G3749

Required Elements of a Local Comprehensive Plan

Brian W. Ohm

Wisconsin's new comprehensive planning and "smart growth" law (1999 Wisconsin Act 9 signed by Governor Thompson in October 1999, as amended by 1999 Wisconsin Act 148) includes a definition of a comprehensive plan. Before this law, Wisconsin law did not define what is meant by the term "a comprehensive plan." The definition provides cities, villages, towns, counties and regional planning commissions with some guidance for local land use planning efforts. The comprehensive plan definition can be found at section 66.1001(2) of the Wisconsin Statutes. According to the new law, a comprehensive plan shall contain at least all of the following nine elements:

1. Issues and opportunities element

The issues and opportunities element is defined as the background information on the local government unit and its overall objectives, policies, goals and programs. This information is used to guide the future development and redevelopment of the local government unit over a 20-year planning period.

Specifically, the background information shall include:

- population, household and employment forecasts that the local government 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.

2. Housing element

The housing element is defined as a compilation of the local governmental unit's objectives, policies, goals, maps and programs to provide an adequate housing supply to meet existing and forecasted housing demand.

Specifically, the housing element must:

- assess the age, structural, value and occupancy characteristics of the local governmental unit's housing stock; and

- identify 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;
  - promote the availability of land for the development or redevelopment of low-income and moderate-income housing; and
  - maintain or rehabilitate the local governmental unit's existing housing stock.

3. Transportation element

The transportation element is defined as 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, walking, railroads, air transportation, trucking and water transportation.

Specifically, the element shall:

- compare the local governmental unit's objectives, policies, goals and programs to state and regional transportation plans;
- 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 and rural area transportation plans, airport master plans, and rail plans that apply in the local governmental unit.

4. Utilities and community facilities element

The utilities and community facilities element is defined as a compilation of objectives, policies, goals, maps and programs to guide the future development of utilities and community facilities in the local governmental unit. Examples include sanitary sewer service, storm water management, water supply, solid waste disposal, onsite wastewater treatment technologies, recycling facilities, parks, telecommunications facilities, power plants and transmission lines, cemeteries, health and child care facilities and other public facilities, such as police, fire and rescue, libraries and schools.

Specifically, the element shall:

- describe the location, use and capacity of existing public utilities and community facilities that serve the local governmental unit;
- 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 ones; and
- assess future needs for governmental services that are related to such utilities and facilities.

5. Agricultural, natural and cultural resources element

The agricultural, natural and cultural resources element is defined as a compilation of objectives, policies, goals, maps and programs for the conservation and promotion of effective resources management. Examples of resources include groundwater, forests, productive agricultural areas, environmentally sensitive areas, threatened and endangered species, stream corridors, surface waters, floodplains, wetlands, wildlife habitat, metallic and nonmetallic mineral resources, parks, open spaces, historical and cultural resources, community design, recreational resources and other natural resources.

James A. Lagro, Jr.

6. Economic development element

The economic development element is defined as a compilation of objectives, policies, goals, maps and programs to promote the stabilization, retention or expansion of the economic base, as well as quality employment opportunities in the local governmental unit.

Specifically, the economic development element shall:

- include an analysis of the labor force and economic base of the local governmental unit;
- assess categories or particular types of desirable new businesses and industries;
- assess the local governmental unit's strengths and weaknesses with respect to attracting and retaining businesses and industries;
- designate an adequate number of sites for such businesses and industries.
- evaluate and promote the use of environmentally contaminated sites for commercial or industrial uses;
- identify county, regional and state economic development programs that apply to the local governmental unit.

7. Intergovernmental cooperation element

The intergovernmental cooperation element is defined as 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.

