

Introduction

Wisconsin's Smart Growth Comprehensive Planning Law requires that the Issues and Opportunities Chapter provide background information about the community, as well as overall visions to guide future development and redevelopment over a 20-year planning period. Specifically, the Issues and Opportunities Chapter must include population, household and employment forecasts, demographic trends, age distributions, education levels, income levels and employment characteristics. This chapter presents the overall vision for Empire, including an assessment of local strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT). The community characteristics and general background information that form the basis for the Issues & Opportunities Chapter is included in Chapter 3.

Visioning Process

Rather than solely develop a series of policy statements, the Town participated in an extensive visioning process to establish a framework from which to make future land use decisions. The result of this process was a vision statement for each of the nine required plan chapters. This process was critical to establish a unified vision for Empire and provide a direction and focus for the planning effort.

To identify community issues and opportunities, a four-step process was utilized. This process included a community survey, SWOT exercise, cognitive mapping and chapter vision development. What follows is a description of the activities and the major issues and opportunities identified through the issues and opportunities process.

What is a Vision?

Webster's Dictionary, defines a vision as: (1) sense of sight; (2) something supposedly seen by other than normal sight; something perceived in a dream; (3) mental image; (4) The ability to perceive something not actually visible, as through mental acuteness or keen foresight [a project made possible by one man's vision].

In planning, the term "vision" is an expression or idea of the desired future.

SWOT EXERCISE

A SWOT is a planning exercise used to get communities thinking about:

- where they have been;
- where they are;
- where they want to be in the future; and,
- how they want to get there.

The objective of the exercise was to find out how residents, business owners, appointed and elected officials viewed various aspects of the Town. This could include their feelings on physical things such as roads, utilities, etc., and "quality of life" issues. At the meeting, each participant was asked to list the Town's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. Each person could write as many items as he/she wished under each category. Residents were then provided an opportunity to share their ideas as part of the meeting facilitated by OMNI Associates. The table summarizes the responses.

Strengths

- Close proximity to neighboring cities/towns (17)
- Rural setting (18)
- Quality of life
- Interested residents (2)
- Good residents / friendly (12); Conservative people; God believing people; Stable population;
- Small community living (3)
- Size (3); Size of population
- Previous planning (3)
- Community participation
- Self reliant
- Natural resources (16)
- Wildlife (6)
- Niagara escarpment (16)
- Spaciousness / Open Space (11)
- Quiet (0)
- Farmland (5)
- Preserved wetlands and environment (0)
- Water quality (2)
- Air quality (2)
- Boundary agreements with the City of Fond du Lac
- Government / good leadership (11)
- Cooperation with adjoin communities / shared utilities (2)
- Safe / Low crime (12)
- Fiscal discipline
- Fond du Lac school system (3)
- Quality services / reasonable amount (22)
- Reasonable taxes (12)
- No large business development (3)
- Employment / work force (0)
- High household income
- Educated residents (2)
- Good roads / low traffic / proximity to hwys (22)
- There is still a lot of land available for agriculture and hunting (5)
- Natural beauty / Scenic (17)
- Building lot sizes / controlled land development (12)
- Older home character / pride in homes (2)
- Affordable housing

Weaknesses

- A town board that does not listen to the citizens concerns and votes on personal agendas instead of citizens concerns / slow to act (10)
- The lack of communication of the board members and the community / local government. (5)
- People that don't understand our values or township
- Some of the residents want to see changes.
- New residents complaining
- People who don't want to see change
- Too much NIMBY (not in my back yard)
- A bit of elitism
- Fickle town board members and planners
- Town government too small. It should be enlarged
- Lack of feeling like a community
- Fire service / EMS (6)
- Whole town sewer plan
- No park for public
- Private property rights
- Trespassing neighbors during hunting season
- Town doesn't follow existing plan just develops because of developers. (15)
- Growing too fast; Slow down building (3); Becoming too "city-like"
- Too close to FDL (0); Annexation into the city (3)
- Too many homes being built on a large piece of farmland and the land is then taken out of production. (3)
- 35 acres needed to build a house / minimum acreage to build on (0)
- Small parcels zoned residential; Inconsistency of breaking up AG land.
- Development that doesn't follow a plan / no direction (2)
- Little respect for preservation of natural areas – runoff (2)
- Allowing development in sensitive areas; Limited enforcement of existing ordinances to protect environment
- Limited substance to previous plan protecting Niagara escarpment, other natural features
- Too much manure on farmlands; Clean up AG materials
- Inability to control wind farm development
- Allow 1000+ cow farm too close to Lake DeNeveu
- Water quality
- Radon content
- No grocery store; No movie house
- Lack of any housing facilities/programs for the elderly
- Development with sub-standard features: roads too narrow, cul-de-sacs too small and inadequate roads maintenance. (0)
- Trailer Court on Artesian Rd.
- Several junk yards still in existence / building in need of repair (2)
- Pedestrian safety on main roads
- Some of the roads and bridges need to be replaced.

