



## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### INTRODUCTION

Located within the Fox Cities in northeast Wisconsin, Neenah is strategically located along the western shores of Lake Winnebago. With a population of nearly ~~286~~,000 people, the City offers residents the friendliness and strong community spirit of a small town and the amenities of a much larger area. The City encompasses about ~~6,400-300~~ acres and includes a mix of residential, commercial, industrial and recreational land uses. Embracing its past, Neenah's unique and distinct character merges the historic architecture of the past with the modern design of today.

The ~~City's growth~~ City grew sharply in the 1960's and 1970's, but slowed during the 1980's and 1990's. Over the planning period, which extends to 2040, the City is expected to grow by about ~~43-65.8~~ percent or by about ~~3,469~~1,609 people. New growth is expected to be accommodated through a mixture of redevelopment activities and growth into surrounding unincorporated areas through annexation. Between 2000 and ~~2045~~2023, the City increased by about ~~20-24~~ percent in land area. Annexations are expected to continue as the City grows west and south.

### PLANNING HISTORY

Neenah enjoys a long history of land use and comprehensive planning. This plan updates an earlier comprehensive plan that was originally adopted by the City of Neenah in 1999 and amended in 2009 to comply with the "Smart Growth" legislation (Wisconsin Statutes 66.1001). According to the legislation, a comprehensive plan "shall be updated no less than once every 10 years". Prior to the 1999 Comprehensive Plan, the City adopted a Comprehensive Plan in 1986.

### PLAN PURPOSE

The purpose of the City of Neenah's comprehensive plan is to assist local officials in making land use decisions that are harmonious with the overall vision of the community's future. Developing a comprehensive plan is a proactive attempt to delineate the ground rules and guidelines for future development. Comprehensive planning decisions evaluate existing facilities and future needs; promote public health, safety, community aesthetics, orderly development and preferred land use patterns; and foster economic prosperity and general welfare in the process of development. The plan evaluates what development will best benefit the community's interests, while at the same time provide flexibility for land owners and protect property rights.



## ENABLING LEGISLATION

This plan was developed under the authority granted by Wisconsin Statutes 66.1001. If the local governmental unit enacts or amends any of the following ordinances, the ordinance should be consistent with local government's comprehensive plan:

- Official mapping ordinances enacted or amended under s. 62.23 (6).
- Local subdivision ordinances enacted or amended under s. 236.45 or 236.46.
- City or village zoning ordinances enacted or amended under s. 62.23 (7).
- Shorelands or wetlands in shorelands zoning ordinances enacted or amended under s. 59.692, 61.351, 61.353, 62.231, or 62.233

## COMPREHENSIVE PLAN FORMAT

The City of Neenah's Comprehensive Plan is composed of two documents – Volume One and Volume Two. Together the two volumes contain all the information necessary to meet state "Smart Growth" requirements. The purpose of the two reports is to create a user-friendly plan that separates a majority of the required background material from the City's vision, goals, objectives and recommendations. Generally, Volume One serves as the "guide" for decision-making, whereas Volume Two provides data and supports the actions detailed in Volume One. Specific details are provided below for each volume.

Volume One. "Goals, Objectives and Recommendations". This volume contains issues, goals, objectives and recommendations for each of the nine required comprehensive plan elements for implementation over the next twenty years. It describes actions and strategies to achieve the goals and objectives listed in each of the nine planning elements, or chapters, within the plan. This document should be consulted by the City Council, City Plan Commission, Committees, Board and Departments when managing community resources.

Volume Two. "Existing Conditions Report". The second volume of this comprehensive plan contains an analysis of existing conditions with the City. It provides a series of Census and other empirical data available through local, regional, state and national sources. The data reveals current findings within the City and how these compare to historical numbers within the City, Winnebago County and Wisconsin. This information was primarily used to identify challenges and opportunities in Volume One. The report is a companion to Volume One and should be used to locate evidence of existing conditions that provide support for recommendations.

Public Visioning Workshops Summary Report. The "Public Visioning Workshops Summary Report" provides a summary and detailed results from the three public visioning workshops that were held between April 19, 2016 and April 21, 2016. The purpose of the workshop was to identify key issues and opportunities that should be considered during the planning effort.

