III. Land Use Patterns and Development Trends

Current and Projected Land Use

As discussed in the previous section, the Chippewa-Eau Claire Metropolitan Planning Area (MPA) has long been characterized by a slow and steady growth pattern. This is evidenced in the following two maps which show base year (2012) land use, and projected future land use (2045). A generalized base year land use coverage for the MPA is depicted on Map 10. This map was produced for this plan using county level property tax assessment data from 2012, the most recent year available, and land use data from the City of Eau Claire from 2013. Figure 18 presents the approximate land use acreage by developed land use classification for the Chippewa-Eau Claire MPA.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Land Use Categories</th>
<th>Acreage</th>
<th>Percent of Developed Area</th>
<th>Percent of Total MPA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Residential</td>
<td>33,344</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercial</td>
<td>5,878</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrial</td>
<td>2,608</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government/Institutional/Park</td>
<td>8,937</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture/Forest</td>
<td>23,419</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>12,602</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL DEVELOPED ACRES</td>
<td>86,788</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL UNDEVELOPED ACRES</td>
<td>8,482</td>
<td></td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WATER &amp; ENVIRONMENTAL ACRES</td>
<td>8,900</td>
<td></td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL MPA ACRES</td>
<td>104,170</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: West Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission, 2015

The development of a future land use map (Map 11) for the MPA incorporated information from future land use plans prepared by local municipalities. Meetings with local planners were conducted to ascertain the validity and progress of their future land use plans and to make adjustments accordingly. For this update, a
number of more recently adopted local comprehensive plans were consulted. While the local comprehensive plans typically have horizon years of twenty years, most of them state that the land use projections depict areas that could be developed, rather than the quantity of land that would be necessary to meet the demands of the next twenty years. In other words, the local plan maps show more land, particularly residential acreage, than will be needed to meet the needs of the projected population. It is not uncommon for land use plans to provide for additional capacity to accommodate various development interests. Figure 19 presents the estimated future land use acreage by developed land use classification for the year 2045 and provides a comparison with the 2012 land use information.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Land Use Categories</th>
<th>2012 Acreage</th>
<th>2045 Acreage</th>
<th>Change Acreage</th>
<th>Change Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Residential</td>
<td>33,344</td>
<td>42,702</td>
<td>+9,358</td>
<td>+28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed Use</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1,405</td>
<td>+1,405</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercial</td>
<td>5,878</td>
<td>7,461</td>
<td>+1,583</td>
<td>+27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrial</td>
<td>2,608</td>
<td>6,775</td>
<td>+4,167</td>
<td>+160%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public/Institutional</td>
<td>5,760</td>
<td>4,769</td>
<td>-991</td>
<td>-17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture/Forest</td>
<td>23,419</td>
<td>14,969</td>
<td>-8,450</td>
<td>-36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parks &amp; Recreation</td>
<td>3,177</td>
<td>6,691</td>
<td>+3,514</td>
<td>+111%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other/Undeveloped</td>
<td>21,084</td>
<td>10,498</td>
<td>-10,586</td>
<td>-50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water</td>
<td>8,900</td>
<td>8,900</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total MPA Area</strong></td>
<td>104,170</td>
<td>104,170</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: West Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission, 2015

As depicted on the future land use map, and supported through the land use acreage tabulations, the largest increases in development are expected in the residential, commercial, industrial, and parks land use categories. Several of the municipalities in the metropolitan planning area have ambitious plans for their future land use, particularly in the categories of industrial and parks and recreation uses. The cities of Chippewa Falls and Eau Claire, and the Town of Union all plan to expand existing industrial areas and industrial parks and designate new industrial areas. The Village of Lake Hallie and the Town of Wheaton both have plans for significant new recreational park land along the Chippewa River. The areas projected to receive some of this new development can be located generally through observation of Maps 3 and 4 which depict the projected high growth areas for households and employment by TAZ.
Chippewa - Eau Claire
Metropolitan Planning Area
2010 - 2045

City of Chippewa Falls Inset

City of Eau Claire Inset

Existing Land Use, 2012
- Residential
- Commercial
- Public/Institutional
- Industrial
- Agriculture/Forest
- Parks and Recreation
- Other/Undeveloped
- Surface Water

