

**CHAPTER 3:
FUTURE LAND USE PLAN**

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INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses in detail the 20-Year General Plan Design and supporting land use recommendations for the town of Oconto. The background information, data and trends provided in Chapter 2 of this plan and *Volume II: County Resources* was referenced by Plan Commission members during the preparation of the town’s preferred future land use map. The town of Oconto 20-Year General Plan Design (**Map 3.1**) reflects the type, location, and density of specific future land uses the town would like to promote during this planning period. The existing land use inventory, a detailed list of development strategies, and a series of implementation tools such as county and local zoning ordinances will assist town officials in achieving the 20-General Plan Design.

20-YEAR GENERAL PLAN DESIGN

Land Use Classifications

The following land use classifications support the town of Oconto future land use plan. Utilizing these land use classifications, this section details the suggested type, location and density of development for the town of Oconto illustrated on the 20-Year General Plan Design. They define those vital land use characteristics that will assist in the preservation of the town’s rural character, valuable agriculture land, and promote efficient and orderly growth. The town’s future land use classifications are:

- Residential
- Mixed Use
- Commercial
- Industrial / Light Industrial
- Parks and Recreation
- Governmental / Institutional / Utilities
- Agriculture / Woodlands
- Transportation
- Mineral Resources Overlay
- Environmental Corridors Overlay

Land Use Recommendations

Residential

It is the intent of this classification to promote orderly and efficient growth patterns that are consistent with adjacent land uses. As a result residential development in the town of Oconto is categorized into two categories- *concentrated residential* and *rural residential*.

Concentrated Residential

The “Concentrated Residential” category is illustrated as “*residential*” on the town’s 20-Year General Plan Design (**Map 3.1**). This residential classification consists only of single-family homes within designated areas of the town that are already experiencing concentrated residential development. Other issues to consider as residential densities increase and expand these areas include:

- Integration of varying residential design standards such as conservation by design subdivisions
- Potential for future annexation by the City of Oconto

- Location and content of the existing environmental features
- Existing infrastructure and efficient connectivity to future development
- Provision of emergency services
- Preservation of ground and surface water quality
- Availability of groundwater
- Location and quality of recreational facilities
- County and local land Use regulations

Recommendations:

- **Concentrated residential development will be primarily directed** to areas adjacent to the City of Oconto and along the Oconto River.
- **Infill should be maximized in concentrated residential whenever possible** to limit the costs to extend infrastructure; minimizing the loss of open space, valuable agriculture land, and productive woodlands; and decreasing the travel distance between residences and existing services.
- **The incorporation of various development techniques helps maintain a balance between the natural environment and new development.** It is recommended that various development techniques such as conservation subdivisions are utilized in these areas in an effort to protect surrounding environmental features; preserve open space and agriculture land throughout residential areas; and protect woodlands and wildlife habitats.
- **New residential development types are encouraged to conform to surrounding uses.** Conflicting size or type of development may detract from existing properties.
- **Future residential development shall be sensitive to natural features.** Environmentally sensitive areas (i.e. woodlands, wetlands, steep slopes, floodplains, etc.) in new areas of residential development should be preserved.
- **The single family residential zoning district will be the primary zoning district of choice for any proposed residential development** in areas shown as concentrated residential. The town may also consider the use of the rural residential zoning district on a limited basis when the use of that district better aligns with existing residential development.

Rural Residential

Future residential development is highly encouraged toward areas in the Residential classifications on the 20-Year General Plan Design Map (**Map 3.1**). However, the town’s agricultural lands, woodlands, and open spaces will likely encounter residential development pressure during the 20-year planning period. This residential category is intended to allow low density development while maintaining the town’s visual and environmental integrity in areas illustrated as “*Woodlands and Agricultural*” on the town’s 20-Year General Plan Design (**Map 3.1**). The following recommendations provide methods to best protect the town’s rural landscape from increased fragmentation.

Recommendations:

- **Low density development is promoted to help maintain the town’s visual and environmental integrity.**

- **Encourage new development techniques which maintain a balance between agricultural/woodland areas and new development.** Utilize various development techniques such as conservation/cluster subdivisions in an effort to protect the surrounding environmental features; allow for more open space; and preserve farmland, woodlands and wildlife habitats within the town.
- **New residential development should conform to surrounding uses** in order not to detract from or conflict with existing properties.
- **The establishment of natural or man-made buffers between residential development and farming operations** will help reduce land use conflicts.
- **Access controls are encouraged to limit the number of driveways** along the primary corridors in order to improve safety and reduce road maintenance costs.
- **The rural residential zoning district will be the primary zoning district of choice for any proposed residential development** while the town may also consider the single family residential zoning district on a limited basis when a smaller lot size would further the towns intent of preserving woodlands and agricultural lands.

