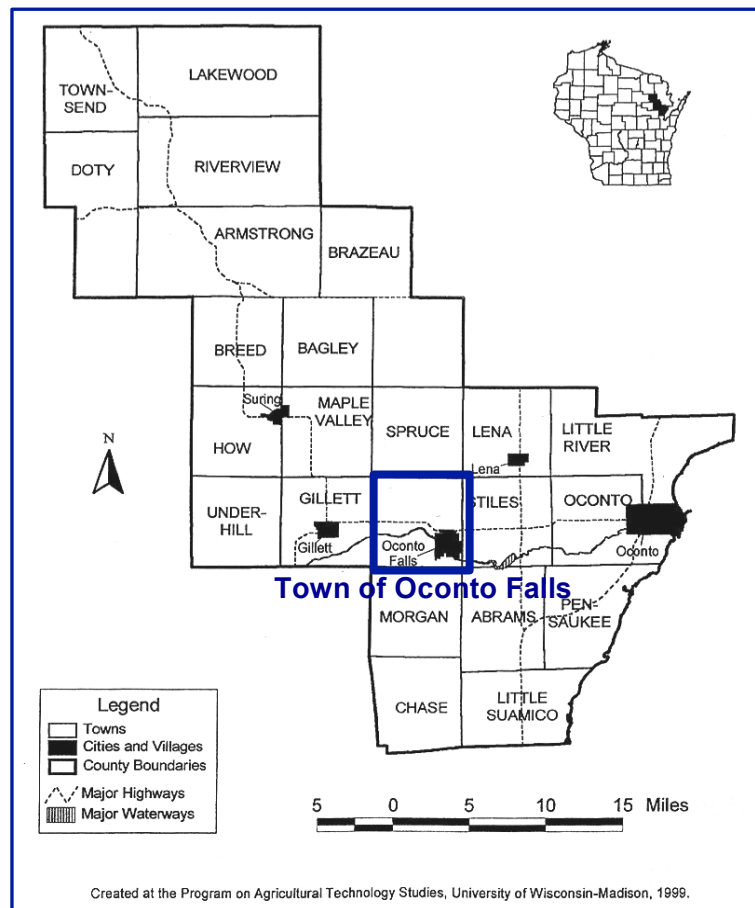


## Introduction

The Town of Oconto Falls is a community of approximately 1,300 people located in south central Oconto County. Oconto Falls is an unspoiled rural paradise for residents seeking a relaxed living environment. The Town has a rich farming tradition and boasts approximately four miles of frontage along the Oconto River. Vast areas of woodlands, wetlands, and other natural areas are found in the community.

The Town of Oconto Falls is approximately 33 square miles in size and shares borders with the Town of Spruce to the north, Town of Gillett to the west, Town of Morgan to the south, and the Town of Stiles to the east. The City of Oconto Falls is located in the southeast corner of the Town. Easy access to USH 141 is provided via STH 22.



## The Comprehensive Plan

A comprehensive plan is a document used by local government to guide community development and preservation actions. It is comprised of data, graphics, maps, goals, objectives, and visions related to housing, transportation, economic development, and natural resources (among others), which guide public land use policy. In 1999, the State Legislature passed Act 9, Wisconsin's Comprehensive Planning Law (Section 66.1001, Wis. Stats.). The law requires that every municipality in the state that administers zoning regulations, subdivision regulations, or an official map do so consistent with an approved and adopted comprehensive plan. Act 9 provides a framework for comprehensive planning. Under the law, a comprehensive plan must include nine elements (or chapters) describing existing conditions within the community and providing a direction for addressing current and future needs. These elements include:

