

Chapter 2 - Agricultural Resources

Per State of Wisconsin Statute 66.1001 - Comprehensive Planning (2)(e), the Agricultural, Natural, and Cultural Resources element of a community's comprehensive plan is to be:

"A compilation of objectives, policies, goals, maps and programs for the conservation, and promotion of the effective management, of natural resources such as groundwater, forests, productive agricultural areas, environmentally sensitive areas, threatened and endangered species, stream corridors, surface water, floodplains, wetlands, wildlife habitat, metallic and non-metallic mineral resources consistent with zoning limitations under s.295.20 (2), parks, open spaces, historical and cultural resources, community design, recreational resources, and other natural resources".

For the purposes of this *Plan*, the Agricultural, Natural and Cultural Resources element has been divided into three separate Chapters, each with their own goals, objectives and policies. The Chapters are as follows:

- Section II: Chapter 2 - Agricultural Resources
- Section II: Chapter 3 - Natural Resources
- Section II: Chapter 4 - Historic and Cultural Resources

Each Chapter also has a section that address issues and opportunities for that specific Chapter, however, tools for implementation that might apply to all three Chapters have been described only at the end of Section II: Chapter 2 - Agricultural Resources of this *Plan* to avoid duplication. Those implementation tools that apply to Section II: Chapters 3 and 4 of this *Plan* will be referenced within 3.4. and 4.4. of those Chapters.

2.1. Overview

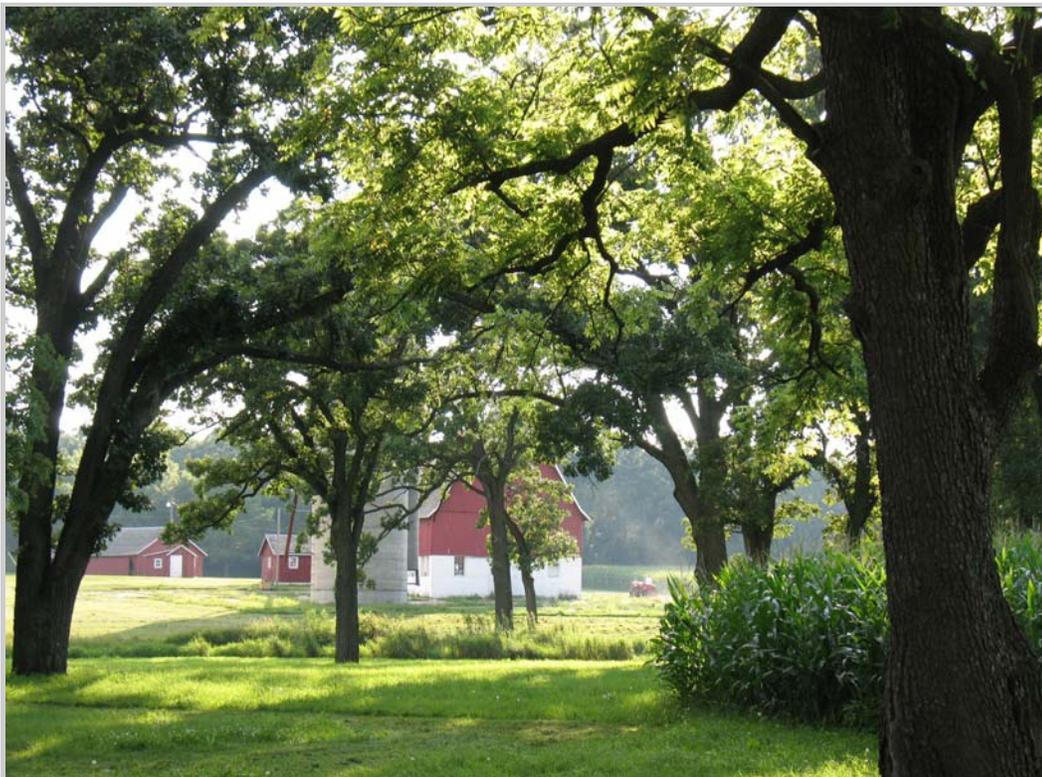
Rock County is largely characterized by agricultural land. This resource serves as the livelihood for many County residents and simply as an outstanding setting in which to live for many others. Either way, it is the most important natural resource existing in the County and should be carefully managed. Agricultural land is also a threatened resource in Rock County. Each year many acres of agricultural land are removed from production and removed from their role as open space in order to make room for development. Once agricultural land is developed, it is very unlikely that it will ever become agricultural land again. For this reason, this topic is one of the most important issues for Rock County to consider for planning purposes.

It is necessary to be knowledgeable about, and carefully consider possible alternatives to development of agricultural land. New and innovative ways to preserve farmland, not only for landowners but for the well-being of all residents of the region, should be carefully researched, analyzed and marketed. Rock County should take the lead in working together with other

jurisdictions to assess how agricultural and natural resources affect the region and determine the best way to manage them. Changing the way that land has been managed is often controversial and emotional, however, with careful research, development and implementation of new ideas and policies, the citizens of Rock County can have the ability to improve the economic viability of agriculture and its related quality of life for all citizens.

Residents of Rock County represent a wide variety of needs and opinions about how the land should be used, regulated and managed. Those who are choosing to live in rural areas and work elsewhere may have opposing viewpoints from those who are making their livelihood from farming the land. Landowners may have a very different idea of what it means to conserve or preserve agricultural and other natural resources than those who track the health and sustainability of the environment. Although it may be difficult or impossible to represent all viewpoints, this Chapter will provide a professional assessment for the best way to preserve agricultural resources based on the needs of all County residents.

This Chapter aims to describe the agricultural resources currently present in Rock County, explains the current level of protection (or lack of it) and proposes various methods and policies on what should be done to preserve agricultural resources for future generations. It is, however, up to the local communities of Rock County to implement methods and policies of their own to reach the level of protection that they have chosen for their agricultural land and to decide if it makes sense to consider methods of agricultural preservation on a Countywide scale.



2.2. Existing Plans and Program

There are many plans and programs that apply to agriculture in Rock County. Those that are currently affecting and are likely to continue to affect the future of agriculture in Rock County include the following:

Rock County Agricultural Preservation Plan: 2005 Update

Agricultural resources planning has previously been addressed via the *Rock County Agricultural Preservation Plan: 2005 Update* (AgPres Plan) published October 31, 2005 and adopted by the Rock County Board December 15, 2005. It is expected that the goals, objectives, and policies of this *Plan* and its future updates will remain in effect during the life of this *Plan*.

The AgPres Plan was written to meet the requirements of the Wisconsin Farmland Preservation Act of 1977. The purpose of the act was to provide a method to preserve farmland through local land use planning and zoning. The AgPres Plan establishes official agricultural preservation areas (APA) whereby landowners in the APAs are eligible for tax credits through the Wisconsin Farmland Preservation Program. The location of APAs are shown on the AgPres Plan Map as it appears in 2.3. of this Chapter, and the entire AgPres Plan is designated as Section II: Chapter 13 of this *Plan*.

The AgPres Plan includes a discussion of the history of farmland preservation in Rock County, an inventory of various physical features affecting agricultural land use, a report on the agricultural economy, a report on the decline of agriculture in Rock County, an account of the public participation in plan development, goals and objectives for agricultural preservation, a map showing APAs and transition areas, policies and implementation tools, and finally, appendices with supporting documentation. Because of their relevance to planning for the future of the agricultural resource, the goals, objectives and policies of the AgPres Plan are reproduced in 2.6. of this Chapter.

Farmland Preservation Program

The Wisconsin Farmland Preservation Act of 1977 created what is known as the Farmland Preservation Program. The program consists of three components, land use planning, soil and water conservation and tax credit. Through this program, Rock County landowners have received an average of over \$850,000 in income tax credits annually when specific program criteria are met.

For Rock County landowners to be eligible for the program, the following criteria had to be met:

1. Rock County had to adopt an agricultural preservation plan that was certified by the State
2. Each individual Town had to agree to become part of the County program
3. Each Town had to adopt a State certified zoning map and text that conforms to the County agricultural preservation plan map
4. Each Town had to have an exclusive agricultural zoning district

With those criteria being met, landowners must also meet certain criteria to receive the tax credit. Examples of criteria for landowners seeking tax credits are:

1. Landowner must be a resident of Wisconsin
2. Landowner must meet farm income qualifications
3. Landowner must obtain a County approved land conservation plan that meets the Rock County soil and water conservation standards for the land in question
4. Land in question must be in an exclusive agriculture zoning district
5. Lot must be at least 35 acres in size

Wisconsin residents who own at least 35 acres of farmland and produce at least \$6,000 in agricultural products per year, or an average of \$18,000 over three years (plus meet other criteria) are eligible to participate in the program. The amount of tax credit varies, depending on the household income and the amount of real estate taxes on the farmland.

The Farmland Preservation Program is the current standard for agricultural preservation and is the primary method for creating financial incentive for farmers to stay in farming in Rock County. Unfortunately however, the financial incentive to develop the land is typically far greater than the tax advantage provided through the program. The Farmland Preservation Program is expected to be significantly changed and updated to be more effective as an agricultural preservation tool during the planning period.

Rock County Land and Water Resources Management Plan (LWRMP)

The LWRMP serves as a long-term strategic conservation plan for the Rock County Land Conservation Department and Rock County residents. The plan provides guidance for conservation efforts within the County and assists in forming annual work plans for the Land Conservation Department. The LWRMP, in coordination with this *Plan* discusses issues related to land use, physiography, soils, surface water (including wetlands) and groundwater, within the framework of watershed management. The LWRMP also includes discussion of other natural resource concerns including threatened and endangered species, forests and woodlands, invasive species, identification of priority farms for agricultural preservation efforts, and State and local regulations used to implement the plan. It is the intent of this *Plan* to uphold the intent of the LWRMP.