Specifically, the element shall:

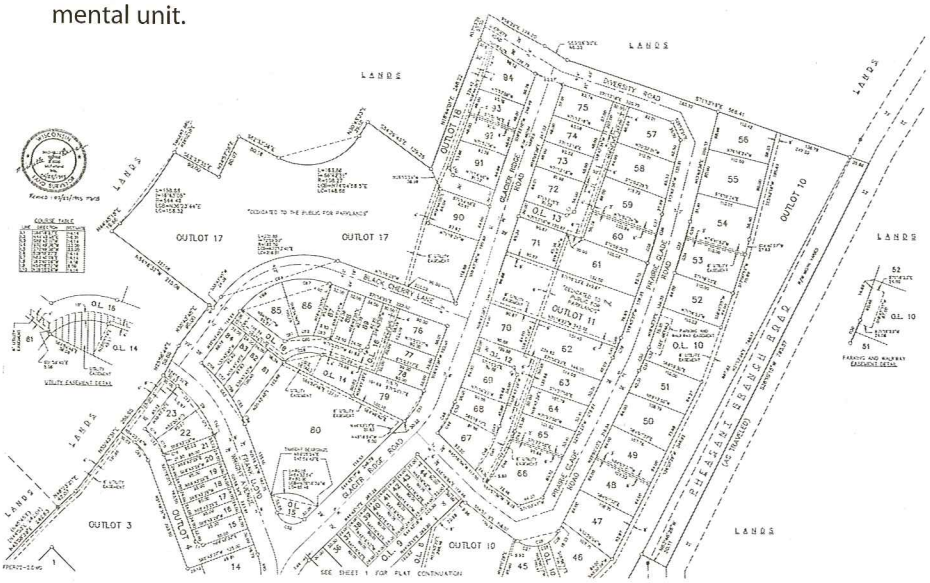
- analyze the relationship of the local governmental unit to school districts and adjacent local governmental units, and to the region, the state and other governmental entities;
- incorporate any plans or agreements to which the local governmental unit is a party under s. 66.0301, s. 66.0307, or s. 66.0309;
- 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.

8. Land use element

The land use element is defined as a compilation of objectives, policies, goals, maps and programs to guide the future development and redevelopment of public and private property.

Specifically, the element shall:

- list the amount, type, intensity and net density of existing land uses (such as agricultural, residential, commercial, industrial or other public and private uses) in the local governmental unit;
- analyze trends in the supply, demand and price of land, opportunities for redevelopment and existing and potential land-use conflicts;
- 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;
- include a series of maps that show:
  - — current 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.



9. Implementation element

The implementation element is defined as a compilation of programs and specific actions to be completed in stated sequence to implement the objectives, policies, plans and programs contained in pars. (a) to (h). This includes proposed changes to any applicable zoning ordinances, official maps, sign regulations, erosion and storm water control ordinances, historic preservation ordinances, site plan regulations, design review ordinances, building codes, mechanical codes, housing codes, sanitary codes or subdivision ordinances.

Specifically, the implementation 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;
- include a mechanism to measure the local governmental unit's progress toward achieving all aspects of the comprehensive plan;
- include a process for updating the comprehensive plan. A comprehensive plan under this subsection shall be updated no less than once every 10 years.

Author: Brian W. Ohm is an attorney and an associate professor in the Department of Urban and Regional Planning at the University of Wisconsin–Madison and the University of Wisconsin–Extension.

Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, University of Wisconsin–Extension, Cooperative Extension. University of Wisconsin–Extension provides equal opportunities in employment and programming, including Title IX and ADA requirements. If you need this information in an alternative format, contact the Office of Equal Opportunity and Diversity Programs or call Extension Publishing at (608) 262-2655.

© 2001 by the Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System. Send inquiries about copyright permission to: Director, Cooperative Extension Publishing, 201 Hiram Smith Hall, 1545 Observatory Dr., Madison, WI 53706.

You can obtain copies of this publication from your Wisconsin county Extension office or from Cooperative Extension Publications, 45 N. Charter Street, Madison, WI 53715, 608-262-3346. Outside Madison, call toll free: 1-877-WIS-PUBS (947-7827). Before publicizing, please check on this publication's availability.

To see more Cooperative Extension publications, visit our web site: www.uwex.edu/ces/pubs/

Required Elements of a Local Comprehensive Plan Checklist (G3749) I-10-01-2M-180