Source:
West Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission
Chippewa County Land Information, 2012
Eau Claire County Land Information, 2013
Wisconsin Department of Transportation
City of Eau Claire Planning Department

West Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission
Chippewa - Eau Claire Metropolitan Planning Area 2010 - 2045

Planned Land Use

Planned Land Use, 2045
- Residential
- Mixed Use
- Commercial
- Public/Institutional
- Industrial
- Agriculture
- Parks and Recreation
- Other/Undeveloped
- Surface Water

Source:
West Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission
Chippewa County Land Information
Eau Claire County Land Information
Wisconsin Department of Transportation
City of Eau Claire Planning Department

City of Chippewa Falls Inset
City of Eau Claire Inset
**Environmentally Sensitive Areas**

Current and future urban area development patterns are largely influenced by the availability of land and municipal utilities. The current *Chippewa Falls-Eau Claire Urban Sewer Service Plan for 2030*, adopted in 2007, provided guidance to the Technical Advisory Committee in determining the reasonable extent of the metropolitan planning area boundary for 2045. The extension of sewer and water utilities, along with the improved access afforded by transportation infrastructure improvements, are key elements in guiding future urban development.

One of the focuses of the *Urban Sewer Service Plan* is to look at urban growth in relation to sewer capacity and the ability of municipal sewage treatment facilities to accommodate that future growth. Another very important element of that plan focuses on environmentally sensitive features that should be protected from urban development. The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WisDNR) guidance incorporated in the *Urban Sewer Service Plan* recommends that lands delineated as environmentally sensitive areas not to be developed for intensive urban use. Areas to be considered for exclusion from the sewer service area because of the potential for adverse impacts on the quality of the waters of the state from both point and nonpoint sources of pollution include, but are not limited to, wetlands, shorelands, floodways and floodplains, steep slopes, highly erodible soils and other limiting soil types, groundwater recharge areas, and other such physical constraints. (NR 121.05(1)(g)2.c.). The identification of environmentally sensitive areas is intended to provide for the long term protection of wildlife habitat and recreation areas; reduce runoff and erosion damage along lakes and rivers; preserve the quality of surface and groundwater; guide development to protect environmentally sensitive areas; prevent excessive non-point source pollution; and reduce public utility costs.

The environmentally sensitive areas that were identified and reconfirmed through this planning effort are depicted on Map 12, and are defined as:

- All regulated wetlands, greater than five acres, delineated on the Wisconsin Wetlands Inventory maps.
- All areas within the Federal Emergency Management Agency delineated 100-year flood hazard zones.
- All areas of 20% or greater slope.

The identified water bodies and environmentally sensitive areas encompass approximately 20,000 acres within the planning area.

In addition, unrestricted wetlands of less than five acres were included on Map 12 as a point symbol for the purpose of flagging any proposed sewer extensions or hookups which may infringe on these environmentally sensitive areas. Their identification is only intended as notification to local municipalities of their presence near existing or proposed development.
The environmentally sensitive areas depicted on Map 12 include most of those areas found within the MPA. However, in addition to the environmentally sensitive areas, other areas identified for environmental constraint are found in the planning area. These include parks and recreation areas, natural and scenic areas, prime farmlands, historical sites, and designated wellhead protection zones. Refer to Map 13 for the other identified areas of environmental constraints.

The developed parks and recreation areas and designated open spaces are identified on the existing and future land use maps and have also been included in Map 13 as other areas of environmental constraints. The importance of these recreation areas for both active and passive recreational activities for planning area residents is well documented in municipal plans. Preserving these and other similar areas contribute to the quality of life experienced by area residents and visitors alike.

The WisDNR, Bureau of Endangered Resources, conducts research to identify natural areas and endangered plants and animals. Due to the sensitive nature of the endangered resources, their exact locations cannot be identified. However, several endangered birds, butterflies and fish have been identified in the planning area, along with four natural areas. The natural areas identified on Map 13 include: the Chippewa Falls-Eau Claire Railroad Prairie; the Union Pacific Railroad Prairie; the Phillips Oxbow Lakes Natural Area; and Putnam Park.