Commercial

The town does not view itself as a community that would attract large commercial businesses during the 20 year planning period. These large businesses are expected to locate within the City of Oconto or nearby communities that have adequate infrastructure.

Recommendations:

- **Existing commercial establishments within the town will continue,** including home based businesses.
- **Businesses should be compatible with the character of the town.** The town encourages new businesses to feature attractive, well-maintained buildings that include appropriate signage and lighting so not to detract from the rural character of the community.
- **Consider highway type businesses.** The town should consider businesses that meet the demands of the traveling public along USH 41 and STH 22.
- **New commercial development should be directed away from environmentally sensitive areas** (shown as “Environmental Corridors” on Map 3.1).
- **Development of new commercial spaces should be carefully planned in order to minimize the impacts on existing infrastructure.** Proposals for new development should consider the adequacy of existing infrastructure to accommodate the needs of that area. New development should minimize the costs of utility and road extensions. Additionally, the presence of truck traffic, noise, and other impacts of industrial activity should be minimized when located near residential areas. When necessary, buffers should be created to minimize impacts between residential and business land uses. The restricted commercial zoning district would be the district of choice for any commercial development not within any area planned for mixed use development that the town feels is consistent with the character of the town and will not negatively impact area land uses.

- **Proposed businesses not located within areas planned for commercial development will be considered on a case-by-case basis.** The town should first determine if the business will negatively impact the surrounding land uses and if it is a use that is consistent with the vision of the town. If a change in zoning is considered to permit the proposed business, the town may consider utilizing the restricted commercial or neighborhood commercial zoning districts.
- **The location of home-based businesses should be carefully scrutinized to ensure their operations do not interfere or compromise surrounding land uses or the rural integrity of the town.** For any home based businesses that grow to a level that requires a change in zoning, the town should first determine if the business will negatively impact the surrounding land uses. If a change in zoning is required to permit the business, the town may consider utilizing the restricted commercial or neighborhood commercial zoning districts.

Industrial / Light Industrial

The Industrial/Light Industrial land use classification specifically accommodates manufacturing businesses which create or change raw or unfinished materials into another form or higher valued product. Since industrial manufacturing can occur at various intensities, the inclusion of light industrial accommodates less intense operations. The town does not view itself as a community that would attract large industrial operations during the 20 year planning period and have not identified any areas for industrial development on **Map 3.1**. Industrial uses are expected to locate within City of Oconto and nearby communities that have adequate infrastructure, while light industrial uses may be considered in areas designated for commercial development on **Map 3.1** or in other areas where commercial businesses may be considered.

Recommendations:

- **Industrial and light industrial uses in the town should be compatible with the character of the town.** Any new industrial or light industrial uses must be consistent with the scale of the town and be environmentally friendly.
- **Control the appearance of industrial and light industrial businesses** by reviewing designs, signage, and landscaping of future establishments through building scale and appearance. Any new light industrial business development should be directed away from environmental sensitive areas (shown as “Environmental Corridors” on Map 3.1).
- **Development of new industrial or light industrial spaces should be carefully planned in order to minimize the impacts on existing infrastructure.** Proposals for new development should consider the adequacy of existing infrastructure to accommodate the needs of that area. New development should minimize the costs of utility and road extensions. Additionally, the presence of truck traffic, noise, and other impacts of industrial activity should be minimized when located near residential areas. When necessary, buffers should be created to minimize impacts between residential and light industrial land uses.
- **The location of home-based businesses should be carefully scrutinized to ensure their operations do not interfere or compromise surrounding land uses or the rural integrity of the town.** For any home based businesses that grow to a level that requires a change in zoning to light industrial, the town should first determine if the business will negatively impact the surrounding land uses.

Mixed Use

The Mixed Use land use classification includes areas with a mix of existing residential and commercial land uses. It is the intent of this classification to promote continued development of commercial uses within these areas, as they are located along the USH 41 and STH 22 corridors within the town. It is not the intent of the town to promote significant residential development within these areas.

