

Volume 1: Inventory and Trends Report

For the Development of Local Comprehensive Plans and the Burnett County, WI Year 2030 Comprehensive Plan

April 2010



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Burnett County

Inventory and Trends Report

Contents

	Page
1. Issues and Opportunities	1-1
1.1 Introduction	1-1
1.2 Regional Perspective	1-2
1.3 Coordinated Planning Effort.....	1-2
1.4 Plan Document Framework.....	1-4
1.5 Public Participation Process	1-5
1.6 Issues and Opportunities.....	1-8
2. Population and Housing	2-1
2.1 Population Characteristics	2-2
2.2 Housing Characteristics	2-12
2.3 Housing Unit Projections.....	2-23
2.4 Population and Housing Trends and Outlook.....	2-27
2.5 Housing Programs Currently in Use.....	2-29
3. Transportation	3-1
3.1 Existing Road System.....	3-1
3.2 Highways	3-2
3.3 Functional Classification of Highways.....	3-3
3.4 Traffic Volume Trends	3-7
3.5 Accidents in Burnett County	3-8
3.6 Additional Modes of Transportation	3-9
3.7 Existing Transportation Plans.....	3-14
3.8 Planned Transportation Improvements.....	3-18
3.9 Transportation Trends and Outlook.....	3-20
3.10 Transportation Programs Currently In Use	3-21
4. Utilities and Community Facilities.....	4-1
4.1 County Administrative Facilities and Services	4-1
4.2 Local Administrative Facilities and Services	4-6
4.3 Protective Services	4-6
4.4 School Facilities	4-16
4.5 Quasi-Public Facilities.....	4-21
4.6 Parks, Recreation, and Open Space	4-24
4.7 Solid Waste Management and Recycling.....	4-31
4.8 Communication and Power Facilities.....	4-33
4.9 Sanitary Sewer Service	4-34

4.10	Private On-site Wastewater Treatment Systems (POWTS)	4-35
4.11	Public Water Supply	4-36
4.12	Stormwater Management	4-37
4.13	Health Care Facilities	4-38
4.14	Day Care Facilities	4-40
4.15	Utilities and Community Facilities Trends and Outlook	4-40
4.16	Utilities and Community Facilities Plans and Programs Currently in Use	4-43
5.	Agricultural, Natural, and Cultural Resources	5-1
5.1	Land Cover	5-1
5.2	Soils	5-5
5.3	Agriculture and Farmland	5-6
5.4	Forests	5-17
5.5	Topography	5-21
5.6	Geology	5-21
5.7	Metallic and Non-Metallic Mineral Resources	5-22
5.8	Wetlands	5-25
5.9	Watersheds	5-26
5.10	Floodplains	5-27
5.11	Surface Water Features	5-27
5.12	Groundwater	5-29
5.13	Water Quality	5-33
5.14	Air Quality	5-36
5.15	Environmental Corridors and Sensitive Areas	5-37
5.16	Rare, Threatened, and Endangered Species and Communities	5-46
5.17	Wildlife Habitat	5-51
5.18	Historical and Cultural Resources	5-53
5.19	Community Design	5-60
5.20	Agricultural, Natural, and Cultural Resources Trends and Outlook	5-60
5.21	Agricultural, Natural, and Cultural Resources Plans and Programs Currently in Use	5-62
6.	Economic Development	6-1
6.1	Labor Force and Employment Analysis	6-1
6.2	Economic Base Analysis	6-6
6.3	Employment Forecast	6-23
6.4	Economic Development Trends and Outlook	6-30
6.5	Economic Development Programs	6-32
6.6	Economic Development Plans	6-39
7.	Intergovernmental Cooperation	7-1
7.1	Intergovernmental Plan Building Process	7-3
7.2	Status of Planning in Neighboring Counties and Communities	7-3
7.3	Status of Intergovernmental Relationships	7-4
7.4	Inventory of Existing Agreements	7-6
7.5	Intergovernmental Cooperation Trends and Outlook	7-9
7.6	Intergovernmental Cooperation Plans and Programs Currently in Use	7-9

8.	Land Use.....	8-1
8.1	Existing Land Use	8-1
8.2	Development Patterns.....	8-11
8.3	Land and Resource Management	8-15
8.4	Land Supply, Demand, and Price Trends	8-21
8.5	Land Use Trends and Outlook.....	8-29
8.6	Land Use Plans and Programs Currently in Use	8-31
9.	Implementation.....	9-1
9.1	Regulatory Implementation Tools Overview	9-1
9.2	Non-Regulatory Implementation Tools Overview	9-8
9.3	Existing Burnett County Ordinances and Codes	9-15
9.4	Existing Local Ordinances and Codes.....	9-37

Tables

Table 1-1	Burnett County Comprehensive Planning Process Consolidated Issues and Opportunities Identification.....	1-8
Table 2-1	Historic Population Counts, Burnett County, 1900-2008	2-2
Table 2-2	Population Counts, Burnett County and Wisconsin, 1970-2008.....	2-3
Table 2-3	Town and Village Population, Burnett County, 1970-2008.....	2-3
Table 2-4	Population Estimates, Burnett County, 2000-2008	2-6
Table 2-5	Population by Age Cohort, Burnett County and Wisconsin, 2000	2-8
Table 2-6	Comparative Population Projections, Burnett County, 2000 – 2030	2-10
Table 2-7	Housing Units, Burnett County and Wisconsin, 1990-2000	2-13
Table 2-8	Housing Units – Towns and Villages Burnett County and Wisconsin, 1990-2000.....	2-14
Table 2-9	Housing Occupancy and Tenure, Burnett County, 1990-2000	2-14
Table 2-10	Units in Structure, Burnett County, 2000.....	2-16
Table 2-11	Year Structure Built, Burnett County and Wisconsin, 2000	2-19
Table 2-12	Housing Values, Burnett County and Wisconsin, 2000.....	2-21
Table 2-13	Persons per Household, Burnett County and Wisconsin, 1990-2000	2-22
Table 2-14	Comparative Housing Unit Projection, Burnett County 2008-2030	2-25
Table 3-1	Existing Roadway Mileage, Burnett County, 2008.....	3-1
Table 3-2	Daily Vehicle Miles of Travel, Burnett County	3-7
Table 3-3	State Highway AADT Counts, Burnett County	3-7
Table 3-4	County Highway AADT Counts, Burnett County	3-8
Table 3-5	Vehicle Crashes in Burnett County, 1999 - 2006.....	3-9
Table 3-6	Public and Private Airports/Airfields in Burnett County	3-10
Table 4-1	Federal Bureau of Investigation Crime Data by Type, 2006 – 2007	4-7
Table 4-2	Percentage Change in School District Enrollment, Burnett County School Districts, 2000 - 2001 to 2007 - 2008.....	4-19
Table 4-3	Public Libraries, Burnett County.....	4-21
Table 4-4	Churches and Cemeteries, Burnett County	4-22
Table 4-5	Post Offices, Burnett County.....	4-23
Table 4-6	Locally Managed Parks, Burnett County	4-27
Table 4-7	Private and Public Campgrounds, Burnett County	4-29
Table 4-8	Solid Waste and Recycling Service Provision, Burnett County, 2008	4-32