Local Land Use Plans and Zoning Ordinances

There are 28 local land use plans and 28 local zoning ordinances currently in effect in Rock County that illustrate where agricultural resources are planned for the future (land use plans), where agricultural resources currently exist (under agricultural zoning) and where development will be or is permitted (in some cases, land use plans and zoning) or is existing (zoned for other than agricultural uses). Each of the land use plans and zoning ordinances affects agriculture in one of three ways: First, by designating specific areas on the land that each community is planning for future agricultural uses, second, by designating specific areas where agriculture may be converted to other uses, and third, by designating areas for development that may be in close proximity to agricultural operations. Analysis of current land use plans and ordinances provides a clear picture of where agricultural resources are likely to be maintained in the near future and throughout the planning period.

2.3. Agricultural Resources Inventory

There are various ways that agricultural resources can be defined and inventoried. Four common methods of illustrating where agricultural resources exist have been chosen to define what is agricultural land in Rock County and what is not. A combination of these defining factors and others will be used later in this *Plan* to make informed decisions about where it makes the most sense to preserve agricultural land and where it makes sense to propose other uses for the land.

The four methods are:

1. Agricultural soil capability - Used to map where agricultural soils are located based on crop production
2. Agricultural preservation areas - Used for tax credit purposes
3. Town zoning - Shows where land is being farmed and/or where development is not allowed
4. City extraterritorial jurisdiction planning maps - Used to show where agricultural land now exists and to predict where it might be developed in the future

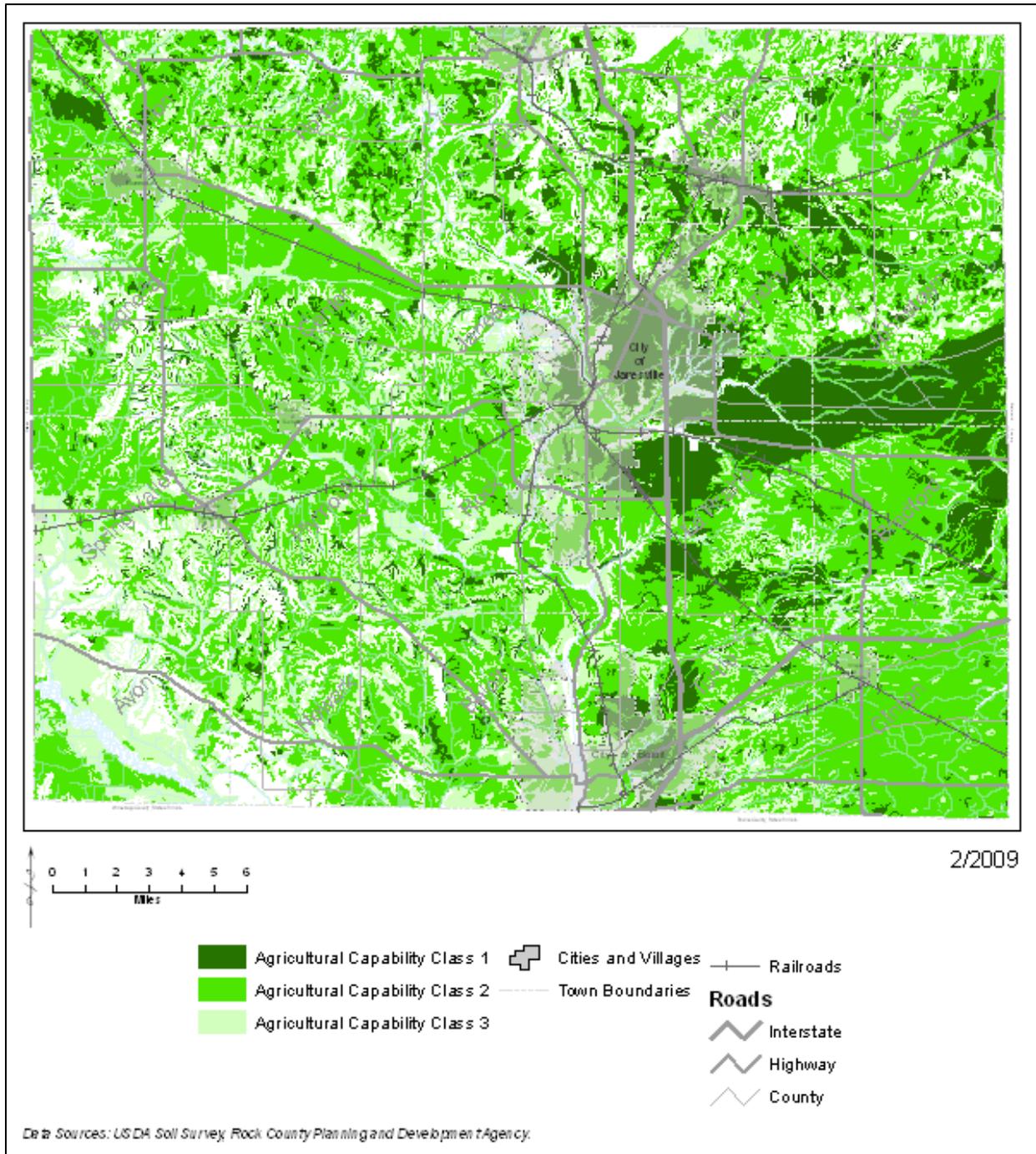
These four methods will be discussed in the following pages and will be used to define agricultural resources in Rock County.

Agricultural Soil Capability

Agricultural soils are classified into eight capability classes (see Map 2.1). Classes 1, 2 and 3 are the most ideal for agriculture. Class 1 soils have few limitations that restrict their use and are considered prime agricultural land. Some of the agricultural soil in Rock County is considered to represent some of the best soil in the world. Class 2 soils have moderate limitations that reduce

the choice of plants, or require moderate conservation practices and Class 3 soils have more severe limitations. Many Rock County farms exist on Class 3 and 4 soils. Smaller areas of interspersed Class 1 and 2 soils are characteristic of Rock County except on the southeastern side of the City of Janesville where a large contiguous area of Class 1 soils extends from the City border to the County line and beyond.

Map 2.1:
Agricultural Soil Capability



Agricultural Preservation Areas

According to the AgPres Plan, much of the agricultural land bordering the Cities of Janesville, Beloit, Evansville, Edgerton and Milton has been designated as urban agricultural transition area. These areas are typically experiencing high development pressure, are sometimes zoned as transition or development areas under local zoning codes, are within City or Village sewer service areas, and are likely to continue to develop, at least partially, during the term of this *Plan*. Most of the remaining agricultural land in Rock County is in the APA and is zoned for exclusive agriculture under local zoning codes. A smaller proportion of agricultural land is designated as excluded and has zoning consistent with small to medium sized, three to 35-acre farmettes, horse farms or residential lots. Rural transition areas are those areas designated for rural development. It is highly recommended that those areas currently in the APAs remain as such throughout the planning period (see Map 2.2).

Town Zoning

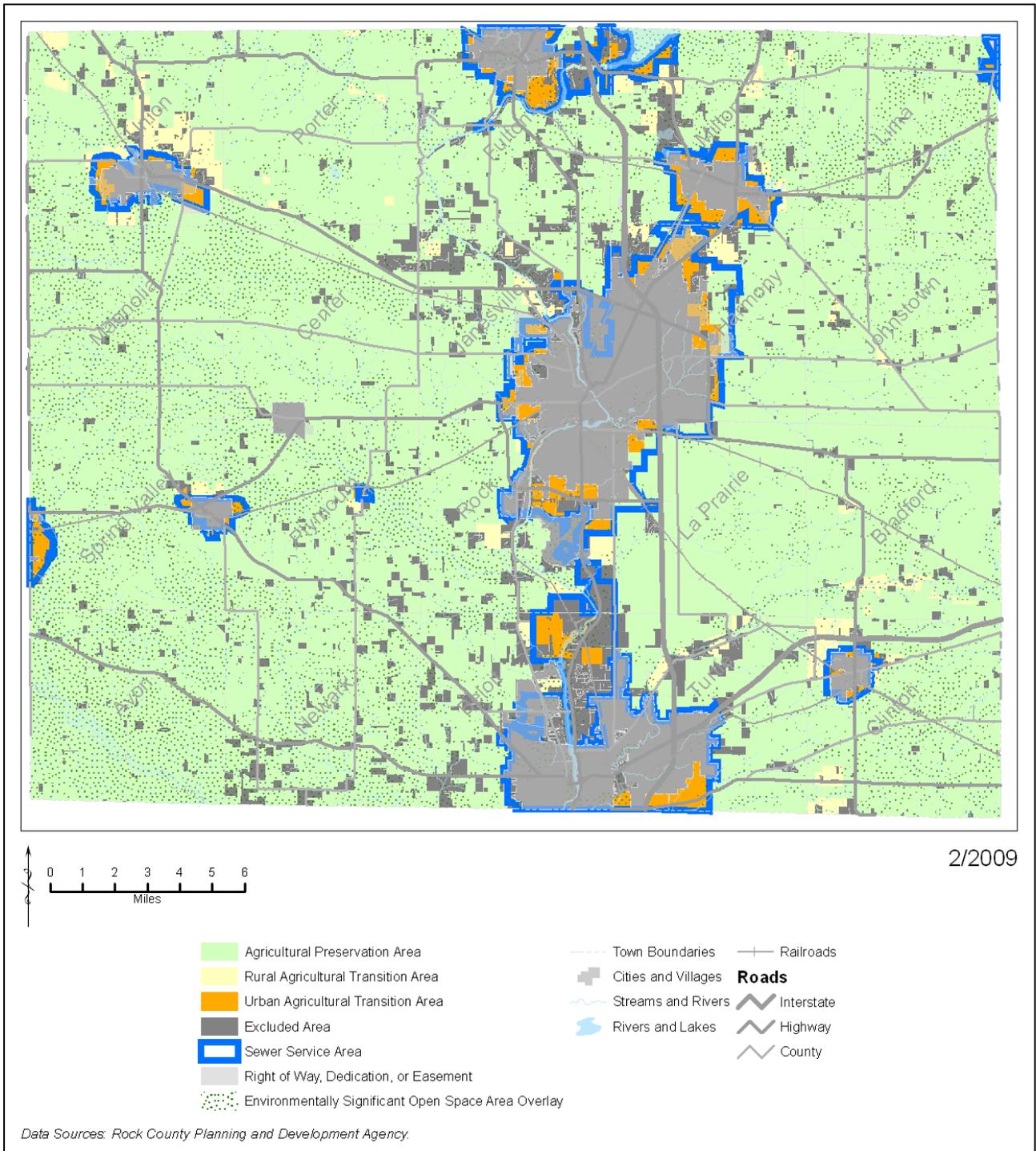
Although zoning does not truly define agricultural land, the reality is that zoning is a good indicator of where farmland currently exists and more importantly, where it is likely to continue to exist in the short-term future. Town zoning maps also delineate exclusive agricultural (A-1) zoning districts, as required by the AgPres Plan for eligibility in the tax credit program. These zoning maps, when compared to previous zoning maps show the history of Town effort to maintain the agricultural community.

