

WISCONSIN LANDSCAPES

Perfecting the Places We Live to Protect the Places We Don't

Volume 6, Number 3 Fall 2002

BUILDING SCHOOLS, BUILDING COMMUNITY

THE LAND USE AND TRANSPORTATION CONNECTION TO SCHOOL FACILITIES PLANNING IN WISCONSIN

Schools are a focal point of any community. If you have a child in school, you think about them getting there and back safely and there are PTA meetings, extra-curricular activities, parent-teacher meetings. And if you don't have children in school, the building is still a center of civic activity where people of all ages meet and participate in the life of a community: it is where you vote, where community car washes are held, where neighborhood meetings take place. Schools serve as artistic and cultural centers, recreational facilities and town halls. Schools act as community anchors and contribute to a neighborhood's vitality. For all of these reasons, they are magnets for residential and commercial development, pulling and holding communities together.

A disheartening trend has developed that reduces the accessibility

Sprawl as a result of school location can lead to the abandonment of neighborhoods, stagnation of property values in central cities, loss of open space, and increased reliance on

and community identity of schools. Many new school facilities are being built on the edge of cities, far from the neighborhoods they are intended to serve. These "sprawl schools" result from a number of misconceptions: that new schools are superior to old schools; that each school must be built on large tracts of land; and that each school must accommodate vast numbers of students. Sprawl as a result of school location can lead to the

abandonment of once-vital neighborhoods, stagnation of property values in central cities, loss of open space, and increased reliance on automobiles.

ISSUES IN SCHOOL FACILITY PLANNING

Renovation vs. new construction

Across the country there is a belief that new schools will offer better educational opportunities for students, while old buildings are inherently insufficient. However, with proper architectural guidance older buildings can be equipped with up-to-date technology, meet Ameri-

cans with Disabilities Act standards, and satisfy modern building codes. Architects and planners that are skilled in restoration techniques can offer accurate estimates of renovation costs, making the decision to renovate more feasible. The modern amenities associated with new buildings can be included during renovation. A new building in a cornfield may seem like an obvious, less expensive choice until you consider greater transportation costs, the need for new infrastructure and other unforeseen costs.

A 1000 Friends survey of 15 school districts that passed school-building referenda between 1995 and 1998 found that a majority of the school districts chose to build new schools in undeveloped areas on the edge of the city or village limits. The 1998 study revealed that one of the factors driving this trend is a belief on the part of school district administrators that minimum acreage "guidelines" developed by the Council for Educational Facilities Planning International (CEFPI) are actually inflexible mandates.

School siting

Population growth in areas should determine school site locations, not the other way around. School quality is one of the most important factors influencing decisions about where to live. When a school is built in an existing community, shorter and safer routes to school are created, public organizations can take advantage of the space outside of school hours, and local school accessibility increases housing values. School facility planners should consider the benefits of public accessibility when siting schools. Restaurants, media centers, health clinics, post offices, grocery stores, and other businesses that serve the community should be located close to the site for optimal accessibility. School districts that integrate school facilities into an existing urban framework would create easier access for students, parents and other citizens to the schools, civic buildings and recreation.

See Building Schools, page 3

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DIRECTORS' COLUMN

Dear Friends.

In this newsletter, as in all of our newsletters, you will read about a host of land use issues facing different communities throughout the state. In this issue we devote several pages to some not-so-great news about land use decisions in parts of the state we all love and have a stake in protecting: the new subdivision planned for Door County, an increased number of tax incremental financing battles cropping up on some of our state's best farmland and the trend toward building sprawl schools.

But it's not all doom and gloom.

One of our founding board members, Larry Kirch, a planner for the city of La Crosse, wanted us to tell you about an award recently won by his city. This spring, the National Trust for Historic Preservation awarded La Crosse a 2002 Great American Main Street Award for its successful efforts in downtown revitalization through historic preservation. A La Crosse public-private partnership called Historic Downtown La Crosse helped to implement the city's first comprehensive master plan for the downtown.