Table 4-9	Communication Towers in Burnett County	4-34
Table 4-10	Public Safety Communication Towers – Tentative Plan.....	4-34
Table 4-11	Wastewater Treatment Plant Average Daily Design Capacity and Loading, Burnett County	4-35
Table 4-12	Medical Clinics, Burnett County.....	4-39
Table 4-13	Regional Hospitals	4-39
Table 5-1	Agricultural Production, Burnett County, 2004 - 2007.....	5-7
Table 5-2	Number of ry Cows and Milk Production 2004-2007, Burnett County, Wisconsin	5-8
Table 5-3	Cash Receipts for Agriculture Commodities State of Wisconsin, 2006	5-9
Table 5-4	Prime Soils, Burnett County, 2003.....	5-15
Table 5-5	Burnett County Forest by Town.....	5-18
Table 5-6	Public and Private Forest Lands, Burnett County	5-19
Table 5-7	Tree Varieties in County Forest, Burnett County.....	5-20
Table 5-8	Watersheds, Burnett County.....	5-26
Table 5-9	Water Features, Burnett County, 2009.....	5-28
Table 5-10	Rare Aquatic and Terrestrial Plant Species, Burnett County	5-47
Table 5-11	Rare Aquatic and Terrestrial Animal Species, Burnett County	5-48
Table 5-12	AHI Sites per Community, Burnett County	5-57
Table 5-13	Cultural Resources Protection Laws	5-58
Table 6-1	Civilian Labor Force Estimates-Yearly Averages, Burnett County and Wisconsin, 2000-2007.....	6-2
Table 6-2	Travel Time to Work for Workers 16 Years and Over, Burnett County, 2000.....	6-4
Table 6-3	Place of Work for Workers 16 Years and Over, Burnett County, 2000.....	6-5
Table 6-4	Worker Flow, Burnett County, 2000.....	6-6
Table 6-5	Top 10 Industries in Burnett County, 2006.....	6-7
Table 6-6	Top 10 Public and Private Employers in Burnett County, 2007	6-7
Table 6-7	Employment Location Quotient by Industry SuperSector in 2007	6-8
Table 6-8	Average Annual Wage by Industry Division in 2007	6-9
Table 6-9	Key Occupations and Wages, 2006.....	6-11
Table 6-10	Per Capita Personal Income, 2000 - 2005	6-12
Table 6-11	Household Income, Burnett County, 1999.....	6-13
Table 6-12	Household Income Comparison, Burnett County & Wisconsin, 1999	6-13
Table 6-13	Educational Attainment of Persons Age 25 and Over Burnett County and Wisconsin – 2000.....	6-16
Table 6-14	Industrial Parks, Burnett County	6-19
Table 6-15	Wisconsin Employment Growth Trends, Part 1 of 4	6-26
Table 6-16	Wisconsin Employment Growth Trends, Part 2 of 4	6-27
Table 6-17	Wisconsin Employment Growth Trends, Part 3 of 4	6-28
Table 6-18	Wisconsin Employment Growth Trends, Part 4 of 4	6-29
Table 6-19	Northwestern Wisconsin Employment Growth Trends	6-31
Table 8-1	2008 Existing Land Use Inventory Summary, Burnett County	8-3
Table 8-2	2008 Existing Land Use Inventory by Town and Village, Burnett County	8-3
Table 8-3	Net Changes in Land Use, Burnett County, 1997 – 2008	8-8
Table 8-4	Residential Land Use Changes in Acres by Town and Village, Burnett County, 1997-2008.....	8-8
Table 8-5	Agricultural Land Use Changes in Acres, Burnett County, 1997-2008.....	8-9
Table 8-6	Commercial & Industrial Land Use Changes in Acres, Burnett County,	

	1997-2008.....	8-10
Table 8-7	Land Ownership, Burnett County, January 1, 2008	8-17
Table 8-8	WWLT Projects in Burnett County.....	8-18
Table 8-9	Equalized Valuation, Burnett County, 2004 - 2008	8-21
Table 8-10	Agricultural Land Sales, Burnett County, 2003 - 2007.....	8-22
Table 8-11	Forest Land Sales, Burnett County, 2000 – 01 & 2005 – 2007	8-23
Table 8-12	WRA Residential Sales Data, Burnett County, 2001 - 2008.....	8-24
Table 8-13	Plat Reviews, Burnett County Towns, 1998 - 2007	8-24
Table 8-14	Permits for New Outhouses, Burnett County Towns, 1998 - 2007.....	8-25
Table 8-15	Building Permit Activity for New Home Construction (New Homes Added), Burnett County, 1998 - 2007	8-26
Table 8-16	Projected Land Use Demand (Acreage), 2010-2030.....	8-27
Table 8-17	Alternate Projections for Residential Development, 2010-2030.....	8-28
Table 9-1	Summary of Local Land Use Regulations	9-38