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- Issues & Opportunities – Background information on the community and detailed demographic data related to population, education, income, and employment, among others.
- Housing – Detailed assessment of the current housing stock and a plan to ensure that future housing will meet the needs of all residents.
- Transportation – A comprehensive description of the existing transportation network and a plan for providing multi-modal systems to meet future demand.
- Utilities & Community Facilities – An analysis of current facilities including water and sewer service, stormwater, electricity and natural gas, parks and recreation, healthcare, schools, Town Hall, and public safety (including police and fire stations), among others; and a plan to ensure that those facilities are adequate to meet future needs.
- Agricultural, Natural, and Cultural Resources – A description of the community’s resource base and the efforts necessary to preserve that base in the long-term.
- Economic Development – Plans and programs to promote the stabilization, retention, diversification, and expansion of the economic base and quality employment opportunities.
- Land Use – A detailed description of current land uses and a future land use plan to guide development during the next twenty years.
- Intergovernmental Cooperation – A list of existing intergovernmental agreements and the identification of opportunities for future coordination and collaboration with adjoining municipalities.
- Implementation – A compilation of the programs and specific actions the local government will take to implement the comprehensive plan.

### Definitions

**Vision:** An overall statement related to the required plan chapters expressing the community’s expectations for the future. These statements provide a framework for decision-making.

**Goal:** A statement that describes a desired future condition. Goals typically address a single aspect of the vision.

**Objective:** A statement that describes a specific action or condition that is to be attained. Objectives include amending local ordinances, adopting new policies, seeking partnerships, and the like.

**Policy:** A course of action, or rule of conduct, used to achieve the goals and objectives of the plan.

In addition to the nine elements listed above, the Planning Law lists a series of fourteen *planning goals* to be achieved during the process of developing a local comprehensive plan. These goals included:

- Promotion of the redevelopment of lands with existing infrastructures and public services, and the maintenance and rehabilitation of existing residential, commercial, and industrial areas.
- Encouragement of neighborhood designs that support a range of transportation choices.
- Protection of natural areas, including wetlands, wildlife habitats, lakes, woodlands, open spaces, and groundwater resources.
- Protection of economically productive areas, including farmland and forests.

- Encouragement of land uses, densities, and regulations that promote efficient development patterns and relatively low municipal, state governmental, and utility costs.
- Preservation of cultural, historic, and archeological sites.
- Encouragement of coordination and cooperation among nearby units of government.
- Building of community identity by revitalizing main streets and enforcing design standards.
- Providing an adequate supply of affordable housing for individuals of all income levels throughout each community.
- 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.
- Balancing individual property rights with community interests and goals.
- Planning and development of land uses that create or preserve varied and unique urban and rural communities.
- Providing an integrated, efficient, and economical transportation system that affords mobility, convenience, and safety, and that meets the needs of all citizens, including transit-dependent and disabled citizens.

Although the Planning Law provides a framework for comprehensive planning, it does not impose a template. A comprehensive plan is not a technical manual. Unlike a zoning ordinance or subdivision ordinance, it is not a regulatory tool. At its core, a comprehensive plan is a guidance document reflecting and representing community visions and providing a road map for future growth and preservation. It must be crafted to meet the unique needs of a community. Its narrative, tables, graphics, and maps must encapsulate the values of the community within an easy to read and easy to understand document; one that informs stakeholders, provides direction to developers, and guides decision-making. By statute; however, municipalities that have adopted a zoning ordinance, subdivision ordinance, or official map must administer and enforce them consistent with an adopted comprehensive plan.

## **Community Engagement**

The Town of Oconto Falls Comprehensive Plan was developed with a variety of opportunities for the active participation of residents, landowners, business owners, and other stakeholders. A brief description of each element of the 2005 and 2016 public participation efforts is described below and on the following pages.

## **2005 Planning Process**

### **Kick-Off Meeting**

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The Town of Oconto Falls Kick-off meeting was held on April 23, 2002 at the Oconto Falls Town Hall. At that meeting, OMNNI Associates (the Town's planning consultant) reviewed the planning program in detail, presented the draft Public Participation Plan and Adoption Procedures, and facilitated a discussion about Town values.

