



RUSK COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN – Chapter 8

ADOPTED – December 15, 2009

8 Land Use

Introduction

The land use chapter is a key backdrop of the county comprehensive plan. It looks at how future land development might play out within each town and what projected acreages might be needed to accommodate growth and change in select land use categories. Overall, land use change is impacted more by human development than the forces of nature, barring any major catastrophic natural event. The previous chapters have provided a wealth of background data and other information pertinent to Rusk County. Land use activity directly or indirectly impacts the livelihood and environment of Rusk County is up to each resident and visitor of the county.

The comprehensive planning legislation outlines the minimum required components necessary to be included in the planning document. These components shall include a compilation of goals, policies, objectives, maps and programs to guide the future development and redevelopment of public and private property; a listing of the type, amount, intensity, and net density of existing uses of land in Rusk County; an analysis of trends in supply, demand and price of land; opportunities for redevelopment; and existing and potential land use conflicts. The plan shall contain projections, based on background information for 20 years, in 5-year increments, of future residential, commercial, agricultural, and industrial land uses and shall also include a series of maps that show current and future land uses that indicate productive agricultural soils, wetlands, natural limitations for building site development, floodplains, and other environmentally sensitive lands, and the boundaries of areas to which the timetable descriptions represented in Chapter Four, and the general location of future land uses by net density or other classifications.

Evaluating present land use patterns assists in identifying projected future land use acreage for agricultural, commercial, industrial, residential, farmland preservation areas, proximity to existing uses, and other measures serve as guides to future development. As a result, an inventory and analysis of existing land use conditions is necessary to evaluate current land use patterns and densities that will assist Rusk County and other local units of government in determining land available to meet the county's future needs.



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8.1 Existing Land Use

Existing Land Use Map Categories

1. **Agriculture** – Predominate land use is agriculture where the lands include croplands, livestock grazing, and dairy farming.
2. **Commercial** – Retail sales establishments, restaurants, hotels/motels, and service stations, including gravel and sand pits.
3. **Forest** – Forest lands under private or industrial ownership. Mixed residential activity may also occur within this area.
4. **Residential** – Lands with structures designed for human habitation including: permanent, seasonal, and mobile housing units and recreational cabins and cottages.
5. **Manufacturing** – Manufacturing and industrial processing, warehousing and distribution, and similar activities.
6. **Open Space** – Private and public owned non-wooded undeveloped lands, fallow fields.
7. **Government/Institutional** – Land used for government-owned administration buildings and offices; fire stations; public hospitals and health care facilities; public schools, colleges, and educational research land; and lands of fraternal organizations. Churches, cemeteries, and other religious facilities are included in this land use category.
8. **Communications/Utilities** – Land used for generating and/or processing electronic, communication, or water, electricity; petroleum; or other transmittable product and for the disposal, waste processing, and/or recycling of by-products.
9. **Federal** – Federal owned forest lands.
10. **State** – State owned forest.
11. **County** – County owned forest lands.
12. **Town** – Town owned forested and non-forested lands.
13. **Water** – Open water areas, including natural and impounded lakes and streams.



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Land Use Pattern

Land use activity has evolved to its present form primarily following human development of the landscape. Rusk County's existing land use pattern remains primarily rural in nature, with large areas of forest and farmland and few established incorporated municipalities. Population centers are concentrated in the communities of Ladysmith, Bruce, Tony, and Hawkins. Large tracts of agricultural and open space lands are found throughout the county.

Land Use Assessments & Trends

Changes in land use over time can indicate development patterns or trends, which may be useful in determining future land use. Ideally, existing land use information would be compared with historic data to identify these trends. Unfortunately, historic land use inventory for Rusk County is largely unavailable, making this type of analysis difficult. Wisconsin Department of Revenue land assessment data can be used to conduct a simplified land use analysis and for examining trends.

- 1. Residential** – any parcel or part of untilled land that is not suitable for the production of row crops, on which a dwelling or other human habitat is located.
- 2. Commercial** – properties where the predominate use is the selling of merchandise or a service. Apartment buildings of four or more units and office buildings.
- 3. Manufacturing** – consists of all property used for manufacturing, processing, assembling, fabricating, or milling tangible personal property or profit. It also engages in assembling component parts of manufacturing parts.
- 4. Agriculture** – land, exclusive of buildings and improvements that is devoted primarily to agricultural use, as defined by rule.
- Undeveloped** – uncultivated land zoned as shoreland, bog, marsh, brush, wetlands and other non-productive lands not elsewhere classified.
- 5m. Agricultural Forest** – land that is producing or is capable of producing commercial forest products, if the land satisfies any of these conditions.
- 6. Forest** – productive forestland that is producing or is capable of producing commercial forest products.
- 7. Other** – includes all tax exempt lands.

Real estate assessments are also used to display trends in land use to aid in predicting future trends. Since the data goes back a few years, they are useful in conducting a simplified



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analysis for each real estate class. Trends in tax class from 2003 through 2006 are depicted for residential, manufacturing, commercial, agriculture and forestry in the next figures.

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Table: Rusk County Tax Assessments 2006	
Real Estate Classes	Acres
Residential	14,223
Commercial	1,618
Manufacturing	583
Agricultural	142,231
Undeveloped	49,946
Agricultural Forest	28,928
Forest	146,137
Other	2,073
Total	385,739

Land Prices

Land prices have remained relatively stable in Rusk County in recent years. A variety of markets impact land prices, and in some cases one market may drive the price in marginal pieces of property that can have multiple uses (recreational land that can also be agricultural land). Price data is available from the Register of Deeds (transfer returns) and Realtors (Multiple Listing Service-MLS). The current market shows agricultural land selling from \$1,000/acre up to \$2,500/acre depending on quality and location in the County. Recreational and Forest land is a little higher, in the \$1,500 to \$2,750/acre. Variables for recreational/forest land include species of harvestable timber, location, and acreage available.

