

8. LAND USE

Introduction

This chapter contains a compilation of background information, goals, objectives, policies and recommended programs to guide the future development and preservation of public and private lands in the Town of Willard over the 20-year planning period. The chapter includes two maps that show existing land uses and recommended future land uses, and provides other related land use data and analysis as required under §66.1001, Wisconsin Statutes.

Existing Land Use

The Town of Willard covers a 36.15 square mile area or about 23,136 acres in southern Rusk County. An accurate depiction of the Town’s existing land use pattern is the first step in planning for a desired future land use pattern. The original Existing Land Use Map was developed using aerial photography from a countywide flight in 2007 with consultations and updates by town residents. Town representatives had an opportunity to review and suggest corrections to the existing land use map before it was finalized. Using data from Rusk County land classification in the tax list, the Existing Land Use Map ([Map 7, Appendix D](#)) has been updated to display 2022 land use.

Forest lands (including lands in managed forest programs) dominate the landscape in Willard covering nearly 55% of the land area. This is followed by undeveloped lands at 22%. Agriculture is nearly 17%.

High density Residential areas are along the waterfront, while the remaining residential development is distributed fairly evenly along the road network.

In general, lands used for agriculture in Willard are located in the eastern half of the Town, with forested lands existing throughout the rest of the Town.

Table 32 Town of Willard Existing Land Use		
Land Use	Acres	Percent
Agriculture (G4)	3,826.30	16.67%
Commercial (C1)	87.56	0.38%
Residential (G1)	754.72	3.29%
Undeveloped (G5)	5,005.92	21.81%
Forest (G5M, G6)	7,666.74	33.41%
MFL/FCL	4,815.91	20.99%
Government/Institutional	138.34	0.60%
Extraction	39.98	0.17%
Other	58.01	0.25%
Water	554.3	2.42%
	22,393.48	100.00%

Source: Rusk County and NWRPC

A general description of each existing land use classification follows:

Residential - Identifies areas of existing residential development typically consisting of smaller lot sizes.

Commercial - Identifies areas used for existing commercial establishments located throughout the Town.

Government/Institutional - Identifies existing governmental/institutional facilities within the Town.

Agriculture - Identifies areas of general crop farming or the raising of livestock.

Forestry - Identifies areas of private forestlands and woodlands.

Transitional Lands - Areas include harvested forestlands, open space or fallow fields.

Extraction - Areas include all non-metallic mineral excavation lands.

Land Cover

Land cover information for the Town of Willard was obtained from the Wisconsin Initiative for Statewide Cooperation on Land Cover Analysis and Data (WISCLAND) set and is shown in Table 33 and on [Map 8 \(Appendix D\)](#). This data represents satellite imagery of surface vegetation, open water and urban area delineations and is to be used for very general planning purposes. The Existing Land Use Map ([Map 9, Appendix D](#)) is a much better representation of current land use in the Town.

Land Use Trends

It is a requirement of the land use element to analyze trends in the supply, demand and price of land in Willard. Historical information regarding land use trends in Willard is largely incomplete or unavailable. The 2008 existing land use assessment was the Town's first formal attempt to identify current land uses. Land use trends and land supply can be gleaned from assessment data. Property tax assessment was used as a surrogate for historical land use data. While having limitations, this information can be used as a broad indicator of land use change over a period of years. Table 34 provides property assessment data for the Town of Willard for residential, commercial, agricultural, manufacturing and forest real estate classes from 2002 to 2022.

Table 33 Town of Willard Land Cover		
Land Cover Type	Acres	Percent
Cultivated Crops	2774.8	12.0%
Deciduous Forest	13836.9	59.8%
Deciduous, High Intensity	0.2	0.0%
Deciduous, Low Intensity	323.6	1.4%
Deciduous, Medium Intensity	6.9	0.0%
Developed, Open Space	114.8	0.5%
Evergreen Forest	11.8	0.1%
Grassland/Herbaceous	68.5	0.3%
Mixed Forest	431.9	1.9%
Open Water	560.2	2.4%
Palustrine Emergent Wetland	826.0	3.6%
Palustrine Forested Wetland	765.0	3.3%
Palustrine Scrub, Shrub Wetland	1698.6	7.3%
Pasture/Hay	1421.8	6.2%
Scrub/Shrub	294.2	1.3%
Total	23135.2	100.0%

Source: WISCLAND

Based on the collected assessment data, it can be demonstrated that although land assessed as Residential, Managed Forest Land, and Agriculture decreased 2002-2017, demand has increased during the past five years.