Community Survey Summary Report. The "2040 Neenah Comprehensive Plan Community Survey" reports provides a summary and detailed results from a public survey offered in the summer of 2016. The purpose of the survey was to gather input from Neenah residents and



visitors on a broader scale and to use those results to help validate the more intense visioning sessions conducted previously.

On-Line Asset/Issues Mapping Exercise. In addition to the public survey, an on-line interactive map was created to allow respondents to identify locations in the City they identified as either assets or issues. These results were used in combination with the public survey to validate the visioning workshop results.

Youth Survey Summary Report. After conducting the public survey in the summer of 2016, a youth survey and mapping exercise was conducted in November 2016 where nearly 250 Neenah High School students participated. The purpose of the survey was to engage the youth of the community similar to the visioning workshops and public survey.

The comprehensive plan also contains the nine elements required by the Wisconsin Statutes 66.1001:

1. Issues and Opportunities
2. Economic Development
3. Housing
4. Transportation
5. Utilities and Community Facilities
6. Agricultural, Natural and Cultural Resources
7. Land Use
8. Intergovernmental Cooperation
9. Implementation

In addition, the state requires that Wisconsin's 14 goals for local planning be considered as communities develop their goals, objectives and recommendations. These goals are:

1. Promotion of the redevelopment of lands with existing infrastructure and public services and the maintenance and rehabilitation of existing residential, commercial, and industrial structures.
2. Encouragement of neighborhood designs that support a range of transportation choices.
3. Protection of natural features, including wetlands, wildlife habitats, lakes, woodlands, open spaces, and groundwater resources.
4. Protection of economically productive farmlands and forests.
5. Encouragement of land uses, densities, and regulations that promote efficient development patterns and relatively low municipal and state governmental utility costs.
6. Preservation of cultural, historic, and archeological sites.
7. Encouragement of coordination and cooperation among nearby units of government.
8. Building of community identity by revitalizing main streets and enforcing design standards.
9. Providing an adequate supply of affordable housing for individuals of all income levels throughout each community.



10. Providing adequate infrastructure and public services and an adequate supply of developable land to meet existing and future market demand for residential, commercial, and industrial uses.
11. Promoting the expansion or stabilization of the current economic base and the creation of a range of employment opportunities at the state, regional, and local levels.
12. Balancing individual property rights with community interest and goals.
13. Planning and development of land uses that create or preserve varied and unique urban and rural communities.
14. Providing an integrated, efficient, and economical transportation system that affords mobility, convenience, and safety that meets the needs of all citizens, including transit dependent and disabled citizens.

## INTERRELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN PLAN ELEMENTS

Although all required elements are presented as separate chapters, it is important to recognize that they are interrelated. For instance, transportation infrastructure allows for the movement of goods, services, and employees; likewise, land use and zoning ~~affects~~[affect](#) the types of housing that can be built within the City, thus affecting the affordability of housing.

Chapter 10: Implementation integrates the goals, objectives and recommendations into one location, Map 10 -1 Future Land Use, which not only depicts future land use but also illustrates key items that affect land use, as identified in other elements. These include, but are not limited to, natural resources, growth areas, potential upgrades to transportation infrastructure (trails and roads) and public infrastructure.

## PLANNING PROCESS

The City of Neenah's comprehensive plan was completed in six phases, all of which provided opportunities for public involvement, as specified in the public participation plan (Appendix A). The phases include: Organization, Plan Kickoff and Public Participation, Inventory/Analysis and Issue Identification, Plan/Goal Alternative Development, Plan Implementation, and Plan Adoption. The City's Ad Hoc Comprehensive Plan Committee worked with East Central staff on the development of the plan.

The first phase (Organization) involved the creation and development of the public participation plan, establishment of a comprehensive plan update webpage, appointment of members to an Ad Hoc Comprehensive Plan Committee, development of an on-line survey, an article in the Post Crescent kicking off the comprehensive plan process and the preparation of preliminary demographic information.

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During the second phase (Plan Kickoff and Public Participation), a news article appeared in the Post Crescent to let community members know about the upcoming visioning sessions. General information about comprehensive planning and the process and preliminary demographic information were presented at an initial meeting with the Ad Hoc. Three community visioning workshops were held to identify key issues and opportunities that should be considered during the planning effort. In ~~addition~~addition, a community on-line survey was created based off the information that was gathered at the community visioning workshops. An interactive asset-mapping website was ~~created~~created, and City Staff initiated a youth survey to gather additional input.

