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Introduction

Of all of the plan chapters, economic development received the least attention in the 1998 plan. Based on resident comments received during the development of this plan (refer to value statements in Chapter 1 and SWOT results in Chapter 2) economic development is not a priority. Participants expressed little interest in seeing *any* commercial or business development within Empire. Rather, residents are more interested in seeing these types of land uses occur within Fond du Lac - where infrastructure and services are available. In fact, during the planning process many residents said they were minutes from the center of Fond du Lac – making the services, churches, shopping, clinics and jobs there easily available. Simply stated, residents like living close to the City, but not within it. This approach allows the Town to retain its rural, character while the City continues to see its urban areas flourish.

According to Wisconsin's Comprehensive Planning Law, the purpose of the Economic Development Chapter is to promote the stabilization, retention and expansion of the economic base, and quality employment opportunities. To address this, this chapter includes:

- Highlights of the labor force information from Chapter 3;
- An assessment of strengths and weaknesses with respect to attracting and retaining business and industry;
- An overview of programs that deal with environmentally contaminated sites for commercial or industrial uses; and,
- A list of organizations (and contact information) providing economic development programs at the county, regional, state and federal levels.

To learn more about economic development, also see these chapters...

- Information about **zoning** is provided in the Land Use Chapter.
- **Recommended development patterns** are shown on the Future Land Use Maps.

Economic Development Vision

In 2025, agriculture has been joined by light manufacturing, small shops, and home-based businesses diversifying the economic environment of Empire. A weekly farmer's market offers opportunities for local farmers, artists, and artisans to sell locally-grown foods and products, and provides a community gathering place for residents and visitors alike.

In terms of the 14 state comprehensive planning goals, those listed below relate specifically to planning for economic development in Empire (For several of these coordination with the City of Fond du Lac is needed):

- Promotion of the redevelopment of lands with existing infrastructure and public services and the maintenance and rehabilitation of existing residential, commercial and industrial structures.
- Encouragement of coordination and cooperation among nearby units of government.
- 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.
- 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.

Labor Force and Economic Base

The Community Profile Chapter (3) provided a detailed analysis of Empire and Fond du Lac County's economy and the labor force. Highlights from that chapter include:

- **Local workers are very mobile.** Residents take advantage of highway access and their proximity to Fond du Lac to commute to nearby employment centers.
- **Income.** Median household, median family, and per capita income reported by Empire residents (refer to Table 8) is significantly higher than Fond du Lac County and Wisconsin state averages. This suggests residents have disposable income available to spend.
- **Occupational Types.** While the Town of Empire has a very diverse population including professional people, small business owners, farmers, and farm workers, the Census data reveals that the most popular occupations among Fond du Lac County residents are in the manufacturing and education fields.
- **Educational Attainment.** Empire residents have the highest educational attainment rates in comparison to reported results in surrounding communities, Fond du Lac County and the State of Wisconsin (refer to Table 10). This information is important because it indicates a high earnings potential among Empire's workforce.

Current Business Inventory and Business Environments

Business development in the Town of Empire is difficult to categorize. Not only is there great variety of businesses, but individual operations provide a variety of services.

Along STH 23 business uses include:

- Caddyshack (sports bar, grill, and indoor volleyball)
- Paul's Auto Body Repair (a home-based occupation)
- I-Deal Auto Body Sales (with a side business in signs)
- Free Spirit Riders (riding stables for therapeutic horseback riding)

Beyond STH 23, a myriad of businesses exist:

- Taxidermy/Cement Operation (off CTH K)
- Howard Johnson Floor Covering (USH 45)
- Tom Ottery Transit (CTH UU)
- GW Plastering (4th Street Road (CTH T))
- Green Acres Supper Club (4th Street Road (CTH T))

These lists are not comprehensive. Other businesses (primarily home-based businesses) are found in Empire. The intent of this list is not to profile all businesses in Empire, but rather to demonstrate the diversity of economic activity. Of course, these businesses are in addition to the economic impact of farming (discussed later in this chapter). All business development in Empire requires approval by the Town in accordance with the BD-business and ID-industrial districts in the *Empire Zoning Ordinance*.

To understand the economy of Empire, it is helpful to classify the local economy. In small communities (i.e. less than 10,000 people) generally there are five types of economies¹:

¹ Randall Gross, Embracing Change in Small Communities, APA National Conference, March 2005.

1. **Resource-Based Economy.** This type of economy is characterized by geographic isolation (i.e. far away from other cities / metro areas with limited interstate access). These communities often have an aging population base and lack of opportunities for higher education and local employment. Many of central Wisconsin communities fall into this category.
2. **Industrial Economy.** This type of economy is characterized by dependence on yesterday's economic base. Often a community of this type has a single manufacturing or industrial operation that sustains the vast majority of residents.
3. **Metropolitanizing Economy.** These communities are experiencing a high amount of residential development which causes concern about decreasing land supplies, loss of community identity, maintaining small town character, and avoiding becoming a "bedroom community."
4. **Dependent Economy.** Usually an unincorporated (i.e. township) area outside of the suburban ring of development. The economic vitality of this community depends on the economic success of the larger adjacent/nearby community (i.e. Fond du Lac). The primary challenge is handling local residential development pressure.
5. **Lifestyle Economy.** These communities include university towns, small communities with military bases, and tourist destinations. Residents enjoy their small community setting and quality of living, but are concerned about their long-term dependency on a single economic source.

Based on these descriptions of small town economies, the Town of Empire is best described as a dependent economy. The Town has relatively little business development. Those businesses that do exist are situated primarily along STH 23 and USH 45. Agriculture is the primary economic activity in the Town. Residential development is a primary challenge.

Costs and Benefits of Economic Development

The Town of Empire has several positive attributes to offer potential businesses:

- A great location that is accessible to Fond du Lac and centrally located between the Fox Cities, Madison, and Milwaukee;
- Properties with highway frontage;
- An attractive and safe community atmosphere that provides for a high quality of living;
- Quality school districts that serve the area;
- Reasonable tax rates;
- High education attainment compared to surrounding communities; and,
- High-income averages compared to surrounding communities – suggesting disposable income to support non-essential businesses (i.e. entertainment, restaurants, and specialty shops).

