



# WISCONSIN'S COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING LEGISLATION

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## Comprehensive Planning Legislation

Wisconsin's Comprehensive Planning Law (s. 66.1001, Wis. Stats.) was signed into law on October 27, 1999. This legislation defines a comprehensive plan, details land use regulations that must be consistent with a comprehensive plan in 2010, and lists mandatory procedures for adopting a comprehensive plan. Sometimes referred to as the "smart growth law," the Comprehensive Planning Law does not mandate how a community should grow, rather it requires public participation at the local level in deciding how a community wants to look and be in the future.

Since its adoption in 1999, the Comprehensive Planning Law has been amended several times. In particular, the consistency requirement was amended to reduce the number of land use regulations that must be consistent with a comprehensive plan in 2010 to a certain group: zoning, subdivision regulations, and official mapping.

With the adoption of the Comprehensive Planning Law, the Comprehensive Planning Grant Program was created to aid communities in the development and adoption of their comprehensive plans. About \$2 million is awarded annually through a competitive application process. This program is enabled by s. 16.965, Wis. Stats. In addition, Grant Program policy is further articulated in [Administrative Rule 48](#) (Please note that the Wisconsin Land Council referenced in the Administrative Rule 48 was sunset by state statute in 2005.) and the [Comprehensive Planning Grant Manual](#).

For more information about the law, grant program, or other questions please visit the [Comprehensive Planning Grant Program webpages](#), email [comp.planning@wisconsin.gov](mailto:comp.planning@wisconsin.gov), or call staff at (608) 267-3369. Statutes can be accessed online at the Wisconsin State Legislature Legislative Reference Bureau website at the following address: <http://www.legis.state.wi.us/rsb/stats.html>.

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# Comprehensive Plans: Definitions, Plan Elements, Consistency Requirements and Procedures for Adoption

## WISCONSIN STATE STATUTES CHAPTER 66: GENERAL MUNICIPALITY LAW -- SUBCHAPTER X: PLANNING, HOUSING AND TRANSPORTATION

### **66.1001 Comprehensive planning**

#### **(1) DEFINITIONS.**

In this section:

(a) "Comprehensive plan" means:

1. For a county, a development plan that is prepared or amended under s. 59.69 (2) or (3).
2. For a city or a village, or for a town that exercises village powers under s. 60.22 (3), a master plan that is adopted or amended under s. 62.23 (2) or (3).
3. For a regional planning commission, a master plan that is adopted or amended under s. 66.0309 (8), (9) or (10). (*note: previously, s. 66.945(8), (9) or (10)*)

(b) "Local governmental unit" means a city, village, town, county or regional planning commission that may adopt, prepare or amend a comprehensive plan.

(c) "Political subdivision" means a city, village, town, or county that may adopt, prepare, or amend a comprehensive plan.

#### **(2) CONTENTS OF A COMPREHENSIVE PLAN.**

A comprehensive plan shall contain all of the following elements:

(a) *Issues and opportunities element.* Background information on the local governmental unit and a statement of overall objectives, policies, goals and programs of the local governmental unit to guide the future development and redevelopment of the local governmental unit over a 20-year planning period. Background information shall include population, household and employment forecasts that the local governmental unit uses in developing its comprehensive plan, and demographic trends, age distribution, educational levels, income levels and employment characteristics that exist within the local governmental unit.

(b) *Housing element.* A compilation of objectives, policies, goals, maps and programs of the local governmental unit to provide an adequate housing supply that meets existing and forecasted housing demand in the local governmental unit. The element shall assess the age, structural, value and occupancy characteristics of the local governmental unit's housing stock. The element shall also identify specific policies and programs that promote the development of housing for residents of the local governmental unit and provide a range of housing choices that meet the needs of persons of all income levels and of all age groups and persons with special needs, policies and programs that promote the availability of land for the development or redevelopment of low-income and moderate-income housing, and policies and programs to maintain or rehabilitate the local governmental unit's existing housing stock.

(c) *Transportation element.* A compilation of objectives, policies, goals, maps and programs to guide the future development of the various modes of transportation, including highways, transit,

transportation systems for persons with disabilities, bicycles, electric personal assistive mobility devices, walking, railroads, air transportation, trucking and water transportation. The element shall compare the local governmental unit's objectives, policies, goals and programs to state and regional transportation plans. The element shall also identify highways within the local governmental unit by function and incorporate state, regional and other applicable transportation plans, including transportation corridor plans, county highway functional and jurisdictional studies, urban area and rural area transportation plans, airport master plans and rail plans that apply in the local governmental unit.