Figures

Figure 1-1	Steps of the Burnett County Planning Process.....	1-6
Figure 1-2	Issues Summary for Participating Communities	1-11
Figure 2-1	Town and Village Population as a Percentage of Total Burnett County Population, Burnett County, 1970-2008	2-4
Figure 2-2	Comparative Percent Population Change, Burnett County and Selected Areas, 1990-2000.....	2-5
Figure 2-3	Percentage of Population by Age Cohort, Burnett County, 1990-2000.....	2-7
Figure 2-4	Comparative Population Projection, Burnett County, 2000-2030	2-11
Figure 2-5	Housing Occupancy and Tenure, Burnett County, 2000.....	2-15
Figure 2-6	Units in Structure, Burnett County, 2000.....	2-17
Figure 2-7	Comparative Housing Unit Projection, Burnett County 2008-2030	2-26
Figure 3-1	Accidents by Year in Burnett County, 1999 - 2006.....	3-9
Figure 4-1	Percentage Change in School District Enrollment, Burnett County School Districts, 2000 - 2001 to 2007 - 2008.....	4-19
Figure 6-1	Unemployment Rates, Burnett County, State Of Wisconsin and the United States: 2000 - 2007	6-2
Figure 6-2	2006 Employment and Wage Distribution by Industry in Burnett County.....	6-10
Figure 6-3	Per Capita Personal Income, 2005	6-12
Figure 6-4	Household Income Comparison, Burnett County & Wisconsin, 1999	6-14
Figure 6-5	Household Income Summary, Burnett County, 1999	6-15
Figure 6-6	Educational Attainment of Persons Age 25 and Over Burnett County and Wisconsin – 2000	6-16
Figure 6-7	Labor Force participation Trends for 18 and 65 Year Olds, Burnett County	6-23
Figure 6-8	Labor Force Participation Trends, Burnett County	6-24
Figure 8-1	Existing Land Use, Burnett County, 2008	8-2
Figure 8-2	Existing Land Use, Burnett County, 1997	8-7
Figure 8-3	Changes in Land Use, Burnett County, 1997 – 2008.....	8-11
Figure 9-1	State of Wisconsin.....	9-39
Figure 9-2	Burnett County	9-40
Figure 9-3	Villages.....	9-41

Figure 9-4	Towns Under County Zoning.....	9-42
Figure 9-5	Towns Not Under County Zoning.....	9-43

Maps

Map 3-1	Transportation System, Burnett County.....	3-5
Map 4-1	Community Facilities and Services.....	4-3
Map 4-2	Fire Protection Service Areas.....	4-11
Map 4-3	Emergency Medical Service Areas	4-13
Map 4-4	School Districts	4-17
Map 5-1	Land Cover.....	5-3
Map 5-2	Prime Agricultural Soils.....	5-13
Map 5-3	Environmental and Water Features	5-23
Map 5-4	Groundwater Contamination Susceptibility	5-31
Map 5-5	National Heritage Inventory Features	5-49
Map 5-6	Historical and Cultural Resources.....	5-55
Map 6-1	Industrial Parks and Tax Increment Districts.....	6-21
Map 8-1	Existing Land Use, Burnett County	8-5
Map 8-2	Structure Locations, Burnett County.....	8-13
Map 8-3	Land Ownership and Management	8-19
Map 9-1	Existing Land Use Regulations, Burnett County	9-13
Map 9-2	Lake Classification System	9-31

Appendices

Appendix UCF	Local Community Facilities and Services Maps
Appendix ANC	Burnett County Lake Descriptions
Appendix LU	Residential Housing Unit Projections
Appendix I	County Lakes Classification Plan

1. Issues and Opportunities

1.1 Introduction

Burnett County is located in the lake country of Northwest Wisconsin and has a total land area of 822 square miles. Burnett County is host to 25 units of local government including three villages and 21 towns. With a 2000 census population of 15,674, population density in Burnett County is low, relative to other Wisconsin counties, with an average density of 19 persons per square mile. The county development pattern is generally rural with concentrated development along lakeshore areas and in the village population centers of Grantsburg, Siren, and Webster.

Burnett County has a strong heritage of natural resource protection and a rich natural resource base. The most dominant feature of the Burnett County landscape is the amount of gently rolling glacial outwash known as the Pine Barrens. The Pine Barrens cover all but the southern farming areas of the county. The most northern and western landscapes are characterized by pitted outwash plains marked by irregular depressions and potholes. The central portion of the county, extending from Grantsburg east through Siren and Webster and to north of Hertel, has been influenced by glacial Lake Grantsburg. The lands are relatively level and feature more fine textured sands, silts, clays, and lacustrine deposits. The southwest and southeast portions of the county have rolling topography resulting from glacial moraine deposits. The soils in this location consist of unsorted, unstratified deposits of clay, silt, sand, gravel, and boulders. Burnett County's landscape was formed in large part by glacial activity. The resulting lakes, rivers, streams, and rolling hills provide an abundance of natural beauty that is valued by both residents and visitors.

The pillars of the Burnett County economy are manufacturing, agriculture, tourism, and the public sector. Unlike some rural Wisconsin economies, Burnett County enjoys a strong manufacturing sector. Top county employers, besides the St. Croix Tribal Council, include the Parker Hannifin Corporation, Burnett Dairy Cooperation, the Nexan Group, and McNally Industries. In 2006, approximately 20 percent of Burnett County's employed workforce had manufacturing jobs and nearly 30 percent of all wages paid in Burnett County were from manufacturing jobs.

Burnett County agriculture provides over 800 jobs and contributes over \$97 million in economic activity. The county's agriculture industry includes not only farms, but a strong infrastructure of supporting businesses such as milk processors, implement manufacturers and dealers, financial institutions, dairy equipment suppliers, and crop supply dealers. Tourism is supported by Burnett County's vast recreational resources. The county's 110,000 acres of forests, trout streams, lakes, and rivers provide ample opportunity for a variety of outdoor recreational pursuits. Burnett County is home to many campgrounds, resorts, golf courses, parks, and public lands including several state natural areas, fish and wildlife areas, the General Knowles State Forest and the St. Croix National Scenic Riverway.