According to Trust President Richard Moe, the plan "has become a powerful economic bridge to take the city and region into the new millennium." "Against overwhelming odds," Moe wrote, "La Crosse bounced back and is more successful than ever. We are proud to honor the city...and congratulate city leaders for their perseverance and excellence in revitalizing their historical central business district."



One of the best things about La Crosse's efforts to bring back its downtown is that as more people are attracted to this vibrant, unique, urban community, fewer will leave the city for the countryside that we are all working so hard to protect.

So, there will be setbacks. But, 1000 Friends staff, board and members are spreading the word about another way of making these decisions about where we live, work, play and learn. And we are gaining ground.

Dave Cieslewicz 1000 Friends of Wisconsin Andrea J. Dearlove
The Land Use Institute

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS: 1000 FRIENDS OF WISCONSIN & THE LAND USE INSTI-

Friends (\$100 to \$249)

Terry Ross, 2351. Candye Andrus, 2339. Stephen Koermer, 2341. William & Avis Rambo, 2345.

Regular Membership (\$35 to \$99)

Hope Hanson, 2340 . Mike & Sally Stewart, 2346 . Mike & Martha Clough, 2347 . Chris Wilkosz, 2349, Terry Lappin, 2350

NOTE: Institute members in regular text, 1000 Friends, Inc. member in italics. Member numbers follow each name.

BUILDING SCHOOLS, BUILDING COMMUNITY CONTINUED

School size

The number of schools in the U.S. declined by 70% since World War II but their average size increased five fold. This trend is changing due to recent research on the effect of school size on student achievement, which indicates that a small school policy may be a powerful tool for improving student performance. Larger schools exact significant and long-lasting costs in the form of lower levels of student achievement; greater problems related to safety, violence, and discipline; and lower rates of attendance and graduation. These are costs that are more likely to be paid first by poor and minority children. Academic achievement in small schools is at least equal, and often superior, to that of large schools. Student attitudes and social behavior are more positive in small schools, and the percentage of dropouts is lower.

The school-transportation connection

Children travel by foot more than any other age group and 23% of the Wisconsin's population is 14 or younger. Highways, busy streets, and other traffic hazards become barriers to walking and biking, even for children who live within easy walking or biking distance from a school. Currently, an average of one in four children is considered overweight. Many schools are trying to come up with strategies to address the growing concern over childhood obesity, but they often overlook the obvious issue of how students travel to and from school. Students that are able to walk or bike to school get great health benefits. In addition, walking and biking gives them a sense of independence and it also reduces dependence on buses and cars, which in turn reduces traffic congestion and air pollution.

Unfortunately, this is one lesson that just isn't being learned. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 30 years ago two-thirds of children were walking and biking to school. Today, less than 10% walk or bike.



Students in Marin County, CA participating in a Safe Routes to School program. Source: http://www.marinbike.org/Campaigns/SafeRoutes/Index.htm

Conclusion

In cities and towns across Wisconsin small, centrally located schools function as the heart and soul of their communities. They are places of lifelong learning and civic involvement, where past, present, and future students alike go to participate in the life of the community. As communities grow and change, they must consider how their school facilities will meet future educational and community needs. Wisconsin could strengthen its schools, its communities, and its economy by offering school facility planning guidelines and legislative incentives that recognize the strong connection between schools and smart land use and transportation policy.

This article was excerpted from a forthcoming report researched and written by Lisa M. MacKinnon, Attorney for 1000 Friends of Wisconsin, and Kate Strom Hiorns, graduate student in the UW-Madison Department of Urban and Regional Planning.

What 1000 Friends is doing about school facilities planning:

Fall 2002, 1000 Friends of Wisconsin will release a report on the *Land Use and Transportation Connection to School Facilities Planning in Wisconsin*. The report will:

- Analyze the current trends in Wisconsin with respect to school facilities planning and construction;
- Provide examples of communities in Wisconsin and other states that decided to enhance or remove neighborhood schools and the consequences of those decisions;
- Offer ideas for how Wisconsin can benefit its schools, its students, its economy, and its communities by making smart facilities planning choices.