Table 34 Property Tax Assessment, Town of Willard 2002-2022										
	Residential		Commercial		Agricultural		Manufacturing		Forest (MFL)	
	Parcels	Acres	Parcels	Acres	Parcels	Acres	Parcels	Acres	Parcels	Acres
2002	392	478	9	29	175	4,706	0	0	433	11,602
2005	440	589	13	80	177	4,680	0	0	371	9,473
2008	494	659	13	82	172	4,374	0	0	355	8,805
2017	530	731	12	89	230	3,754	0	0	132	1,664
2022	536	755	11	88	234	3826	0	0	130	4815

Source: WI Dept of Revenue, Rusk County

Land Prices

Land prices are dictated by the real estate market and the laws of supply and demand. Increasing the amount of available developable land can press land costs downward, while decreasing the supply of developable land can raise prices. Government regulation can also impact the overall supply of developable land and, consequently influence land prices. The market price of land depends upon many factors, which can vary significantly from one location to another. It is often difficult to generalize the market price of property within a unit of government due to the 'location specific' factors that dictate the price and by the fact that a limited number of properties are on the market at any given time. The Wisconsin Department of Revenue Bureau of Equalization provides values for land and their improvements.

Table 35 details the land values and improvement values according to the 2022 Statement of Assessments for the Town of Willard.

Parcel Count				Value		
Real Estate Classes	Land	IMP	Acres	Land	Improvements	Total
Residential	536	405	755	\$24,235,900	\$41,221,900	\$65,457,800
Commercial	12	11	88	\$148,100	\$868,600	\$1,016,700
Manufacturing	0	0	0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Agricultural	234	0	3827	\$474,200	\$0	\$474,200
Undeveloped	467	0	5.006	\$1,038,000	\$0	\$1,038,000
Agricultural Forest	130	0	4815	\$1,041,900	\$0	\$1,041,900
Other	35	35	58	\$165,300	\$2,676,900	\$2,842,200
Real Estate Totals	1414	451	9,548	\$27,103,400	\$44,767,400	\$71,870,800

Source: WI Dept. Revenue, Rusk County

Environmental Factors

Undeveloped lands and redevelopment lands are subject to a wide array of potential environmental factors which may preclude certain land use practices. These factors may limit development options or completely exclude lands from future development. It is important that development constraints be considered throughout the planning process and in the future as development proposals are brought before the Plan Commission. Below is a list of some environmental factors or development constraints that have been identified in Willard.

- ✓ Natural drainage patterns
- ✓ Steepness of slopes
- ✓ Soil conditions
- ✓ Hydrography (water resources)
- ✓ Floodplains
- ✓ Lands already developed
- ✓ Public lands
- ✓ Roads

General Zoning

The Town of Willard drafted its own zoning ordinance which has advantages and disadvantages. The County Board may continue to have *veto power* over future amendments to the Town's Zoning Ordinance per §60.62(2), Wisconsin Statutes. The advantage of this option includes providing the greatest amount of local control over zoning decisions. The zoning districts and other ordinance provisions could be tailored to best achieve the desired future conditions in each land use area.

With the aid of the Town Zoning Committee, the Town Board administers the Town Zoning Ordinance, investigates all complaints, gives notice of violations, and enforces the Zoning provisions.

Alternative administration may be achieved in a variety of ways. The Town could fund its own administration. The County and Town could jointly administer this ordinance by having a Town zoning administrator that is also a County deputy zoning administrator. Another alternative could involve §66.30, Wisconsin Statutes, intergovernmental agreements to contract with the County or an adjacent town for zoning administration and enforcement.

Shoreland Zoning

All counties are mandated by Wisconsin law to adopt and administer a zoning ordinance that regulates land-use in Shoreland/wetland and floodplain areas for the entire area of the county. Shoreland zoning affects all areas of Rusk County that are within 1000 feet of any lake, pond or flowage, or within 300 feet of any river or stream. Shoreland Zoning is administered by Section 17.57 of the Rusk County Code, which limits the development of wetlands and Shoreland areas in order to protect water quality. This ordinance supersedes any town ordinance, unless the town ordinance is more restrictive. Permits are required for construction and other land uses. Shoreland areas in the Town of Willard are shown buffered on [Map 9 \(Appendix D\)](#).

Land Use Conflicts

One of the challenges in land use planning is providing for a harmonious mix of diverse land uses, while avoiding land use conflict. Conflicts between uses arise when use in one area interferes with the uses in another. In some cases, these conflicts may be minor annoyances, but in other situations, land use conflicts can pose threats to health and safety. Examples of a common land use conflict include situations where residential land use directly abuts areas of industrial areas. It is often desirable to reduce land use conflicts through the use of "buffer zones", or zones of transition between disharmonious land uses. [Appendix C](#) contains a sample conflict resolution process that may be utilized in an effort to resolve land use conflicts.