While the Town of Empire enjoys advantages, there are several challenges that must be addressed if seeking to attract new businesses and industry. In particular:

- Residents can easily drive to nearby communities to purchase services and products.
- Similarly, most residents travel outside of the Town to work and find shopping, dining and entertainment choices conveniently located near their place of employment.
- There is a lack of businesses catering to people's everyday needs that further entices residents to drive to other communities for shopping.
- Sewer infrastructure is only available within the sanitary districts and their capacity to serve business development is limited. Community water service is not available.
- Competition from existing development centers limits the market area for businesses in Empire.
- Limited Town population growth is projected for Empire in comparison to surrounding communities (refer to Table 2 in Chapter 3). This will ensure that the market base remains about the same size over the planning period, which will limit the growth potential of existing businesses and the market demand for additional businesses.
- Opposition to development from Town residents who perceive business uses as a threat to the Town's rural character and quality of living.

Local Economic Development Desires

Each community has a different vision for economic activity. Empire, like other townships located on the edge of a larger city is more focused on offering a quality residential setting, preserving natural resources and sustaining remaining agricultural operations than expanding business and industry.

Two different planning tools were used to ascertain local economic desires and expectations for 2025:

1. Ideas and comments collected during the Kick-Off and Vision meetings facilitated by OMNNI Associates in February and March of 2005
2. Community-wide survey results

LOCAL VISIONS FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



As part of the SWOT exercise conducted during the Kick-Off Meeting some residents indicated new business development, particularly along STH 23 and STH 45 was an opportunity for the Town. However, even more residents indicated during the SWOT exercise that development of commercial uses (businesses) in Empire and too much growth

along the USH 151 bypass and STH 23 corridor were threats to the future of the community.



Farmers Market in Empire

During the visioning session held March 31, 2005, residents expressed a far more refined vision for economic activity in Empire. Specifically, when asked to describe desired economic activities in 2025,

participants indicated they were largely uninterested in new industrial or shopping developments. Existing commercial and industrial uses should remain and any new business development that is established should occur in planned, suitable areas, possibly near STH 23 and USH 151. A farmers market was desired and wind turbines, if developed at all, should not be located in residential or environmentally sensitive areas.

COMMUNITY SURVEY RESULTS

In 1995 a community-wide survey was distributed. That survey was used as a guide in the development of the Town's 1998 plan. In that survey, with respect to economic activity, approximately 80 percent of Empire residents felt that the Town had an appropriate amount of commercial development in 1995 and about 73 percent indicated that there was no need for industrial development in Empire.

As part of the effort to develop this plan, a follow-up survey was distributed in the fall of 2005. Results from several of the questions in the 2005 survey are useful in understanding resident desires for future economic development.

Q12: Do you feel the Town of Empire needs more commercial development or is it OK as it is now?

Needs more:	23.5%
OK as is:	72.0%
No Opinion:	4.5%

Q13: What types of business would you like to have available in the Town of Empire?

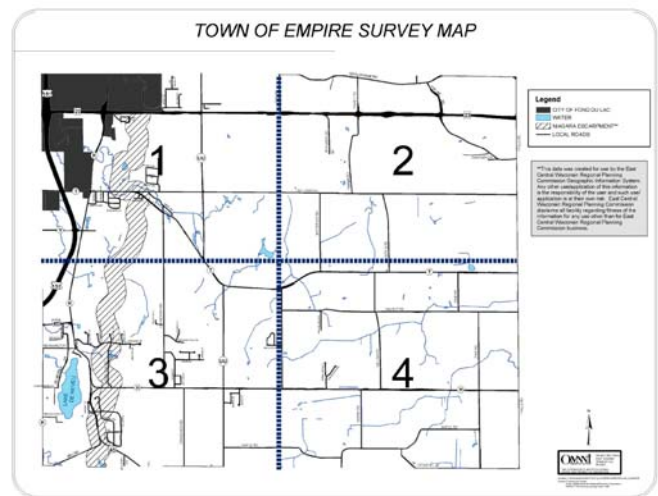
Bed and Breakfasts:	22.2%
Senior Housing:	34.4%
Restaurants:	32.9%
Farm/Produce Stands:	24.4%
Other:	36.9%

Q14: Where should businesses be located in the Town of Empire?

Quadrant 1:	54.6%
Quadrant 2:	19.2%
Quadrant 3:	21.8%
Quadrant 4:	6.7%
Other:	23.6%

Q15: What type of industrial development is acceptable in Empire?

Heavy Industry:	3.8%
Manufacturing:	14.9%
Warehousing:	24.6%
None:	41.7%
Other:	5.1%
Light Industrial:	41.2%
Assembly:	23.6%
Industrial Park:	24.5%



Economic Development Opportunities

During the planning process, a few economic development opportunities were identified in Empire. This section highlights those opportunities. Supporting goals, objectives and policies are provided in the Economic Development section of the Implementation Chapter to help Empire capitalize on its most *desired* economic opportunities.

NEW ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY STUDY RECOMMENDATIONS ²

In October 2004, Northstar Economics, Inc. conducted an economic opportunity study to understand deteriorating employment trends in certain industry sectors within Northeast Wisconsin.³ The study was based on the premise that the model for future economic prosperity in the region has changed. In the previous model (Old Economy) the production of goods was based upon proximity to raw materials and limited distribution channels. Labor chased growing businesses. The new model (New Economy) is based on ideas, creativity, and innovation. Now successful businesses chase a scarcity of skilled workers. Skilled workers are attracted to places with high qualities of life and rich cultural and recreational environments.

Whereas the Old Economy is based upon a competitive race to the bottom to secure and hold markets, the New Economy is based on knowledge and abundance theory – the concept that collaboration will grow the economy sufficiently to serve everyone. A skilled workforce is imperative in this new economic model.

