

**SECTION**

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**INTRODUCTION**



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The availability of natural and recreational resources, and the proximity to the Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area has made Polk County a desirable place to live. In addition, ongoing improvements in the transportation system, modes of transportation, and communications technology, have continued to expand the boundaries of acceptable distances between home and the workplace.

With the allure of the County's natural and recreational resources, rural character, and the area's continued strong economy, development pressures are likely to continue.

However, it is also important to understand that growth and development activities have an impact on the social, economic and natural environments, and, in some instances, can eliminate the desired characteristics that originally made the location an attractive place to live.

To accommodate expected future growth and development, local officials decided to develop a Land Use Plan to provide them with a current and expanded information base. The plan and accompanying information will assist officials with decisions concerning how the community should preserve its desired characteristics and make positive changes in an orderly fashion.

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## **REGIONAL AND COUNTY SETTING**

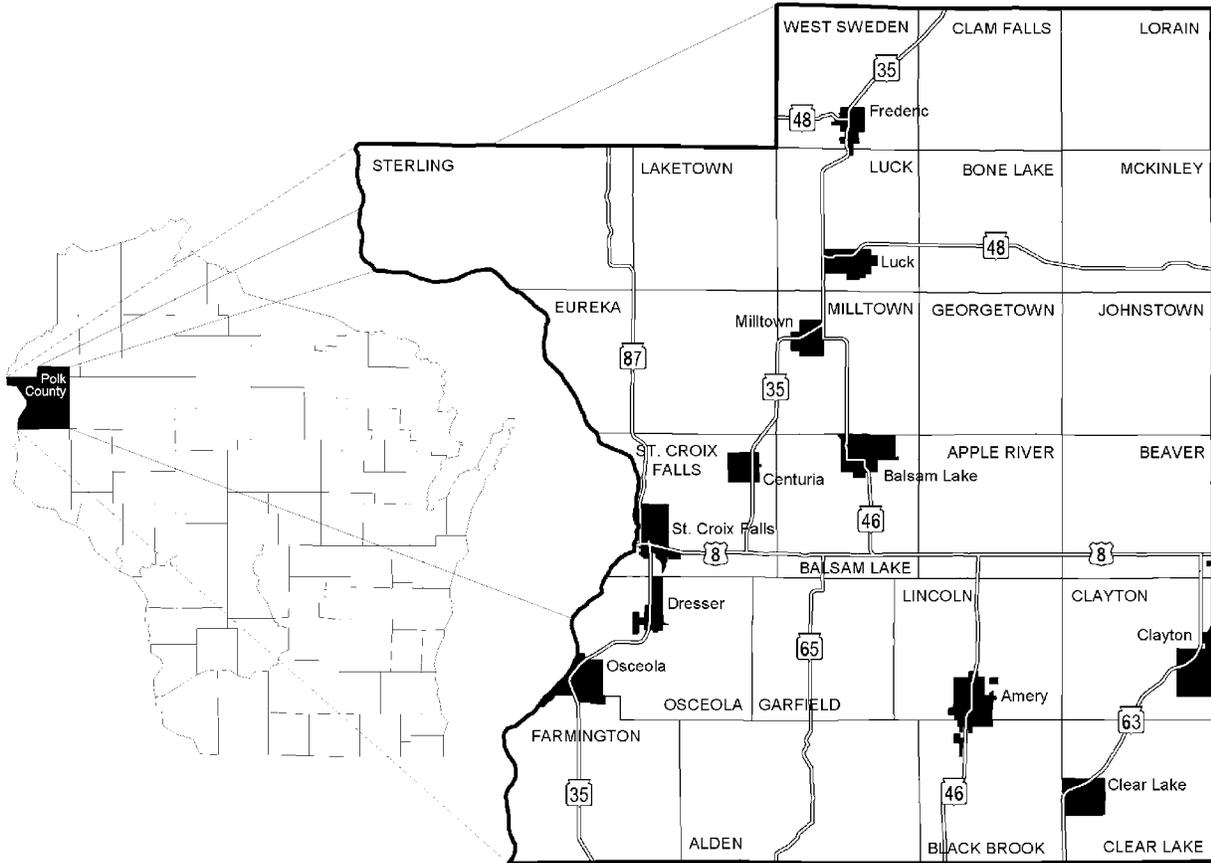
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Polk County is located in west central Wisconsin along the Minnesota-Wisconsin border. The County has a total combined surface area of land and water of 605,672 acres, or 946 square miles. The County is bordered on the west by the St. Croix River, the north by Burnett County, on the east by Barron County and on the south by St. Croix County.