The desires of the Towns for land use in the short-term future is best acknowledged through study of each Town's zoning map. Map 2.3 is a composite of current zoning maps from those Towns that have approved digital maps on file with Rock County (see Map 5.2, Section II: Chapter 5 - Land Use of this *Plan* for a larger version). This map will be used to help determine future land use recommendations for Rock County.

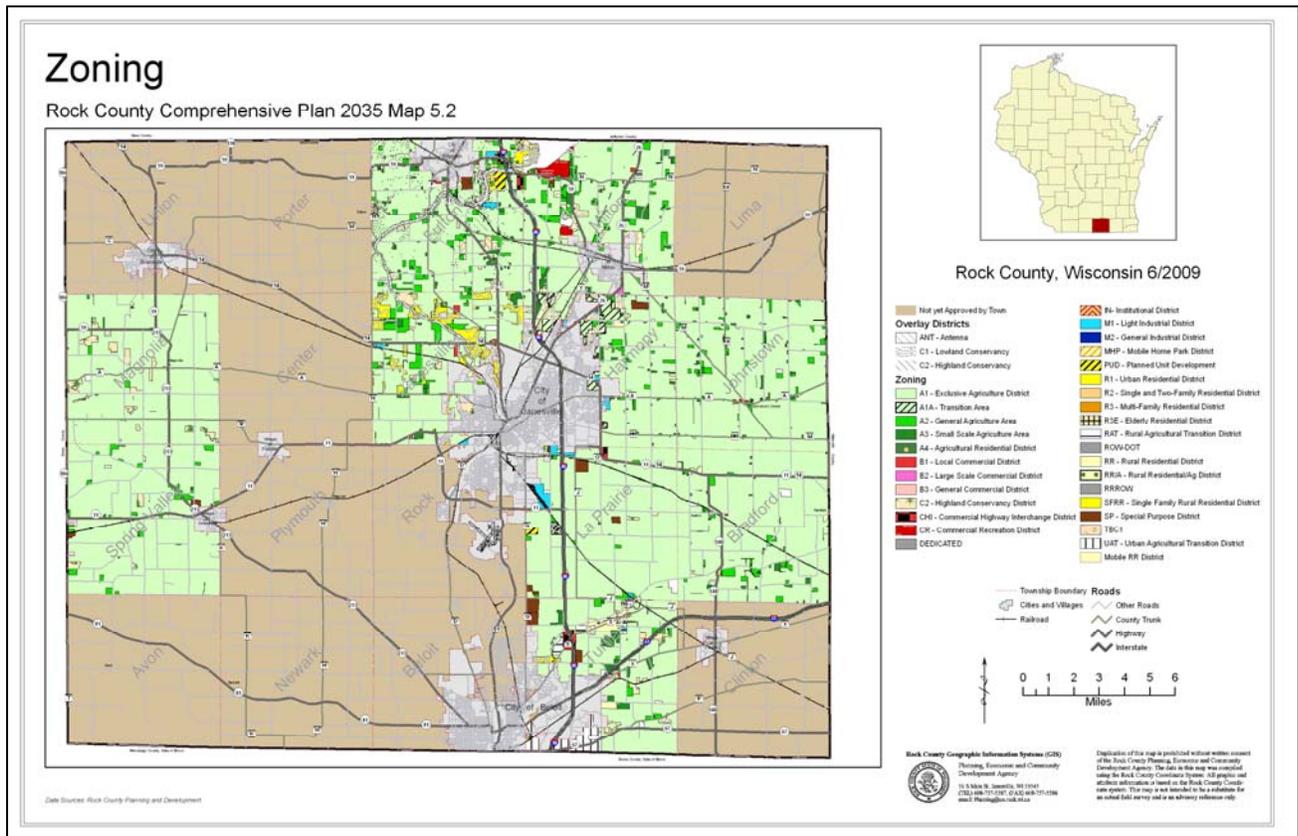
City/Village Extraterritorial Planning

Each city and village in the State of Wisconsin has the right to review and approve land uses in areas adjacent to their borders. This is called extraterritorial jurisdiction. Cities with a population of 10,000 or more have the right to control land use within three miles of their borders. Cities and villages with less than 10,000 in population have the right to control land use within one and one half miles of their borders. Eleven Cities and Villages, within Rock County or in adjoining counties, retain this jurisdiction over land uses in Rock County Towns. A significant amount of land acreage is within these extraterritorial jurisdictions making it an important consideration for future planning (see Map 2.4).

Map 2.2:
 Rock County Agricultural Preservation Plan: 2005 Update Map



Map 2.3:
Composite Town Zoning: 2009

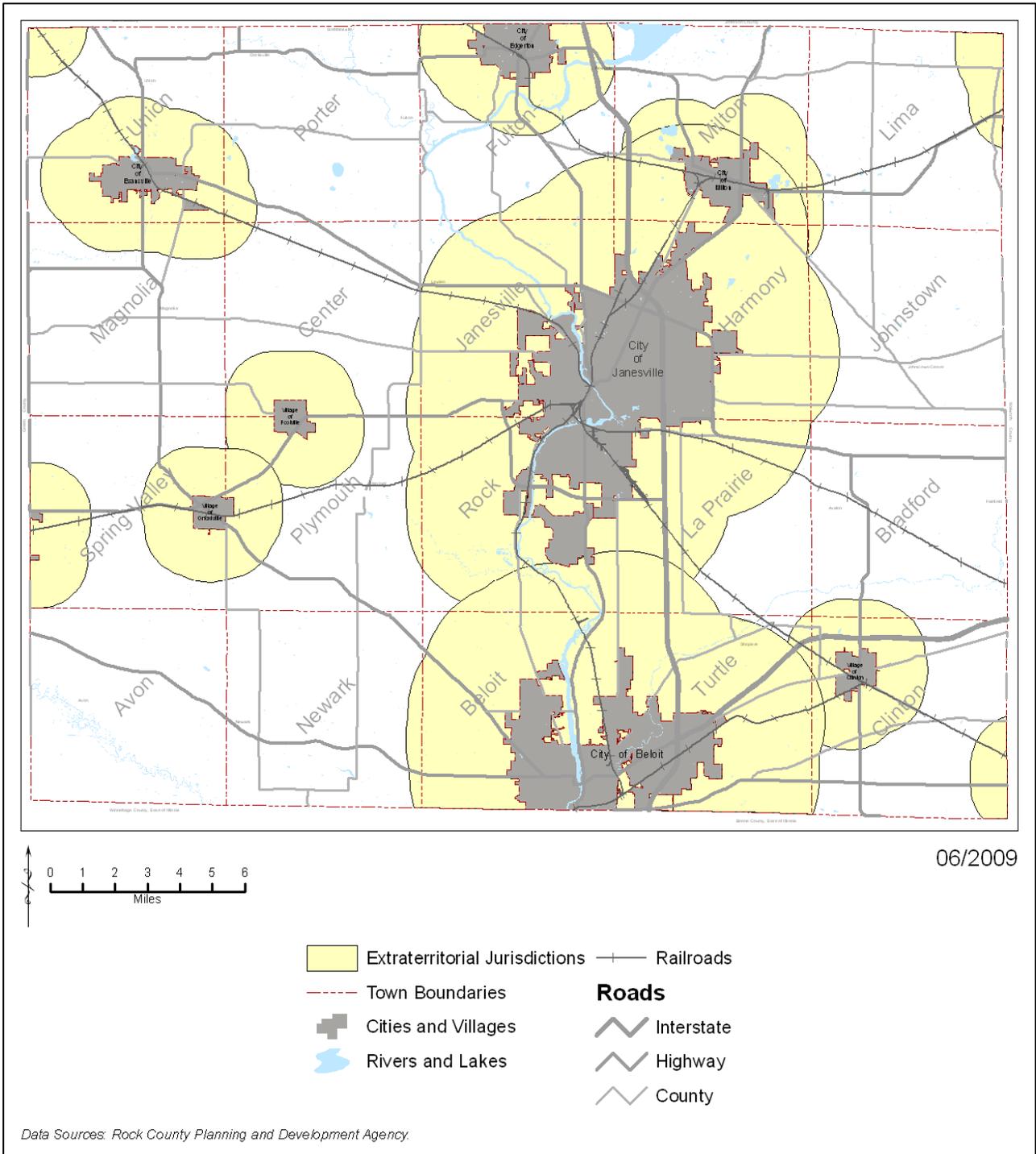


2.4. Agricultural Resources Issues and Opportunities

In order to preserve agriculture as a viable economic activity in Rock County, the best practice is to consciously select and plan for specific areas for development that are not on agriculturally productive soils and that do not fragment areas of agricultural production. Isolated areas of development within agricultural areas can cause fragmentation of farmland that brings about conflicts among rural neighbors and discourages farming. When scattered development occurs, the negative impacts are often far-reaching and permanent.