The following industry clusters were identified in the *NEW Economic Opportunity Study* as areas that should be expanded and built in the region:

- * BioRefinery/Paper Products
- * Insurance Products
- * Nutraceuticals (i.e. vitamins, supplements, bio-products)
- * Healthcare
- * Maritime Vessels & Equipment
- * Specialty Crops
- * Education & Workforce Training Services
- * Printing and Publishing
- * Production Technology
- * Machine Tool Design
- * BioMass/Agriculture/Food Processing
- * Tourism
- * Automated Manufacturing Technology
- * New Economy Created Products

These recommendations for Northeast Wisconsin encompass the Fond du Lac area that, in turn, includes Empire. The recommended industry clusters may be seen in new development that may occur at the STH 23 and USH 151 interchange. Moreover, the specialty crop farming and tourism opportunities may be capitalized on locally by area farmers, nature enthusiasts, and trail users.

² Portions of this summary were obtained from the Northeast Wisconsin Economic Opportunity Study Executive Summary, October 2004.

³ Northeast Wisconsin defined as Brown, Calumet, Door, Fond du Lac, Green Lake, Kewaunee, Manitowoc, Marinette, Menominee, Oconto, Outagamie, Shawano, Sheboygan, Waupaca and Waushara Counties.

AGRICULTURE AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

A depressed farm economy and growing pressure from nonfarm development has led to increasing conflicts over the use of agricultural lands. Central to this conflict is the demand for rural housing and recreational land, which has resulted in accelerated rates of farmland conversion to nonfarm uses. In fact, nonfarm growth pressures lead to Wisconsin passing the Comprehensive Planning Law in 1999 to encourage communities to write and use comprehensive plans to guide land use decisions.

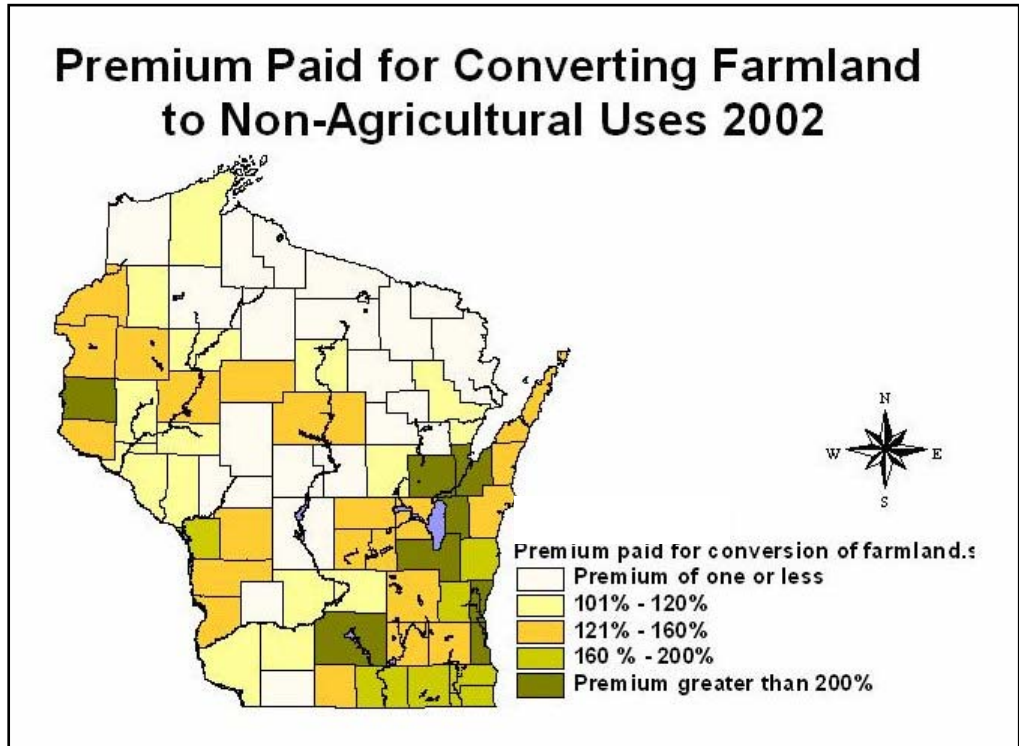
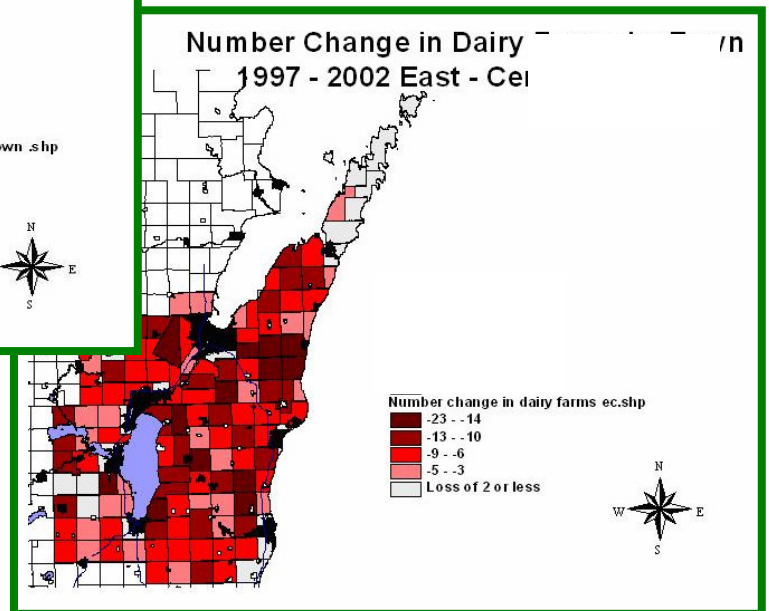
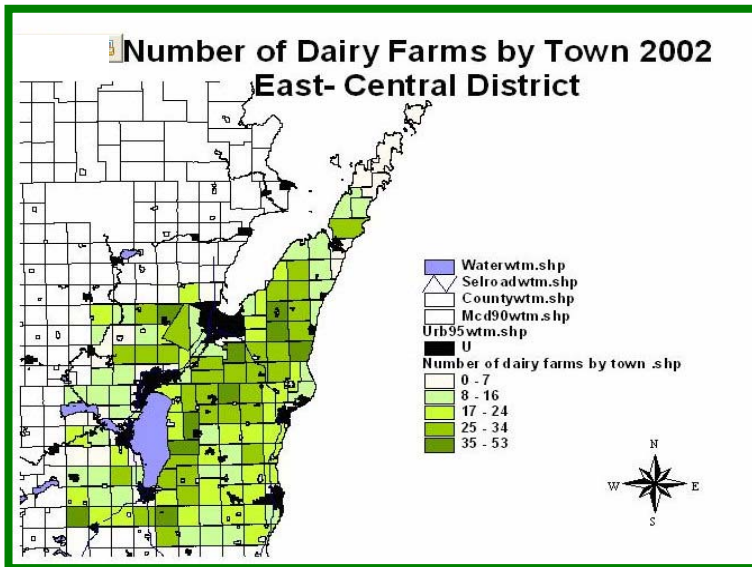


