buffalo were asked whether there was a need for various types of housing in the Town of Buffalo. What follows is a summary of the results. The percentages indicate residents who agree or strongly agree that this type of housing is needed:

- Assisted Living-Elderly (41.0%)
- Single Family Housing (29.2%)
- Low to Moderate Income Housing (26.3%)
- Duplexes (7.2%)
- Multi-Unit Apartments (6.5%)
- High Income Housing (6.4%)
- Mobile Home Parks (6.2%)

Based on population projections and the fact that household size is steadily decreasing, 135 new homes will be needed through 2025. Based on historic building permit trends, town estimates approximately 264 new homes will be built in the town by 2025.

## Housing Programs

A number of federal and state housing programs are available to help the Town of Buffalo promote the development of housing for individuals with lower incomes, senior housing, housing for people with special and/or housing maintenance needs.

### FEDERAL PROGRAMS AND REVENUE SOURCES

**HUD** is the federal agency primarily responsible for housing programs and community development. Though many of its programs are directed to larger cities and urban areas, the Town of Buffalo does qualify for some available funds. Specifically, HUD provides money to non-entitlement (i.e. communities with populations less than 50,000) communities through grants. In the State of Wisconsin, the **Division of Housing and Intergovernmental Relations (DHIR)** within the Department of Administration is responsible for the distribution of these federal funds. It awards these funds through a competitive proposal process.

The **United States Department of Agriculture-Rural Development (USDA-RD)** provides a variety of housing and community development programs for rural areas. Its programs are generally available to communities with populations of 10,000 or less. It provides support for rental housing development, direct and guaranteed mortgage loans for homebuyers, and support for self-help and cooperative housing development.

### STATE PROGRAMS AND REVENUE SOURCES

Beyond the funds distributed through HUD, the DHIR administers several state funded programs that can potentially be used to finance housing improvements. Money available through the DHIR, because it is funded by general-purpose revenue, cannot be used to invest directly in housing development. However, funds can achieve the desired result by helping organizations develop the capacity to develop houses or by providing various types of financial assistance to homebuyers or renters through grants to local governments or non-profit agencies.

The **Wisconsin Housing and Economic Development Authority (WHEDA)** is a quasi-governmental agency that finances housing development through the sale of bonds. Unlike the DHIR, it receives no direct state-tax support. Therefore, WHEDA can provide mortgage financing for first-time homebuyers and financing for multifamily housing as well. Specific programs evolve and change with the needs of the housing market.

### LOCAL PROGRAMS AND REVENUE SOURCES

The Town of Buffalo has the ability to affect the type and cost of housing available in the area through local regulations and policies. While most government regulations are implemented in order to protect public health, safety and welfare needs, they may also have unintended adverse impacts on affordability.

One technique for ensuring a range of housing choice is to provide a variety of densities and lot sizes. This can be regulated through recommended improvements in the **comprehensive plan**,

**subdivision control ordinances** (including conservation subdivisions – See the Agricultural, Natural & Cultural Resources Chapter for additional information), and local zoning controls.

At this time, Marquette County enforces the only **zoning** (shorelands only) and subdivision controls in the Town of Buffalo. There are no additional zoning controls in effect in the Town of Buffalo. The town may adopt its own local zoning ordinance. However, since Marquette County already has a county zoning ordinance available (but not approved in the Town of Buffalo), the Town of Buffalo must first obtain permission from Marquette County to develop its own town zoning ordinance. If Marquette County denies this request, the Town of Buffalo may either adopt the County Zoning Ordinance or may continue to have no zoning ordinance in effect.

As growth continues in the Town of Buffalo, additional regulatory tools may need to be adopted to preserve the rural character of the area. Specifically, the Town of Buffalo may want to consider developing its own subdivision and zoning ordinances to gain better control over local land development. These ordinances must be at least as stringent as similar ordinances currently being enforced by Marquette County.