Data from the previous comprehensive plan was used as a starting point for the third phase (Inventory/Analysis and Issue Identification Development) of the planning effort. Background information was revised to reflect new U.S. Census data and updated to reflect changes to the physical, social and economic resources of the City. This data was analyzed to identify existing and potential issues. Using results from the community visioning workshops, on-line survey, feedback from the Ad Hoc Comprehensive Plan Committee, City Staff, and others, as well as background data compiled during the inventory stage, key issues and opportunities were identified.

Goals, objectives and recommendations were developed for each of the comprehensive planning elements as part of the fourth phase (Develop Draft Goals, Strategies and Recommendations). Utilizing the Existing Conditions Report, the Goals, Objectives and Recommendations Report, input from the Ad Hoc Comprehensive Plan Committee, the community visioning workshops, on-line survey and City staff, a draft future land use map (Map 10-1) was created.

The fifth phase (Plan Implementation) established the tools necessary for implementation of the plan. Recommendations for regulatory techniques including zoning and an action plan with an accompanying timeline were developed to ensure that the intent of the plan is achieved. An intergovernmental meeting was held to obtain input from neighboring jurisdictions, county departments, local governmental units and state agencies.

The final phase (Plan Review, Public Hearing and Adoption) of the planning process culminates in the adoption of the comprehensive plan update by the City Council. Draft plans were available at the City Hall, and the Neenah Public Library, as well as on the plan website. Following the publication of a ~~30-day~~30-day notice in the local newspaper and a public hearing, the Plan Commission recommended that the City adopt the plan by ordinance.

### Public Participation

Public participation is a major component of the comprehensive planning process. In accordance with s. 66.1001 (4), which defines "Procedures for Adopting Comprehensive Plans", the City of Neenah actively sought public participation from its citizens. To gain citizen



understanding and support throughout the planning process, the public was provided with a variety of meaningful opportunities to become involved in the process. The first step in the planning process was the development and adoption of a public participation plan for comprehensive planning. Public input was encouraged through meetings and activities. Approximately 13 (13) public meetings with the Ad Hoc Comprehensive Plan Committee; a public visioning session with the City Council; three community vision workshops; an on-line survey; youth survey and mapping exercise; attendance by City Staff at Farmers Markets, Community Fest, Neenah Library, several senior living apartments, Bergstrom Mahler Museum; input from school groups and three public information meetings at the end of the planning effort. All meetings were open to the general public; notices were posted at predetermined public areas. Articles appeared in the Post Crescent, updates were posted on the City's Facebook Page and relevant information was posted on the project website. A public hearing was held to present the final draft version of the plan to the general public and neighboring municipalities and to solicit further input. The draft plans were available for review at the Neenah Public Library, the City Hall, and the comprehensive plan update website. A website specific to the planning effort was developed for the planning effort. To facilitate public knowledge and involvement in the comprehensive planning process, the plan provided a timeline and methods for public participation.

### **Community Visioning Workshops, On-Line and Youth Surveys**

#### Community Visioning Workshops

Three Community Visioning Workshops were held between Tuesday, April 19, 2016 and Thursday, April 21, 2016 to obtain input from residents, business owners and others. Each workshop focused on a specific area of the City, though participants were invited to attend any of the workshops. Workshop focus areas included Downtown and Doty Island, South Commercial Street / Green Bay Road Corridor and the West Side Growth Areas. A total of eighty-one participants attended the sessions; five people attended multiple sessions. A series of five interactive group/individual exercises were completed. Input was sought on the following concepts: Community Assets, Neighborhood and Business District Delineation, Community Connections, Business District / Corridor and Community Improvements, and New Development and Redevelopment. Major input from each concept is identified below:

Community assets are qualities or characteristics that define Neenah. Assets were identified and separated into seven (7) main categories: recreational / natural resources, community facilities, historic / cultural resources, economic development, transportation, housing and other. Top group assets identified included: Trestle Trail / Bike System / "Loop the Little Lake" and Library. Top individual assets identified included: City Parks, City of Neenah (positive, clean, well-maintained, safe, progressive, friendly, quiet, good people and diverse) and Neenah Downtown (engaging, vibrant, good mix of retail, food and bars, restaurants, historic, viable and historic).