Illustration above shows that farmland in Fond du Lac County sold for residential development costs more per acre than farmland in several surrounding counties.
 SOURCE: Program on Agricultural and Technology Studies, 2002

Fond du Lac County has not escaped from residential development pressure and corresponding farmland losses. As was mentioned earlier in this plan, the community surveys and participant comments at meetings reveal support for agriculture and agriculture-related businesses. At the same time, though, some local farmers and others expressed their concern about the long-term sustainability of farming. As local farmers age, they choose to sell their land or simply stop their farming activities. Unfortunately, there are relatively few young people that are becoming farmers in today’s economy. As a result, when local farmers retire, they cannot always find young farmers to purchase additional farmland. Often, faced with a need for retirement income, local farmers seem to have no choice but to sell their property for development.

Between 1990 and 1997, Empire lost 15 of its 46 local dairy operations (refer to Table 21). The maps on the next page reveal losses have continued since 1997 in Empire and across Northeast Wisconsin.⁴ Table 22 highlights the significance of “off the farm” income to area farmers.

⁴ Program on Agricultural and Technology Studies, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1997



Township	1990	1997	% Change
Empire	46	31	32.6%
Eden	65	48	26.2%
Fond du Lac	15	8	46.7%
Forest	63	46	42.9%
Taycheedah	55	40	27.3%

SOURCE FOR TABLES 21, 22 & MAPS:
Program on Agricultural Technology,
www.pats.wisc.com

Notwithstanding these losses, agriculture is still very much an important economic force in Fond du Lac County. The county's 1,790 working farms account for more than \$151 million in commodity sales annually - placing it sixth in the state among the 72 counties. The farms are first in the state in production of winter wheat and fourth in production of sweet corn. The average farm size is 218 acres. The county is sixth in Wisconsin in the production of corn silage, alfalfa for hay and tenth in oats for grain. It is also tenth in soybeans and oats. Fond du Lac County's 583 dairy farms have a total of 40,200 cows. Collectively, these dairy farms rank seventh in Wisconsin in milk production.⁵

County	Zero Days	99 Days or Less	100 Days or More
Fond du Lac	51%	9%	39%
Calumet	46%	8%	46%
Sheboygan	43%	9%	48%
Washington	52%	9%	39%
Winnebago	45%	7%	48%

⁵ Fond du Lac County Chamber of Commerce, 2004

The Agricultural, Natural and Cultural Resources Chapter highlighted several strategies for sustaining agriculture in the Town over the next 20 years and beyond. Given the importance of agriculture to the local economy, this section offers some additional opportunities available to local farmers.

- **Sell products directly to customers** at a centralized farmer’s market. As of 2002, only 4.7% of Fond du Lac farmers sold their products directly to consumers. This is lower than the State average of 6.4%.⁶ To expand this market opportunity a regional farmers market is recommended in Empire. Currently, a small farmers market is operated on Sundays from June to October in the Empire Town Hall parking lot. A regional farmers market could be established at this same location or another spot in Empire. Possible locations for a new regional farmers market are identified on the *Future Land Use Map* later in this plan.
- **Develop a historical and/or niche farm tour** to showcase local farm operations, farm products and Century Farms. This tour should be included on the Empire web site and also be the subject of a brochure available through the Fond du Lac Area Convention and Visitors Bureau.
- **Participate in seminars and training** hosted by the UW-Extension to learn about tools available to farmers to accommodate development requests (i.e. transfer and purchase of development rights, zoning ordinance tools) and other opportunities (i.e. the sale of farm by-products for energy generation, organic farming opportunities, niche farming opportunities, etc.).
- **Consider conversion to organic farming.** As of 2002, only 0.6% of Fond du Lac County’s agriculture was in organic farming. This is less than overall Wisconsin average (0.7%), but higher than the percentages in many nearby counties (Door County – 0.5%; Brown County – 0.6%; Winnebago – 0.1%; Outagamie 0.6%– Washington – 0.5%; and Sheboygan – 0.4%).⁷ Calumet County farmers have more than double Fond du Lac County’s agriculture production in organic farming at 1.6%. Strong organic and specialty farm markets are proving very profitable. Since 1990, the organic food industry has grown 20 percent or more *each year* and now constitutes an almost \$8 billion industry. An opportunity exists to capitalize on this growing market.



Images of Successful Farmers Markets from Across Wisconsin

⁶ University of Wisconsin Extension, Center for Economic Development, 2002 Economic Census Data.

⁷ See Footnote # 5.

TOURISM

Two potential tourist markets exist in Empire:

1. **Eco-Tourism.** The Niagara Escarpment, rural / rustic bike routes and planned trails provide opportunities to bring nature enthusiasts to the area that could spend money in the community at local restaurants, the farmers market, and other businesses. (Refer to the Transportation Chapter for more information on bike and trail route opportunities in Empire.)
2. **Agri-Tourism.** Agricultural uses dominate the landscape in Fond du Lac County. Given the strength of the agricultural economy opportunities exist to offer tourist activities related to area agriculture, including: farmer-for-a-day experiences, rural bed & breakfasts, roadside stands, horse boarding and trail riding, pick-your-own produce operations, corn mazes, pumpkin patches, wineries, cheese factories, and the like.