Land Demand

Providing an adequate supply of developable land is critical to accommodate projected growth, promote and sustain economic development and to build strong and prosperous communities. Wisconsin's comprehensive planning legislation requires that comprehensive plans contain projections, in 5-year increments, of future residential, agricultural, commercial and industrial land uses.

Land use projections for the Town of Willard are based on Wisconsin Department of Administration estimates projection data and are also based on straight-line projections of land assessment trends. These projections are consistent with the Town's vision for growth as well as the goals, objectives and policy recommendations detailed in this comprehensive plan. However, given the relatively small population and size of Willard, a small number of changes can impact actual land use. In particular, deviations from land consumption trends would impact future land use projections. Consequently, the projections in Table 36 should be used with care.

Table 36 Town of Willard Forecast Land Demand							
Projected additional acres of land needed							
Land Use Types	2008 accessed acres	2010	2015	2020	2025	2030	Total
Residential	659	715	851	988	1,124	1,261	602
Commercial	82	101	136	171	206	241	159
Agriculture	4,374	4,433	4,310	4,187	4,065	3,942	-432
Manufacturing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Source: WI Dept. of Administration and NWRPC

Future Land Use

The future land use map and its categories is a community's visual guide to future planning. The future land use map should bring together most, if not all elements of the Comprehensive Plan such as natural resources, economic development, housing, transportation and utilities and community facilities. It is a map of what the community wants to have happen; it is not a predication. The future land use map is not an official map, nor is it a zoning map. The Future Land Use Plan Map represents the long-term land use recommendations for all lands in the Town of Willard. Although the map is advisory and does not have the authority of zoning, it is intended to reflect community desires and serve as a guide for local officials to coordinate and manage future development of the Town.

Using all pertinent data available to them, the Town of Willard Plan Commission participated in a mapping exercise to identify the desired future land use scenario for the Town. Specifically, they used their broad knowledge of the Town, the series of maps that were prepared as part of the planning process and their interpretation of the current trends. The goal was to produce a generalized future land use map to guide the Town's growth over a 20-year planning horizon.

The Future Land Use Plan Map ([Map 9, Appendix D](#)) has identified two future land use areas, one of them being a broad area of residential land use and the other is a commercial land use areas that straddle all of State Highway 27, CTH I and part of CTH D west of 27. Also shown on the map, but not a land use, are the Shoreland buffer zones.

The following is a description of the definition of the future land use categories as set by the Town of Willard:

Residential – Residential developments on lots of at least two and half (2.5) acres or more and located virtually anywhere in the Town.

Agriculture - Areas of general agriculture, crop farming or raising of livestock and located virtually anywhere in the Town.

Commercial - Commercial developments would be limited to areas along State Highway 27, CTH I and part of CTH D. This may include such commercial entities as retail establishments, restaurants, hotels, motels, service stations, convenience stores, etc.

Shoreland - Shoreland areas would be accommodated by both residential and commercial developments as long as they meet the Town of Willard minimum threshold of being no less than 0.75 acres or 32,670 square feet, which is more restrictive than the current Rusk County Zoning of 20,000 square feet.

Land Use Goals, Objectives and Policies
Goals
1. Promote the redevelopment of land with existing infrastructure and public services and maintenance and rehabilitation of existing residential, agricultural, commercial and industrial areas.
2. Encourage land uses, densities and regulations that promote efficient development patterns and relatively low municipal, state government and utility costs.
3. Balance individual property rights with community interests and goals.
4. Preserve the rural character of the Town of Willard by planning for future development through this comprehensive plan.
Objectives
1. Maintain orderly, planned growth which promotes the health, safety and general welfare of residents and makes efficient use of land and efficient use of public services, facilities and tax dollars.
2. New development should not negatively impact the natural environment or existing property.
3. Provide for a mix of land uses within the Town.
4. Promote new land development that is consistent with this plan.
5. Land uses and building locations that minimize both the loss of productive farmland and the potential for conflicts between existing and proposed land uses will be encouraged.
Policies
The Town will maintain the Comprehensive Plan, which will serve as a guide for future land use decisions. New development will be permitted based on consideration of this Plan, as well as other Town, County, Regional and State plans and other regulations.
Use conservancy zoning to protect natural resources in the Town.
Encourage conservation easements and other tools to protect environmentally sensitive or unique resources. Update existing land use regulations to be consistent with this plan.