Infill development within existing development areas should be promoted and growth should occur outwardly from urbanized areas where the provision of public infrastructure is cost efficient. The rate of desired growth in each community should be carefully analyzed and the amount of development that is allowed to occur should match the desired growth rate. Orderly growth and development is imperative to reduce costs of infrastructure and to preserve the quality of life for Rock County residents.

Map 2.4:
Extraterritorial Jurisdiction Areas: 2009



- Land Conversion:** In most Rock County Town ordinances, there are three agricultural zoning districts. The district that most Towns term the exclusive agricultural (A-1) district allows a minimum lot size of 35 acres and is intended for large-scale farming operations. The A-2 district, often termed general agricultural district two, commonly allows a minimum lot size of 10 acres and is intended to provide for agricultural activities and uses that are compatible with agriculture that are generally best suited for smaller farm units. The A-3 district, often termed small-scale agricultural district, usually allows a minimum lot size of three acres and is intended for combined rural residential/agricultural uses.

Although much of the land in Rock County is under local exclusive agricultural zoning, agricultural land can be converted to residential or other non-farm uses through rezoning. Figure 2.1 shows that over 12,300 acres of land zoned A-1 was rezoned to other districts from the time that each Town entered into the Agricultural Preservation Program through 2006. This figure does not include farmland that was annexed into other jurisdictions for development. It does represent land that has had a probable land use change while remaining within Town jurisdiction.

**Figure 2.1:
Exclusive Agricultural (A-1) Zoning District Acres Rezoned
Out of Rock County Agricultural Preservation Program: 1977- 2006***

A-1 Rezoned To	Primary Uses	Acres Taken Out of A-1
Agriculture 10-35 acres and combined ag districts (A2, A2/A3)	Housing, horse farms, and hobby farming	5,285.0
Agriculture (A-3) 3-10 acres		2,551.1
Combined agriculture and residential (A2/CR, A2/R1, A2/RR, A3/RR, A3/SFRR)		332.3
Residential (R1, RR, SFRR, MHP)	Housing/manufactured housing	2,328.0
Business, manufacturing, and special purpose (B1, B2, M1, SP)	Local business, small industry, gravel pits, salvage yards, and landfills	1,143.0
Conservation, commercial, recreation and combined (C2, C1/CR, CR)	Open space, campgrounds and associated buildings	658.8
Other (A3/B1, A4, and other)	Combined districts, agricultural preservation, and other	19.9
TOTAL**	-	12,318.0

Source: Rock County Planning, Economic & Community Development Agency - 2007

* Towns entered the Agricultural Preservation Program at different times.

**Rock County total is from the time the first Town entered the Program.

Figure 2.1 also shows that over 2,300 acres was rezoned from exclusive agriculture (A-1) to residential zoning districts. Often when zoning is changed from the A-1 district to the A-3 district, it is for the purpose of placing a house on a large rural lot and often does not include any agricultural use at all. This is also true for some of the zoning changes into the A-2 district. While there is nothing wrong with building a house on a large rural lot, the implications for preserving contiguous areas of agricultural land are often negative. The frequent placement of houses on large rural lots causes fragmentation and high consumption of agricultural land. In addition, more houses in rural areas create more traffic, the need for more road maintenance or expansion of roads, and the need to provide city services that are needed or desired by non-farm residents.

The use of A-2 and A-3 zoning districts often creates an avenue for more housing, along with its accompanying issues, in rural areas that are far removed from city services and employment centers. Figure 2.1 shows that over 12,300 acres of land zoned for exclusive agriculture (A-1) was rezoned into other agriculture districts that accommodate housing (first three zoning categories combined). These figures show that exclusive agricultural zoning alone is not enough to control the rate at which agricultural land is being converted to housing and other uses. To effectively manage the rate of development on agricultural land, the County should assist Town governments, when appropriate, in making policy changes that address these rezone situations.

- **Fragmented Development:** Unsustainable, and therefore, unhealthy patterns of rural development have, unfortunately, become commonplace and acceptable in the United States. Many Americans continue to desire rural living where housing has been developed on large rural lots in agricultural or open space areas that are fragmented and non-contiguous to existing forms of urban development, and are often detached from existing public infrastructure. These developments are often non-cohesive and separated from existing communities. They are often far removed from schools, parks and recreation, workplaces and shopping destinations, creating more reliance on automobiles and discouraging pedestrian activity and mixed-use neighborhoods. As such, these developments are less sustainable and more costly to maintain over time, detracting from a sense of place, while segregating the community and expediting the removal of agricultural land from production and threatening or eliminating existing natural features.

Rock County should continue to collaborate with local governments toward the creation of regional policies that prohibit fragmented and unsustainable development, especially in rural areas that are rich in agricultural soils. In fact, it may at times be even more reasonable and less costly to area governments to simply sustain and maintain agricultural production. An analysis of the anticipated cost for building, expanding and maintaining utilities, roadways, schools, emergency services, etc., may determine in some instances, that it is less expensive to invest in the preservation of agricultural and natural resources, through a purchase of agricultural easements (PACE)/purchase of

development rights (PDR) program for example, than it would be to actually support development in certain areas. Efforts to ensure sustainable, cost efficient development, while encouraging a sense of place, strengthening the community and preserving agricultural land should continuously be pursued and analyzed by County and Town officials.

- **Preservation vs. Property Rights:** In the past, the profitability of development has brought about a basic conflict between preservation policies and private property rights. Although Federal land laws do not provide landowners with uncontrolled land rights, Rock County and many of its local communities have, in the past, typically supported policies that allow land owners broad discretion on how and when to change the use of, or develop their property given physical constraints. Thus, landowner property rights have typically prevailed over policies that enforce agricultural and natural resource preservation.

Although this type of policy is often best for the individual landowner in the short run, it can generate conflict with the common good of the community at large. The disappearance of our basic life sustaining resources is a concern for everyone and should be acknowledged in our land use policies. Those policies should provide for innovative methods that allow landowners profitability from their land, while at the same time preserving this essential resource. This *Plan* aims to point out strategies, policies and programs that are available for the County and the agricultural community to help alleviate the financial incentives associated with converting large portions of agricultural land to other uses.

Various tools exist to promote preservation including use value assessment, zoning, conservation easements and PACE/PDR or transfer of development rights (TDR) programs (see pages II-2-23,24 of this Chapter). Other strategies such as cluster and conservation developments ensure that less land will be used when new housing is developed. Zoning and density regulations, as well as policies guiding the rate of growth can have a powerful effect on how development occurs within the County. However, these must be implemented at the Town level. These tools for preservation and others will be examined in 2.5. of this Chapter.

- **Agriculture and Nature:** In southern Wisconsin, agriculture is often interspersed with or in close proximity to other natural resources. The special interconnectedness of these resources makes it necessary to analyze and manage them as a whole, rather than as separate planning issues. It makes sense to analyze agriculture as it affects and is affected by wildlife and other natural resources.

Agriculture has long been valued not only for its productive and economic qualities, but also for its ability to provide visual open space. Land that is zoned agriculturally often includes natural areas that are valuable for their ability to provide continuous areas of

cover and passage for wildlife. Agricultural land should also be considered for its ability to buffer important natural resources from areas of development where a change in landscape, water drainage and human activity itself can threaten some natural resources. With these assets in mind, contiguous areas of open agricultural land should be encouraged and preserved.

Agriculture should also be considered for its role as a source of non-point water pollution. Agricultural run-off is one of the biggest contributors to surface and groundwater contamination, primarily in the form of nitrates and phosphorus from fertilizers. It is important to be sure that agriculture does not harm other important natural resources. This issue can be addressed through careful agricultural management and conservation practices. There are also opportunities available for educational and monetary assistance to farmers who are operating near water sources and wish to reduce the negative affects of their operation on the environment. With these issues in mind, an inventory of natural resources as well as common tools, strategies and programs for conservation and/or preservation of both agriculture and natural resources are explored in this Chapter as well as in Section II: Chapter 3 - Natural Resources of this *Plan*.

- **Annexation:** It would be remiss to make recommendations for agricultural preservation in Rock County without acknowledging the issue of annexation. Some of the consumption of farmland in the County does not occur because of Town or County policy, but because of annexation beyond the control of either jurisdiction. It is the right of landowners living in areas contiguous to a neighboring city to request annexation into the municipality for the purpose of developing their land. This process is often imminent for farmers on the fringe of an urban area because surrounding uses make it difficult or impossible to farm, and because of the overwhelming economic incentive to allow the land to be developed. It is with these issues in mind, that constant and continuous discussion, cooperation and identification of common values and possible solutions be sought between Cities, County and Towns regarding appropriate growth, development, and land preservation.
- **Food vs. Fuel:** Food vs. fuel is a growing debate in the agriculture industry that is beginning to impact communities like Rock County. Farming, similar to other industries, is heavily impacted by structural economic as well as political issues. Perhaps more than ever, these influences have begun to shape what has been commonly referred to as the food versus fuel dichotomy. Although the long-term impacts of this dichotomy are relatively unknown, it has already begun to have profound impacts.

Historically, the agricultural community's outputs have been designed exclusively for food generation. Over time however, other value-added attributes (e.g. composites, additives, etc.) generated from food based products, have become commercially acceptable and viable. The printing and plastics industries, in particular, have enjoyed a long-standing relationship with agriculture. Yet despite these relationships, commodity exchange and agricultural property prices remained somewhat stagnant.

The same cannot be said for what is happening with respect to the fuel dichotomy associated with agriculture. As the United States and other nations worldwide seek to become less dependant upon fossil-based fuels, agriculture has become vogue. Specifically, fuels generated from traditional food commodities, such as corn and soybeans, have placed unknown pressures upon this nation's economic landscape.

