

# COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT FACT SHEET SERIES

## #3 – Information in Land Use Planning

As the character of Wisconsin communities and landscapes have changed, more and more communities have decided to prepare long-range plans for land use and development. Counties, local government, and neighborhoods have initiated comprehensive planning efforts.

### A. Planning Is a Process

Throughout the Community Environmental Assessment Fact Sheet series, you will note an emphasis on planning steps.<sup>1</sup> Fact sheet #2 encourages the plan commission or task force to review the status of environmental resource planning, to consider citizen desires, and to determine where additional information is needed. This fact sheet (#3) describes how to integrate environmental information into community land use plans. You are referred to fact sheets #2 and #5 and other resources to complete recommended steps.

#### A Land Use Plan Is

- A public guide to community decision
- An assessment of community's conditions, trends, and needs
- A statement of community values, goals, and objectives
- A blueprint for the community's physical development
- A program for achieving community goals
- A record of baseline information that makes it possible to evaluate how the community is changing over time, and how well the community is achieving its goal
- A public document adopted by government
- Continuously updated as conditions change

#### COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT FACT SHEET SERIES

#1 – OVERVIEW OF COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

#2 – TAKING STOCK

A questionnaire to summarize information about the community and consider how to manage environmental resources.

#3 – INFORMATION IN LAND USE PLANNING

Describes how to integrate environmental information into community land use plans

#4 – THE ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES INVENTORY

A one page overview useful for explaining the inventory process to potential users.

#5 – INVENTORY WORKSHEETS

Inventory the community environment, open space lands, and land in consideration for changed uses. Worksheets identify what questions to ask, and are best completed with the assistance of a technical advisory. Fact sheets for some topics are included in #9, Support Resources.

#6 – DEVELOPMENT IMPACT ANALYSIS

What is it and how to use it?

#7 – POTENTIAL IMPACTS FROM DEVELOPMENT PRACTICES

Provides a worksheet to guide review of potential impacts from a proposed development along with an example, summarizing potential impacts from construction activity.

#8 – HOW TO SET UP THE IMPACT PROCESS

The Leopold Matrix and instructions.

#9 – SUPPORT RESOURCES

Provides background information about air quality, cultural features, floodplain protection, groundwater, shorelands and wetlands, the Wisconsin Environmental Policy Act (WEPA).

**To prepare a plan**, you will need to go through a sequence of steps:

1. Identify a problem or opportunity
2. Formulate goals, objectives, and priorities
3. Collect and interpret information
4. Identify and evaluate options and alternatives
5. Review and assess methods of implementation
6. Monitor and evaluate impacts of implementation program

**As you plan**, you may want to gather information about environmental resources for a number of reasons, such as:

- To develop a community plan which recognizes the importance and benefits of local resources
- To help decide the best uses for a site or resource feature
- To determine how community preferences relate to the quality of the resource
- To learn how environmental and planning laws, regulations, and ordinances could affect local plans.

## **B. Identify goals**

Before the community can plan effectively, they need to know where they've been and where they want to go - they need to set some goals. The preservation, protection and wise use of human and natural resources has always been an important goal for Wisconsin communities. But putting that goal into words, providing discussion opportunities for the entire community, and acting based on results is a job which requires increasing attention as our communities grow and change.

Many groups have given considerable thought to what should be included in community environmental resource goals. An Environmental Corridors White Paper adopted in draft form at the 1994 Wisconsin American Planning Association conference begins:

*The natural resource base of an area is a primary determinant of its development potential and its ability to provide a pleasant and habitable environment for all forms of life. Thus, the preservation, protection, and wise use of the natural resource base is of vital importance to sound social and economic development, as well as to the preservation of environmental quality in that area.*

This type of vision statement can form the basis for developing goals about natural resources in the community. The plan commission may also want to plan for overall quality of life by considering human health, aesthetics, and cultural resources.

### C. Develop goals for specific environmental resource topics

You can determine specific topics for planning through completion of the COMMUNITY RESOURCE PLANNING CHECKLIST found in #2 and the inventory worksheets provided in #5. These tools will help identify current uses and community management preferences highlighting topics of interest specific to the locality. Another source of ideas is the Wisconsin American Planning Association, which provides a listing of goals as well as elements which could be included in a plan.<sup>ii</sup>

#### Specific goals and samples

Goals from Idaho's Local Planning Act and Denver's Comprehensive Plan, featured in the box at the right, offer general concepts that a community might include.