State Highways 70 and 77 provide east–west transportation routes in Burnett County. STH 70 transverses the southern part of the county and links the Village of Siren with the Village of Grantsburg. State Highway 35 runs north–south approximately splitting the county in two parts.

The villages of Siren and Webster are linked by STH 35. The route ultimately leads north to the Superior, Wisconsin and Duluth, Minnesota area.

Given Burnett County's valuable natural and agricultural resource base, its access to transportation systems, and its desirability as a place to live, work, and play, comprehensive planning will play a central role in helping to secure a positive future for its residents and visitors. This report is intended to provide the base of information necessary to allow Burnett County and its communities to manage growth and change over the long term.

1.2 Regional Perspective

Burnett County is bordered by Douglas, Washburn, Barron, and Polk Counties as shown in Map 1-1, Regional Setting. Although Burnett County contains higher populated areas in its three villages, it is also influenced by larger communities beyond its borders. These urban centers provide Burnett County residents with access to larger regional shopping centers, regional commerce and employment opportunities, regional health care facilities, post-secondary educational institutions, and cultural amenities. Burnett County is geographically positioned near the center of a triangle formed by the region's three most populous centers: Minneapolis-St. Paul to the southwest, Eau Claire to the southeast and Duluth-Superior to the north. The county has significant appeal to the surrounding region as a small-town, northwoods, lake country get-away with reasonable proximity to larger metropolitan markets. These urban areas are linked by major U.S. Highways. State highways connect Burnett County with the U.S. Highway system allowing access to these respective regional centers.

1.3 Coordinated Planning Effort

Development of the *Burnett County Comprehensive Plan* is a coordinated effort between the county and its communities. Burnett County has a long history of land use planning, dating back to the 1998 Burnett County Land Use Plan. In the year 1999, Wisconsin passed comprehensive planning legislation (Wisconsin Statutes, Ch. 66.1001) which requires all units of government (counties, cities, villages, and towns) to adopt a comprehensive plan by the year 2010 if they wish to make land use decisions by utilizing zoning, land division regulations, shoreland zoning, or official mapping. After the year 2010, a unit of government must make such decisions in a manner that is consistent with its own comprehensive plan. Burnett County falls under this requirement, as it administers programs such as county zoning, a county land division ordinance, and state-mandated shoreland zoning. Burnett County's communities must also comply with this requirement if they wish to continue utilizing the plan implementation tools that are currently in place. As Burnett County already had significant planning and development policies in place that addressed a majority of development (case in point being shoreland management through Lakes Classification zoning), the county took a conservative approach to commencing the planning process at a county-wide scale. Beginning in the summer of 2008, the county developed a coordinated planning strategy with 14 of the 25 units of government participating in the Burnett County Comprehensive Plan process. The participating units of government collectively applied for grant funds from the Wisconsin Department of Administration Comprehensive Planning Grant program, which was successful in securing \$186,000 in grant dollars toward the project costs. Communities participating with Burnett County include:

Towns

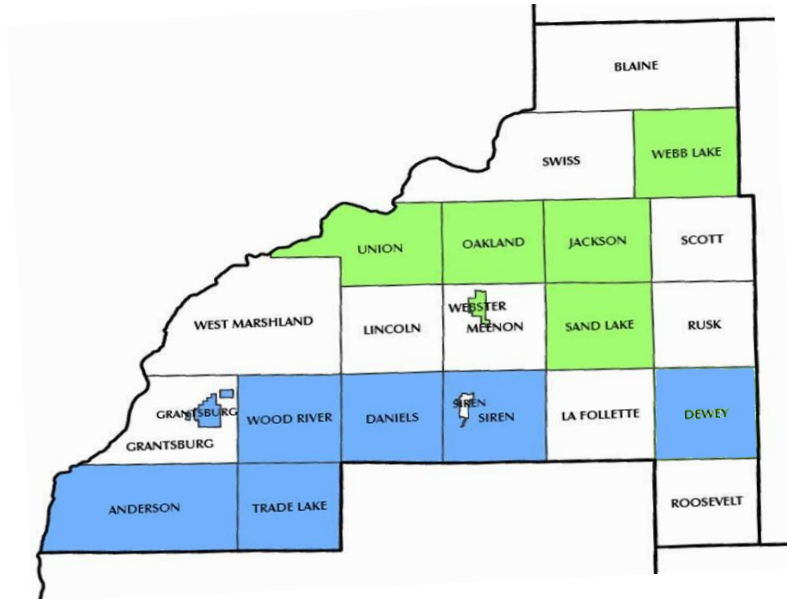
- ◆ Anderson
- ◆ Daniels
- ◆ Dewey
- ◆ Jackson
- ◆ Oakland
- ◆ Sand Lake
- ◆ Siren
- ◆ Trade Lake
- ◆ Webb Lake
- ◆ Wood River
- ◆ Union

Villages

- ◆ Grantsburg
- ◆ Webster

Planning Clusters

- Northern Cluster
- Southern Cluster



The Burnett County comprehensive planning process was uniquely structured to encourage both local control and coordinated planning. Although each jurisdiction is developing its own comprehensive plan, the participating jurisdictions developed their plans by meeting in regional clusters in order to encourage intergovernmental discussion and cooperation. In order to encourage coordination between local plans and the county plan, the development of the county plan was led by representatives from each participating community.

Municipal comprehensive plans are not chapters in the Burnett County Comprehensive Plan but their own plans adopted separately. The Burnett County planning process will attempt to reconcile conflicts among plans to the extent that it is politically and practically feasible and, failing reconciliation, will identify processes that can be used for future conflict resolution.