Specific neighborhoods were identified based on participants' delineation of their own neighborhood. Five neighborhoods received the highest number of responses: Two neighborhoods on Doty Island, one neighborhood in the downtown area, one neighborhood in the Congress Street / Cedar Street / Cecil Street / Fairview Avenue area, and the final neighborhood in the South Park Avenue / Maple Street / Kraft Street / Omaha Avenue area.

Business districts / corridors within Neenah were delineated ~~in order to~~ better define the boundaries of the Downtown Neenah Business District, the Doty Island Business District, the S. Commercial Street Business Corridor and the Fox Point / Green Bay Road Commercial Corridor for planning activities.

To assess the level of connectivity within the City, participants were asked to highlight routes that they use to go between various locations in Neenah. Major routes for bicycling and walking included: Kimberly Point area (N. Park Avenue and Lakeshore Drive), Wisconsin Avenue (Lakeshore Avenue to Main Street), N. Lake Street, S. Park Avenue (Wisconsin Avenue to Bell Street), Oak Street (Wisconsin Avenue to the north side of the W. G. Bryan Bridge), First Street (W. G. Bryan Bridge to Nicolet Boulevard), N. Commercial Street (Nicolet Boulevard to the north) and the trail along Little Lake Butte des Morts from Main Street to N. Lake Street.

Barriers to travel, and business district, commercial corridor and community improvements were also addressed. Identified major barriers to connectivity/mobility that people felt restrict or limit travel include S. Commercial Street from Cecil Street to Bell Street (congestion, parking and bicycle safety), N. Commercial Street (congestion north of Wisconsin Avenue and confusion at the Nicolet Boulevard / First Street Intersection) and Winneconne Avenue (congestion, roundabouts and pedestrian and bicycle safety in the Green Bay Road area and congestion at the Henry Street intersection).

Suggested improvements to business districts / corridors were categorized by district / corridor. The downtown business district received the largest number of responses. Common suggestions in the downtown included additional parking and enhanced dining, recreation and cultural experiences. Suggestions for S. Commercial Street focused on corridor revitalization. The primary focus for Doty Island was the N. Commercial Street and First Street corridors. Participants would like to see façade improvements, additional parking, retail and restaurants on N. Commercial Street. While on First Street people are looking for redevelopment. Top businesses or services that people identified as missing in Neenah included: a grocery store like Trader Joe's, a dog park and a community theater. Top features, businesses or buildings that should be preserved included: the downtown area (charm historical, brick and facades); the ThedaCare Regional Medical Center; and historic architecture (businesses, homes, neighborhoods and corridors).

Specific sites or broader locations for redevelopment within Neenah included First Street (Jersild and ThedaCare Regional Medical Center (if the hospital decides to leave) sites),



Arrowhead Park (recreational uses including access to the water, site for music and festivals) and S. Commercial Street (revitalization).

Suggestions for improvements in undeveloped areas surrounding the City were less focused. Multiple groups identified the growth area north of Breezewood Lane and west of Pendleton Road extended, the Pendleton Road to Breezewood Lane connection and the growth area at the southwest corner of Winneconne Avenue and Pendleton Road extended.

#### On-Line Survey

An on-line survey was created based off the information that was gathered from the community visioning workshops ~~in order to~~ continue to identify the community vision. A total of 770 people participated in the survey which went live on June 30th, ~~2016~~ 2016, and remained active until August 15th, 2016, a total of 47 days. Questions focused on assets, issues or things that should be changed, statements where attention in terms of investment, perceptions on things ranging from schools to the environment, rehabilitation or redevelopment should be made, and people's vision for the future.

To determine top assets in Neenah, people were asked to identify why Neenah is a great place to live, work and visit. Top reasons selected by people were downtown Neenah (46%), city parks (43%) and safe community (42%). Interestingly a larger percentage of non-residents (58%) identified the downtown as a great place versus residents. Parks (42%) and public access to lakes (40%) and river were the other top assets identified by non-residents.