### Values Exercise

During the Kick-Off Meeting, participants were asked to describe what makes the Town of Oconto Falls a desirable place to live. The exercise resulted in the creation of a series of value statements used to guide the development and implementation of the comprehensive plan.

- We value the Town's quiet, peaceful, and clean environment.
- We value the Town as a wholesome place to live and rear children.
- We value our access to recreation opportunities (i.e. Oconto River, hunting, nearby parks in City of Oconto Falls and Gillett).
- We value our location – surrounding the City of Oconto Falls.
- We value our access to quality fire and ambulance service through the City of Oconto Falls.
- We value the Town's beauty – its rolling hills, woodlands, river frontage, and open, scenic vistas – free from development.
- We value the Town's wildlife habitat areas.
- We value our farms and rural businesses.

### Planning Committee Meetings

The Planning Committee met monthly to review draft chapters and maps, and to establish goals and priorities for plan implementation. Each of these meetings was duly posted and open to the public.



### Visioning Workshop

On June 25, 2002, the Planning Committee hosted a Visioning Workshop. At this meeting, participants engaged in a series of exercises focused on current conditions and the future of the Town.

### SWOT Exercise

A SWOT Exercise is a planning tool used to identify current conditions within a community. SWOT is an acronym for *strengths*, *weaknesses*, *opportunities*, and *threats*. The exercise was facilitated by Rob Burke, Community Educator for the Oconto County UW-Extension, in cooperation with OMNNI Associates, the Town's planning consultant.

- Strength - Something that makes a community stand out when compared to other communities. Something that makes you proud to call the community home. A strength may be a physical asset, a program, an environmental condition, or an impression or feeling (i.e., friendly community atmosphere).
- Weakness - Opposite of a strength. A problem that needs to be addressed.

- Opportunity - Something that can be done to improve the community.
- Threat - A threat may be internal or external. Something that may jeopardize the future success of a community.

### **Strengths**

- Oconto River - a source of scenic beauty and other recreational assets such as fishing, boating, canoeing, snowmobiling, skating, and wildlife habitat.
- Well-maintained homes and properties that are spread out throughout the Town.
- A number of undeveloped lakes, several of which provide scenic vistas, and one (Balcom Lake) providing public access.
- Abundance of wooded areas, hilly terrain, and natural habitat for plants and wildlife. Probably more now than in past because of less pasturing.
- Well maintained local roads and State Highways, several of which are designated as “scenic”. The roads provide opportunities for biking and inline skating, dog walking, and limited access to snowmobile trails.
- While close and having easy access to Green Bay and Shawano for employment, shopping, and entertainment, and to Oconto Falls for city services (libraries, fire protection, groceries, hospital and banks), too far away to become a “bedroom community”.
- Friendly (not “nosy”) people that you can count on to watch your home while away, help retrieve lost pets, and watch out for each other.
- Very good relationship with neighboring Town officials that respond positively when issues arise.
- Cooperation with the City of Oconto Falls on the joint fire department.
- Able to sustain several dairy farm businesses, plus other businesses that complement rural setting.
- Close proximity to some agricultural services.
- Good school district.
- Provides living opportunities for a variety of income levels - don't have to be rich.
- Some residents have long histories and deep roots in the area.
- Although development has increased, no part of the Township has been “spoiled” by development yet. We have no fast-food restaurants, no gas stations and few billboards.

### **Weaknesses**

- Abandoned, unsafe buildings.
- Unsafe wells, often in connection with unsafe buildings.
- Rapidly rising property taxes.
- The loss of good farmland due to development pattern.
- Lack of communication among realtors, sellers, buyers, county zoning, etc. regarding what residents should expect when moving into a rural area.
- Lack of enforcement of Land Use/Zoning requirements.
- County zoning policy is haphazard and not goal-oriented.
- Township can feel unwelcoming to newcomers.
- Some new homes set deeply from the road, cutting into farmland and inaccessible to services and homes that are being built behind homes on the same lots (County CC).
- Farm businesses are becoming less profitable.
- Lack of walking or biking trails and no location signs for boat landings or fishing areas.
- No social center for people to gather; nothing to bring us together.
- Poor relationship with City of Oconto Falls.