Recommendations:

- **Mixed use development is planned along USH 41 and STH 22.** These locations are envisioned to contain primarily commercial, retail, and service related businesses that will be widely used by the town’s residents and visitors along with some existing residential uses and some limited new residential uses.
- **New businesses should be compatible with the character of the town.** The town encourages new businesses to feature attractive, well-maintained buildings that include appropriate signage and lighting so not to detract from the rural character of the community and the mixture of uses within the planned mixed use area.
- **New development should be directed away from environmentally sensitive areas (shown as “Environmental Corridors” on Map 3.1).**
- **Development of new commercial spaces should be carefully planned in order to minimize the impacts on existing infrastructure.** Proposals for new development should consider the adequacy of existing infrastructure to accommodate the needs of that area. New development should minimize the costs of utility and road extensions. Additionally, the presence of truck traffic, noise, and other impacts of commercial activity should be minimized when located near residential areas. When necessary, buffers should be created to minimize impacts between residential and business land uses.
- **Residential uses within these mixed use areas are anticipated to continue, however it is not the intent of the town to promote significant residential development within these planned mixed use areas.** The town will utilize the single family residential zoning district for the limited new residential uses as needed.
- **The general commercial zoning district will be the primary zoning district of choice for any proposed commercial proposals.** When a commercial proposal within one of the designated mixed use areas is situated amongst existing residential uses the town may wish to utilize the restricted commercial or neighborhood commercial zoning district.

Governmental/Institutional/Utilities

The Governmental/Institutional/Utilities land use classification addresses the capacity and efficiency of government buildings; emergency services and facilities; utilities and utility sites; cemeteries; and public services provided to the town residents.

Recommendations:

- **Town officials should continually monitor the efficiency and effectiveness of all town provided services** to identify the need for improvement, change in policy, establishment of mutual aid agreements, or future capital investments.

- **Future municipal development should be located and signed in a manner to ensure safe access** into and out of all public buildings and facilities.
- **Town officials should remain aware of siting and other changing issues** regarding telecommunication towers, antennas, and wind generation facilities.
- **The town is encouraged to maintain regular contact with the Oconto and Lena School Districts and the City of Oconto** in order to be involved with any long-range planning.

Park and Recreation

The Park and Recreation land use classification discusses existing and future recreational facilities, trails, parks, and open spaces within town of Oconto.

Recommendations:

- **Future town recreational facilities should be located in areas that can be easily accessed** by either motorized or non-motorized means.
- **Future town recreational facilities should be built to accommodate all age groups, levels of disabilities, and skills.**
- **Town officials are recommended to work with the City of Oconto and Oconto County** on the development of trails and recreational facilities as part of the development of the Oconto County Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan and/or City of Oconto Comprehensive Park and Outdoor Recreation Plan.
- **The town should cooperate with the surrounding towns, Oconto County, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, and local organizations** to promote the expansion and connectivity of recreational trails.
- **Proposed private campgrounds should be compatible with the character of the town and located in areas that do not conflict with area land uses.** Any campground proposals should be directed away from environmentally sensitive areas (shown as “Environmental Corridors” on Map 3.1) and away from area that do not have suitable soils to support the sanitary system needs of the proposed use.

Agricultural

The Agricultural land use classification encompasses lands being utilized for agricultural purposes within the areas illustrated as “*Agriculture / Woodlands*” on the town’s 20-Year General Plan Design (**Map 3.1**). The agricultural classification is designed to preserve existing lands devoted to the growing of crops and the raising of livestock.

Recommendations:

- **The town should encourage the preservation of agricultural lands** and the farmer’s right to farm. Areas that have been designated as farmland preservation areas within the town are shown on **Map 3.24** found in Chapter 3 of *Volume I: County Plan*. The town should verify the location of development proposals in relation to areas designated for farmland preservation when reviewing development proposals in the area illustrated as agriculture/woodlands on the town’s 20-Year General Plan Design.

- **If residential development is permitted in these areas, low density development should be considered.** Future development in these areas should be done in a fashion which is least impactful to the natural environment and ensures fragmentation of quality open space does not occur.
- **Where appropriate, encourage new development techniques and programs which will preserve as much farmland as possible.** The utilization of various development techniques such as conservation by design subdivisions help preserve farmland.
- **The promotion of best management practices for agricultural activities will help maintain these valuable agriculture lands from development and natural degradation.** Inappropriate agricultural practices can have an adverse impact on the productivity of the soil as well as the quality of surface water and groundwater unless properly managed.
- **The integration of natural and/or man-made buffers** are encouraged between farming and future non-farming operations in order to lessen conflict between land uses.
- **Large-scale farming operations** are recommended to be located in areas of the town that avoid environmental corridors and surface water features.
- **Town officials are recommended to work with Oconto County** to address the siting of large-scale farming operations.

Woodlands/Open Space

The Woodlands/Open Space land use classification encompasses lands being utilized for woodland and natural open space and is illustrated as “*Agriculture / Woodlands*” on the town’s 20-Year General Plan Design (**Map 3.1**). The woodland classification is designed to promote the maintenance of private woodlands and open space areas within the town.