Locations for New Business Developments

SPECIALTY ZONED AREAS

The Vision Exercise completed in March 2005, revealed that residents want to ensure that any nonresidential development occurs in specialty-zoned areas. The Town of Empire has its own zoning ordinance that includes districts to accommodate different land uses⁸. Locations for future business development are identified on the *Future Land Use Map*. The most desirable location for business development includes the STH 23 corridor - particularly near the USH 151 interchange.

ENVIRONMENTALLY CONTAMINATED SITES

Development efforts can sometimes encounter the challenge of potentially contaminated properties, which are commonly referred to as brownfields (see box at right). Brownfield sites vary in size, location, age, and past use. A brownfield site can be a former corner gas station or an empty manufacturing plant. There are an estimated 10,000 brownfields across Wisconsin. These sites pose a number of problems for communities including:

- Neighborhood deterioration and community blight;
- Potential harm to human health and the environment;
- Reduced tax revenue and economic growth; and,
- Attraction for vandalism, open dumping and other illegal activity.

The United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) defines **brownfield sites** as "With certain legal exclusions and additions, the term 'brownfield site' means real property, the expansion, redevelopment, or reuse of which may be complicated by the presence or potential presence of a hazardous substance, pollutant, or contaminant."

The term "brownfield" was first used to distinguish developed land from unused suburban and rural land, referred to as "greenfield" sites. The EPA, states, and municipalities believe that choosing brownfield redevelopment over greenfield development yields several benefits for communities and for commerce. Brownfield redevelopment encourages the cleanup of contaminated sites. This is the major goal of most modern environmental regulations. The fewer the number of contaminated sites, the less the cumulative

⁸ Additional information about the zoning ordinance is included in the Land Use Chapter of this plan. In general, it should be noted that there is little land in the Town zoned for business development. This is consistent with the Town's 1998 Plan.

impact to the environment. Another benefit of brownfield redevelopment is that it revitalizes urban areas (many brownfields are centrally located in urban areas). This leads to another perceived benefit -- the minimization of green space development. When brownfields are redeveloped or revitalized in urban areas, less farmland on the urban fringe is developed, maintaining green space and reducing the need for expanding infrastructure and utilities. Finally, when brownfields are redeveloped and new businesses begin operating, these properties return tax base and provide jobs. This is a major financial incentive for communities to develop and encourage programs for brownfield redevelopment.

Interested residents can search for properties in the Town of Empire that have been impacted by environmental contamination (and have been reported) through the WDNR Bureau for Remediation and Redevelopment Internet web site tracking available at: www.dnr.state.wi.us/botw/Welcome.do. This database tracks identified sites from first reporting through closure or no further action. Records are kept in perpetuity regardless of whether or not contamination was actually found, the size of the incidence, and whether or not the site has been cleaned.

The WDNR database lists five (5) properties in the Town of Empire. Three (3) of these sites are closed because remediation activities were either unnecessary or completed. One site was identified as requiring no action. The remaining property identified is located at W2795 Fourth Street is listed as having had a leaking underground storage tank (LUST) that was used to store diesel fuel. According to the WDNR web site the action is in the process of being cleaned up by the property owner and WDNR officials. However, Town Officials report that the site has been fully remediated with Fond du Lac County and the WDNR database should be updated.

Governments at all levels have recognized that brownfield redevelopment is an important issue. Numerous programs have been created to encourage brownfield redevelopment including grants, loans, and tax incentives. In the future, Empire should encourage landowners to pursue the clean up of any brownfield site. Likewise, to minimize future environmental impacts, Empire will encourage environmentally friendly business development that is properly permitted and regulated to protect the area's natural environment, particularly its groundwater resources.

Economic Development Tools, Programs, and Partners

CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS PROGRAM (CIP)

Through a CIP, communities are able to responsibly plan for future improvements. As is recommended in the Utilities and Community Facilities Chapter, Empire should seriously consider developing a CIP to help plan for community improvements that can support existing local businesses and desirable new business opportunities. Improvements a CIP may be used to plan for include road maintenance and Town facility improvements (i.e. Town Hall, Maintenance Garage etc.).

INTERNET MARKETING

An opportunity exists to use Empire's web site as a marketing tool to advertise desirable economic activities (i.e. home occupations and a local farmers market). The web site could include information about available development sites. More importantly the web site could provide information about the development approval process, including printable permit applications and meeting agendas. As is suggested in the Housing Chapter, the internet can also be used as a tool to provide the public with information about upcoming Plan Commission and Town Board agenda items, including site plans and completed application forms for resident review.

TAX INCREMENT FINANCING

Tax Incremental Financing (TIF) allows communities to undertake a public project to stimulate beneficial development or redevelopment that would not otherwise occur. It is a mechanism for financing local economic development projects in underdeveloped and blighted areas. Taxes generated by the increased property values pay for land acquisition or needed public works.

In Wisconsin, TIF has historically been used exclusively by cities and villages. However, recently the Wisconsin Law was changed to allow Towns to establish TIF districts to promote agricultural and forestry development. Towns are more restricted than cities and villages in the range of activities that may receive TIF benefit. The list of eligible activities for a Town TIF district includes⁹:

How Does a TIF Work?	
1.	The community defines a TIF district area.
2.	Tax assessments for the district are frozen at their current value.
3.	The community prepares a plan for the TIF district called a "project plan" to describe costs to be incurred and the anticipated tax revenue to make up for the cost overtime.
4.	The community, through its tax-increment finance authority, can acquire land and make capital improvements in the district (i.e. streets, lighting, landscaping, etc.) to make it more desirable to developers.
5.	When development occurs, the value of the land in the district increases. This increased value is taxed, but for a period of time while the TIF district is in effect, the additional tax revenues go to the TIF.
6.	This additional tax revenue is used to pay off the expenses incurred by the community in land acquisition and installation of capital improvements.
More information about establishing a TIF is available in Wis. Stats. Ch. 66.1105(5)(g).	

