

## **Regional Land Use Plan for Southeastern Wisconsin: 2035 Key Recommendations**

The regional land use plan sets forth the fundamental concepts that are recommended to guide the development of the seven-county Southeastern Wisconsin Region. The most recent version of the plan<sup>1</sup> was adopted by the Regional Planning Commission in 2006. The plan embodies the following vision for the Region over the course of the next three decades:

- New urban land would be provided through the infilling and renewal of existing urban areas and through the orderly outward expansion of existing urban areas—resulting in a more compact and efficient urban settlement pattern, one that is readily served by basic urban services and facilities and that maximizes the use of existing urban service and facility systems.
- Residential development and redevelopment would occur in a variety of residential neighborhood types and in mixed use settings—with an emphasis on medium and high residential densities.
- Growth in the economic base of the Region would be accommodated through the development and redevelopment of major economic activity centers as well as community-level and neighborhood-level centers.
- The land development needs of the Region would be met while preserving the best remaining elements of the natural resource base—most of which are located within the environmental corridors and isolated natural resource areas—and preserving the most productive farmland.

The regional land use plan was designed to accommodate growth in population, households, and employment in the Region envisioned under the Commission's intermediate growth projections, including an 18 percent increase in population, a 24 percent increase in households, and a 12 percent increase in employment in the Region through the year 2035.

### **Urban Land**

- Under the year 2035 regional land use plan, urban land—defined as land devoted to high, medium, and low density residential use as well as to commercial, industrial, governmental and institutional, recreational, and transportation, communication, and utility uses—would increase by 93 square miles, or 13 percent, from about 732 square miles in 2000 to 825 square miles in 2035. Urban development would occur within urban service areas served by public sanitary sewerage facilities and other public utilities and services. Urban development beyond planned urban service areas would be limited to low density residential development in areas already committed to such use, along with highway-oriented business uses, utility uses, and recreational uses that may, of necessity, have to be located beyond planned urban service areas.
- The plan envisions that urban residential land—including high, medium, and low density residential land, but excluding sub-urban density residential land—would increase by a total of 69 square miles, or 21 percent, from 333 square miles in 2000 to 402 square miles in 2035. This includes increases of 4 square miles in high density residential land, 53 square miles in medium density residential land, and 12 square miles in low density residential land. About 154,800 housing units, or 88 percent of the total projected increase in housing units between 2000 and

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<sup>1</sup> Documented in *SEWRPC Planning Report No. 48, A Regional Land Use Plan for Southeastern Wisconsin: 2035, June 2006.*

2035, would occur at high and medium densities. About 14,800 housing units, or 8 percent of the projected increase, would occur at low density. Urban residential development would occur in a variety of residential neighborhoods providing a full complement of basic neighborhood amenities including a school, park, and shopping area, as well as in more mixed-use settings.

- The total amount of commercial and industrial land in the Region would increase by 18 square miles, or 28 percent, from about 63 square miles in 2000 to 81 square miles in 2035. The plan envisions a range of commercial and industrial areas. Thus, the plan envisions neighborhood, community, and regional commercial centers, including both mixed-use areas with a residential component and areas devoted more exclusively to commercial uses. Likewise, the plan envisions both community-level and regional industrial centers. The plan envisions a continuation of the trend toward mixing industrial and commercial activities in the same area. Under the plan, the largest commercial and industrial areas are identified as major economic activity centers—areas with concentrations of commercial and/or industrial land that would accommodate at least 3,500 total jobs or 2,000 retail jobs. The plan envisions a total of 60 such major economic activity centers in the Region in 2035.
- The plan envisions increases in other urban land use categories over the 35-year planning period, including a 10 percent increase in transportation, communication, and utility lands; a 7 percent increase in governmental and institutional lands; and a 15 percent increase in outdoor recreational lands. The latter consists, for the most part, of anticipated increases in neighborhood, community, and regional parkland. The plan envisions a total of 32 regional parks—large parks of at least 250 acres in size that provide opportunities for a variety of resource-oriented outdoor recreational activities—within the Region.

#### **Sub-urban Density Residential Land**

- Additional sub-urban density residential development—defined as residential development at a density of 0.2 to 0.6 dwelling unit per acre—would be restricted to areas that have already been committed to such use through subdivision plats and certified surveys. Sub-urban density residential land is neither truly urban nor rural in character. Development at this density generally precludes the provision of centralized sanitary sewer and water supply service and other urban amenities. Under the plan, the amount of sub-urban density residential land would increase by nine square miles, or by about 31 percent, between 2000 and 2035, accommodating about 3,400 households, or about 2 percent of the projected increase in households in the Region between 2000 and 2035. No additional sub-urban density residential land beyond the already committed area is recommended.

#### **Environmentally Significant Lands**

- The plan recommends the preservation of the Region's primary environmental corridors in essentially natural, open use. The plan further recommends the preservation of secondary environmental corridors and isolated natural resource areas, as determined in county and local plans. The plan recognizes that certain development may be accommodated in such areas without jeopardizing their overall integrity. These guidelines recognize that certain transportation and utility uses may of necessity have to be located within such areas and that limited residential and recreational uses may be accommodated in such areas. Residential development in environmental corridors would be limited to upland environmental corridors at an overall density of no more than one dwelling unit per five upland acres, with conservation subdivision designs strongly encouraged where residential development is accommodated. Under the guidelines, in lieu of rural density residential development, up to 10 percent of the upland corridor area may be disturbed in order to accommodate urban-density residential, commercial, industrial, or other urban development.