Prime farmlands are identified by the Soil Conservation Services' capability unit classification system as exhibiting class I, II and III soil characteristics. New development within prime farmlands must be in accordance with the Farmland Preservation Plans of Chippewa and Eau Claire counties. These plans have implemented procedures to direct non-farm development away from prime farmland. Prime agricultural lands are identified in the MPA in the towns of Union and Wheaton, as well as to the east of USH 53 in the Village of Lake Hallie and to the north of the City of Chippewa Falls in the Town of Eagle Point. However, protection of these prime farmlands through exclusive agricultural zoning and/or enrollment in the farmland preservation program is minimal.

The significant presence of historical, architectural and archeological properties in the MPA has been identified and recorded by the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, though specific locations are not divulged here as many sites are considered sensitive. Historical Society staff is also certain the area contains many undiscovered prehistoric and early historic sites. The Historical Society, in cooperation with area developers and local municipalities, will lend assistance with the surveying and evaluation of potential archeological and historical sites in the planning area to help preserve these valuable cultural assets.
Map 12

Environmentally Sensitive Areas

- Steep Slopes: 20% or greater
- 100 Year Floodplain
- Wetlands greater than 5 Acres
- Wetlands less than 5 Acres

Sources:
- U.S. NRCS Soil Surveys for Eau Claire and Chippewa Counties
- FEMA D-FIRMs for Eau Claire and Chippewa Counties
- WDNR Wisconsin Wetlands Inventory

City of Chippewa Falls Inset

City of Eau Claire Inset

Chippewa - Eau Claire Metropolitan Planning Area
2015 - 2045

Chippewa Falls

Lake Wissota

Chippewa County

Eau Claire County

Half Moon Lake

Dells Pond

Chippewa River

Lake Hallie

Sources:
- U.S. NRCS Soil Surveys for Eau Claire and Chippewa Counties
- FEMA D-FIRMs for Eau Claire and Chippewa Counties
- WDNR Wisconsin Wetlands Inventory

West Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission
Map 13

Areas of Other Environmental Constraints

- Parks, Forests, Open Spaces, and other Natural Areas
- Prime Farmland (not necessarily cultivated)

Note: Smaller neighborhood parks and playgrounds and privately owned natural areas are not mapped.

Sources:
- Chippewa and Eau Claire County Land Information
- WDNR Stewardship Lands GIS data
- NRCS Soil Survey for Eau Claire and Chippewa Counties
- Map 13 inset maps:
  - City of Chippewa Falls
  - City of Eau Claire

West Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission
Land Use and Growth Management Issues

Maps 3 and 4, presented earlier in this report, depict the projected high growth areas for population and employment in the MPA for the 25-year planning period. Those areas represent the projected expansion of developed land uses for residential, commercial, industrial, recreational, governmental/institutional and transportation purposes. The interaction between land use and the transportation infrastructure is readily apparent in the current and projected future development patterns identified for the MPA. While the cost of providing transportation access and utility service to new development is primarily an economic consideration, there are additional social and environmental considerations that factor into the benefit/cost equation for expanding development.

The main goal of growth management is to achieve a balance of the associated benefits and costs of not only the economic impacts, but also the social and environmental impacts of growth and development. Growth management is increasingly viewed not as a strategy to limit growth but as a strategy to promote growth, spur economic development, and ensure the availability of affordable housing. An initial step toward a balanced approach to urban area growth is to identify those growth management issues that relate to urban land use and development trends. It is only through the recognition of the cause and effect of urban growth issues that effective growth management strategies can be formulated to address the challenges of urban growth.