1000 Friends of Wisconsin has *added this issue to its 2003-2004 Wis- Conservation legislative agenda* and will be advocating for development of comprehensive state and local policies for school facilities planning that address:

- the land use and transportation connection to school siting decisions;
- the necessity for school transportation plans and budgets that include and encourage pedestrian and bicycle transportation programs;
- the renovation of older schools as an attractive and feasible alternative to new construction;
- the social and educational benefits of small, neighborhood schools; and
- the financial and social costs of sprawl development.

ISSUES AROUND WISCONSIN: DEVELOPMENT PRESSURE THREATENS DOOR COUNTY



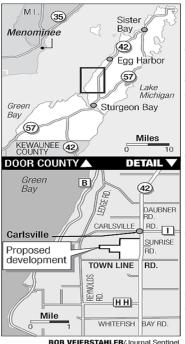
300-Acre Subdivision Puts Peninsula At Risk

Because of the irresistible pull of its quaint villages, spectacular state parks, famous cherries, and picture perfect shorelines and farms, Door County may be able to weather a summer of beach closings and high E. Coli bacteria levels in Green Bay. But it may not be able to overcome suburban sprawl, which may destroy the special qualities that make this peninsula so unique.

Former Wisconsin Governor Patrick Lucey and his development team are proposing to build 89 homes sprawling across nearly 300 acres in the Town of Egg Harbor. If approved, this land consumptive subdivision would contribute to the transformation of Door County into an exclusive sprawling suburb with more traffic congestion and less charm.

What is particularly troubling is that the county will not hold a public hearing on this development – one of the largest, if not the largest ever on the peninsula. In fact, as long as the preliminary plat – the map showing the size and location of the single-family home lots – meets a few basic standards, it will be approved with barely a peep from the County Board.

How can this happen? The county's land division ordinance is modeled after the state statutes, and since the state doesn't require counties to hold public hearings on preliminary plats, Door County doesn't hold them.



The problem doesn't end there. State law requires that preliminary plats be approved or denied within 90 days of the date they are submitted — not much time for any government to consider the wide range of impacts on the community and the environment. But Door County has made this law even worse by reducing the time it has to make legally sound, good planning decisions to just 40 days. This time limit forced the county to make its decision on the Lucey subdivision before the town hired an engineer to study the impacts of the 89 septic systems on the groundwater. It also significantly shortens the time frame for concerned citizens to voice their opinions about proposed developments.

Door County has created a set of sound planning policies in its Development Plan. This plan contains strong goals and objectives to protect the county's rural character and natural resources while providing for "efficient, sequential, and orderly" development. Unfortunately, there is little, if any, connection between the plan and the land division ordinance, which means the only way the plan will be implemented is if a developer proposes a subdivision that happens to comply with it.

Failure to implement their plan, a short-circuited subdivision review process, and lack of public input on major proposals pose unnecessary risks to Door County's future. The county should create a comprehensive plan to comply with the Smart Growth Law before it's too late. Compliance with the law would allow the public to participate in making and implementing the plan, and require that the plan be enforced through ordinances.

In a recent Milwaukee Journal Sentinel article, reporter Dan Egan wrote, "there is a growing edginess among business owners and real estate developers who are as dependent on clean, healthy waters as are the fish that they so love to boil for tourists." In fact, rental business in the county is down 50% since the first sicknesses were publicized in July. Egan warned "the contamination problem could upset more than a few stomachs in the coming years. Cash register receipts, hotel occupancy rates and even property values could be at stake if Door County's reputation for clean water goes in the toilet."

Sprawl could further worsen the clean water problem with more septic tanks and run-off from congested roads, parking lots and developments. And it could permanently damage Door County's majestic character.

We hope Door County will heed the warnings of then-Governor Pat Lucey when he said more than 30 years ago, "The overcrowding and abuse of this resource will mean the end of it as an attraction. Those developers who don't care about the future will continue to squeeze the goose that lays the golden eggs until the goose is dead. It makes economic sense to prevent rather than encourage such an event."

Nick Lelack, Planning Director

WHY SMART GROWTH IS GOOD FOR WISCONSIN'S FORESTS

This article continues our series on "Why Smart Growth is Good For..." that will illustrate why a community, coming together to plan for its future, improves our quality of life in Wisconsin.