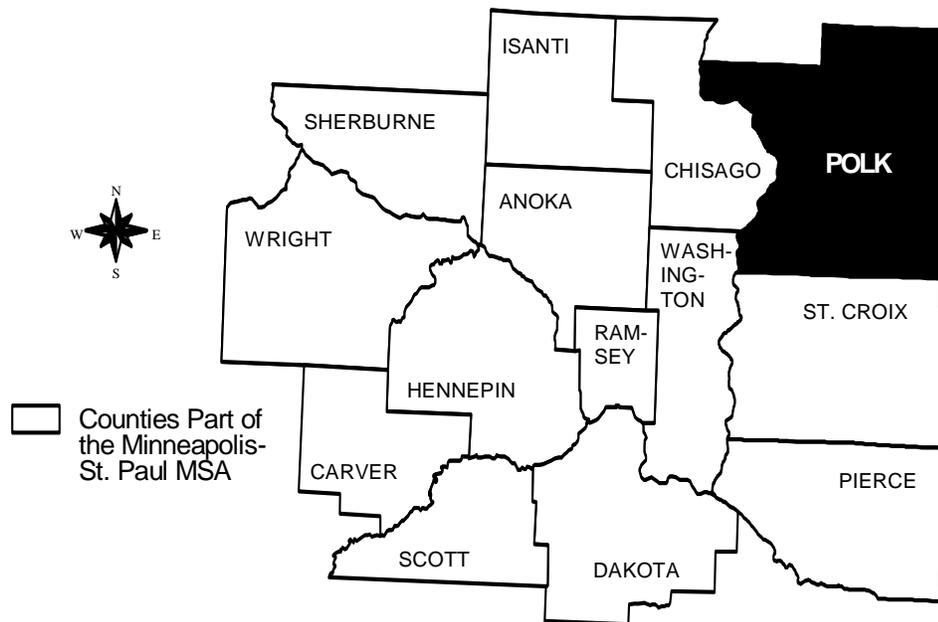
Polk County is comprised of all or parts of 36 civil divisions, consisting of 24 towns, 10 villages and 2 cities. This includes the Village of Turtle Lake that lies almost exclusively in Barron County. The Village of Balsam Lake, population 950, is the county seat. The largest community is the City of Amery that has 2,845 people.

Polk County is located northeast of the Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area, and is contiguous to the Minneapolis-St. Paul Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA). The Census Bureau defines a Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) as a county or counties with a central city of at least 50,000 people, a total population over 100,000 people, and significant social and economic ties that exist between the central city and any outlying counties that are included. Based on that definition, St. Croix County became part of the Minneapolis-St. Paul MSA in 1980 and Pierce County in 1990. Consequently, even though Polk County is not currently a part of the MSA, it is apparent that the influence of the metro area is spreading, and that Polk County is becoming more economically and socially interconnected.

**GENERAL LOCATION  
POLK COUNTY**



**PROXIMITY TO THE MINNEAPOLIS-ST. PAUL METROPOLITAN STATISTICAL AREA  
POLK COUNTY**



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## **NEED FOR A PLAN**

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Polk County has never completed a countywide comprehensive land use planning effort. In addition, Polk County's Zoning Ordinance was originally adopted in 1971, and has not been comprehensively revised since that time. Consequently, it is likely that the information base upon which development decisions are being made in the County, and the implementation tools used to guide development, are inadequate to meet the challenges of effectively directing current or future growth and development.

The proximity to the Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area has a profound impact on Polk County. Population growth alone indicates the magnitude of that impact on the County. Significant increases in population occurred during the 1970s and 1990s, and this growth appears to be continuing in the 2000s.

In general, towns, villages and cities located in the southwestern part of the county have experienced the greatest rates in growth. This is especially true of rural residential development. Similar to trends in other areas of Wisconsin, non-farm residential development has increased significantly in rural areas. Although this transition is not yet as pronounced as other areas closer to the Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area, continued growth will foster an increased demand for this type of development. This residential growth has led to a change in the rural character by transforming the previously rural farm areas into rural residential areas.