Comprehensive plans are implemented and administered through a variety of incentive based, non-regulatory, and regulatory policies and programs. The authority to utilize these policies and programs is defined in various statutory provisions and is not directly connected to the comprehensive planning law. Each governmental unit's land use decisions must be consistent with its own comprehensive plan as adopted or amended. The Burnett County planning process developed a framework for both plan development and for coordinated implementation and land use management strategy while the plans were being developed. Burnett County leveraged the county-level planning process to save administration cost and improve coordination with local units of government by coordinating policy before plans and maps are developed in the process and by imbedding a multi-jurisdictional development review process within the comprehensive plans.

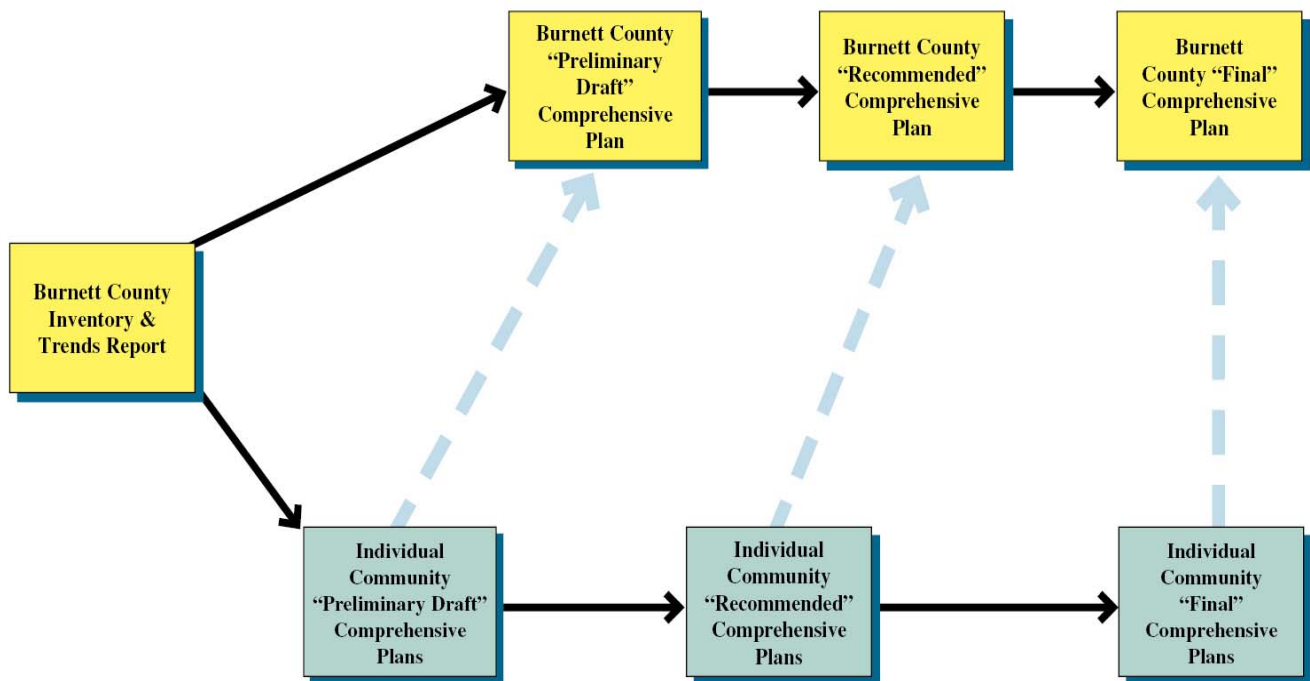
Furthermore, the state comprehensive planning law does not change the relationships between counties and towns in the adoption and administration of zoning, or villages and towns with respect to the exercise of extraterritorial jurisdiction. While the law encourages coordinated planning between jurisdictions, it does not require consistency between plans. Accordingly, it is possible that a village's future land use map may conflict with the plan of a neighboring town and that each respective plan will portray this difference.

1.4 Plan Document Framework

The Burnett County planning process was designed to ensure that Burnett County and each participating community receive a plan document that meets the requirements of the State of Wisconsin's Comprehensive Planning legislation found in Wisconsin Statutes Ch. 66.1001. This will be achieved through the following document structure which includes three main components.

- ♦ *Burnett County Inventory and Trends Report.* This document is focused on **existing conditions** and contains inventory, background, and trend data for all nine required planning elements. Subjects include: population, housing, transportation, utilities, community facilities, agriculture, natural resources, cultural resources, economic development, intergovernmental cooperation, land use, and existing implementation programs. This document will serve as the foundation to build the next two documents both at the local and county levels.

Burnett County Planning Documents



- ♦ *Local Community Plan Recommendations Reports.* These documents will reference the *Burnett County Inventory and Trends Report* and will provide all components of the comprehensive plan that are oriented toward the **vision and strategies for the future** of each participating community. They will include the goals, objectives, and policies selected by each community. They will also identify preferred land uses, planned community facility improvements, and the programs, recommendations, and implementation strategies selected by each community. Each local comprehensive plan will then be represented by the sum of two documents – the *Burnett County Inventory and Trends Report* and the *Local Community Plan Recommendations Report*.

- ♦ *Burnett County Plan Recommendations Report.* This will be the final product of the planning process as developed in response to the *Local Community Plan Recommendations Reports*. This document will reference the *Burnett County Inventory and Trends Report* and will provide all components of the comprehensive plan that are oriented toward the **vision and strategies for the future** of Burnett County. It will include the goals, objectives, and policies selected by Burnett County. It will also identify preferred land uses, planned community facility improvements, and the programs, recommendations, and implementation strategies selected by Burnett County. The county comprehensive plan will then be represented by the sum of two documents: the *Burnett County Inventory and Trends Report* and the *Burnett County Plan Recommendations Report*.

1.5 Public Participation Process

The Wisconsin comprehensive planning legislation specifies that the governing body for a unit of government must prepare and adopt written procedures to foster public participation in the comprehensive planning process. This includes open discussion, communication programs, information services, and public meetings for which advance notice has been provided, in every stage of the preparation of a comprehensive plan. Public participation provides for wide distribution of proposed drafts, alternatives, and amendments of the comprehensive plan. Public participation includes opportunities for members of the public to send written comments on the plan to the applicable governing body, and a process for the governing body to respond. Burnett County and each participating community has adopted a Public Participation and Education Plan in order to comply with the requirements of Section 66.1001(4)(a) of the Wisconsin Statutes.