Top issues or things that people would like to see changed in the City included improvements to the S. Commercial Street corridor (40%), improvements to the condition of street surfaces (32%) and investment in additional sidewalks and trails (31%). Priorities for non-residents were slightly different. Things non-residents would like to see changed included more opportunities for visitors (40%), more public access to waterfronts (34%) and improvements along the S. Commercial Street corridor.

People were asked to respond about how strongly they agreed or disagreed with certain statements. Respondents overwhelmingly agreed with the statement "Protecting Neenah's water resources (Fox River, Neenah Slough, Lakes) from pollution is important" (Strongly Agreed (75%) or Agreed (22%)). Other statements people supported included "Schools (public and private) within the City area valuable asset to attracting and retaining young families to Neenah" (Strongly Agreed (55%) and Agreed (35%)), and "Neenah's historical structures and neighborhoods should be preserved" (Agreed (52%) and Agreed (35%)).

Respondents were asked to think about areas in need of most attention in terms of investment, rehabilitation, or redevelopment. ~~The majority of~~ Most respondents chose S. Commercial Street followed by Main Street, and Doty Island.



People were asked to think about Neenah 20 year from now. Top responses included Safety, Diversity, Family-Oriented Community, and Emphasis on Downtown Neenah. Many of these responses aligned with the assets people identified in an earlier question.

#### Youth Survey

In conjunction with the Neenah Historical Society, the City conducted a group asset/issue mapping exercise and a survey to nearly 250 participating Neenah High School Students on November 17 and 18, 2016. Top responses are listed below.

~~A majority of~~Most students travel to school by car, which takes them between 5 to 10 minutes (40.2%) or more than 10 minutes (33%). About two-thirds (65.4%) felt that there were activities and things for them to do in Neenah. In 2 years about three-quarters of the students expect to be away at college (75.6%), while in 10 years about three-quarters (73.9%) of the students would like to be living and working outside of Neenah. The top 3 favorite things to do or places to go in Neenah included: parks (109 responses), downtown Neenah (65 responses) and community facilities (39 responses). What's missing in Neenah included restaurants (69 responses) such as Noodles and Company, Chipotle, White Castle, and others; outdoor recreation / activities (35 responses); and entertainment (28 responses). Positive descriptions of the City included: small (62 responses); nice, kind people, community oriented (48 responses); and clean, comfortable and relaxing (29 responses). Negative descriptions of Neenah included bland, boring, generic (24 responses). Top assets in Neenah reported during the group activities included Riverside Park (78%), downtown Neenah (78%) and the Neenah Pool (72%). Top group issues included the Neenah High School (50%), I-41 construction (39%) and Lake Winnebago water quality (39%).

Input from the community visioning workshops, and on-line and youth surveys were used to identify key issues and opportunities.

#### Intergovernmental Meeting

The City of Neenah hosted an intergovernmental meeting October 12, 2017. Invitations, which included a link to the plan documents and future land use map, were sent to neighboring jurisdictions, county departments, local governmental units, state agencies and those with non-metallic mineral interests near the City.

The meeting was designed as an open forum for the City to solicit input into the development of the comprehensive plan update.

#### Community Open Houses

~~The City of Neenah hosted three community open houses to allow the community an opportunity to view the plan and ask questions. The open houses were held on Tuesday, November 14, 2017 at the Neenah City Hall, Wednesday, November 15, 2017 at the Neenah Public Library and Thursday, November 16, 2017 at the Neenah-Menasha Fire Station No. 31.~~

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### **Written Comments**

~~Written comments were solicited throughout the planning process. A website and was developed and maintained by the City. Needs to be inserted later~~

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### **Public Hearing**

A formal public hearing on the proposed comprehensive plan update was held by the City's Plan Commission prior to recommendation to the City Council for approval of the plan. The hearing was held on December 12, 2017 to solicit input on the comprehensive plan.

A Class I public notice was published in the Appleton Post-Crescent on ~~2-~~November 8, 2017. Copies of the draft City's Comprehensive Plan Update, Volume One and Two were available for review at the Neenah Public Library, City Hall in the Community Development Department, and on the City's Comprehensive Plan Update website. Notices were sent to all adjacent and overlapping jurisdictions, non-metallic mining operators and the Neenah Public Library.