As a further example:

Goals for *economic development* might include:

- an industrial mix minimally affected by cyclical fluctuations
- trade and services capable of serving all basic needs of residents and businesses in the trade area
- employment opportunities that match the skills and experience of the area's labor force

Goals for *open space* might include:

- adequate open-space to protect environmentally critical areas
- preservation of critical views of lakes and significant vistas
- opportunities for developing greenways and outdoor recreation sites

#### Idaho's Local Planning Act, 1992

##### Goals

- Protect property rights and enhance property values
- Ensure adequate public facilities and services
- Ensure that the economy is protected and enhanced
- Ensure that important environmental features are protected and enhanced
- Encourage the protection of prime agricultural, forestry, and mineral lands
- Avoid undue concentration of population and overcrowding

#### Denver's Comprehensive Plan, 1989

##### Core Goals

- Stimulate the economy
- Beautify the city and preserve its history
- Protect, enhance and integrate a city of neighborhoods
- Educate all of Denver's residents with excellence
- Clear the air, now
- Meet expanding transportation needs, efficiently, cleanly, economically, innovatively
- Help the disadvantaged help themselves
- Revise land use controls, streamline procedures
- Celebrate the city's arts, culture and ethnic diversity
- Share resources and responsibilities in the metropolitan area

### Develop goals for key resources:

If time and resources are limited, the plan commission will want to establish priorities for inventorying and planning. These priorities will vary according to the size and stage of development of the community.

Here are 6 topics that may be priorities in your community:

- Water supply — Groundwater recharge area and/or surface water watershed
- Geological and geographical features contributing to development considerations - soil types and classifications, significant topographic features (i.e. glacial features), high quality agriculture soils and mineral resource areas, flood plains
- Primary environmental corridors — natural areas which are connected for many miles
- Significant isolated natural areas
- Large natural areas with potential for park land and water — based recreation
- Significant resources for economic use — housing, harvesting, extraction, etc.

#### Environmental resources:

- Geographic setting and soils
- Land ecosystems
  - Plant communities
  - Wildlife habitat
- Water ecosystems
  - Plant communities
  - Wildlife habitat
- Water supply
- Cultural resources
- Human health - air and water quality

#### Resources with economic potential:

- Agricultural land resources
- Mineral resources
- Recreation resources
  - Aesthetic qualities/scenic resources
  - Cultural/archeological resources
  - Land and water recreation sites

### D. Provide data for each goal you have identified

Planning requires reference to information about the community or region in consideration. The plan commission will need data to answer to questions like the following: What activities already occur using specific resources? Who owns resources of interest? What are community needs for recreation or open space? What special resources should be protected? Will the community need more services such as roads, schools, or shopping areas?

#### Assess all potential uses.

The plan commission will need to review uses for a site, cultural resource or natural resource feature. For example, a community might want to review potential uses for a series of rock bluffs, before making a final agreement to preserve or develop the bluffs.

#### Consider the quality of the resource.

For example, an historic site which is completely inaccessible or in poor condition may or may not merit protection depending on the community's long-term goals or vision of themselves. On the other hand,

agricultural lands in an area needed for housing development may provide the highest quality agricultural soils in the region or an important opportunity for groundwater recharge, and may need to be excluded from development.

**Identify particularly fragile areas.<sup>iii</sup>**

These are areas where:

1. Development would be especially damaging to wildlife habitat and local ecosystems.
2. The *carrying capacity* of the community would be exceeded. Carrying capacity describes how many people and how much development a community can support before serious negative impacts on the natural environment would occur.

Fact sheets #2 and #4 of this series provide information and inventory worksheets to help the community develop a data base about natural resources, human health, aesthetics, and cultural resources. Experts who live within the community or who are hired as consultants can help complete the inventory worksheets and make qualitative assessments.

**Gather information about environmental management tools.**

Regulations and voluntary opportunities - will also become an important part of planning. A chart at the end of this fact sheet summarizes some to be considered.<sup>iv</sup>

**E. Checking the plan**

As you consider different aspects of your plan, ask yourselves the following questions: Which subjects have been researched? How do they relate to the goals and objectives of the plan elements? Is the data complete? Data could be provided as a separate volume or spread throughout the plan elements.