The Burnett County comprehensive planning process was designed to encourage local citizen-based input. Not only were public outreach tools and events utilized, but citizens were directly involved in writing their own local comprehensive plans, as well as the county comprehensive plan, using the process illustrated in Figure 1-1. The initial direction was set by identifying issues, opportunities, and desires. Then the decision making process began, moving from general to specific and from planning to implementation. The local plan commissions and boards were in control of the decision making process by developing community goals (the most general step), objectives, policies, and finally actions, strategies, and recommendations (the most specific step). Each step in the planning process built on the citizen-generated results of the previous step. The County goals, objectives, policies and recommendations were developed from the local documents, thereby creating a synergy and consistency between the county and local units of government.

Figure 1-1
Steps of the Burnett County Planning Process



The Burnett County planning process was given an organizational structure (Figure 1-2) designed to encourage extensive public participation. This structure includes local planning committees or commissions, two community regions called "clusters" and a county-level "County Planning Committee" (CPC). The local planning committee and commissions were responsible for developing each local comprehensive plan. The regional clusters are the forum established to bring the planning process to the participating communities. At the County level, the CPC includes eight county board members and one representative from each local unit of government regardless if they were participating members of the planning process. The CPC's primary role was to develop the county comprehensive plan by facilitating the framework for how local plans would be developed. It is ultimately the responsibility of the governing bodies of each participating community to adopt their own respective comprehensive plans. The cohesion between local and county policy enables understanding between local units of government, which is the basis for integrated decision-making.

Cluster Meetings

The meetings of the regional community clusters, which came to be known as "cluster meetings," were the heart of the plan development process. In this forum, information relevant to the topic of discussion was presented by the planning consultant and county staff. Then communities broke out into local meetings to work on the development of their local comprehensive plans. The planning elements were addressed in the following groupings.

- ◆ Trends and Existing Conditions for all Nine Elements
- ◆ Issues and Opportunities
- ◆ Land Use, Intergovernmental Cooperation, Implementation
- ◆ Natural and Cultural Resources
- ◆ Utilities and Community Facilities, Economic Development, Transportation
- ◆ Agriculture, Housing

The framework of the county planning process required the local planning commissions to meet on their own between cluster meetings to continue the work of developing their local comprehensive plans. Many communities met monthly during the planning process.

County Planning Committee Meetings

The meetings of the CPC followed the same process as the cluster meetings, but for the development of the county comprehensive plan. The CPC examined the results of the cluster meetings and identified common concerns, areas of consensus, and issues of county-wide importance. These findings were then elevated as components of the county comprehensive plan. The CPC met throughout the planning process on the "off" months between cluster meetings. The key to this process was the CPC would develop ideas, policy initiatives, and overall land use management strategy and share with the local participating communities as part of the integrated communication and decision evaluation process. The reverse also occurred, where local communities would elevate ideas, issues and questions to the CPC for discussion and evaluation at the county level. The communication and opportunity for issue resolution as the process unfolded was primary in developing integrated policies at the local and county level, the result of which is reduced administration and increased efficiency during plan implementation.

Focus Groups

A series of focus groups was held early in the comprehensive planning process to help identify issues and opportunities at the county level. Focus groups gather area leaders and citizen experts to share their opinions, beliefs, and values in their particular areas of interests. Each focus group held an 'issues session' and then responded to a series of questions pertaining to the topic. Focus groups were held October 14-15, 2008 with respect to the following topics.

- ◆ Growth Management
- ◆ Natural Resource Management
- ◆ Intergovernmental Cooperation
- ◆ Economic Development

Public Outreach Efforts

In addition to the plan development meetings and project structure, a full range of public outreach efforts will be utilized during the planning process. These efforts are documented in the county and local *Public Participation and Education Plans* and include the following.

- ◆ Public Opinion Surveys both at the county level and by several local communities
- ◆ Comprehensive Planning Project Web Site

- ◆ News Releases
- ◆ Radio and Newspaper Interviews
- ◆ Public Notices and Postings for Meetings
- ◆ Direct Mailed Newsletters
- ◆ Direct Mailed Meeting Notices
- ◆ Informational Programs
- ◆ Public Informational Meetings at local and county level)
- ◆ Public Hearings (held in each village, and town hall)
- ◆ Public Comment Period (at every meeting and during release of draft plans)
- ◆ Plan Document Distribution
- ◆ Other locally hosted efforts (public informational meetings, postcard mailings, meeting notices and posting, etc.)

1.6 Issues and Opportunities

There are a number of major issues, opportunities, and trends that Burnett County leaders will deal with over the 20 year planning period. Pro-active planning may help resolve these issues and facilitate the realization of opportunities. The following is an analysis of the results of the issue and opportunity identification discussions that took place during the initial stage of the planning process, both at the County Planning Committee and local cluster meetings.