- *Agriculture* - animal and crop production and direct support activities.
- *Tourism* –camps, RV parks, campgrounds, dairy product stores and public golf courses
- *Forestry* – including logging and direct support activities.
- *Manufacturing* – defined as animal slaughtering and processing, wood product manufacturing, paper manufacturing, or ethyl alcohol manufacturing.
- *Residential development* – limited to sleeping quarters within a TIF district for employees who work for employers engaged in an eligible TIF project. Residential development may not include hotels, motels or general residential development.
- *Retail development* - Related to the sale of products as a result of allowed agriculture, forestry or manufacturing activities.

The boundary of a TIF may be amended one time. A TIF district could potentially be used in Empire to support the establishment of a regional farmers market and parks/trails associated with the Niagara Escarpment. A Town TIF district can remain in existence until the earliest of the following:

- The Town has received aggregate incomes equal to the total project costs;
- 11 years after the last expenditure in the original plan is made;
- The Town Board dissolves the district by resolution (the Town is then liable for all costs); or,
- The Secretary of Revenue determines the tax increments have been used to pay ineligible costs.

⁹ At least 75 percent of the area of a TIF in a Town must be used for one of the allowable activities.

NORTHEAST WISCONSIN REGIONAL ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIP (NEWREP)

NEWREP was established in 2002 by former Governor Scott McCallum as a technology zone. It is one of eight zones created throughout Wisconsin, each of which had \$5 million in income tax credits to provide as incentive to attract high-tech companies to the area and to help existing companies increase productivity. The zones will be in effect through 2012. The current focus of NEWREP, based on the results of the *NEW Economic Opportunity Study* completed in October 2004, is to foster collaboration across all sectors in the region – business, labor, government, education, health care – to support the regional economy. Specifically, NEWREP is focused on:

- Move to a New Economy focused on maintaining and improving quality of life to retain skilled labor;
- Move to a collaborative economic development construct focused on establishing a regional approach to economic growth;
- Changing the social and cultural mindset to risk and collaboration for economic development;
- Change the regional image to reflect the New Economy; and,
- Promote industry cluster development.

FOND DU LAC COUNTY UW-EXTENSION

Through the Fond du Lac County Office of the University of Wisconsin-Extension, the Fond du Lac County Community Development Educator and Agriculture Educator provide research and educational materials for government and local businesses. This information can be very valuable to individuals considering business/agriculture operation development and expansion in Empire.

STATE AGENCIES/PROGRAMS

- Wisconsin Department of Commerce – www.commerce.state.wi.us: This department is the state’s primary agency for delivery of integrated services to businesses.
- Wisconsin Department of Transportation – www.dot.state.wi.us: The Office of Disadvantaged Business Enterprise Programs encourages firms owned by disadvantaged individuals to participate in all federal and state transportation facility contracts.
- Forward Wisconsin – www.forwardwi.com: Forward Wisconsin markets outside Wisconsin to attract new businesses, jobs, and increase state economic activity.
- Department of Workforce Development – www.dwd.state.wi.us: This department builds and strengthens Wisconsin’s workforce by providing job services, training and employment assistance, and helping employers find necessary workers.
- Wisconsin Small Business Development Centers – www.uwex.edu/sbdc: These centers help ensure the state’s economic health and stability. They offer formative business education, counseling, and technology training.
- Wisconsin Youth Apprenticeship Program helps businesses prepare future workers and is an integral part of the State Department of Workforce Development's workforce training strategy. Youth apprenticeship is a rigorous two-year elective program for high school juniors and seniors that combine academic and technical classroom instruction and on-the-job training from mentors.
- Dairy 2020 Initiative is a state, business, and education partnership that works to enhance the competitive edge of the Wisconsin dairy industry.
- Wisconsin Women's Business Initiative Corporation - www.wwbic.com: This statewide economic development organization offers quality business workshops and trainings, one-on-one business assistance, business incubation programs, a variety of micro loan programs and individual development accounts.

FEDERAL AGENCIES/PROGRAMS

- Department of Agriculture Rural Development Administration – www.rurdev.usda.gov
- US Small Business Administration – www.sba.gov: provides financial, technical and management assistance to help Americans start, run and grow their businesses.
- US Department of Commerce – www.doc.gov
- US Department of Transportation – www.dot.gov

Economic Development Issues & Concerns

RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT AS ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

To some, residential development is a growing source of taxable income for the Town, as such; economic development is often related to residential development. However, to a much greater degree than commercial, industrial and agricultural development, housing requires services to accommodate resident needs. These services include: schools, parks, trails, public safety, roads and associated maintenance (including snowplowing). As a result, residential development is not a long-term strategy to decrease local tax rates. In fact, Empire tax rates have steadily increased over the years as development has occurred. By comparison, Empire's effective tax rate (0.1643) is higher than the Town of Forest (0.1566) - a more rural neighbor to the east.¹⁰

A number of community studies have been completed across the country which compare tax revenue generated by different land uses (i.e. commercial, industrial, single-family residential, multiple family residential, etc.) to the services they require. Study after study demonstrates that single-family residential development routinely increases public costs by a larger amount than it increases tax revenue for local governments that must provide those services. Commercial and industrial development have a far more positive balance relative to tax dollars paid and dollars expended on services.

The premier example of such a study in Wisconsin was completed by the Town of Dunn (Dane County) in 1994. Subsequent studies rely on the Town of Dunn as a model in their efforts.¹¹ The study revealed that for every dollar in tax revenue collected by the Town of Dunn, \$1.24 was required in local services (including schools). The ratios for commercial and industrial uses were far more favorable (i.e. for every \$1 in tax revenues collected significantly less than \$1 of service costs were required). The tax ratio was most favorable for farmland and natural areas that required generally around 0.15 cents in services for each \$1 in taxes collected. As a result of this study, the Town of Dunn estimates that residential development costs taxpayers \$1,060 in services for every \$1,000 paid in property taxes. Farm and parkland only cost \$180 to service for the same \$1,000 in taxes paid.