Similar to other agricultural related public policy issues, the outcome of this food versus fuel debate is one that will continually have roots within the upper Midwest and Wisconsin in particular. The United Cooperative Ethanol plant in the City of Milton, the Midwest Biofuel plant in the Village of Clinton and the proposed North Prairie Production facility in the City of Evansville, as well as other plants not yet proposed, will definitely be part of these debates. Even though their true impacts will not be known for several years, additional discussions regarding this topic will likely be addressed within future updates of the AgPres Plan and future updates of this *Plan*.

Tools for implementation are policies or actions local governments can take, in order to meet the goals, objectives and policies detailed in this *Plan*. The following implementation strategies should work collectively to guide development to appropriate locations in the County while also valuing and preserving agricultural, natural and cultural resources.

- **Growth Management Coalition:** Cities, Villages and Towns in Rock County have the right and responsibility to zone the land within their jurisdictions. Town zoning usually provides for the division of land into rural lots of at least 40,000 square feet (nearly one acre) with private septic and wells. City and Village zoning, on the other hand, allows for development that is often at least four times more dense. Property laws allow rural landowners the right to petition for annexation of their property into a neighboring municipality, often for the purpose of achieving higher density development. Thus, it often makes sense for Towns to also rezone agricultural land that is already close or contiguous to other development for higher density development. While compact, dense development is more sustainable and should be a regional goal, sometimes growth occurs in locations where preservation of agricultural and natural resources would be desirable.

There is, therefore, a growing need to collaborate on planning and growth issues. By forming a growth management coalition of County and local planners and officials that border each other in growth areas, there is an opportunity for open discussion, debate and consensus on important planning and growth decisions. In an effort to guide development, provide clear priorities for the location of growth, and find ways to best preserve agricultural and natural resources, there must be a "meeting of the minds" between local jurisdictions to identify the best way to manage growth in the best interest of everyone. To that end, it is recommended that the Towns, Villages, Cities and County come together to form a growth management coalition so that all parties and considerations for growth can be heard and understood.

- **Tall Unnatural Structures:** Wind power devices, cell phone towers, and other unnatural, tall structures are becoming increasingly prevalent in the rural landscape and are being erected with little or no regulation in place. Rock County, in conjunction with local communities, should carefully research the environmental, agricultural and aesthetic ramifications of placing such structures in the rural landscape and develop ordinance language as needed.
- **Community/Development Design:** As land becomes more scarce and development pressures increase, it is important that the development that does happen is planned and designed with the needs of the future residents, public, and environment in mind.

As our population increases and diversifies, it is important to take into account the young, the old, the wealthy, the poor, the healthy and the disabled. Community design issues such as housing types, lot sizes, aesthetics, building placement on lots, street and road configuration, trails, transportation design, and accessibility issues will take place within other Chapters of this *Plan*. Because the Agricultural, Natural, and Historic and Cultural Resources Chapters (Section II: Chapters 2-4) of this *Plan* are associated with the identification, preservation, and protection of the environmental resources of the County, it is necessary to discuss the issues of logical and efficient design of subdivisions and home sites here.

For years, in general, subdivisions and home sites have been designed and planned with limited analysis done of the actual physical conditions of the proposed site. Conditions such as steep slope, soil types, drainage patterns or hydrologic systems, viewsheds, and overall compatibility with the surrounding character of the land are sometimes overlooked, under studied, or simply not taken into consideration. This practice adds a substantial inefficiency and cost to the development process due to the fact that both parties must make numerous requests, adjustments, and re-submittals to react to issues that would have been recognized earlier in the process had pre-design analysis been done.

Conservation subdivision design, often referred to as cluster development design, is one example of a design concept that supports the analysis of the existing environment prior to starting the actual design process. Compared to conventional subdivision design practices, conservation subdivisions and cluster developments generally attempt to preserve the open space and natural resources of the parcel being developed, while minimizing the infrastructure of the development.

With the opportunity of comprehensive planning to introduce new smart growth-oriented ways of doing business, a fundamental change in site planning is appropriate. Currently, new technology makes computer-generated analysis of the environmental features and physical characteristics of the land possible (see land evaluation and site assessment (LESA), under 2.5. of this Chapter). Site evaluations and analysis enables

development sites to be assessed prior to design, taking into account both the positive amenities and the environmental limitations of the building site. This pre-design analysis can lower costs, streamline the application/approval process, as well as alleviate frustrations for the County and local approving agencies and the developer when determining compliance with Federal, State, and local code enforcement, environmental constraints, public safety issues, etc.

It is suggested that the process of design become a collaborative effort at the very beginning of the development process, between the developer or home owner and the County and local approving agencies. In addition, it is recommended that the design process take place only after the physical conditions of building and development sites have been evaluated and analyzed. This site evaluation process would maximize the potential of the building site to the developer or homeowner while minimizing the impact of the development on the environment. In practice, pre-design site evaluations would undoubtedly expedite the approval process saving money for the County government, Town government, and the developer or homeowner.

2.5. Tools of Implementation

Regulatory Tools

Regulatory tools are those used for controlling consumption and promoting preservation of valued resources through policy and code. The following is a description of some of the tools that are available and may already be in use. There may be other appropriate tools in addition to those described here. It is important to recognize that all laws, codes and regulations, or the lack thereof, that affect land use, also affect the natural and/or agricultural environment in some way. For this reason, careful examination of any policies or laws affecting land use is highly recommended.

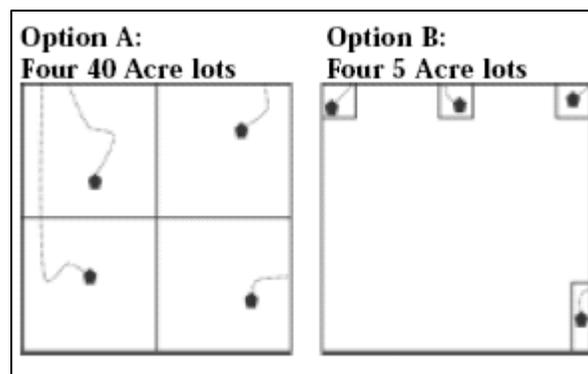
- **Landscaping and Vegetative Cover:** One of the most critical regulatory strategies for retaining rural character as well as for addressing issues of erosion control and replacement of disrupted natural features is a landscaping ordinance. Most cities and villages in Southern Wisconsin have stringent requirements for natural screening and replacement of vegetation when a subdivision is developed. Used as part of or in conjunction with local planned unit development regulations and/or subdivision ordinance, landscaping can have a significant effect on the shaping of the rural environment. Rock County should encourage and support the local implementation of landscaping requirements as one way to sustain the rural character of the County even as development continues to occur.

Specific requirements for landscaping and vegetative cover is also one of the tools available to municipalities, corporations, developers, landowners, and homeowners to offset the negative visual effects of infrastructure facilities and structures, as well as

neighborhood population density. The use of both natural and artificial landscaping to separate and buffer potentially obtrusive features, structures, and developments is gaining national acceptance and can greatly improve the privacy and general visual aesthetics of an area or viewshed. Techniques such as disguising cell towers as evergreen trees, building audio/visual berms adjacent to developments and retail stores, or simple linear plantings of large trees and shrubs can improve the visual appeal of an area and improve the quality of life for the residents.

- Lot Size and Density:** Rock County Towns typically have zoning regulations that require a large (35-acre) minimum lot size in exclusive agriculture (A-1) zoning districts. These large lots are often not big enough for a viable farming operation and can tend to encourage the development of rural housing on very large lots, thereby defeating the purpose of the exclusive agricultural (A-1) zoning district. Town zoning ordinances can, if desired, require much smaller maximum lot sizes (i.e. 5 acres) for new housing development, in both agricultural and residential zoning districts, in order to encourage non-farm housing to locate on relatively small lots. To further discourage the fragmentation of farmland, Towns may regulate the density (number of houses) allowed in their exclusive agriculture (A-1) district. In order for this to work effectively, density restrictions would need to be placed on the deeds of all new parcels based on the density allowed on the original acreage prior to any land divisions (*Planning for Agriculture in Wisconsin-A Guide for Communities*, November 2002). Lowering lot sizes might seem, at first, to allow more housing on agricultural land, but when used in conjunction with density limits (see Figure 2.2) is an effective method of preserving farmland.

Figure 2.2:
Same Density Lot Size Comparison



Source: *Planning for Agricultural Resources Guide* - November 2002

- Performance Zoning:** Performance zoning is a method that permits controlled development while also being sensitive to the landscape. It tries to regulate the impacts of land uses rather than the uses themselves, by outlining general goals for developers that they can meet in different ways. Landowners are permitted a wide variety of uses,

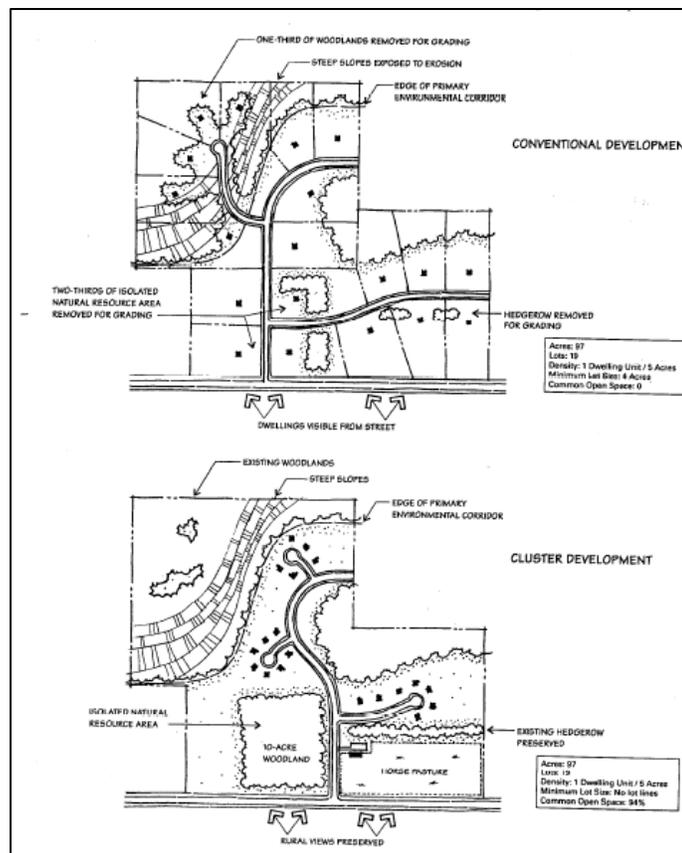
so long as they meet certain numeric standards such as a certain ratio of impervious surfaces, a certain density, a certain amount of open space, or certain noise level standards. Performance zoning is done at the local level and can be complex. It would likely require a professional planner on staff to administer the ordinance.