Another indicator of development is the increased economic growth as indicated by

employment increases within the county. Although, commuting patterns indicate that a significant portion of residents living in southwestern Polk County are driving to the Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area to work, Polk County has maintained a presence in the region's economy. Between 1990 and 2000 there was a 33% increase in employment within the County, while having a 19% increase in population. Consequently, even though a significant number of people are commuting to Minnesota to work, employment increases within the County have also contributed to growth in the residential, industrial and commercial sectors of the Polk County economy.

Although increases in employment and development are viewed as positive, it is also important to understand that this growth has increased the demand for public services, required significant investment in public infrastructure, and impacted natural resources and the physical environment. Unfortunately, local units of government have limited capacity to deal with these issues. This is primarily due to a lack of resources and non-existent or outdated planning information and enforcement tools. The Polk County Land Use Plan was viewed as an opportunity to provide the county and local governments with information on the current extent of development (type, location and intensity); the impact of development on the physical landscape; the affect of development on the provision of public services and infrastructure; the options for managing future development; and reasonable (politically, technically, and financially) strategy for managing future development.

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## **PLANNING BACKGROUND AND AUTHORITY**

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Under Section 59.69 of the Wisconsin Statutes, the stated purpose of planning and zoning is to promote the public health, safety, convenience and general welfare of the County. In addition, other identified reasons for planning and zoning are:

- to encourage planned and orderly land-use development;
- to protect property values and tax bases;
- to permit careful planning and efficient maintenance of highway systems;
- to ensure adequate highway, utility, health, educational, and recreational facilities;
- to recognize the needs of agriculture, forestry, industry, and business in future growth;
- to encourage the appropriate land use and natural resource conservation;
- to provide adequate light and air, including access to sunlight for solar collectors and wind for wind energy systems;
- to encourage the protection of ground water resources;

- to preserve wetlands and conserve soil, water, and forest resources;
- to protect the beauty of the landscape and man-made developments;
- to provide healthy surroundings for family life; and,
- to promote the efficient and economical use of public funds.

To accomplish the above stated purpose the Polk County Board of Supervisors may plan for the physical development and zoning of territory within the County. According to Wisconsin Statute, a plan may include, without limitation, comprehensive surveys, studies, and analyses of:

- county history;
- existing land use;
- population and population density;
- economy;
- soil characteristics;
- forest cover;
- wetland and floodplain conditions; and,
- other human or natural features of the county.

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## **PURPOSE OF A PLAN**

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The purpose of the Polk County Land Use Plan is to develop a complete set of informational resources and a policy framework to assist the county and local units of government in managing development. To address growth and development occurring in Polk County, the plan explores the physical and economic conditions of the county; identifies what the residents, groups, organizations and institutions believe are the important development issues affecting the County; and articulates a countywide development policy to assist local and county governments in building their capacity to deal with development issues. When adopted by the Polk County Board of

Supervisors, the Land Use Plan is certified by designated state statutes to serve as a guide for public and private actions and decisions to assure the appropriate development of public and private property in Polk County.

If conscientiously implemented, the plan will act as the basis for ensuring the appropriate development of the County. The plan, along with the implementation tools, will provide local governments with the ability to effectively and efficiently make public investment decisions and work with developers to ensure private investments are compatible with the public interest.

The primary objective of the Land Use Plan is to minimize the impacts and maximize the opportunities that growth and development brings to the County. Development, acceptance and implementation of the plan can also provide many other benefits including:

- an allocation of land uses that provides for the health, safety, and welfare of the residents, and maximizes the amenity and convenience;
- an allocation of land uses that maintains a balance between the activities of people and the natural environment which supports them;
- the establishment of a relationship of land uses to soil type in order to maximize existing natural resources, avoid costly development activities, and protect irreplaceable resources;
- the protection of lakes, streams, wetlands and woodlands, and other natural habitats, which are essential in order to maintain environmental values, provide

recreational opportunities and maintain a desirable aesthetic setting;

- the preservation of the most productive agricultural land for agricultural use;
- the development of an efficient and cost effective transportation system that provides accessibility and service essential to support the surrounding land uses;
- the establishment of residential areas conveniently located proximate to commercial, educational, health, transportation and recreational facilities and employment opportunities; and
- the savings of public and private expenditures through wise investment decisions based on sound development policy.

The result of the Polk County Land Use Plan will be an enhanced ability of the County and local governments to promote the health, safety and welfare of the public and make wise investment decisions.