Wisconsin's forests provide livelihood and leisure to residents and visitors alike. Our forests provide the raw materials for the wood products industry, which employs over 96,000 people and pumps \$15 billion annually into the state's economy. Forests also help create the magnificent landscape for Wisconsin's recreation and tourism industry, which employs 350,000 people and generates \$14 billion annually. Even more importantly, forests provide benefits that are harder to quantify, including scenery, water quality, fish and wild-life habitat, and native species diversity. Trees in Wisconsin even have positive effects on the world atmosphere as they mitigate global warming and air pollution through carbon sequestration and oxygen production.

Forests cover an extraordinary 16 million acres of Wisconsin's landscape—that's nearly half of the state's total 35 million acres. Forested land has grown significantly, recovering from the big cut-over that took place in the late nineteenth century, and reaching about the same land coverage that existed prior to European settlement. But the composition of those forests is very different with species that have commercial value for wood or paper taking precedence over the presettlement diversity. Still, those same industries that have contributed to the lack of species diversity have also kept large tracts of forest intact for decades. As the land becomes more valuable for recreational home development, large tracts are now coming on the market. Some are being preserved through purchase, usually through the state's Stewardship land protection fund, but much is being sold in small parcels and developed. The natural solitude, guiet lakes and abundant wildlife we treasure are threatened like never before. Even clear-cut forests can grow again, but once developed into houses, a forest is gone forever.

Unplanned, haphazard development has significantly eroded the integrity of our forest resources. The leading threat to Wisconsin's forests is fragmentation, which is the parceling up of formerly continuous forests into smaller holdings with the often-resulting houses, roads and power lines that come with development. With major corporations now starting to divest themselves of these holdings, Wisconsin stands at the threshold of an historic opportunity to preserve large blocks of unbroken forest forever, largely through purchase. But that's only part of the answer. Over 80% of Wisconsin's forestland is in small holdings. Keeping thousands of individual properties forested is a daunting task. Long-standing programs like Stewardship and the Managed Forest Law can help, but the state's

relatively new Smart Growth law also presents some interesting opportunities.

The Smart Growth Law & Forests

Smart Growth seeks to protect forests by channeling growth into existing developed areas. Beginning in 2010, a local governmental unit's land use decisions must be consistent with its comprehensive plan. Any local government that plans with the help of state dollars, must also meet fourteen goals for the outcomes of its plan. Here are the goals that are most relevant to forests:

- Promotion of redevelopment of land with existing infrastructure and public services, and maintenance and rehabilitation of existing residential, commercial and industrial structures. If communities promote infill development in areas with existing infrastructure, many acres of forestland can be protected from haphazard development.
- Protection of natural areas, including wetlands, wildlife habitats, lakes, woodlands, open spaces and groundwater resources. This is a direct and explicit goal that calls for protecting forests and associated ecosystems.
- Protection of economically productive areas, including farmland and forests. Forests are a great source of economic activity from timber products to tourism.
- Promoting expansion or stabilization of the economic base and job creation. The timber and tourism industries employ many people in Wisconsin; protecting our forest resources will allow us to maintain these jobs.
- Planning and developing land uses that create or preserve unique urban & rural communities. The unique culture of the North Woods with its tourism, recreation and timber harvest communities is special to this state and should be maintained.

One of the most exciting things about the Smart Growth law, however, is its emphasis on public participation. If you own forestland or want to help protect the forests in your community, contact your local government and ask how you can participate in the process and be a voice for the trees! For more information on the law, please visit our website at www.1kfriends.org.

Alexis Wolff



There are many threats to our forests today. Private paper companies, which have historically owned large tracts of land, are selling them off in small parcels. This transition in forestland ownership results in more road building. more homes encroaching on these natural areas and more forest fragmentation. These actions damage wildlife habitat, air and water quality and the chance to find solitude.