(d) *Utilities and community facilities element.* A compilation of objectives, policies, goals, maps and programs to guide the future development of utilities and community facilities in the local governmental unit such as sanitary sewer service, storm water management, water supply, solid waste disposal, on-site wastewater treatment technologies, recycling facilities, parks, telecommunications facilities, power-generating plants and transmission lines, cemeteries, health care facilities, child care facilities and other public facilities, such as police, fire and rescue facilities, libraries, schools and other governmental facilities. The element shall describe the location, use and capacity of existing public utilities and community facilities that serve the local governmental unit, shall include an approximate timetable that forecasts the need in the local governmental unit to expand or rehabilitate existing utilities and facilities or to create new utilities and facilities and shall assess future needs for government services in the local governmental unit that are related to such utilities and facilities.

(e) *Agricultural, natural and cultural resources element.* A compilation of objectives, policies, goals, maps and programs for the conservation, and promotion of the effective management, of natural resources such as groundwater, forests, productive agricultural areas, environmentally sensitive areas, threatened and endangered species, stream corridors, surface water, floodplains, wetlands, wildlife habitat, metallic and nonmetallic mineral resources consistent with zoning limitations under s. 295.20 (2), parks, open spaces, historical and cultural resources, community design, recreational resources and other natural resources.

(f) *Economic development element.* A compilation of objectives, policies, goals, maps and programs to promote the stabilization, retention or expansion, of the economic base and quality employment opportunities in the local governmental unit, including an analysis of the labor force and economic base of the local governmental unit. The element shall assess categories or particular types of new businesses and industries that are desired by the local governmental unit. The element shall assess the local governmental unit's strengths and weaknesses with respect to attracting and retaining businesses and industries, and shall designate an adequate number of sites for such businesses and industries. The element shall also evaluate and promote the use of environmentally contaminated sites for commercial or industrial uses. The element shall also identify county, regional and state economic development programs that apply to the local governmental unit.

(g) *Intergovernmental cooperation element.* A compilation of objectives, policies, goals, maps and programs for joint planning and decision making with other jurisdictions, including school districts and adjacent local governmental units, for siting and building public facilities and sharing public services. The element shall analyze the relationship of the local governmental unit to school districts and adjacent local governmental units, and to the region, the state and other governmental units. The element shall consider, to the greatest extent possible, the maps and plans of any

military base or installation, with at 200 assigned military personnel or that contains at least 2,000 acres, with which the local governmental unit shares common territory. The element shall incorporate any plans or agreements to which the local governmental unit is a party under s. 66.0301, 66.0307 or 66.0309. The element shall identify existing or potential conflicts between the local governmental unit and other governmental units that are specified in this paragraph and describe processes to resolve such conflicts.

(h) *Land-use element.* A compilation of objectives, policies, goals, maps and programs to guide the future development and redevelopment of public and private property. The element shall contain a listing of the amount, type, intensity and net density of existing uses of land in the local governmental unit, such as agricultural, residential, commercial, industrial and other public and private uses. The element shall analyze trends in the supply, demand and price of land, opportunities for redevelopment and existing and potential land-use conflicts. The element shall contain projections, based on the background information specified in par. (a), for 20 years, in 5-year increments, of future residential, agricultural, commercial and industrial land uses including the assumptions of net densities or other spatial assumptions upon which the projections are based. The element shall also include a series of maps that shows current land uses and future land uses that indicate productive agricultural soils, natural limitations for building site development, floodplains, wetlands and other environmentally sensitive lands, the boundaries of areas to which services of public utilities and community facilities, as those terms are used in par. (d), will be provided in the future, consistent with the timetable described in par. (d), and the general location of future land uses by net density or other classifications.

(i) *Implementation element.* A compilation of programs and specific actions to be completed in a stated sequence, including proposed changes to any applicable zoning ordinances, official maps, or subdivision ordinances, to implement the objectives, policies, plans and programs contained in pars. (a) to (h). The element shall describe how each of the elements of the comprehensive plan will be integrated and made consistent with the other elements of the comprehensive plan, and shall include a mechanism to measure the local governmental unit's progress toward achieving all aspects of the comprehensive plan. The element shall include a process for updating the comprehensive plan. A comprehensive plan under this subsection shall be updated no less than once every 10 years.

### **(3) ACTIONS, PROCEDURES THAT MUST BE CONSISTENT WITH COMPREHENSIVE PLANS.**

Beginning on January 1, 2010, if a local governmental unit engages in any of the following actions, those actions shall be consistent with that local governmental unit's comprehensive plan:

- (g) Official mapping established or amended under s. 62.23 (6).
- (h) Local subdivision regulation under s. 236.45 or 236.46.
- (j) County zoning ordinances enacted or amended under s. 59.69.
- (k) City or village zoning ordinances enacted or amended under s. 62.23 (7).
- (l) Town zoning ordinances enacted or amended under s. 60.61 or 60.62.
- (q) Zoning of shorelands or wetlands in shorelands under s. 59.692, 61.351 or 62.231.