Once the community has identified goals and gathered data for developing decisions, results can be used to update old plans or to develop a new one. Your plan should:

- Include a map which shows all current land uses
- Identify goals/objectives, rationale, and steps to achieve each goal.
- Include a checklist for the goals, policies, and objectives of your plan. Use the checklist to make sure your decisions match your intentions.
- Show how the community will look when the land use policies are implemented.
- Use a format which enables community members to identify elements easily

**F. Develop a Plan of Action**

The Community Environmental Assessment fact sheets provide worksheets and background information to help the community plan how to manage local environmental resources. We recommend several

steps for planning. Use the worksheet at the end of this fact sheet, *Study Area - Actions Summary*, to monitor your progress.

- STEP 1 Assess the status of local planning for environmental resources, the status of current information and documentation about the resources, and the status of development controls.
- STEP 2 Determine local values about environmental resources: understand indicators of change in the community, map local uses of resources, identify preferences for future uses.
- STEP 3 Identify critical areas: natural, historic, economic, health issues, and aesthetic concerns through collection and analysis of data about these resources.
- STEP 4 Develop planning guidelines that recognize the values you have determined and uses the data you have gathered. Include reference to appropriate environmental management tools (legal and voluntary).
- STEP 5 Communicate plans to the community and use them.

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## Environmental Management Tools Available to Communities

Environmental Resource	Federal role	Wisconsin role	Local opportunities
<p><b>Aesthetic resources</b></p> <p><i>Zoning solely for aesthetic purposes is an ideal whose time has come. Wayne Tlusty</i></p>	<p>Highway sign ordinances Federal Historic Districts Wild and Scenic Rivers Act</p>	<p>Highway sign ordinances Conservancy easements for greenways, environmental corridors, and unique habitat</p>	<p>Design review ordinances View protection</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- shoreland zoning</li> <li>- building heights</li> <li>- hillside protection</li> </ul> <p>Tree protection</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- protection of specimen trees on private property</li> <li>- regulation of land clearance operations to retain trees in new developments</li> <li>- landscaping requirements</li> </ul> <p>Outdoor communications, such as signs and satellite dishes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- size and placement requirements</li> <li>- caution in regulating content</li> <li>- satellite dishes regulated by Federal Communications Commission</li> </ul> <p>General guidelines</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- clear public purpose</li> <li>- specific controls must be related to stated purpose</li> </ul>
<p><b>Floodplains</b></p>	<p>Requires local governments to regulate floodplain development</p>	<p>Requires counties, cities, and villages to adopt ordinances conforming to</p>	<p>Broad authority to zone to protect public health, safety and welfare Need for definition about:</p>

Environmental Resource	Federal role	Wisconsin role	Local opportunities
<i>Floodplain regulations are primarily designed to achieve public protection objectives - not environmental objectives</i>	before property owners can purchase flood insurance	minimum standards for flood plain zoning Floodplain mapping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- if counties must adopt flood plain map</li> <li>- what can be done in a floodway?</li> <li>- what can be done in flood fringe area?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Groundwater</b></p> <p><i>Contaminated groundwater may persist for years, making the resource virtually unusable.</i></p>	Authorizes Wisconsin to administer regulations	<p>Quality emphasis</p> <p>Regulates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- private wastewater systems</li> <li>- well construction</li> <li>- drinking water standards</li> <li>- groundwater standards</li> </ul>	<p>Authorized to adopt zoning to protect groundwater</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- prohibit uses that can contaminate groundwater</li> <li>- require developers to provide information</li> <li>- allow conditional uses with design and performance standards</li> <li>- limit density of population</li> <li>- create districts for aquifer recharge areas, well protection, or areas susceptible to contamination</li> </ul> <p>Authority to adopt well code ordinances</p>
<p><b>Historic and archeological</b></p> <p><i>Historical resources can include buildings, structures, districts, archeological resources, engineering works, monuments and cultural resources</i></p>	<p>Provides the National Register of Historic Places</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- requires federal agencies to consider effects of actions on historic properties</li> <li>- recognition</li> <li>- tax incentives</li> <li>- community development block grants</li> </ul>	<p>State Register of Historic Places</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- requires state and local agencies to consider effects of actions on historic properties</li> <li>- recognition</li> <li>- tax incentives (?)</li> </ul>	<p>Preservation is primarily a local responsibility</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Only local regulations can prohibit the demolition of a privately owned historic resource</li> </ul> <p>Local historic preservation ordinances, can</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- be very flexible and dependent upon specific language</li> </ul>