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### Opportunities

- Tourism for canoeing on the river and outdoor recreation such as: bike and walking trails, sites for fishing and canoeing.
- Agricultural tourism such as horses stables/riding, game farms, and variety of sizes of dairy farms.
- Tourism and other businesses based on the increased traffic volume of those traveling to northern Oconto Co.
- Rural/Bed and Breakfasts.
- Development of a banquet hall.
- The preservation of personal property rights, balanced with existing owners desires and community needs.
- The preservation of wooded land, a beautiful river and river/lake frontage.
- Preservation of existing farms and their land base.
- Development of a mix of newer, older, affordable and luxury housing could be developed.

### Threats

- Annexation by the City of Oconto Falls of land most suited for development, which lowers Town's tax base.
- Losing the fact that we are a well-kept "Secret" (Nice place to live).
- Contamination of values and behavior by drugs, crime, and vandalism.
- Loss of farmland and increased taxes due to rural subdivisions.
- Poor placement of homes and subdivisions such that homes are built deep set from the road cutting up farmland and making it harder to crop.
- Homes built around perimeter of farmland (on the roadside) could pit a couple farmers against dozens of homeowners.
- Unsightly, spotty development.
- Allowing developers or homeowners to put in a road and then have the Township take over maintenance may prove to be very expensive long term. Should every new house get its own road?
- Depleting profits from farm businesses, resulting in the sell-off of land for development.
- Loss of agricultural services in the area for farm businesses.
- Limited public access to river frontage.
- Increased traffic, noise, pollution, etc., due to widening of county roads.
- Loss of wildlife and water quality due to increased traffic and development.
- Potential development of fast-food restaurants, gas stations and billboards.

### Visioning Exercise

During the Visioning Exercise, participants were given a series of phrases to complete about the future of the Town. For example, "In twenty years looking down from an airplane at the Town of Oconto Falls one would see..." OMNNI Associates used the responses to draft a vision statement for each of the nine required plan elements.

### Photo Assignment

During the summer of 2002, the Planning Committee was provided with several disposable cameras to photograph areas of the Town to illustrate desired housing types, available and



desired utilities and community facilities, transportation features, land uses, scenic areas and local economic development opportunities. The photos taken by the Planning Committee served as an important reference for understanding the Town vision and are incorporated throughout this plan.

### **Cognitive Mapping Meeting**

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 an 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.

As part of the Map Workshop, the Planning Committee and other residents in attendance were provided two maps of the Town of Oconto Falls. On the first map, participants were asked to delineate important travel routes and aesthetically pleasing areas of the Town. The most attractive places were colored in one shade, less attractive another, not attractive in yet another color. On the second map, participants outlined those areas where they would like to see new commercial/industrial development, new residential development, new recreation areas and open space in the Town of Oconto Falls.

These maps were used in the development of the Future Land Use map to ensure that it accurately reflects community concerns and priorities for the future. The maps created as a result of this exercise are presented in the Appendix of this plan.

### **Map Workshop**

In 2004, the Planning Commission hosted an informational meeting to share with the public copies of the plan maps. At the meeting, OMNNI presented an overview of how the maps were developed and unveiled the draft future land use map. During this meeting, residents participated in a consensus mapping exercise whereby everyone in attendance received a map of the Town. On this map, they were asked to identify where they would like to see future commercial, industrial, and residential development. They were also asked to identify important natural resources that should be protected and areas of concern.

### **Project Webpage**

The planning program was profiled on an interactive web page hosted on the OMNNI Associates website. The page included meeting schedules, summaries of past meetings, draft maps and plan chapters, and general education materials about the Wisconsin Comprehensive Planning law (Chapter 66.1001, Wis. Stats.). The site was updated regularly to ensure that the information was current and would effectively inform the public.