Recommendations:

- **If residential development is permitted in these areas, low density development should be considered.** Future development in these areas should be done in a fashion which has the least amount of impact on the natural environment to help ensure fragmentation of quality open space does not occur.
- **The utilization of existing natural areas will help to enhance the character of the town.** The Preservation of large tracts of natural areas and/or features is essential to enhance/retain buffers between incompatible uses while maintaining scenic views of the town.
- **Private woodlands should not be developed with higher densities.** The utilizing of unique development options such as conservation subdivision designs or clustering can help maintain the continuity of woodlands.
- **The application of best management practices will help protect the town’s many natural features and open space areas** that can be better utilized to enhance the town’s recreational opportunities and facilities.

Transportation

The Transportation land use classification covers both motorized and non-motorized travel. This includes the existing road network; future recreation paths and trails; and recommendations for safety and improved traffic movement in the town.

Recommendations:

- **To preserve the natural look of the town and to minimize the negative impacts of future residential development along roads**, it is recommended that new residential development be minimally visible from the road through the utilization of buffers or setbacks from major transportation routes and future residential development.
- **For any new concentrated development proposed within the town, an Area Development Plan should be provided.** This will allow the town to review and ensure that future roads are well designed to promote efficient traffic flow and to avoid unnecessary cul-de-sacs and loops that can increase the town’s future maintenance costs or be disruptive for fire, police or rescue services.
- **The utilization of the PASER (Pavement Surface Evaluation and Rating) program** will assist town officials in maintaining the roads in the future and ensure there is a cost effective road management plan in place.
- **Recreational paths and trails such as snowmobile trails should have proper signage and intersection controls** to ensure safe crossing and interaction with vehicles.

Mineral Resources Overlay

The Mineral Resources Overlay is depicted on the General Plan Design to ensure active and future quarries are identified within the town. This overlay includes both metallic mining, although extremely rare, and non-metallic mining activities. In most cases, the type of mining to occur in Oconto County will involve extraction of gravel, marl, clay, and similar materials to be conducted for a specified approved period of time. When mining is complete and the site is reclaimed, the overlay shall be removed and the previous land uses allowed to continue.

- **The town should work with Oconto County Officials to monitor existing mining operations.** Any issues involving the mining operation should be brought to the attention of the county officials in a timely manner.
- **The town will adequately review proposed mining operations.** The town should recommend conditional use requirements to the county that ensure the mining operation does not significantly compromise surrounding land uses. The application of setbacks will help alleviate issues with neighboring properties.
- **Mining operations should be sited in areas that will have little negative impact** on the neighboring properties, adverse effects on groundwater, or significant wear on local roads.
- **The town will work with Oconto County and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources** to ensure mining operations are properly closed and reclaimed.
- **The town will pursue avenues in which to reclaim mining operations not sufficiently reclaimed.**
- **The reclaimed mining sites will be available for other land uses.** The town will need to determine the land use that best suits the area and needs of the town. (i.e. agriculture, recreational, residential)

Environmental Corridors

Environmental corridors contain four components; 100-year floodplain as defined by the Federal

Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), WDNR wetlands, steep slopes of 12 percent or greater, and setback from all navigable waterways as defined by the Oconto County Shoreland Zoning Ordinance. Together, these elements represent the areas of the town that are most sensitive to development and are intended to be preserved.

Recommendations:

- **This plan should serve as a guide for the preservation of environmental corridors.** Using the environmental corridors as a guide when reviewing proposed developments will give the town background information to determine what areas are important to maintaining the rural character and quality of the town’s natural resource base. The corridors are an overlay to the General Plan Design (**Map 3.1**) and should be utilized as a reference.
- **Future developments should be steered away from environmental corridors as much as possible**, or they are designed in such a manner to minimize the negative effects on water resources, wildlife habitats and the overall character of the town.
- **Development near environmental features in the town should be carefully reviewed in order to maintain ample wildlife corridors.**

IDENTIFIED SMART GROWTH AREAS

According to s. 16.965, Wis. Stats., a “smart growth area” is “an area that will enable the development and redevelopment of lands within existing infrastructure and municipal, state and utility services, where practicable, or that will encourage efficient development patterns that are both contiguous to existing development and at densities which have relatively low utility and municipal and state governmental costs.”

During the planning process the town of Oconto identified “smart growth areas” as lands immediately adjacent to the City of Oconto and include the developed portions of the town’s Sanitary District No. 1.

- Locating these areas near the city’s existing development allows for more orderly and efficient development patterns.
- Lands immediately surrounding the city will allow for a mixture of uses (residential, industrial, commercial, recreational, etc.), and are in close proximity to urban services such as public sewer and water.
- Locating more development adjacent to the city also assists the town in maintaining its rural character by offering the opportunity to preserve the many valuable natural areas and agricultural lands that make up the town of Oconto’s landscape.

Map 3.1: 20-Year General Plan Design