The Town of Dunn is similar to the Town of Empire, in that it is located near to a major employment center (Madison) and it is a community without municipal water and sewer. However, unlike the Town of Dunn, the Town of Empire does have three sanitary districts that can accommodate some additional development. Other communities in Wisconsin have completed similar studies¹², but none in Fond du

¹⁰ Wisconsin Department of Revenue, 2004, Effective Tax Rates.

¹¹ Additional Information about the Town of Dunn Community Services Study is available on-line at www.town.dunn.wi.us.

¹² The Village of McFarland estimates that new home building costs all village taxpayers an additional \$30 for each \$1 million of value built.

Lac County. The bottom line in the Town of Dunn study (and similar studies completed more recently) is that houses cost more, from a tax standpoint, than farmland and parks.

To be certain that local residential development does not negatively impact the local tax base over time, it is important to ensure that residential tax dollars cover the costs of needed services. Empire supports the idea that new residential development should pay a fair and proportionate share of its service costs and complete necessary studies to adequately gauge their impact on traffic and schools. To achieve this, impact fees can be used to require that new development pay a fair and equitable share of road improvement and park costs. However, even this is not a permanent solution because impact fees are only collected as long as new development continues to occur. If new development stops or slows significantly, revenue generated from impact fees will decrease or disappear. In this situation, tax money must be used to pay for services.

To make informed land use decisions, the Town must be provided with the full costs and benefits of new development. Just as an Environmental Impact Statements allow for an understanding of the effects of building projects on environmental resources, Property Tax Impact Statements help decision-makers to assess the full costs and benefits of new development. Property Tax Impact Statement estimate the additional costs of providing and servicing schools, roads, fire, police, water, sewer and other public services that will be required for each new development. With a Property Tax Impact Statement decision-makers will know up-front what the Town will be paying for and will be able to decide if a development is beneficial or detrimental to Empire from a financial standpoint. These statements may be prepared by a developer or the town could possibly contract with an independent analyst, the cost of which would be paid by the developer.

CONCENTRATED ANIMAL FEEDING OPERATIONS (MEGA-FARMS)

Concentrated animal feeding operations (sometimes referred to as mega farms or CAFOs) are of concern to many residents of Empire. Residents are concerned about odors, groundwater contamination, and the contradiction in scale and character CAFOs represent in comparison to traditional family farming operations.

For any CAFO to be approved, careful site selection (after extensive investigation to determine and mitigate any potential impacts), as well as, a strong public information and education campaign will be essential. Consideration of any CAFO must be in accordance with State regulations (refer to the Agricultural, Natural and Cultural Resources Chapter for more information). It is possible that no suitable location may be found in the Town of Empire for a CAFO. No specific site for such a use is recommended on the *Future Land Use Maps*.

RESPECTING RURAL CHARACTER

The visions in preceding chapters highlighted the need to preserve natural features, maintain farmland, and continue to offer a quality rural living environment. Accordingly, it is important that economic development respect these visions by being of a smaller scale. Intensive industry (with potential pollution concerns) and large commercial establishments (i.e. superstores, strip malls, etc) are not consistent with this image.

While a limited number of new businesses may be established in Empire, any new business must be appropriately located to minimize potential conflicts with residential areas (i.e. near existing business development, along highway corridors, etc.). Furthermore, new business development must exist in harmony with the rural setting and respect the Town's zoning and design standards.

To further protect the rural landscape from development, the Town may want to coordinate with Fond du Lac County to consider opportunities for purchase and transfer of development rights programs (refer to the Agricultural, Natural and Cultural Resources Chapter for more information). These types of programs are discussed more in the Agricultural, Natural and Cultural Resources Chapter.

SPRAWL

Sprawling residential and commercial development patterns are a concern to residents of Empire.

The new bypass and future plans for STH 23 will increase pressure for development along and near these corridors. However, just because these roadways are developed/expanded, the Town is not required to approve new commercial development like what is found on the west side of Fond du Lac along STH 23. Commercial development sprawl – characterized by the lining of a road corridor with business uses in otherwise natural, open and farm areas – is of great concern because it has the potential to:

- Detract from rural character;
- Blur community identity so that passing motorists will not know when they are in the Town of Empire or the City of Fond du Lac; and,
- Slow traffic thereby reducing the effectiveness of these highway routes for moving people.

By retaining open, undeveloped lands along these corridors, Empire can help to maintain the safety and function of these corridors in the long-term. To explain, rather than line corridors with development (including associated driveways, signage, frontage roads, and stop lights) large undeveloped stretches allow motorists to efficiently pass through the area without potential conflicts from turning traffic. This rationale is why the DOT restricts direct access to important thru routes like highways 23 and 151. The Town can prevent strip development and effectively manage development pressure along these corridors by enforcing the pattern of development illustrated on the *Future Land Use Maps*.

With respect to sprawl and residential development, there is concern that scattered residential subdivisions will increase the potential for conflicts with agricultural uses. As a result, farmers may face complaints from neighbors when pursuing routine agricultural practices (i.e. planting, fertilizing, watering, harvesting, etc.). Scattered residential uses also have the potential to increase community service costs related to: school bussing, road plowing, road maintenance, garbage collection, etc. As a general concern, sprawling residential development patterns also increase automobile dependency to get to work, shopping and other destinations. Concentrated areas of development (i.e. within Town or City Growth Areas as opposed to areas across the entire community) can offer residents opportunities to walk or bicycle to destinations. This approach can also benefit outlying agricultural areas by buffering farms from development pressures.

To address concerns about sprawl, careful consideration was given to appropriate locations for business and residential development when preparing the *Future Land Use Maps* presented later in this plan.

WHAT IS RURAL SPRAWL?

“Sprawl” usually refers to development with negative effects such as loss of agricultural land, open space, and wildlife habitat. Sprawl is often equated directly with growth. That is, as population increases in an area or as city limits expand to accommodate growth, an area is considered to be sprawling (*National Geographic*, November 1999 Issue).

One of the strongest indicators of sprawl is increased traffic. As a result, auto-dependent development is considered to be sprawl.