LEGISLATION & LITIGATION UPDATE

Looking Back & Planning Ahead

Since our last newsletter the Legislature has gone home. We were successful in defending good land use planning and resource protection programs from attack. We fought off attempts to cut the Stewardship Fund and Smart Growth planning grants, we saved the 2010 implementation date for Smart Growth from attempts to push it back, and the special exemption from wetlands protection measures for Ashley Furniture was vetoed.

Now we're working on retooling our WisConservation land use agenda for the next session, which begins in January. We've also sent surveys to legislators and candidates for governor and lieutenant governor asking about their positions on our issues. Those results should be up on our website by mid-October.

Finally, we're planning meetings with legislators in their own districts to discuss our agenda for next session. We want our members in these meetings because legislators are most responsive to their own constituents. If you can join our staff at a meeting with your legislator, please call Ward Lyles at 608.259.1000 or email him at ward@1kfriends.org.

TIF Abuse on the Rise

One of our priorities next session will be to reform Wisconsin's 25-year-old tax incremental financing law. That law was designed to allow taxpayers to subsidize development in blighted urban areas to even the playing field between infill development, which is usually more expensive, and development on the urban fringe. A 1998 report from 1000 Friends found that the law had been abused to subsidize development of about 30,000 acres of farmland. The abuses are becoming more outrageous. Within the last several months:



This farm will be included in the Cross Plains TIF if approved by the village board.

The Village of **Cross Plains** is trying to subsidize the development of some of Wisconsin's best farmland in the Black Earth Creek Watershed for yet another office park. Like many TIF proposals, the amount of the proposed subsidy

nearly tripled over just a few months, from about \$1.3 million to \$3.4 million. We worked with a local group to oppose the proposal. The group collected 516 signatures calling for a referendum. Village officials decided not to hold the referendum, but plan to ask an advisory question on November's ballot.

The City of **Verona** is considering a \$6.7 million subsidy to build a Target, Kohl's, Menard's and national chain restaurants in a 130-acre cornfield along High-

way 151. Their hope is that the automobile traffic generated by this sprawl will help attract businesses to the Verona business park. This proposal entirely misses the mark – it's not for redevelopment or industrial uses at all. It's for auto-oriented, big box sprawl along a highway. No final decision has been made on this one.

The City of **Oconomowoc** finalized a \$24 million subsidy to an Illinois developer for the development of the historic, 1500-acre Pabst Farms. We fought this needless subsidy in Oconomowoc and it has been our poster child for what's wrong with TIF.

The City of **Mineral Point** is considering TIF for a McDonald's. The city created an open space TIF along Highway 151 a few years ago because the city assumed that businesses would jump at the opportunity to develop subsidized land along the highway. Some businesses did, but a key city-owned property remained on the market far longer than expected. A couple of local businesses wanted to buy it, but the city refused to sell to them because they wouldn't generate enough tax dollars to pay off the city's debt to create the district in the first place. Now, Mineral Point is courting a McDonald's developer to build a new restaurant and gas station on the site. Nobody can say that McDonald's needs a break today, especially not for a location along a highway in an historic city.

These are just a sampling of the open space TIF proposals we have opposed around the state; unfortunately, there are others. But citizens are becoming more engaged than ever in the local battles to stop these abuses, and we are gearing up to tackle the issue again in the legislature next year.

Dane County RPC Issue Goes to Court

The Dane County Regional Planning Commission was set to go out of business on October 1, 2002. We fought for a two-year extension in the state budget repair bill. Then, only a few weeks after signing the extension into law, Gov. McCallum reversed himself and said that he would disband the RPC on October 1st by executive order. We joined Dane County Executive Kathleen Falk, the League of Women Voters and others in asking a Dane County circuit court to put a hold on the Governor's order and to keep the RPC alive for two more years. We believe we have a strong case on the merits. McCallum says that Dane County should join a multi-county RPC with its neighbors and while we agree that that might be best, there is no reason to leave Wisconsin's fastest growing county without planning services while the details of a multi-county RPC are worked out. As of press time, the court had not ruled.

— Nick Lelack & Dave Cieslewicz

AROUND THE STATE - GET OUT YOUR CALENDARS!