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## **PLANNING PROCESS**

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Taking into account the scope of this plan, a considerable number of financial, political, technical and legal resources were necessary to complete it. These resources included the respective county and local governments; the Wisconsin Departments of Revenue, Transportation, Natural Resources, and Workforce Development; West Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission; University of Wisconsin-Extension; Soil Conservation Service; Minnesota-Wisconsin Boundary Area Commission; the private sector (developers, engineers and lawyers); and the Wisconsin Legislature.

In addition, throughout the entire process, oversight for the development of the Land Use Plan was the responsibility of the ad-hoc Land Use Plan Committee.

The Land Use Plan Committee was formed to be the guiding force behind the planning effort. This committee was comprised of

members of the Polk County Planning and Zoning Committee and 7 other members that represented local elected officials, or residents. During the entire planning process the Committee held regular meetings to discuss issues, review and analyze data and make decisions. The Land Use Plan Committee formed the majority of the policy in the plan in consultation with the Polk County Agriculture, Land Conservation, Planning, Zoning and Land Records Committee. The participants on the Land Use Plan Committee are listed in Appendix A.

The planning process also relied on the participation of local governments, individual citizens, and the representatives of special interest groups. Without their involvement and support, the plan would not be an accurate reflection of what Polk County is, what it wants to be, and how it wants to get to its desired future.

The process to create the Polk County Land Use Plan consisted of three main phases. These phases were:

- Socio-Economic and Physical Features Analyses
- Plan Development
- Plan Implementation Activities

Perhaps the most important element of the planning process occurred in all phases of the plan's development -- Community Involvement. Within each of the three phases of development, the community involvement process was used to provide information, education and training to, and obtain input from, the citizens, local governments, and various interest groups. The following is a description of the three main phases of plan development and the community involvement activities.

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## **PHASE ONE: SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND PHYSICAL FEATURES ANALYSES**

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### **Where are we now?**

The first step in any successful planning effort is to understand the current environment in which we live and how we got to that point. In order to accomplish this, it is essential to collect and analyze uniform, reliable planning data. The need to analyze current information was important in order to make intelligent forecasts and develop alternative courses of action.

Analysis of the county included two main components, a review of the socio-economic conditions and physical features.

Review of the socio-economic environment provides us with a general understanding of the man-made characteristics of the county, including the type and location of unnatural

features (i.e. roads, streets, land uses, and development). Analysis of the socio-economic characteristics of Polk County include a review of the population, economy, housing, land use, transportation, and recreation resources.

Review of the physical features of the County provides an inventory of the County's natural and physical resources, and the impacts that development can have on these resources. The physical features analysis includes an identification and review of the general topography, geology, soils, water resources, wetlands, shoreland areas, floodplains, closed depressions, steep slopes, woodlands, grasslands, and wildlife, fishery, natural and scientific areas.

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## **PHASE TWO: PLAN DEVELOPMENT**

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### **Where do we want to be?**

This was the dynamic aspect of the planning process that examined alternative approaches and policies for future development in the County. Based on the socio-economic and physical features analyses and various community involvement activities, Polk County identified the desired “look” of the County. It was also necessary to identify which characteristics of the current environment contribute to the desired result, which development activities detract.

This part of the planning process resulted in the development of the goals and objectives and identification and definition of the planning areas. Together these sections of the plan form the basis from which local and county governments could decide whether or not existing implementation tools needed to be upgraded or new ones developed to assist them in creating the desired development pattern.

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## **PHASE THREE: PLAN IMPLEMENTATION**

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### **How do we get to the desired future?**

The most important element of the Polk County Land Use Plan is carrying out the recommendations outlined in the plan.

The entire process of creating the Land Use Plan was intended to provide a foundation

for a major revision of the Polk County Zoning Ordinance. The need for this revision has been identified for several years. The County will consequently undertake this activity following the completion of the plan.

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## **COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT**

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The success of the plan and its implementation hinges on strong public, local government and interest group support. Throughout all phases of the planning process, input from the public, local governments and interest groups was encouraged and obtained. The County and all agencies involved in the development of the plan organized and executed a collective effort to gather input and inform and educate the public, interest groups and elected officials about the plan. This was completed through the use of surveys, advisory committees, focus groups and issue

identification sessions, and public and special interest group meetings.

Significant efforts were made to make this a plan for all of Polk County. This meant giving individuals, groups, institutions and organizations in the County an opportunity for the common exploration of the conditions and issues facing Polk County, creating a vision of what is good about the County and what it should be in the future, and agreeing on the course of action that will best serve all of the residents and interests in the County.