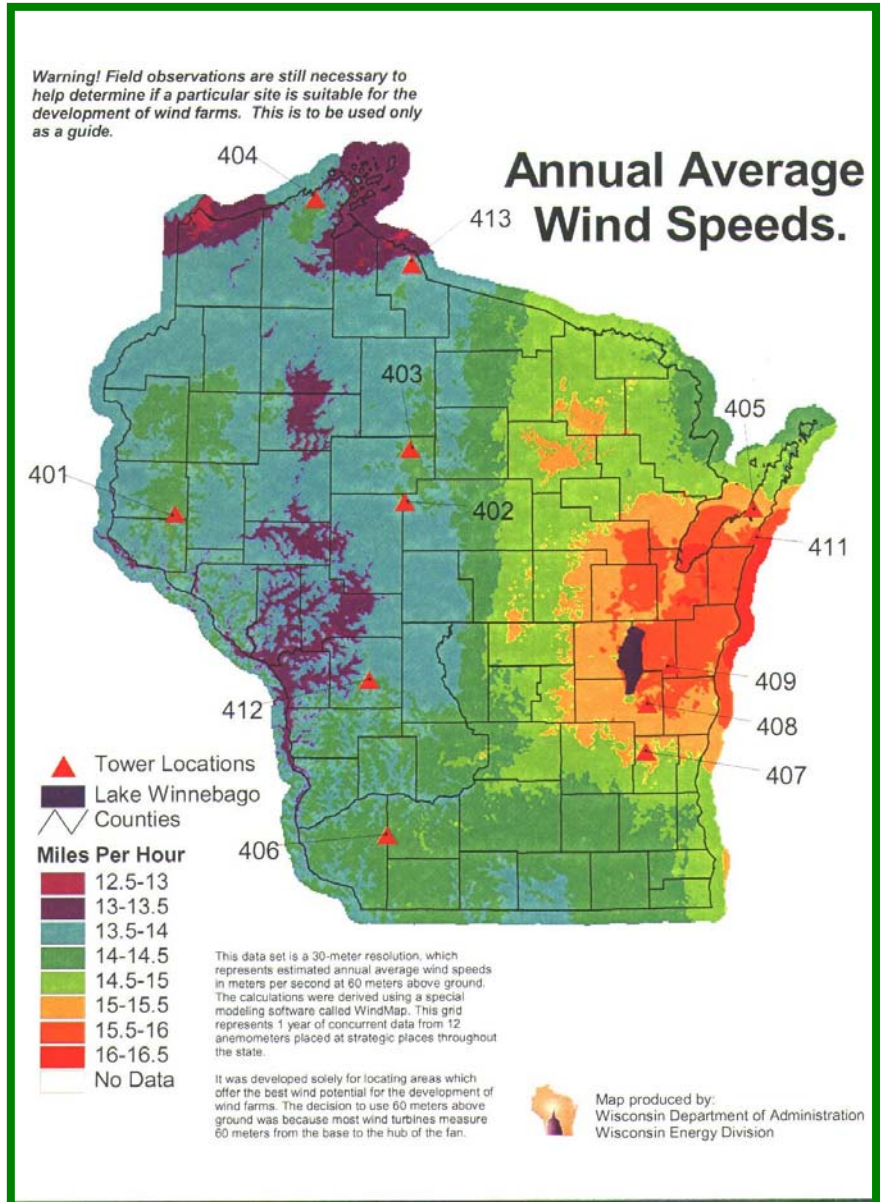
Sprawling development is usually located on the urban fringe, at the edge of an urban area. Sprawl is often considered to be “low-density” development, though how low is generally not defined. Since “low” is a relative term, even when low-density is defined, it is not standardized and ranges significantly (from 1 units per acre to 1 unit per 40 acres).

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND ENERGY PRODUCTION

The Town of Empire has some of the strongest average annual wind speeds in the State – strong enough to support wind energy production. This situation provides the potential for wind turbines in the Town.

At the time this plan was being prepared an application for approximately 13-15 towers were being considered in Empire. The siting of a wind turbine provides a landowner direct economic gains. For this reason, wind towers can be particularly enticing to farmers who can benefit from the financial return and still continue to farm the land surrounding the turbine without the conflicts that arise when farmland is sold for residential uses (i.e. complaints about farm noise, odors, hours of operation, etc.). Moreover, having available local sustainable energy supplies is a positive economic factor that may influence some businesses to locate in the region.

Wind farms are not without their concerns. They include: noise, visual impact, impacts on birds, and economic effects on land values for properties surrounding turbines or properties with views of turbines. For wind turbines to be effectively located in Empire, areas should be selected that are agricultural in character with limited nearby residential development. This will translate into locations on the far easternmost sections of the Town, away from designated growth areas and away from the sanitary districts.



Coordination with Other Comprehensive Plan Chapters

The Economic Development Chapter most directly impacts the Future Land Use, Transportation, Housing, and Utilities and Community Facilities Chapters. Therefore, it is important that the chapters are consistent.

FUTURE LAND USE CHAPTER

Any new business development must be located in areas that the market will support. At the same time, new development should not create a nuisance for neighboring properties or natural resources. These criteria were carefully considered during the development of the *Future Land Use Maps*.

TRANSPORTATION CHAPTER

Any new business development Empire should coordinate with Fond du Lac County and WisDOT to monitor traffic flows to ensure that it is appropriately planned and sited to minimize its impact on adjacent roadways. This may periodically require traffic studies to understand the impacts of proposed developments. Pedestrian and bicycle access must also be considered.

HOUSING CHAPTER

Economic development in Empire (and in Fond du Lac) can bring visitors to the Town who may decide its rural, scenic, country-setting is an ideal location to live. Successful business development can also result in jobs that bring people to the community looking for places to live near their place of employment. Accordingly areas for housing development, consistent with state growth projections, are provided on the *Future Land Use Maps*.

UTILITIES & COMMUNITY FACILITIES

To support economic development, infrastructure (sanitary service, transportation, electricity, communication, etc.) must be available to meet the needs of businesses. The Utilities and Community Facilities Chapter discusses Empire's existing and planned infrastructure to serve the needs of the community, including economic interests.