Every year, as fall arrives, you can feel the conference and event planning in the air as organizations take advantage of our instincts to hibernate and stay indoors. Here are some great ways for you to get in from the cold this fall and winter — and maybe even learn a thing or two...

Wisconsin Academy Waters of Wisconsin Conference — Madison, October 21-22, 2002

The Waters of Wisconsin Forum, to take place October 21–22 at Monona Terrace, is the culmination of Waters of Wisconsin (WOW), a statewide initiative that for the past two years has brought together representatives from widely varied areas of water use and management—including agriculture, industry, conservation, all levels of government and public agencies, education, and Native American tribes—to address the use, management, and long-term protection of Wisconsin's waters. The participants at this forum will comprise one of the largest and most diverse groups of water professionals and water users ever gathered in the state. Much discussion at the forum will center on the Waters of Wisconsin draft report, which will be further refined at the gathering and serve as the formal declaration of WOW recommendations for water policy. The Academy hopes that the Waters of Wisconsin Forum will serve as a catalyst for new and expanded citizen efforts to preserve and protect Wisconsin's waters. For registration information, please visit the Academy website at http://www.wisconsinacademy.org/wow/forum/.

River Alliance of Wisconsin Conference — Rosholt, November 8-10, 2002

The year 2002 marks the 30th Anniversary of the Clean Water Act, while 2003 has been proclaimed as the "International Year of Freshwater" by the United Nations and proposed as the "Year of Water" in Wisconsin. Recognizing water as a critical resource for the future, an upcoming statewide conference, RIVERS 2002—A WATERSHED EVENT, is scheduled for November 8-10 near Stevens Point in Rosholt, Wisconsin. Sponsored by the River Alliance of Wisconsin, 1000 Friends of Wisconsin, The Nature Conservancy, Trout Unlimited and a long list of other organizations, the conference will bring together more than 125 representatives of Wisconsin organizations, tribes and agencies concerned with local watershed protection. For more information, please visit the River Alliance website at www.wisconsinrivers.org.

1000 Friends of Wisconsin Holiday Book Fair, Madison, December 14, 2002

Save the date! On Saturday, December 14th, 1000 Friends will host its first Holiday Book Fair. From 1:00 to 4:00 pm, at a Madison location to be announced, we have invited some of Wisconsin's best writers to read selections from their books, as we read from our anthologies, "A Place to Which We Belong" and "In My Neighborhood — Celebrating Wisconsin's Cities." Our books will be on sale at special holiday rates and a percentage of the proceeds will support 1000 Friends programs that protect Wisconsin's landscapes from sprawl. Invited authors include Dennis Boyer (confirmed), "Sacred Sites of Wisconsin" author Rev. John-Brian Paprock (confirmed), Jerry Apps (confirmed), Michael Bie (confirmed), Susan Lampert Smith and Justin Isherwood. THIS IS A GREAT WAY TO GET ALL YOUR HOLIDAY SHOPPING DONE IN ONE ENJOYABLE AFTERNOON! We will send an invitation out when we have all the details set.

ANOTHER WAY TO PROTECT OUR STATE FROM SPRAWL AND SUPPORT THE WORK OF 1000 FRIENDS OF WISCONSIN!!!

Community Shares of Wisconsin

Change the world in your own backyard by giving generously to Community Shares of Wisconsin during the fall workplace campaign. Community Shares of Wisconsin works with its donors and 40 member agencies, including **1000 Friends of Wisconsin's Land Use Institute** to address social, environmental and economic problems through grassroots activities, advocacy, research and public education.

Community Shares raises funds for its agencies through an employee payroll deduction campaign for private sector employers in the Madison area. Public sector employees can designate Community Shares and its member agencies through the Combined Campaign. If your employer already runs a Community Shares campaign — please remember to look for 1000 Friends! If your employer doesn't, and you would like to have this opportunity to give to 1000 Friends or any of the other fantastic organizations through the ease of payroll deduction, please call the Community Shares office at 608.256.1066.

The Community Shares of Wisconsin's workplace campaign is an easy and convenient way to change the world in our own backyard. For more information about Community Shares of Wisconsin, call 608.256.1066 or visit www.communityshares.com.

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