Urban sprawl is perhaps the largest single consideration of growth management that encompasses a wide array of subordinate issues. Urban sprawl is generally defined as growth that occurs in a haphazard fashion, with little thought given to the cost-effectiveness of municipal service delivery or land use compatibility. All too often, urban sprawl is associated only with municipal boundary expansions, when in fact higher density rural development along urban borders also contributes to urban sprawl. The natural progression for municipalities to grow is through the incorporation of additional land through annexation. The planned orderly growth of a municipality can oftentimes be sidetracked by requests for annexation from property owners in higher density rural development areas who are seeking municipal sewer and water services because of the failure of their on-site sewage treatment and water supply systems. Similarly, municipalities can stray from their intended growth plans to accommodate an economic development opportunity. Any of these events can lead to an unanticipated increase in expenditures to extend municipal services along with street improvements, and the increased cost of maintaining a larger municipal street and utility system.
Urban growth is an evolutionary process. Some of it occurs according to a plan, some not. Unexpected side effects can occur under both the planned and unplanned scenarios. A typical example of this evolutionary urban growth process occurs in most small urban areas when they experience the development of their first shopping mall. The shopping mall is typically located on the urban fringe with easy access from a major highway, and provides ample off-street parking. The perceived convenience and variety afforded by the shopping mall soon attracts shoppers away from the retail sector in the municipality’s downtown, leading to the decline of the downtown as a retail center and impacting its tax base. Downtown redevelopment efforts then become a focus of the municipality. As the urban area continues to grow, another larger shopping mall is developed on the now expanded urban fringe with more direct access from major highways and even more parking. This newer and larger retail development impacts not only the declining downtown retail sector, but also competes with the first shopping mall and may result in the eventual decline of the retail base of the first mall, which initiates additional redevelopment efforts to bolster another declining tax base. Urban economic growth opportunities can also present undesirable side effects by shifting growth patterns, oftentimes presenting a fine line between managed growth and urban sprawl.

Both Eau Claire and Chippewa Falls have worked to preserve and revitalize their downtowns. These downtowns have developed attractive housing in an attempt to counter some of the effects of sprawl and grow their core areas. Residential uses, in combination with office and entertainment uses, in the downtown area help to provide 24-hour activity and spur development of service and smaller retail businesses.

**Cost-efficiency** in the provision of urban services, and who pays for them, is a concern to urban area municipalities. It is much more costly to provide streets and municipal utilities to areas developed under lower density rural development standards due to the larger lot requirements. In addition, economic incentives to businesses can also place a greater share of the cost of such improvements on the general population. New infrastructure improvements represent not only a capital cost, but also add to the on-going operational and maintenance expense to be borne by the municipality. An unbalanced investment in the provision of new urban services can often negatively impact on the ability of a municipality to keep up with the operation and maintenance of its existing infrastructure. The increasing cost of public utilities and transportation infrastructure and services place an increased emphasis on the cost-efficient use of public funds.

**Environmental protection** is another growth management issue that can be viewed from different perspectives. While the physical environment of the MPA is a major attraction for growth and development, that growth, if not guided carefully, can have a detrimental impact on the natural environment. Environmental guidance, such as contained in the *Urban Area Sewer Service Plan*, can help to identify those sensitive environmental areas and recommend
measures for development to avoid or minimize a negative impact on the environment. Additional environmental protection is afforded through municipal plans and zoning ordinances, county farmland preservation plans, state shoreland and wetland regulations, and health and sanitation regulations governing rural development, as well as federal laws governing air and water quality. While these and other environmental regulations afford protection to those environmental resources that are considered valuable enough by society to warrant their preservation, they are also often viewed as restrictions to growth and development by requiring costly and time consuming studies and mitigation measures. Environmental protection in its strictest regulatory form can also reflect negatively on the cost-efficient use of public funds. However it is viewed, environmental protection will remain a key element to be addressed by growth management policies and practices.

Public safety is usually identified as an element of transportation, or fire and rescue and police protection. The common denominator linking these public safety issues is land use patterns. Growth and development trends influence traffic loadings on the street and highway network, affecting their designed functioning and, consequently, impact on the safety of motorists, bicyclists and pedestrians. Development patterns and land uses also affect public safety from the standpoint of response times for fire, rescue, and police services. In an expanding urban environment, more resources are required to address the increased public safety needs of a growing population. An improvement to a highway corridor to address traffic congestion and roadway safety concerns must also address the adequacy of access to the surrounding area for the delivery of fire, rescue and police protection services to existing and future development. It thus becomes extremely important for public safety to coordinate transportation improvements with municipal protective services and future land use plans. Public safety is certainly integral to urban growth management.