- **Overlay Zoning:** Overlay zones allow special regulations within all or a portion of a zoning district or several districts. This type of zoning can be helpful for agricultural or natural resource preservation because it can then provide protection in a consistent way, regardless of which district it is in. Overlay zones are common for wellhead protection areas and groundwater recharge areas. The agricultural-residential overlay district, used in the Town of La Prairie, Rock County, is an example of a successful overlay district that helps to protect agriculture.
- **Incentive Zoning:** Incentive zoning allows developers to provide additional amenities such as open space in exchange for higher densities, additional floor area, or other property enhancements. Incentive zoning strategies may be used in the context of other ordinances like conservation subdivisions ordinances (see page II-2-20 of this Chapter) where higher housing densities are permitted in exchange for developing around natural resources present at the site. TDR programs (see page II-2-24 of this Chapter) utilize incentive zoning by permitting higher density building in receiving areas.
- **Official Maps:** Official maps show existing and planned public facilities such as streets and parks. They can also be used to restrict the issuance of building permits within the limits of the mapped areas. The maps are an especially effective means to reserve land for future public use, such as parks and open space.
- **Sign Ordinance:** Signs, especially billboards can drastically affect the perceived rural character of the County as viewed from roadways. For this reason, it is important to have an up-to-date sign ordinance that regulates such things as location and size of billboards, light emitting diodes, changing message and pictures on signs. Wisconsin law now allows a changing message every six seconds on billboards. This can cause a noticeable change to the rural landscape unless addressed in local ordinances. It is recommended that codes address how existing signs may be modified as well as specific requirements for new signs.
- **Cluster Development:** The concept of cluster development, including conservation subdivisions (to be discussed next) is one of the most important strategies, along with landscaping regulations, available for the preservation of agriculture and natural resources. In a cluster development, up to four dwellings, each on the smallest allowable lot size (typical minimum lot size for residential development in most Towns in Rock County is one acre) with the additional requirement that they are clustered together in such a way as to avoid important agricultural and natural resources. In the agricultural districts that allow residential development on rural size lots, such as A-3

zoning that allows three acre lots and A-2 zoning that allows 10-acre lots, the result can be widely spaced homes that cause fragmentation of farmland, woodlands, or degradation of other natural resources (see Figure 2.3). Requiring smaller lots and specifying building envelopes for dwellings that are clustered together on the portion of the land least likely to degrade or fragment existing resources, preserves larger contiguous tracts for agricultural use and natural resources.

Through use of cluster housing overlay districts, local units of government can encourage cluster development by allowing a higher density of housing (i.e. more lots) than would be allowed under the underlying zoning district if the developer agrees to cluster homes on the minimum allowable sized lots (this is an example of incentive zoning). This type of regulation can be also accomplished through a town or county level land divisions regulation and as part of a conservation subdivision for developments of over five land divisions (see conservation subdivisions, next).

Figure 2.3:
Cluster Development



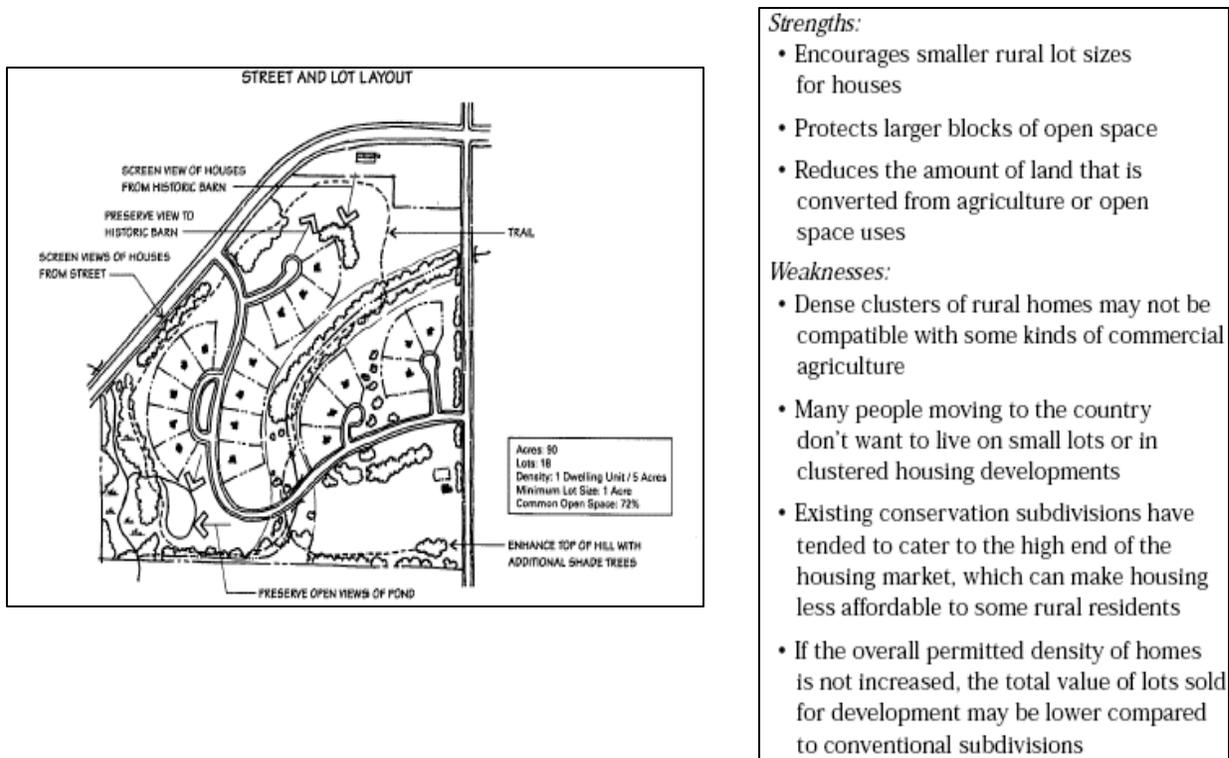
Source: Rural Cluster Development Guide - December 1996: Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Plan Commission

- Conservation Subdivisions:** Conservation subdivisions are an excellent way to preserve agriculture, open space and natural resources in zoning districts where subdivisions, five or more lots created through land division, are permitted. The most appropriate way to

regulate conservation subdivisions would be through a specific conservation subdivision ordinance at the local level. In Rock County where most of the buildable areas are characterized by flat, open spaces, landscaping requirements would be a necessary regulatory element to achieve the desired effect of a conservation subdivision.

The clustering of homes into conservation subdivisions can promote development in areas best suited for such development and away from areas that are environmentally sensitive, such as wetlands or woodlands, providing for the preservation of archeological sites, scenic views and natural vegetation often found near surface water. These subdivisions are most effective when the open space is owned publicly or through a homeowners association, as these natural amenities can be preserved for the community or neighborhood as a whole. Finally, conservation subdivisions can help protect water and groundwater quality for everyone through the maintenance of surface water buffers and better management of run-off (see Figure 2.4).

Figure 2.4:
Conservation Subdivisions: Strengths and Weaknesses



Source: *Rural Cluster Development Guide - December 1996: Southeast Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission*
Planning for Agriculture in Wisconsin, A Guide for Communities - November 2002

In order to sustain an agricultural community and ensure farming as a viable lifestyle, large blocks of contiguous farmland should be protected. Conservation subdivisions are appropriate for protecting blocks of agricultural land and promoting areas where agricultural and residential activities can co-exist especially if used along with other

conservation practices intended to prevent fragmentation of agricultural land. This is significant for particular types of agricultural practices that have some economic and aesthetic benefits for residential homeowners. This might include pick-your-own operations, community supported agricultural programs, organic vegetable production, hay and straw production and other specialty products and activities that use low chemical and low intensity production.

- **Building Permits:** Establishing criteria for the issuance of building permits gives local governments influence over the precise siting or location of new construction within a parcel of land. Issuance of building permits can be further subject to conformance with language in an ordinance or plan that states specific rules about placement of structures (i.e. that new homes are situated in such a way as to avoid agricultural land and/or must be shielded from views of neighbors). Cities, villages and towns may specify a limit on the number of building permits that will be issued each year based on the rate of growth deemed appropriate. In this way, the consumption of land and the strain on the environment caused by development can be more carefully monitored and controlled.
- **Driveway Standards and Other Regulatory Strategies:** The siting of driveways, septic systems and wells as well as other land use controls such as specific requirements for siting of structures relevant to agricultural and natural resources helps to regulate the effect of housing developments on the rural environment. These issues can be addressed through local or county ordinance.

Land Acquisition and Related Tools

There can be little question that the best way to preserve agricultural and natural resources is for those resources to be owned by an entity that is obligated to preserve it and/or for development to be restricted by property deed. There are several viable economic options for this to occur.

- **Conservation Easements:** Conservation easements can be compulsory or voluntary. Compulsory conservation easements occur when a governmental unit designates, through approved policy and/or through code, land or environmental conditions that are not acceptable for building. The government entity may prevent these areas of concern from being built upon by placing a permanent conservation easement (deed restriction) on the portion of the land where those conditions exist. In Rock County some features of environmentally significant open space areas (ESOSA) are protected through compulsory conservation easements. Conservation easements are an excellent way to permanently protect natural resources. However, to ensure consistency, specific criteria for their future use should be included in a regulatory document such as the Rock County Land Division Regulations (Chapter 15 - Municipal Code of the County of Rock).