## **Coordination with Other Comprehensive Plan Elements**

Housing is a secondary land use in the Town of Buffalo, with farmland and undeveloped natural areas as the primary land uses. Given its importance, housing can directly affect most other elements of this comprehensive plan. Land Use, Utilities and Community Facilities, Transportation, Economic Development and Agricultural, Natural, and Cultural Resources are all elements directly affected by housing. Therefore, it is important that the elements are consistent and support one another.

### **LAND USE ELEMENT**

Land use dictates the amount of land available for housing, as well as its location, type and density. The *Future Land Use Maps* devote 1,311 acres to residential use by. Furthermore, the goals and objectives of the Land Use Element recommend reviewing building permit and residential platting activity to gauge development trends.

### **UTILITIES AND COMMUNITY FACILITIES**

Improvements such as roads, sewer, water, parks, recreational facilities and schools all need to be coordinated with the housing decisions and vice versa. The best method to coordinate improvements is to follow the land use pattern, presented on the Future Land Use Maps. This approach will greatly enhance the efficiency of capital improvements and services.

### **TRANSPORTATION**

The location of housing affects commuting patterns and transportation costs. The inverse is also true. The location and density of housing affects transportation needs. The location of housing

influences on which roads people drive or whether they need to drive at all. These factors were carefully considered in the Transportation Element to ensure compatibility with projected residential development.

## **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

Housing needs must be linked to a community's economic development plans. It is important to ensure that the housing supply is affordable to local workers. For this reason, an affordability analysis is presented in this chapter. Moreover, given that housing is and important land use in the Town of Buffalo, quality housing directly impacts the town's ability to finance needed improvements to support the economy through receipt of property taxes.

## **AGRICULTURAL, NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES**

The desire to preserve agricultural and natural areas competes with the desire of others to build additional housing in the Town of Buffalo. These competing interests are balanced through the land suitability analysis information presented in the Agricultural, Natural and Cultural Resources Element. This information helps to ensure that housing is located in areas that will have the least impact possible on existing farming areas and important natural resources, while still supporting additional residential development needs.

## **Goals and Objectives**

Based on population projections through 2025 and the predicted reduction in household size over that same period, it is estimated that there will be at least 135 additional housing units needed in the Town of Buffalo. To ensure that these units are of a high quality, goals and objectives are included here based on the information gained during the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) Analysis and input from town residents and the Planning Advisory Committee members.

These goals and objectives were developed to ensure that the Town of Buffalo remains a good place to raise a family for the next 20 years. The community acknowledges the opportunity for all property owners to receive fair value for their lands with defined standards for managing growth and maintaining sound land use.

## **OVERALL GOALS**

1. Maintain the environmental assets and rural character of the community so that it continues to be an attractive place to live.
2. Conserve or improve the quality of existing single-family housing and maintain housing values.
3. Increase the supply of housing opportunities to serve residents of all ages.

## **OBJECTIVES**

1. Encourage future single-family residential developments where services are readily available, conflicts with agricultural uses are minimized, and efficient, cost effective development is most likely.
2. Using the information provided in the Agricultural, Natural and Cultural Resources Element, identify and map areas for primary and secondary conservation in the Town of Buffalo.
3. Develop a conservation subdivision ordinance to encourage the preservation of natural areas, buffers, and protect farmland in the town.
4. Encourage “low impact” development within the town that can help reduce stormwater runoff and flooding.
5. Support existing efforts and consider new programs that provide needed assistance for elderly and disabled residents, who wish to stay in their own homes. This effort may include coordination with the City of Montello and Marquette County to direct alternative and multiple family developments to the City where appropriate services are available.
  - a. Develop articles for the town newsletter that describe available services and contact persons.
  - b. Develop a brochure for interested residents in need of assistance programs available through the county and private organizations (i.e. home maintenance programs, transportation services, visiting nurses, meals on wheels, etc.)
  - c. Coordinate with the local school districts to provide opportunities for students to volunteer time assisting seniors with special projects on occasions like “Make a Difference Day” or through other groups coordinated by the school district like the National Honor Society, Student Council, etc.
6. Educate town residents about the importance of property maintenance.
  - a. Hold a special town meeting to discuss the issue with residents.
  - b. Develop articles for the town newsletter that highlight property maintenance techniques and benefits.