Table 1-1
Burnett County Comprehensive Planning Process
Consolidated Issues and Opportunities Identification

Issues
<p>Services Delivery and Cost</p> <p>The need for government services is increasing while simultaneously, the traditional mechanisms which support those services are being cut. This is leading to increased workloads due to lack of resources (staff, time, funds, space, time to train, time to plan, reactive rather than proactive, competition for scarce resources, etc.). It is expected that this trend will continue for some time into the future. Strategies are needed to determine which services to eliminate, reduce, or leverage with technology (self service). Strategies are needed to increase efficiencies through cooperation with other units of governments and consolidation of services. Strategies are also needed to determine which service to grow or invest in. Simultaneously, strategies are needed to tap into the County's strong property tax base, low business tax structure; ability to leverage grants to off-set local taxes and tap into state and federal programs, increase revenue from forest, room tax, highway, fees, develop new fee for services.</p> <p>Natural Resources</p> <p>Preservation and enhancement to spur economic growth while maintaining Northwood's character. The perception is that access to public lands, recreation, and wildlife is being threatened. Furthermore, there is concern over loss of woods, "green spaces", and how sensitive areas such as lakes are becoming overdeveloped. Impact of land use and development on natural resources including potential harm to wildlife habitat, surface water, shorelines, groundwater, open space, and wetlands. Direct pollution of groundwater by actions of property owners. Invasive species/aquatic exotics. Unwise development could threaten wildlife and naturally sensitive areas</p>

Lakefront Water Issues

Demand for lake front property and lake access has caused increased development pressure on lakes in the County. Many lakes are threatened with overcrowding and the problems associated with overuse such as public recreation conflicts, surface water use conflicts, adverse impacts to sensitive riparian and littoral habitats. (Could be a sub-set of Natural Resource issues.) Increasing pressure to develop stream and riverfront properties as lakeshores are filling up with homes.

Economic Development that is appropriate to Burnett County

Leverage the potential strengths to spur economic growth and mitigate the weaknesses that hinder economic growth. The lack of retail stores, limited number of manufacturing jobs lack of markets for wood and contractors and the lack of trained professionals to run businesses needs to be leveraged against the ability to generate marketing dollars for expanded tourism, international tourism, and work more closely with the tribal enterprises. Need to attract business development. Concerns are related to both the amount and quality of businesses and jobs. Limited number of manufacturing jobs.

Burnett County's Northwoods Character/Quality of Life

The perception is this is currently being threatened by increasing development, population, tourism and poor development practices. The General character of the County is being affected by unsightly development and land use conflicts. A widespread perception that existing land use controls and guidance have not kept pace with the changing conditions. The issue needs to be defined and then develop strategies to protect that definition. Desire to preserve Northwoods character, small town atmosphere, and scenic beauty. Includes related issues of limiting change, preserving undeveloped land, preserving farmland, preserving woodland, and controlling the impacts of new and existing development such as noise and light pollution. Rural blight including junk vehicles, poorly maintained properties, dilapidated structures, and road-side litter.

Youth Issues

Brain drain, creating opportunities for youth that will keep them in Burnett County; lack of opportunities for youth (maybe causing brain-drain), lack of funding for schools, declining enrollments, lack of state funding, etc.

Demographic Shifts and Impacts on the Community

Retirement and turnover of municipal staff lead to lack of leadership and vision for long term (staff and Boards), increasing demand for government services due to the general aging of the population. Loss of youth and increase of elderly. We are losing young people and people raising families as 'family supporting' employment opportunities are not available while simultaneously gaining older people who need services. Need a strategy to keep young people here, attract high tech individuals to area and tap into their skills. Address the lack of technical skills and ability to receive training to upgrade skills; strategy to tap into the skilled, educated secondary homeowners (this could be a sub-set of economic development)

Communication Improvements

It is perceived that overall communication needs to improve; poor communication between County and Tribe; inter-departmental, between state and county, with other agencies, the public, etc.

Technology Issues

County has average technology infrastructure; Burnett County needs to leverage technology as a economic development tool. Access to Broadband technology needs to increase, including wireless. The fiber optics network needs to be expanded.

Transportation Issues

Impact of road improvements on rural character. Loss of curves, bridges, and scenic values. Increasing traffic levels on rural roads including impacts of more vehicles and increased speeds. Growing cost of road maintenance.

Agriculture and Farming

Loss of farmland. Limited options for aging farmers. Few young people interested in continuing farming. Need for improved regulation of animal waste and milk byproduct handling. Need to protect the viability of farmlands and all components of the farming industry. Tax implications of farmland sold for development. Declining agriculture infrastructure and loss of support businesses. Conflicts between rural residential growth and agriculture operations (noise, odors, late hours of machinery use). Starting a new agriculture venture is difficult (high risk and low profits). Animal waste and other regulations have made farming of certain lands uneconomical. Changing views and values of agriculture as a shrinking proportion of the total population is involved in farming.

Intergovernmental Cooperation

Annexation of town land. Extra-territorial powers of villages preclude town development. Lack of cooperation, communication, and lack of a shared vision for the future between communities. Need for additional sharing of emergency services by local providers – assistance to county. Need better communication between County and tribe.

Land Use Issues

Appropriate density, design, and minimum lot sizes for rural residential development. Due to large amounts of open space, the potential for rural residential development is very high in towns. The division of farmland into smaller parcels and conversion to other uses such as residential, commercial, and recreational. Unplanned growth. A plan is needed that guides the type, location, and density of new development. Need for controls on quality and character of commercial and industrial development. Increasing land values. Potential impacts of comprehensive planning. Impact of new development on recreational pursuits such as hunting and motorized recreational vehicle use.