### **(4) PROCEDURES FOR ADOPTING COMPREHENSIVE PLANS.**

A local governmental unit shall comply with all of the following before its comprehensive plan may take effect:

(a) The governing body of a local governmental unit shall adopt written procedures that are designed to foster public participation, including open discussion, communication programs, information services, and public meetings for which advance notice has been provided, in every stage of the preparation of a comprehensive plan. The written procedures shall provide for wide distribution of proposed, alternative or amended elements of a comprehensive plan and shall provide an opportunity for written comments on the plan to be submitted by members of the public to the governing body and for the governing body to respond to such written comments. The written procedures shall describe the methods the governing body of a local governmental unit will use to distribute proposed, alternative, or amended elements of a comprehensive plan to owners of property, or to persons who have a leasehold interest in property pursuant to which the persons may extract nonmetallic mineral resources in or on property, in which the allowable use or intensity of use of the property is changed by the comprehensive plan.

(b) The plan commission or other body of a local governmental unit that is authorized to prepare or amend a comprehensive plan may recommend the adoption or amendment of a comprehensive plan only by adopting a resolution by a majority vote of the entire commission. The vote shall be recorded in the official minutes of the plan commission or other body. The resolution shall refer to maps and other descriptive materials that relate to one or more elements of a comprehensive plan. One copy of an adopted comprehensive plan, or of an amendment to such a plan, shall be sent to all of the following:

1. Every governmental body that is located in whole or in part within the boundaries of the local governmental unit.
2. The clerk of every local governmental unit that is adjacent to the local governmental unit that is the subject of the plan that is adopted or amended as described in par. (b) (intro.).
3. The department of administration.
4. The regional planning commission in which the local governmental unit is located.
5. The public library that serves the area in which the local governmental unit is located.

(c) No comprehensive plan that is recommended for adoption or amendment under par. (b) may take effect until the political subdivision enacts an ordinance or the regional planning commission adopts a resolution that adopts the plan or amendment. The political subdivision may not enact an ordinance or the regional planning commission may not adopt a resolution under this paragraph unless the comprehensive plan contains all of the elements specified in sub. (2). An ordinance may be enacted or a resolution may be adopted under this paragraph only by a majority vote of the members-elect, as defined in s. 59.001 (2m), of the governing body. An ordinance that is enacted or a resolution that is adopted under this paragraph, and the plan to which it relates, shall be filed with at least all of the entities specified under par. (b).

(d) No political subdivision may enact an ordinance or no regional planning commission may adopt a resolution under par. (c) unless the political subdivision or regional planning commission holds at least one public hearing at which the proposed ordinance or resolution is discussed. That hearing must be preceded by a class 1 notice under ch. 985 that is published at least 30 days before the hearing is held. The political subdivision or regional planning commission may also provide notice of the hearing by any other means it considers appropriate. The class 1 notice shall contain at least the following information:

1. The date, time and place of the hearing.
2. A summary, which may include a map, of the proposed comprehensive plan or amendment to such a plan.
3. The name of an individual employed by the local governmental unit who may provide additional information regarding the proposed ordinance.
4. Information relating to where and when the proposed comprehensive plan or amendment to such a plan may be inspected before the hearing, and how a copy of the plan or amendment may be obtained.

(e) At least 30 days before the hearing described in par. (d) is held, a local governmental unit shall provide written notice to all of the following:

1. An operator who has obtained, or made application for, a permit that is described under s. 295.12 (3) (d).
2. A person who has registered a marketable nonmetallic mineral deposit under s. 295.20.
3. Any other property owner or leaseholder who has an interest in property pursuant to which the person may extract nonmetallic mineral resources, if the property owner or leaseholder requests in writing that the local governmental unit provide the property owner or leaseholder notice of the hearing described in par. (d).

(f) A political subdivision shall maintain a list of persons who submit a written request to receive notice of any proposed ordinance, described under par. (c), that affects the allowable use of the property owned by the person. At least 30 days before the hearing described in par. (d) is held a political subdivision shall provide written notice, including a copy of the proposed ordinance, to all such persons. The notice shall be by mail or in any reasonable form that is agreed to by the person and the political subdivision. The political subdivision may charge each person on the list who receives a notice a fee that does not exceed the approximate cost of providing the notice to the person.

**(5) APPLICABILITY OF A REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION'S PLAN**

A regional planning commission's comprehensive plan is only advisory in its applicability to a political subdivision and a political subdivision's comprehensive plan.

**(6) COMPREHENSIVE PLAN MAY TAKE EFFECT.**

Notwithstanding sub. (4), a comprehensive plan, or an amendment of a comprehensive plan, may take effect even if a local governmental unit fails to provide the notice that is required under sub. (4) (e) or (f), unless the local governmental unit intentionally fails to provide the notice.