Environmental justice, as it relates to land use and growth management, is generally viewed in the context of the availability of affordable housing and transportation, and employment opportunities for people with disabilities, minorities, elderly, and the economically disadvantaged. Growth management policies, or the lack of them, can have a significant impact on the social structure of an urban population. The type and placement of housing is most often determined by an economic hierarchy. The placement of nursing homes, group homes, and low income housing are oftentimes located in areas of similar economically disadvantaged residents. Elderly and low income apartments may be located without adequate access to a public transit system, further impacting the limited transportation options available to the residents. While the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) ensures comparable paratransit service for those who qualify, all public transit users are restricted by the routing, scheduling, and hours of service offered by the transit provider. Freedom of movement for the transit dependent is determined by the access provided by the public transit system.
As an urban area grows, the trend has been for employment growth to be clustered in business and industrial parks and retail malls occupying large tracts of land on the urban fringe. While downtown Eau Claire and Chippewa Falls have seen significant increases in downtown employment opportunities in recent years, the effects of employment growth on the urban fringe will be obvious for years to come. Access to the employment opportunities generally requires the availability of motorized transportation. Those portions of the population with disabilities and in economic distress do not have the same level of access to these employment opportunities because of transportation limitations. The growth of an urban area in this manner stretches the capacity of a fixed route transit system to operate cost-effectively. The increased travel time demanded of the bus system to serve urban fringe growth becomes less convenient to a transit rider by choice and results in a reduction in transit usage by those with other transportation options. This, in turn, leaves the transit system serving a smaller segment of the population at increased costs and facing reductions in service. It is, however, the transit dependent segment of population who suffer the greatest impacts from a reduction in transit service due to their limited transportation options.

While the lack of personal transportation can contribute to social isolation, too much transportation can have the same effect. A street or highway capacity improvement to address a traffic congestion problem can also serve as a physical barrier to pedestrian and bicycle traffic and impede movement into and out of a particular neighborhood. Such road improvements have been known to divide neighborhoods and present difficulties for residents to access area schools, libraries, and community services. Transportation improvement projects that increase automotive travel should also consider the impacts on other forms of personal travel and the effect on neighborhood and community interaction.

**Jurisdictional autonomy** leading to jurisdictional rivalry is one of the greatest obstacles urban areas have to overcome in order to develop effective growth management practices. The lack of an effective coordinated approach to growth management is the result of statutory enabling legislation that empowers all levels of government in Wisconsin to operate with similar municipal authority regardless of the capabilities of individual governmental entities to provide the services expected of urban municipalities. Jurisdictional territoriality and competition for development and increased tax base are often at the core of urban sprawl. The inability of rural and urban units of government to reach a mutual agreement on urban growth and development patterns and the cost-efficient use of public funds has contributed to land use compatibility problems along the urban fringe and, in many cases, increased the cost of eventually providing municipal utilities and transportation infrastructure improvements. Taking steps to address these issues, the City of Eau Claire has entered into agreements with surrounding towns to address development expectations near city limits.
While certainly not all-inclusive, these six land use and growth management issues effectively identify some of the principal concerns associated with urban growing pains and the difficulty with trying to address them. It is readily apparent from ongoing statewide attempts to repeal the state’s comprehensive planning law, that no concise, coordinated, and workable approach is uniformly supported by the many units of local government in the state with the responsibility for managing land use. The effectiveness of the state’s requirement for the adoption of local comprehensive plans as a basis for land use regulations and decisions has been substantial, however, many statutory impediments to cooperation and coordination between diverse local governments still exist. This legislative requirement does little to ensure an effective outcome. Recent tight budgets have provided some incentive for neighboring municipalities to coordinate services, but too often barriers exist, and still little incentive exists to encourage coordination on land use and growth issues. In the absence of any statewide consensus on addressing land use and growth management issues, local units of government in expanding urban areas continue to deal individually in trying to develop cooperative approaches to address their land use and growth management issues, often butting heads with their neighbors in the process. While some additional catalysts to spur additional coordination between municipalities may be needed, recent and ongoing efforts to repeal comprehensive planning requirements would certainly be quite detrimental in this matter. Efforts to establish Regional Transportation Authorities would be a step in the right direction toward coordination among jurisdictions.
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