Land Use Element
(Multi-Jurisdictional Comprehensive Plan Preliminary Draft Chapter IX)

Together with the agricultural, natural and cultural resources element, the land use element seeks to balance long term growth in Racine County with the environmental well-being, agricultural activities, and cultural history of the County. One of the nine State-required plan elements, the land use element must identify goals, objectives, policies and programs to guide future development and redevelopment of public and private property. Arguably the most important chapter of the plan, the land use element provides a means of relating day-to-day development decisions to long-range development goals.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

A detailed description of existing land uses in Racine County as of 2000 is compiled and mapped in Multi-Jurisdictional Comprehensive Plan Chapter IV, “Inventory of Existing Land Use and Transportation Services and Facilities,” available on the Racine County Smart Growth website. Some of the key inventory findings include:

- According to the Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (SEWRPC)’s land use inventory, in 2000, urban land uses encompassed about 79 square miles, of 23% of Racine County’s total planning area. The largest urban land use was residential, which encompassed about 37 square miles, or approximately 46% of all urban land (11% of the total planning area).

- In 2000, nonurban land uses encompassed about 262 square miles of Racine County, or about 76%. Agricultural land was the largest nonurban land use, covering about 196 square miles, 75% of all nonurban land (58% of the total planning area).

- Between 1963 and 2000, urban land uses increased about 70%. Between 2000 and 2007, about 4,240 residential lots were created by subdivision in Racine County.

- Between 1963 and 2000, nonurban land uses decreased by about 11% (32.4 square miles), much of which can be attributed to the conversion of farmland to urban uses. This trend is expected to continue, and poses several challenges to the County’s goals of preserving and enhancing rural character and the agriculture sector.

For a copy of the Multi-Jurisdictional Comprehensive Plan Draft Chapter IX, please visit the Racine County Smart Growth website:
http://racine.uwex.edu/cnred/SmartGrowth.html
Based on the countywide public opinion survey, and the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) analyses conducted in 2007, some of the land use issues identified by the community included:

- The plan should strive to preserve rural and small town character.
- The plan should recognize the importance of balancing urban and rural land uses.
- The plan should consider the impacts of growth on public infrastructure and environmental and economic sustainability.
- The plan should strive to accommodate mixed use developments that could include housing, jobs, shopping, and schools.
- The plan should identify sufficient lands to accommodate job growth and economic development in the County.
- The plan should seek to balance the preservation of open space lands with private property rights.
- The plan should recognize and take into consideration the impacts of new developments on agricultural and open space lands and uses.

**LAND USE PLAN: 2035**

The land use plan for Racine County is intended to guide the physical development of the planning area so that the County grows in a more efficient and attractive pattern, as well as to promote public health and safety and the general welfare of all residents. The recommended land use plan map for Racine County is a composite of the maps prepared by every city, village and town, and indicates where certain types of urban development should occur and areas that should be preserved for farmland and natural resources. Land use conflicts between adjacent communities, most commonly found between towns and neighboring cities or villages, are mapped and addressed in Chapter XVI, "Intergovernmental Cooperation Element."

It should be noted that the timing and location of future development is dependent on a number of factors, including political and economic climate and the availability of essential services (for example, sewer/water), and it is possible that not all lands identified for urban development will be fully developed by the year 2035.

**Urban Uses**

*Residential Development*

The plan envisions that additional urban residential development would be accommodated though the infilling of existing vacant lots in areas already committed to such use, on vacant developable land in designated urban residential areas, and on lands designated for redevelopment to urban residential or mixed-use residential uses. Between 2000 and 2035, urban residential lands are anticipated to increase by about 12,400 acres, or about 70%, while suburban residential lands are expected to increase by about 1,260 acres, or 115%.

*Commercial and Industrial Development*

Additional commercial and industrial land uses are expected to be created through the development of vacant land in the respective designated areas and on lands designated for redevelopment. Between 2000 and 2035, commercial land uses are anticipated to increase by about 2,700 acres, or 140%, while industrial land uses are anticipated to increase by about 5,000 acres, or 205%.

*Transportation, Communication, and Utility Development*

Additional transportation, communication and utility land uses would be created through the development of needed streets and highways in developing urban areas, airport expansions, and the expansion of utility facilities, such as sewage treatment plants. Between 2000 and 2035, these uses are anticipated to increase by about 5,200 acres, or 39%.

*Recreational Development*

Recreational land will increase through the expansion of existing park sites and the development of new park sites in developing urban areas in association with new residential neighborhoods. Between 2000 and 2035, recreational land uses are expected to increase by about 1,400 acres, or about 47%.
Nonurban Uses

Agricultural Lands

Of Racine County’s 17 local units of government, only the Village of Mt. Pleasant and the Towns of Burlington and Waterford have identified lands as prime agricultural land. These lands will be preserved in agricultural use, and may constitute about 19% of all the County’s farmland in the year 2035.

Between 2000 and 2035, agricultural and open lands are anticipated to decrease by about 32,000 acres, or about 23%. About 77% of this converted land would be farmland; the remainder would be open space lands. About 1,800 acres of this decrease can be attributed to the planned restoration of farmland to more natural uses as environmental corridors and isolated natural resource areas.

Environmental Corridors and Isolated Natural Resource Areas

Primary environmental corridors—defined as areas rich in natural resources that are at least 2 miles long, 200 acres wide, and 400 acres in area—will be preserved in natural open uses, and are expected to increase by about 1,050 acres between 2000 and 2035. Secondary environmental corridors and isolated natural resource areas should be considered for preservation as urban and rural development occurs; these are anticipated to increase by about 720 acres. As mentioned above, these increases are likely to come from the reversion of currently farmed floodplains that are adjacent to existing environmental corridors or natural resource areas to more natural conditions.

Other land uses addressed in this element include: governmental and institutional development, urban reserve, other open lands to be preserved, and extractive and landfill uses.
OVERALL ELEMENT GOALS

Goal X-1: Maintain the agricultural base, preserving productive farmland and environmentally sensitive areas.

Goal X-2: Maintain the environmental assets of the community and develop methods to protect and preserve valuable natural features, including wetlands, wildlife habitats, lakes, woodlands, open spaces, groundwater resources, and floodplains.

Goal X-3: Preserve open space to enhance the total quality of the environment, maximize essential natural resource availability, give form and structure to urban development, and provide opportunities for a full range of outdoor recreation activities.

Goal X-4: Protect and enhance cultural structures, historic sites and districts, and archaeological sites.

Goal X-5: Encourage a public participation process that provides equity and fairness to landowners and other stakeholders, balanced with responsible land use.

Goal X-6: Guide future growth in a manner that preserves and enhances the quality of life and character of urban and rural communities.

For more information, please visit http://racine.uwex.edu/cnred/SmartGrowth.html