Implementation and Administration

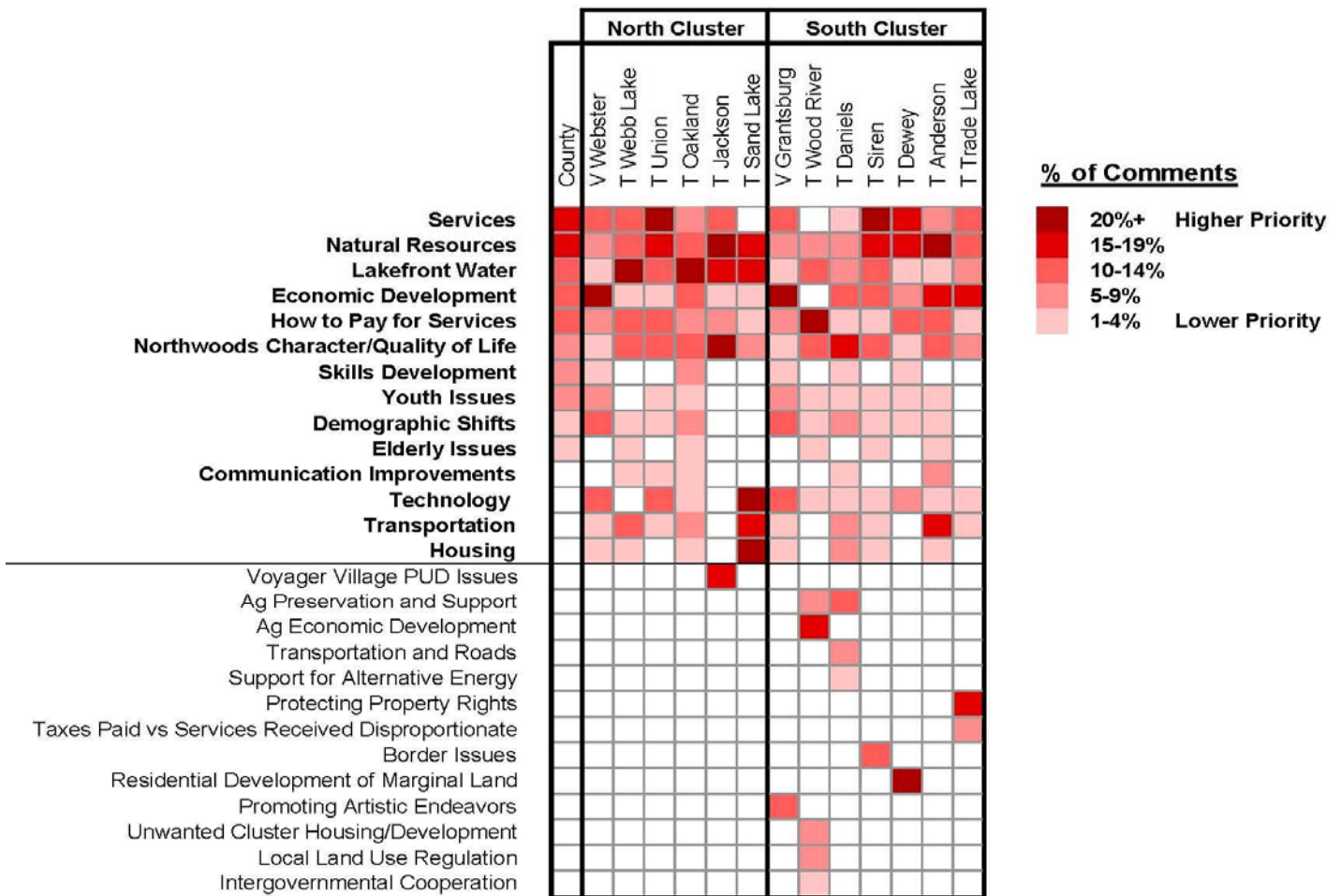
Managing public concerns and conflicts between opposing viewpoints such as farmers versus non-farmers, long-time residents versus new residents, and individual rights versus community well being. Control of local situations at the town level often superseded by state, county, and village government. Result is a perceived loss of local control. Infringement of private property rights including trespassing problems and concerns over the ability of individuals to develop their property as they wish. Increasing property taxes and related issues including difficulty for long-time residents to continue to own their land, need for retiring farmers to sell land, and impact on the size of rural parcels that people can afford to buy. Limited public involvement in planning and other forms of local decision-making. Need for improvements to land use controls such as zoning and subdivision regulations. Limited tax base in forested and other sparsely developed areas.

Common Themes

While each of Burnett County's towns and villages have unique situations and motives for being involved in planning, some common threads tie them together. All types of communities have shown that they place very high value on their character and natural resources. This was expressed repeatedly as the desire to preserve rural character, maintain water quality and natural resources, and manage development to meet community goals. While their approaches varied based on their local situations, towns and villages have all shown a concern for the potential negative impacts of unplanned growth. Strong similarities between many communities were also found in the area of service allocation, delivery, and cost and in pursuing future opportunities for intergovernmental cooperation.

Figure 1-2 shows a general summary of issue identification from the participating communities. Both the villages of Webster and Grantsburg show economic development as priorities, which is to be expected considering the investment each community has in support infrastructure such as sewer, water, business parks, and associated public facilities and administration. Many of the towns in Burnett County focus more on managing rural residential housing development and community character. Towns also vary depending on the prevailing issues, geography, and types of existing land uses. As an example, agriculture is a high priority issue for Trade Lake and Dewey but not as much for Jackson. Towns with lakes have priorities relating to lakeshore development and so on.

Figure 1-2
Issues Summary for Participating Communities



The strongest points of consensus regarding issues facing Burnett County's rural communities were related to the preservation and enhancement of natural resources and general land use management, which factors into the overall quality of life in the area. Stakeholders are concerned that development is viewed to be more important, or have a higher priority placed on it, than managing the potential negative impacts, especially so in the lakeshore and shoreland

areas. A majority of participating towns referenced the preservation of natural features, like lakefronts and rural character as both issues and as opportunities. Demand for lakefront property and lake access has caused development pressure on lakes in the County. Many lakes are threatened with overcrowding and the problems associated with overuse, such as public recreation conflicts, surface water pollution, erosion, and negative impacts on riparian and littoral habitats.

All towns reported that the preservation of Burnett County's Northwoods character and overall quality of life were very important. Most people do not have a problem with development, but with the negative results of it if not managed appropriately. A widespread perception is that existing land use controls and guidance have not kept pace with changing local conditions.

Economic development also emerged as an important issue, particularly for the villages and Burnett County proper. While most towns feel economic development is important, they feel the investment of economic development related resources belongs in villages (which is consistent with established economic development related goals across the county). Those who participated in the public involvement process noted that areas in the County currently lack amenities, such as retail stores, and there is a diminishing number of manufacturing jobs. Stakeholders expressed a desire to leverage existing strengths to spur economic growth. Opportunities may exist for a more robust tourism industry as well as partnerships with tribes. Strategies are also needed for attracting additional white collar professionals who can leverage technology to work remotely. Technology infrastructure is also a key component of the overall economic development strategy as broadband connectivity is limited in the county and needs investment to facilitate growth.