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### Intergovernmental Meeting

As part of the planning program, the Plan Commission hosted an intergovernmental meeting with representatives from neighboring units of government, the school district, Oconto County, the Bay-Lake Regional Planning Commission, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) and Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT) to discuss the existing plans of these neighboring jurisdictions and agencies and identify potential conflicts that may exist with the proposed *Town of Oconto Falls Comprehensive Plan*. Participants were given the opportunity for mutual exchange of ideas and recommendations to address any conflicts. Based on the conversations and suggestions received at this meeting, the *Town of Oconto Falls Comprehensive Plan* includes recommendations to continue to resolve intergovernmental planning issues and conflicts over the 20-year planning period.

### 2016 Planning Process

#### Community Engagement Session

The Community Engagement Session was held **on October 21, 2015** at the Oconto Falls Town Hall. The purpose of the session was three-fold:

- To discuss statutory requirements related to comprehensive plans and the role of the plan in guiding land use decisions.
- To present updated demographic data related to population, income, employment, education, and housing, among others, that would be critical to decision-making during the development of the plan.
- To engage participants in a *visioning exercise* intended to identify the core visions and values of the community as they relate to the nine required plan elements.

#### Visioning Exercise

During the engagement session, participants completed an exercise intended to visualize Oconto Falls' ideal future. The assignment asked those in attendance to imagine it is the year 2036 and indicate, through a series of directed questions, what the Town looks like with respect to key land use elements. The visioning exercise focused on five general land use categories: housing, transportation, economic development, parks and recreation, and preservation. The results are presented below and on the following pages. The numbers in parentheses indicated multiple responses.

#### By 2036, housing in the Town of Oconto Falls includes...

- Housing where the kids come back and live with multi families [generations] in one home. (2)
- 80% single-family / 20% multi-family. (2)
- Subdivisions, 1- to 2-acre lots.
- 4- to 8-unit duplexes along city borders.



- Solar and wind energy systems.
- Minimum 1,000 sq. ft. floor area for single-family homes.
- 90% single-family / 10% multi-family.
- 25-30% use wood [for heating].
- Geothermal heating systems.
- Minimum 1,200 sq. ft. floor area for single-family homes.
- Self-contained energy.

By 2036, the transportation system in the Town of Oconto Falls includes...

- No blacktop roads, back to gravel (due to expense).
- Senior busing to city.
- Recharging stations for electric cars.
- Electric vehicles.
- Self-driving cars.
- Personal transporter, no roads.

By 2036, economic development in the Town of Oconto Falls includes...

- We don't need to do anything.
- Home-based work.
- Small businesses.
- Agricultural- oriented economic development.
- Small home-based businesses.
- More tech services needed.
- Internet.

By 2036, parks and recreational opportunities in the Town of Oconto Falls include...

- Farmland.
- Access to Oconto River and other private lakes. (2)
- No more building on open farmland.
- Parks and Rec for seniors.
- Creative thinking.
- Outdoor activities.

By 2036, the Town of Oconto Falls has successfully preserved...

- Maintain [community] as is, as much as possible.
- Agricultural land. (2)
- Forest land.
- Hunting.
- Community character.
- Few subdivisions.
- Preserve Oconto River.

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### **Plan Commission Meetings**

The Plan Commission met monthly between October 2015 and April 2016 to review and discuss draft plan chapters and maps.

### **Project Website**

Community Planning & Consulting, the Town's 2016 planning consultant, maintained a project webpage throughout the process of developing the Town of Oconto Falls 2036 Comprehensive Plan. The webpage hosted meeting summaries, draft plan chapters, project maps, and other information related to the planning process.

### **Public Hearing**

A public hearing, consistent with the requirements of Chapter 66.1001(4)(d), Wis. Stats., was held on May 12, 2016 at the Oconto Falls Town Hall to receive testimony in support of or opposition to the recommended draft of the 2036 Town of Oconto Falls Comprehensive Plan.