Voluntary conservation easements are typically used as part of a TDR or PACE/PDR transaction (see the following). They are the same legal agreements as compulsory conservation easements, but are established when the right to develop a property is purchased from a private landowner by a qualified land trust, conservation organization or government agency for the purpose of limiting land to specific uses and thus protecting it from development. The development right value of a voluntary conservation easement is often purchased, but is frequently donated by conservation-minded landowners. Grantors can receive tax benefits as a result of donating easements that may apply to parts of or entire parcels of property.

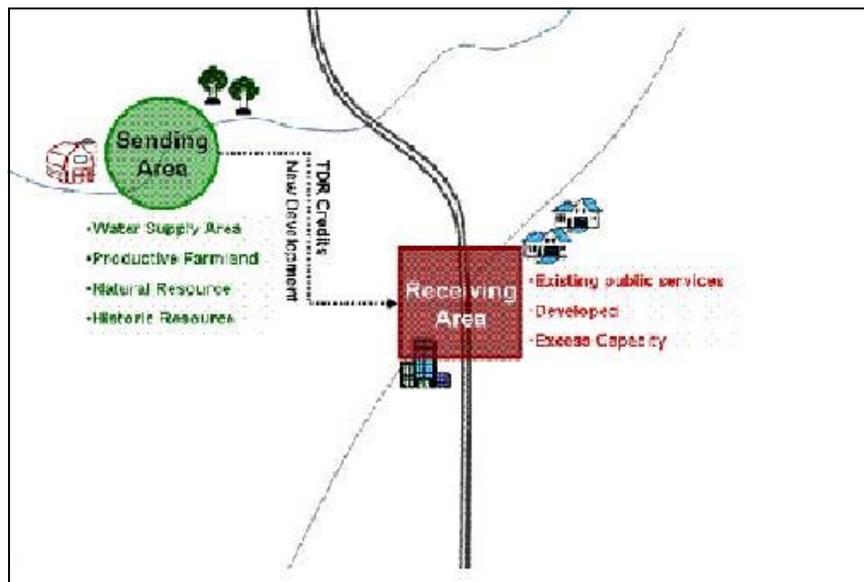
- **Purchase of Agricultural Conservation Easements (PACE)/Purchase of Development Rights (PDR):** Purchase of agricultural conservation easement (PACE)/purchase of development rights programs are aimed at maintaining the economic viability of keeping land in agriculture, even in the face of development pressure. PACE/PDR programs facilitate the purchase of the right to develop farmland property (i.e. purchase the value of putting a conservation easement on the property) that meets pre-established criteria for agricultural preservation. Through various efforts, including partnerships with other governmental and non-profit agencies, a landowner can voluntarily put a conservation easement on his or her land that permanently prohibits the right to develop the land in the future. The deed to the property reflects the inability to develop no matter who owns the land or how many times it is sold. This system lowers the value of the land for taxing purposes and also provides cash-in-hand to the landowner that can be used for re-investment into the farming operation.

The highlights of PACE/PDR programs are summarized below:

- The value of an easement is determined by calculating the difference between the market value of the land with development and the value of the land without development, in current dollars.
- The right to develop land is purchased from the landowner (farmer) from a local government or non-profit organization.
- Some landowners may choose to donate land in order to reduce tax burden while keeping their land in agriculture.
- Easements are recorded on the deed and remain with the land into perpetuity.
- Landowners may sell the development rights to all or just a portion of their land.
- Landowners retain the right to continue to use their land and sell it to others, but the right to develop the land is no longer available once development rights have been sold.
- This system puts cash in the hands of current farmers.

- This system keeps the price of farmland lower for future farmers.
- **Transfer of Development Rights (TDR):** A transfer of development rights (TDR) program is based on the same principles as a PACE/PDR program, but also provides a mechanism for cooperating units of government to designate sending areas (areas where development is discouraged) and receiving areas (areas where development is encouraged). The sending area would typically contain farmland that a community wants to protect and the receiving area would be an area planned for development (see Figure 2.5). These areas do not necessarily need to be under the same governmental jurisdiction, as long as there is agreement between them. Landowners in sending areas are allocated development rights based on density policy and criteria identified in adopted plans, which specify the number of potential building sites or non-farm development available on the property. Landowners seeking to develop in a receiving area must first buy development rights from landowners in a sending area. Once a development right is purchased and transferred, the landowner in the sending area gives up the ability to develop all or a portion of the property.

Figure 2.5:
Transfer of Development Rights (TDR)



- **Non-Profit Conservation Organizations:** Non-profit conservation organizations such as land trusts are private organizations established to protect land and water resources for the public benefit. Land trusts often protect natural resources by owning the land or by holding a conservation easement which limits the use of the land to the terms specified in the easement. Land trusts and other non-profit conservation organizations are eligible to participate in State grant programs that fund land or conservation easement acquisitions.

- **Public or Private Purchase:** Governmental units and non-profit conservation organizations can acquire land for conservation purposes by purchasing it outright. This is recommended when full public access to the property is required.
- **Public Land Dedication:** Local governments may require, through ordinance, that a specified percentage of land is dedicated to the public whenever a subdivision or other type of development occurs. This requirement assures that there will be public open space within each development. If appropriate, a fee in lieu of a land dedication can be permitted, thereby creating a fund for maintenance of public lands.
- **Land Evaluation and Site Assessment (LESA):** Land evaluation and site assessment (LESA) categorizes land parcels, and guides land-use decisions by evaluating soil and site suitability for specific uses, including agriculture, development, or recreation. A LESA program utilizes a comprehensive, objective methodology to develop a LESA score that provides a numerical method for evaluating a parcel of land. A LESA score can then be utilized for evaluation and decision making regarding the preservation or development potential of any property.

Rock County Agricultural Preservation Plan: 2005 Update Implementation Tools

- **Exclusive Agricultural (A-1) Zoning District:** The exclusive agricultural (A-1) district employed by all twenty Towns in Rock County permits agricultural pursuits. The district requires large lot sizes and ensures that residential development in rural areas does not become more dense than one home for every 35 acres, except in certain circumstances. In fact, the intention of the A-1 district is that only farmland owners and other persons engaged in agriculture are allowed to reside there. This stipulation helps protect neighboring farmland owners from potential nuisance complaints generated by non-farming rural residents. Non-farm uses are limited in the A-1 district. Rock County dissuades rezoning petitions that remove properties from the A-1 district. Where development is not warranted or appropriate, the Towns should consistently deny rezoning out of the A-1 district, in order to preserve farmland.
- **Sanitary Codes:** The Rock County Sanitary Code is enforced by the County Health Department. The purpose of the code is to regulate the placement of private septic systems. The intent of the code is to promote development that conserves land and water resources. In so doing, development is restricted in some areas of the unincorporated County.
- **Urban Service Areas:** Some incorporated municipalities in the County have conducted water quality management plans. These plans provide policies to promote cost effective development while preserving agricultural and natural lands. These plans establish urban service areas, which depict where cost effective installation of public sewer service is planned. By guiding development to be within the urban service areas, less

sprawl would be allowed to occur and more agricultural land would be preserved.

- **Land Division Regulations:** Rock County adopted the currently applied Land Division Regulations (Chapter 15 - Municipal Code of the County of Rock) in 1971 to guide the creation of parcels, whether for a large residential subdivision or simply for a farmer selling land to a neighbor. The intent of these regulations, as outlined in the ordinance, is to have development occur in an orderly, planned, efficient and environmentally sound manner. If the purposes of the regulations are carried out, development should only occur where the siting of public infrastructure is cost efficient and overcrowding and congestion should be mitigated. Also, land divisions should be designed to protect the beauty of the landscape. Agricultural land comprises much of the landscape in the unincorporated County. The ordinance should protect the rural countryside from sprawling development. The ordinance should be updated to allow for the implementation of additional tools listed in this *Plan*.
- **Rock County, Wisconsin 2009-2014 Parks, Outdoor Recreation and Open Space (POROS) Plan:** The POROS Plan contains broad recommendations for the maintenance and improvement of park and recreation facilities. The plan also references and/or includes portions of the 2003 update of the plan titled the *Parks, Outdoor Recreation and Open Space (POROS) Plan 2003-2008* (specifically, those portions of the earlier plan that discuss and define ESOSA). Those policies that are being reinforced in the new plan have been re-created, in their original form, within the goals and objectives section of the current POROS Plan. These policies identify and define fourteen physical characteristics or natural features in the County that are either in need of protection or that currently limit land availability for development. Though prime agricultural land is not included as one of the fourteen natural features, land used for agriculture often contains other natural features such as wetlands, hydric soils, depressions, groundwater recharge areas, and so forth.

By protecting areas defined as ESOSA, construction is restricted on a sizable amount of the County's agricultural land. The policies of the POROS Plan, if consistently enforced, will encourage compact, conservation developments, helping to maintain natural areas in the unincorporated County.

- **Use-Value Taxation:** Rock County supports use-value taxation for farmland owners. Property assessed at fair market value is based on the highest and best use of the land. This can place an irrational tax burden on farmland owners, particularly in vicinities experiencing development pressures. When agricultural property is taxed according to use-value it is based on the amount that the land is worth if it were restricted to agricultural uses. This would typically result in an assessment that is less than the fair market value.

In 1995 the State of Wisconsin passed legislation to require farmland to be assessed based on the income that could be generated from its rental for agricultural use. This

use-value assessment only applies to land devoted primarily to agricultural use. Eligible agricultural land is categorized by assessors as being first grade tillable cropland, second grade tillable cropland, third grade tillable cropland, pasture or specialty land. Every year each category is assigned a value by the Wisconsin Department of Revenue (WDOR), on which to base the assessed value of the agricultural land.