- Under the plan, the existing (year 2000) configuration of environmental corridors and isolated natural resource areas would be modified slightly. These modifications include minor deletions due to prior local commitments to development, along with certain additions. The additions include currently farmed floodplains adjacent to existing environmental corridors within planned urban service areas that may be expected to revert to more natural conditions over time and become part of the corridor. The additions also include certain other open lands that are envisioned to revert to more natural conditions and become part of the environmental corridor as proposed in county park and open space plans. Under the plan, primary environmental corridors would encompass about 481 square miles, or 18 percent of the Region, in 2035. This represents a net increase of 18 square miles, or 4 percent, over the existing 2000 area. Secondary environmental corridors would encompass 77 square miles in 2035, a net increase of about two square miles, or 3 percent, over 2000. Isolated natural resource areas would encompass about 63 square miles in 2035, about the same as in 2000.
- The plan recommends the preservation of all remaining natural areas and critical species habitat sites identified in the regional natural areas and critical species habitat protection and management plan. Almost all of these sites are located within environmental corridors or isolated natural resource areas.

### **Rural Lands**

- Areas of the Region beyond the planned urban service areas are recommended to remain in essentially rural use—primarily agricultural use and rural density residential use. Prime agricultural land in this area—the land best suited for agricultural use—is recommended to be preserved for farming, with residential development generally limited to no more than one dwelling unit per 35 acres. The regional plan recommends that counties in the Region, in cooperation with the concerned local units of government, carry out planning programs to identify prime agricultural land. The regional plan holds out the preservation of the most productive soils—soils in U.S. Natural Resources Conservation Service Agricultural Capability Class I and Class II—as a key consideration in efforts to identify prime farmland, recognizing, however, that other factors, such as farm size and the overall size of the farming area, should also be considered. Most county planning in this regard was carried out more than 20 years ago and needs to be reviewed and updated.
- While much progress has been made in preserving primary environmental corridors and other environmentally significant lands in the Region, the preservation of prime farmland remains a difficult and challenging issue, one that involves the balancing of land use planning objectives and the economic realities faced by farmers. Historically, efforts to ensure the preservation of farmland within the Region have relied on zoning and other land use controls. Mechanisms designed to compensate landowners for committing their land to agricultural use—such as the purchase or transfer of development rights—have not yet been widely embraced within the Region. The regional plan thus reaffirms the importance of preserving prime agricultural land in Southeastern Wisconsin while acknowledging the difficulties inherent in achieving this goal.
- The plan also encourages the preservation of nonprime farmland for agricultural use. This could be in the form of traditional agricultural use or alternative agricultural uses such as smaller hobby farms or specialty farms including community supported agricultural operations. The regional plan recommends that the development of nonprime farmland in planned rural areas be limited to rural residential development at a density of no more than one dwelling unit per five acres. Where rural residential development is accommodated, the regional plan encourages the use of

conservation subdivision designs. The regional land use plan envisions that about 2 percent of the increment in households in the Region between 2000 and 2035, or about 3,700 households, would be accommodated through rural density residential development.

#### **Public Sanitary Sewer and Water Supply Service**

- Under the plan, most new urban development would be served with public sanitary sewer and water supply facilities. The plan envisions that most existing urban development currently served by onsite sewage disposal and water supply systems and located within planned urban service areas would eventually be connected to public sanitary sewer and water supply systems. In 2000, about 477 square miles, or 18 percent of the Region, and about 1.71 million persons, or 89 percent of the regional population, were served by public sanitary sewer facilities. About 390 square miles, or 15 percent of the Region, and about 1.58 million persons, or 82 percent of the regional population, were served by public water supply facilities. In 2035, under the regional land use plan, about 639 square miles, or 24 percent of the Region, and about 2.11 million persons, or 93 percent of the regional population, would be served by public sanitary sewer and water supply services. Public water supply would be provided in several small communities for which sanitary sewer service is not envisioned.
- Development beyond planned sewer and water service areas would be limited to low density and sub-urban density residential development—in areas where commitments to such development have already been made—and to rural residential development. About 5,400 households, or 3 percent of the incremental households envisioned under the plan, would be accommodated on existing platted lots at low and sub-urban densities beyond the planned urban service areas. While such development is not consistent with regional development objectives, the regional plan recognizes existing commitments to such development and the likelihood that these lots will be developed over time.

#### **Population, Households, and Employment Distribution**

- The year 2035 regional land use plan envisions moderating the historic trend of decentralization of population, households, and employment relative to Milwaukee County within the Region. Milwaukee County's share of the total regional population would decrease from about 49 percent in 2000 to about 44 percent in 2035; this compares to a decrease in relative share of 11 percentage points during the previous 30-year period. Similarly, Milwaukee County's share of total regional employment would decrease from 51 percent in 2000 to 46 percent in 2035—compared to a decrease in relative share of about 16 percentage points over the previous 30 years.