## Comprehensive Planning Grants

### WISCONSIN STATE STATUTES CHAPTER 16: DEPARTMENT OF ADMINISTRATION-- SUBCHAPTER VI: STATE PLANNING AND ENERGY

#### 16.965 Planning grants to local governmental units.

1) In this section:

(a) "Local governmental unit" means a county, city, village, town or regional planning commission.

(b) "Smart growth area" means an area that will enable the development and redevelopment of lands with existing infrastructure and municipal, state and utility services, where practicable, or that will encourage efficient development patterns that are both contiguous to existing development and at densities which have relatively low municipal, state governmental and utility costs.

(2) From the appropriation under s. 20.505 (1) (cm) and (if), the department may provide grants to local governmental units to be used to finance the cost of planning activities, including contracting for planning consultant services, public planning sessions and other planning outreach and educational activities, or for the purchase of computerized planning data, planning software or the hardware required to utilize that data or software. The department shall require any local governmental unit that receives a grant under this section to finance a percentage of the cost of the product or service to be funded by the grant from the resources of the local governmental unit. The department shall determine the percentage of the cost to be funded by a local governmental unit based on the number of applications for grants and the availability of funding to finance grants for the fiscal year in which grants are to be provided. A local governmental unit that desires to receive a grant under this subsection shall file an application with the department. The application shall contain a complete statement of the expenditures proposed to be made for the purposes of the grant. No local governmental unit is eligible to receive a grant under this subsection unless the local governmental unit agrees to utilize the grant to finance planning for all of the purposes specified in s. 66.1001(2).

(4) In determining whether to approve a proposed grant, preference shall be accorded to applications of local governmental units that contain all of the following elements:

(a) Planning efforts that address the interests of overlapping or neighboring jurisdictions.

(b) Planning efforts that contain a specific description of the means by which all of the following local, comprehensive planning goals will be achieved:

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 archaeological 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 and that meets the needs of all citizens, including transit-dependent and disabled citizens.

(c) Planning efforts that identify smart growth areas.

(d) Planning efforts, including subsequent updates and amendments, that include development of implementing ordinances, including ordinances pertaining to zoning, subdivisions and land division.

(e) Planning efforts for which completion is contemplated within 30 months of the date on which a grant would be awarded.

(f) Planning efforts that provide opportunities for public participation throughout the planning process.

## Traditional Neighborhood Development and Conservation Subdivision Ordinances

### WISCONSIN STATE STATUTES CHAPTER 66: GENERAL MUNICIPALITY LAW

#### 66.1027 Traditional neighborhood developments and conservation subdivisions.

**(1) DEFINITIONS.** In this section:

(a) "Conservation subdivision" means a housing development in a rural setting that is characterized by compact lots and common open space, and where the natural features of land are maintained to the greatest extent possible.

(b) "Extension" has the meaning given in s. 36.05 (7).

(c) "Traditional neighborhood development" means a compact, mixed-use neighborhood where residential, commercial and civic buildings are within close proximity to each other.

**(2) MODEL ORDINANCES.** (a) Not later than January 1, 2001, the extension, in consultation with any other University of Wisconsin System institution or with a landscape architect, as that term is used in s. 443.02 (5), or with independent planners or any other consultant with expertise in traditional neighborhood planning and development, shall develop a model ordinance for a traditional neighborhood development and an ordinance for a conservation subdivision.

(b) The model ordinances developed under par. (a) shall be presented to the chief clerk of each house of the legislature, and shall be referred immediately by the speaker of the assembly and the presiding officer of the senate to the appropriate standing committee in each house. The model ordinances shall be considered to have been approved by a standing committee if within 14 working days of the referral, the committee does not schedule a meeting for the purpose of reviewing the model ordinance. If the committee schedules a meeting for the purpose of reviewing the model ordinance, the ordinance may not be considered to have been approved unless the committee approves the model ordinance.

**(3) CITY AND VILLAGE REQUIREMENTS.** (a) Not later than January 1, 2002, every city and village, with a population of at least 12,500 shall enact an ordinance that is similar to the model traditional neighborhood development ordinance that is developed under sub. (2) (a) if the ordinance is approved under sub. (2) (b), although the ordinance is not required to be mapped.

(b) A city or village whose population reaches at least 12,500, after January 1, 2002, shall enact an ordinance that is similar to the model traditional neighborhood development ordinance that is developed under sub. (2) (a) if the ordinance is approved under sub. (2) (b) not later than the first day of the 12<sup>th</sup> month beginning after the city's or village's population reaches at least 12,500, although the ordinance is not required to be mapped.