Opportunities

- Smart growth
- Develop a plan with some “teeth”
- Continue to improve land use
- New management [town leadership]
- Do more surveys (2)
- More community involvement in future town growth and plans following a consistent plan (10)
- Able to control growth rate (5)
- Become an example for other townships
- Stay the same / rural atmosphere (12)
- Space for possible future growth and development / orderly (9)
- To preserve the land / wildlife / nature resources for future generations (18)
- Balance
- Protect farming (1)
- More hiking and biking trails (3)
- Planning for traffic (3)
- 151 Bypass opportunities (6)
- HWY 23 & 5 business (2)
- Attract new business to area (7)
- Wind farms / alternate power source (2)
- Connect to city waste treatment
- Protect against annexation
- Chance to live a good life / affordable living (3)
- Keep taxes low (2)
- Elderly housing (1)
- Small subdivisions (3)
- Large lots
- Create upscale living (2)
- Subdivisions should have restrictions in design to enhance our outdoor environment, requiring trees and natural environmental designs.
- Development plan that offers a variety of housing options (i.e. smaller lots in some areas, larger in other, flexibility for subdivisions) (3)

Threats

- Over restrictive government / too much control / poor governing (6)
- Cut backs in government
- Rising costs of services / taxes (7)
- Higher taxes (2)
- Too much change / growth (5)
- Enlarge services because they becoming to spread out (2)
- The development of commercial / business in town
- Too much growth along or part of 151 bypass and HWY 23 widening (8)
- Don't re-route HWY 23 expansion - use existing route, but widen. (2)
- More traffic / roadways / 151 bypass traffic / DOT (11)
- Over development of housing and industry / uncontrolled (22)
- Population growth (3)
- Increasing property value which conflicts with desire to maintain rural feel.
- Subdivisions (6)
- Developers (7)
- Small houses being built without a plan of development (8)
- Decrease land requirements for house building
- More elderly people leaving the area
- Aging population
- Attracting young people to come back and raise families
- Encroachment from city & other towns / annexation (33)
- Destruction of the escarpment (6)
- Development of woodlots / loss of natural resources / green space (9)
- Large farms with extreme odor problems / spread of manure (2)
- Loss of animal farming (dairy) / good AG land / lose land (12)
- Lack of common sense
- Windmills too close to residence / need EPA intervention (2)
- Water quality / runoff (5)
- Over crowding in schools
- Attaining a "diversity" populace
- Boundaries set new comers



Farming (and attributes/characteristics thereof) was listed as a Strength, Weakness, Opportunity, and Threat by participants in the SWOT Exercise. Farm shown here is located southwest of Pine and Walnut Roads in Empire.

COGNITIVE MAPPING

Cognitive mapping was another approach used during the development of this plan to appreciate local stakeholder issues, concerns, and desires for Empire.

At the Mid-Course Meeting, participants were provided two maps of the Town of Empire. On the first map, the individuals outlined portions of the Town based on their opinion of aesthetic appeal or special memories or experiences they have had. The most attractive places were colored in one shade and not attractive in another color. Areas with special meaning or memories were circled.

On the second map, participants outlined those areas where they would like to see new commercial/industrial development, new residential subdivision development, new recreation areas and open space.

Participants then worked in small groups to discuss their second map. Common areas, agreed by all group participants, were illustrated on a collective group maps. At the conclusion of the meeting, each group presented these maps to all in attendance.

These maps were used in the development of the *Future Land Use Maps* presented later in this plan. This approach helps to provide residents and other stakeholders the opportunity to more clearly reflect community concerns and priorities for the future.

COMMUNITY SURVEY

A community-wide survey was distributed by the Town of Empire in December 2005. The survey included 50 questions addressing each of the nine chapters of this comprehensive plan. In Chapter 1, information related to resident satisfaction with the community is provided from the community survey. Throughout the rest of this plan relevant information from the survey is highlighted as a gauge for understanding resident desires and expectations for the future. An important question in the survey that provides a general indication of the overall future vision for Empire asked, “*If you could control the future, which one phrase would you select to describe Empire in 10 and 20 years?*” The results reveal that residents would like to refer to the community as a mixed agricultural/residential community over the next 10 years (48.4%) and 20 years (52.9%). The second most popular response called for the community to be described as a rural, agricultural community in 10 years (46.6%) and 20 years (33.2%). Less than five percent of respondents indicated the community should be described as a residential community in 10 years or 20 years.

CHAPTER VISION EXERCISE

In **March of 2005** a vision meeting was held. The focus of the meeting was a visioning exercise. The exercise involved completing a series of statements related to what the Town of Empire would look like in 20 years. The statements related to each of the nine (9) required plan chapters. For example, participants were asked to complete the following statement, “*In 20 years, looking down from an airplane at the Town of Empire, one would see...*” OMNNI used the responses to

What is a Cognitive Map?

A cognitive map, or mental map, is a map drawn by a person that geographically locates his or her memories, ideas and thoughts of a particular place. Since cognitive maps are based on individual’s preferences and opinions there are no “right” or “wrong” maps. Cognitive maps are used to delineate geographic areas of a community people like, dislike, frequently visit, feel are important, travel through regularly, feel safe, etc.



Residents at the Vision Exercise Meeting on March 31, 2005 at the Town Hall.

develop draft vision statements, which the Planning Commission reviewed in the spring of 2005. The final vision statements are provided throughout this plan to introduce the remaining chapters. The overall vision is provided at the end of this chapter.

Issues & Opportunities Chapter Vision (Overall Vision)

Below is the overall vision statement, which represents the broad interests of Town residents, elected/appointed officials, business leaders and property owners. This vision was included in the Town's 1998 plan. To expand upon this general overall vision statement, more detailed supporting visions for each of the required plan chapters are provided at the beginning of the chapters of this plan. Supporting goals, objectives and program initiatives are described in Chapter 12 of this plan.

To preserve our rural character, protect our natural and historical resources, promote sustainable growth and provide a legacy that will enrich the lives of future generations.



Residents Rank Visions on Wall Graphic
March 31, 2005