The use-value taxation employed by the State aims to combat urban sprawl. It protects the farm economy by helping to make farming more affordable, while also discounting farmlands' potential for development. In addition, farmland owners are subject to a monetary penalty if the use of their land changes from an agricultural use to a non-agricultural use.



2.6. *Rock County Agricultural Preservation Plan: 2005 Update* Goals, Objectives and Policies

The following goals, objectives and policies were approved as part of *the Rock County Agricultural Preservation Plan: 2005 Update*. That plan is intended to serve as part of the *Rock County Comprehensive Plan 2035* (Section II: Chapter 13) and is expected to remain in effect during the planning period.

Agricultural Goal

Preserve the agricultural land base, for the long term, by protecting agricultural soils from nonagricultural development.

Agricultural Objectives

- To protect the agricultural land base by clearly designating Agricultural Preservation Areas that are to be used for exclusive agricultural use (chosen on the basis of soil types, topography, agricultural productivity, historic use, existing land use and location) on the Agricultural Preservation Plan Map.
- To protect the profitability of farming, by discouraging rural-urban land use conflicts and by preventing the imposition of urban development into prime agricultural areas.

Growth Management Goal

Manage growth through a process involving all governmental units by guiding development to areas of sufficient physical characteristics and supporting infrastructure.

Growth Management Objectives

- To manage growth by clearly designating Rural Transition Areas where existing rural development, physical features and existing public services support future rural development.
- To manage growth by clearly designating Urban Transition Areas where access to cost-effective public sewer service and other public services are available to support future urban development.
- To manage growth through urban infill development and urban brownfield redevelopment.

Environmental Goal

Protect areas of environmental and open space significance for all residents of Rock County.

Environmental Objectives

- To protect the Environmental Corridors (i.e. wetlands, floodplains, storm water drainage areas, etc.) and Areas of Environmental Significance (i.e. endangered plants and animals, groundwater contribution areas) as Open Space not to be developed, but to be acquired by conservation easements or purchase over time.
- To allow minimal destruction to significant environmental characteristics in the county, as defined in the Parks, Outdoor Recreation and Open Space Plan.

Policies

- Land uses in the Agricultural Preservation Areas should be limited to those permitted under Farmland Preservation law. Only land uses and residence provided in s.91.75 Wis. Stats. should take place in the Agricultural Preservation Area.
- Areas planned for agricultural preservation should contain a minimum of 100 acres of contiguous area.
- Areas planned for transition should contain a minimum of 35 acres of contiguous area.
- When permitted under Chap. 91 Wis. Stats. and consistent with permitted uses/conditional uses in state certified "Exclusive Agricultural Use Ordinances", if the Town board wishes to allow the creation of a parcel of less than 35 acres in an agricultural preservation area, the Town board should accomplish such creation by conditional use permit where permitted by ordinance, or by such means as will retain the parcel in agricultural use.
- Town boards are encouraged to concentrate rural residential development in areas identified as Rural Agricultural Transition Area or in Excluded Areas outside of Rural Agricultural Transition Areas on the Agricultural Preservation Plan Map and in areas where the soils are suitable for private septic systems or where sewer systems are to be constructed.
- Dense residential development should occur in areas identified as Urban Agricultural Transition Areas or in areas identified as Excluded on the Agricultural Preservation Plan Map, and in areas that have public water, public sewer and satisfactory roads.
- The Towns and the County should not permit development of lots of a size less than permitted under Town and County land division regulations and zoning ordinances.

- Non-agriculturally related commercial and industrial development should occur in areas serviced by public sewer and/or water, or in designated areas on the Town/County land use plans.
- Public sewer and water providers should not extend sanitary sewer lines and water mains outside Urban Agricultural Transition Areas and urban Excluded Areas indicated on the Agricultural Preservation Plan Map, unless a new water quality management plan is approved or an existing water quality management plan is amended by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources.
- Town boards and the County should discourage future development in areas indicated as Environmentally Significant Open Space Area Overlay on the Agricultural Preservation Plan Map. Limited development in these areas should be consistent with the resource being protected and ensure the least disturbance possible to environmental features.
- Environmentally Significant Open Space Area Overlays are not intended to change the agricultural use of the underlying Exclusive Agricultural Preservation Area.
- In making land use decisions, Town boards and the County should adhere to the Rock County Farmland Preservation Soil and Water Conservation Standards, as adopted by Rock County Land Conservation.
- Towns should use the Agricultural Preservation Plan Map as a guide, and traverse rezoning requests that are not consistent with the Plan Map. Rezoning out of the Exclusive Agricultural district should only be granted if the standards in s.91.77 Wis. Stats. are met. In those cases, the Town Clerk must notify the State of Wisconsin of the rezonings, per s.91.77 (3). In addition, Town Clerks must notify the Rock County Planning and Development Agency of all rezonings and conditional use permits granted.



2.7. Agricultural Resources Goals, Objectives, and Policies

The following goals, objectives and policies were formulated for the *Rock County Comprehensive Plan 2035* for implementation through 2035.

Agricultural Resources Goal

2.1. Preserve and protect all agricultural resources identified in Rock County.

Agricultural Resources Objectives and Policies

- 2.1.1. Develop Rock County policies and mechanisms for effective preservation and protection of agricultural land.
 - 2.1.1.a. Rock County shall promote conservation and preservation of farmland through consistent, well thought-out land division decisions.
 - 2.1.1.b. Rock County shall provide information and recommendations for development to committees, local governments, landowners and developers based upon soil quality, presence of natural features, proximity to urban services and other appropriate objective measures.
 - 2.1.1.c. Rock County shall, through coordination with local Towns, approve land divisions based upon soil quality, presence of natural features, proximity to urban services, the effects of development on on-site and off-site agricultural and natural resources and other appropriate objective measures for determining where development should be located.
 - 2.1.1.d. Rock County shall, through coordination with local Towns, create land division policy that will establish clear, concise rules about how, when and where development (especially residential) should occur.
 - 2.1.1.e. Rock County shall research the implementation of fees and other financial mechanisms to support agricultural preservation efforts and create a disincentive for conversion of agricultural land.
 - 2.1.1.f. Rock County shall, through coordination with local Towns, amend the current Land Division Regulations (Chapter 15 - Municipal Code of the County of Rock) with clear criteria for development that requires maximum protection of agricultural resources as listed:
 - Require review of all land divisions regardless of size
 - Require all current and proposed agricultural features to be depicted on all development proposals

- Require subdivisions to be located near urban services and adequate transportation facilities
 - Reduce farmland fragmentation with improved driveway regulations
- 2.1.1.g. Rock County shall educate and work with local governments to update their zoning ordinances.
- 2.1.1.h. Rock County shall assist Town governments, when appropriate, by providing language for policy changes that address rezone situations.
- 2.1.1.i. Rock County shall provide model cluster development and conservation subdivision ordinances and educate local governments on their features and use.
- 2.1.1.j. Rock County shall provide a model landscape ordinance for all developments and educate local governments on its features and use.
- 2.1.1.k. Rock County shall provide a model sign ordinance as needed to preserve the rural character of the landscape and educate local governments on its use.
- 2.1.2. Communicate and plan with neighboring communities to the greatest extent possible to ensure the protection of the County's agricultural resources through cooperative efforts.
- 2.1.2.a. Rock County shall encourage Cities and Towns to work with each other and the County to establish standards and policies that uphold the values of Rock County citizens.
- 2.1.2.b. Rock County shall meet with Cities and Towns and other applicable groups and/or jurisdictions to identify agricultural areas for preservation, promote and decide upon the viability of regional preservation programs and to consider other factors such as groundwater protection criteria and areas, etc.
- 2.1.2.c. Rock County shall assist local governments in implementing agreed upon standards by assisting with writing them into official zoning, subdivision or land division ordinances.

Agricultural Resources Goal

2.2. Maintain agriculture as a viable economic activity in Rock County.

Agricultural Resources Objectives and Policies

2.2.1. Encourage and promote innovative and value-added farming practices.

2.2.1.a. Rock County shall provide information on innovative farming ideas or direct interested individuals to helpful organizations and resources.

2.2.1.b. Rock County shall develop clear policies and procedures under which value-added agricultural ventures can be encouraged and allowed.

2.2.1.c. Rock County shall provide or direct farmers and interested parties to information regarding assistance programs, conservation practices, niche farming, organic farming, alternatives to development, etc.

2.2.2. Research and determine the viability and usefulness of implementing tools at the County or multi-Town level, such as purchase of agricultural conservation easements (PACE)/purchase of development rights (PDR), transfer of development rights (TDR) and conservation subdivisions to meet agricultural resource goals.

2.2.2.a. Rock County shall hold education workshops and distribute written material for farmers, developers, landowners and the general public on options and alternatives to development, including but not limited to purchase of development rights (PDR)/transfer of development rights (TDR).

2.2.2.b. Rock County shall research a design, present scenarios and conduct a survey, if necessary, of Rock County residents to determine the desire for a land evaluation and site assessment system (LESA) to specifically evaluate and identify areas for preservation, purchase of development rights (PDR) and transfer of development rights (TDR) programs.

2.2.2.c. Rock County shall research the costs and procedures for implementing a purchase of development rights (PDR) program.

2.2.2.d. Rock County shall support the creation of purchase of development rights (PDR) and transfer of development rights (TDR) programs in jurisdictions where such programs are desired.

Agricultural Resources Goal

- 2.3. Adhere to goals as listed in the *Rock County Agricultural Preservation Plan: 2005 Update*, dated December 15, 2005.

Agricultural Resources Objectives and Policies

- 2.3.1. Adhere to objectives as listed in the *Rock County Agricultural Preservation Plan: 2005 Update*, dated December 15, 2005.

- 2.3.1.a. Rock County shall adhere to policies as listed in the *Rock County Agricultural Preservation Plan: 2005 Update*, dated December 15, 2005.