Environmental Resource	Federal role	Wisconsin role	Local opportunities
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- limited protection for demolition and other changes</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- can protect against demolition or alteration</li> <li>- ordinances are required where properties are listed with State or National Registers</li> </ul> <p>Local commissions may plan for creation of State designated Historic District</p>
<p><b>Shorelands and wetlands</b></p> <p><i>Interjurisdictional decision making</i></p>	<p>Clean Water Act</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- regulates many (but not all) activities that damage wetlands</li> <li>- mitigation required where development is allowed</li> <li>-exemptions from regulations</li> <li>-states can veto permit decisions</li> </ul> <p>NEPA</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- applies to federally funded projects</li> </ul> <p>No shoreland protection role</p>	<p>Water quality standards to protect wetlands</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- do not apply to shoreland-wetlands zoning decisions</li> <li>- additional exemptions</li> <li>- can protect state from federal permitting decisions</li> </ul> <p>Mandates local zoning for shorelands and wetland protection</p>	<p>Shoreland development standards</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Minimum requirements set by state</li> <li>- Lot sizes, building setbacks, vegetation removal, sanitary codes, subdivision of land</li> <li>- Local governments can adopt more restrictive standards</li> </ul> <p>Wetlands protection</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- state requirements for local zoning regulations cover wetlands greater than 5 acres within the shoreland zone</li> <li>- local governments can regulate additional wetlands</li> </ul>
<p><b>Wisconsin Environmental Policy Act</b></p>		<p>Established a role for citizen participation in decision making</p> <p>Requires state agencies to prepare an EIS for “major actions significantly affecting the quality of the human environment”</p>	<p>Local government could enact its own “environmental policy act” which could apply to county, municipal or private actions</p>

Environmental Resource	Federal role	Wisconsin role	Local opportunities
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- development of buildings and highways</li> <li>- financial assistance</li> <li>- permits</li> </ul> <p>Can't be used to stop, approve or modify projects on its own</p>	

COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES INVENTORY  
STUDY AREA – ACTIONS SUMMARY

STUDY AREA/TOPIC

Name

Geographic location, community map correlation

CURRENT INFORMATION – STATUS

Topics reviewed:

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aesthetic Qualities                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Water Supply                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Geographic Setting and Resources    | <input type="checkbox"/> Waste Reduction               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cultural Features                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Plant Communities             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agricultural Land Resources         | <input type="checkbox"/> Wildlife and Wildlife Habitat |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Human Health/ Environmental Hazards | <input type="checkbox"/> Other Concerns:               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Surface Water Features              |  |

Key findings

MANAGEMENT OPTIONS IN PLACE

COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES INVENTORY  
STUDY AREA – ACTIONS SUMMARY

SIGNIFICANCE OF AREA IN THE REGIONAL ECOSYSTEM

In relation to other natural resources

In relation to human health concerns

Need for additional study

INFORMATION MAPPED

RESOURCE USE POSSIBILITIES

GOAL FOR RESOURCE/AREA

COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES INVENTORY  
STUDY AREA – ACTIONS SUMMARY

COMMUNITY PREFERENCES FOR AREA

INFORMATION SHARED WITH CONSULTANT (or to be shared)

PLANS

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<sup>i</sup> Points about planning are summarized from materials provided by the Wisconsin Chapter of the American Planning Association 1994 Planning Conference; *Planning Made Easy* by William Toner, Efraim Gil, and Enid Lucchesi, 1994; and *The Citizen's Guide to Planning* by Herbert H. Smith, 1993. Both books are published by Planners Press, American Planning Association.

<sup>ii</sup> The Wisconsin American Planning Association list of planning topics and program objectives for environmental corridors are included as a resource with the Community Environmental Assessment materials.

<sup>iii</sup> For more ideas about this topic, see the #5 - Environmental Resource Inventory fact sheets. This concept was described by Thomas L. Daniels, John W. Keller, and Mark B. Lapping in *The Small Town Planning Handbook*, Planners Press, American Planning Association.

<sup>iv</sup> Summarized by Tim Filbert, University of Wisconsin URPL graduate student, 1995.