The Rusk County Zoning Office administers the following Rusk



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County Ordinances:

Comprehensive Zoning – The Towns of Atlanta, Flambeau, Grant, Grow, Marshall, Thornapple, Stubbs, Washington, and Wilson have adopted Comprehensive Zoning. Chapter 17 of the Rusk County Code regulates the location, construction and use of buildings and structures, and other land uses so as to separate conflicting land uses and promote and protect public health, safety and general welfare.

Shoreland Zoning – Countywide. Shoreland zoning limits the development of wetlands and shoreland areas in order to protect water quality, fish spawning grounds, wildlife habitat and lake and river ecosystems.

Floodplain Zoning – Countywide. Chapter 20 of the Rusk County Code addresses floodplain protection in order to protect life, health and property in floodplain areas.

Subdivision Control Ordinance – Countywide. The subdivision ordinance regulates the division of land within all unincorporated areas of Rusk County in order to provide safe and orderly subdivision layouts.

Private Sewage Ordinance – Countywide. This ordinance refers to Comm 81-87 and Comm 91 of the Wisconsin Administrative Code and Chapter 145 of the Wisconsin State Statutes. These rules address proper siting, design, installation, inspection and maintenance of private sewage systems in order to protect public and environmental health and safety.

Nonmetallic Mining Reclamation Ordinance – Countywide. This ordinance provides for proper restoration of gravel pits and other nonmetallic mining operations. Permits are required for all nonmetallic mining operations in the county.

Airport Height Restriction Zoning – Rusk County Airport. This ordinance restricts the height of structures in the airport zones in order to provide



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unobstructed and safe access for air travel. Adopted in 1999.

The Zoning Office prepares an annual report which details permit activity in the County on an annual basis. In addition the office monitors inspections of holding tanks, and private sewage systems

Opportunities for Redevelopment

Opportunities for redevelopment include infill, brownfield site redevelopment, and obsolete and dilapidated building sites. Throughout Rusk County, there may be parcels of land in all local units of government that could use varying levels of redevelopment. Because of the rural nature of Rusk County, redevelopment will occur when and where practical in order to protect land values and properties close by. The Economic Development Administrator acts as the Brownfield Site Coordinator which entails working with county-owned sites that are contaminated by chemical pollution and then taking steps to get the sites cleaned up and back on the tax roll by being re-sold to the public.

Existing and Potential Land Use Issues and Conflicts

As growth occurs in Rusk County and as municipal areas expand and get bigger, there will likely be increasing land use conflicts. Future rural residential, commercial and manufacturing developments will likely require the conversion and fragmentation of forests, farmland, and open space areas.

Conflicts between non-farm residential development and surrounding farms and forestry activities could become increasingly common in the rural parts of Rusk County. Other potential rural land uses that could conflict with neighboring uses include non-metallic mining operations, late night farming operations, large-scale farm operations, and rural manufacturing plants. While this plan and its process sought to minimize future land use conflicts, continuous local government and developer related coordination must occur as few ordinances are in place that can directly impact land use conflicts.

8.2 Future Land Use

Future land use is anticipated to be very similar to current land use. No significant



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changes in use or in demand are anticipated based on survey data and historic trends. Market changes in the recreational land, agriculture, forestry, and residential land sectors will undoubtedly change and land parcels may move amongst these land uses as the demands change. However, as it has historically occurred, land uses will balance out. Demand will also rise and fall for shoreland uses, where there is a more limited supply and limited ability to create more parcels. Market demands will cause price fluctuations and change the activity that occurs on these lands, (i.e. removal of smaller cabins/houses to construct larger structures). Again this has happened historically as the market demands change and cycles occur within the recreation and housing industry. No extraordinary or unusual future land use demands are anticipated.

Current and future land use maps are attached displaying identical land uses, and are based on current land use from assessment information. Land Use maps are not-binding on property owners and do not determine or impose zoning on a property. The land use maps provide a visual guide to the community to identify trends and patterns.

8.3 Survey Data Summary

The Survey data indicated that 68% of the respondents felt that land use policies, laws & ordinances were adequate or very adequate. More telling may be that only 14.2% felt that they were inadequate. 17.8% had no opinion.

Likewise 64.8% felt that enforcement of those policies, laws & ordinances were adequate or inadequate, 16.9% felt that enforcement was inadequate and 18.3% had no opinion.

According to the Rusk County Comprehensive Planning Survey, the respondents say that if new housing is to be built, it should be built away from farm operations and should be within or adjacent to villages and cities. Over half the people who took this survey agree land owners should be allowed to construct solar panels and wind turbines.

A majority of the respondents agreed that steps should be taken to reduce forest and farmland fragmentation.

About 2/3 of respondents favored private property rights at some level over community property rights.

One third of respondents thought all towns/villages should be zoned, but 28.2% felt they should not, and 38.9% were not sure.

8.4 Summary – Goals & Objectives



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Goal: Work in cooperation with municipal bodies and the public to promote development and land use that is sustainable and compatible and also respects private property rights.

Objectives:

1. Promote communication between government entities and the property owners.
2. Work to educate the public on comprehensive planning, development and zoning.
3. Monitor land use activities within the County and region for public sentiment and emerging trends.

Actions:

- A. Review the need for and update current ordinances and regulations as deemed necessary.
- B. Maintain the comprehensive plan so that it is consistent with existing ordinances and regulations.