

2.0 Purpose

The Town of Excelsior Comprehensive Planning Committee, comprised of twenty-one area residents, took part in several efforts to identify issues and opportunities facing the Town of Excelsior. These issues and opportunities culminated in the Town's Vision as well as its goals, objectives and policies. These efforts included a community-wide survey, community visioning session, numerous press releases and media articles, focus group work, an intergovernmental forum, a formal consensus process to agree upon all goals, objectives and policies, including the Town's density policy, an open house to view the draft Comprehensive Plan and a public hearing on the final Comprehensive Plan. A more in depth description and summary of each activity with results are noted in this chapter. Specific background information regarding population, household and employment forecasts, demographic trends, age distribution, educational levels, and income levels and employment characteristics of the Town can be found under the respective chapters that follow in this Plan.

2.1 Community Survey

As part of the process, the Comprehensive Planning Committee developed and administered a community wide survey. The survey questions were developed to ascertain the opinions and perceptions of residents and landowners on the issues and opportunities in their Town. During the summer of 2006, 756 surveys were mailed all Excelsior landowners, on the tax roll, in the Town of Excelsior. Of the 756 surveys mailed 200, or 26.5%, were returned. This response rate is about the average for a survey of this nature, due to its length and the types of questions asked. A copy of the cover letter to the survey as well as a tally of responses is located in Appendix A. A summary of the more significant results of the survey can be noted as follows:

➤ Quality of Life

Defining and maintaining a high quality of life in Excelsior is the most important common denominator among all residents and visitors to Excelsior. Among respondents, 64% agreed that "the quality of life is excellent" and another 14% strongly agreed. A way to define quality of life is to find out why people choose to live where they do and, more importantly, why they choose to continue to live there. To better define quality of life, the survey asked participants to list their three most important reasons for living in Excelsior. The rural character of the town ranked first with about 25% of respondents noting the natural beauty and quiet, slower, country atmosphere. About 13% of respondents cited the proximity to or from other cities, notably Reedsburg, employment, convenient roads and the 90-94 Interstate. Sixteen percent of respondents noted family, friends, community and home as reasons for coming, and staying. Twelve percent of respondents noted economic reasons such as land prices and tax differences between larger cities and Excelsior. Other responses named a variety of reasons, among them recreational opportunities, good schools, and the clean air and water.

➤ Housing

Housing is an important part of how a community grows. The location of housing can impact a community's need for services, its aesthetics and overall community feel. Survey participants were asked to review aerial images to determine where and how rural housing could be built in the town. Overwhelmingly, almost 41% of respondents chose to locate new housing in rural subdivisions with the requirement that they maintain blocks of open space. Only 6.5 % expressed a preference for the conventional subdivision layout with little or no open space. Almost twenty percent of respondents preferred no new housing development and nearly 16% chose small clusters of homes surrounded by open space. Based on the responses in the survey, it appears as though most survey participants are

not categorically opposed to additional housing development so long as provisions are made to include open space areas.

➤ Agriculture Resources

The majority of respondents to the survey indicated that they would support varied forms of community-supported agriculture and value-added agriculture operations. Over 68% indicated they would support the direct sale of farm products. Almost 46% percent of respondents also indicated that they would support forms of agriculture tourism. Eighty percent of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that that the preservation of farmland is important, suggesting a strong commitment to sustaining agriculture operations in the Town.

➤ Economic Development

Agriculture and recreation represent the two primary forms of local economic activity in the Town of Excelsior, however alternative forms of economic development were considered in the survey? In terms of sustaining agriculture, survey respondents were asked if they felt there were adequate agriculture support and complementary services such as cooperatives, agronomists, implement dealers, haulers, etc., in northern Sauk County to keep agriculture viable in the Town. Of the total response from residents, many of whom are presumably not farmers, 47% either agreed or strongly agreed that there were adequate support services, while 39% had no opinion.

In terms of other economic opportunities, respondents were asked if they would support business development in areas adjoining the City of Reedsburg or the Villages of Rock Springs and North Freedom. Overall, 76 % of respondents agreed that both small businesses (10 or less full time employees) and large businesses (10 or more full time employees) should be permitted there. Sixty percent agreed on permitting either small or large businesses in rural areas. 19% of respondents indicated that they would not support either type of business in the rural area.

With respect to economic development and self-sustainability, the majority of residents supported the development of solar and wind energy. Over 84% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the development of these alternative energy sources. 50% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the development of ethanol plants, and 39% agreed or strongly agreed with methane production. 5% or less of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with wind and solar energy production, while about 24% and 22% disagreed or strongly disagreed with methane and ethanol production, respectively.

➤ Utilities and Community Resources

This category of the survey evaluated residents' satisfaction with services such as fire, garbage collection and library opportunities as well as energy needs and energy alternatives. Overall, services primarily received a 'good' rating. However, about 25% of respondents felt that both Internet and cable services were not adequate, and over 30% concluded that cell phone service was inadequate

Eighty-four percent of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that the preservation of cultural, historical, and community resources was important.

➤ Natural Resources

Survey participants were asked to rank the importance of protecting various natural resources in their community, ranging from general resources such as wetlands, woodlands, and forests to more specific resources such as scenic views, air quality and overall rural character. In almost every resource category over 80% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that protection is important, but they were somewhat less enthusiastic about the categories of shoreline, floodplains, and hillsides/steeep slopes. When asked if the Town should support programs that purchase conservation easements for open space and farmland preservation purposes, over 62% agreed while only 19% disagreed. At the same time, 39% of respondents indicated that it is acceptable to build houses on tillable land.

➤ Transportation

Survey participants were asked to consider both the adequacy and condition of transportation systems (primarily roads) within the Town. Eighty-seven percent of respondents indicated that they strongly agree or agree that the overall road network meets the needs of citizens, and 78% felt that road conditions were adequate for intended uses. When asked if there are any hazardous road conditions that need to be addressed, 29% of respondents indicated that there were none while 51% were unsure. In terms of multi-modal transportation, 51% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that biking routes should be maintained or improved.

➤ Land Use

The Land Use element recognizes the relationships between all of the other elements of a comprehensive plan and provides an opportunity to integrate their goals, objectives and policies. The Land Use element also addresses some of the larger issues in a community, and its study can yield specific direction to mitigate land use conflicts by posing consistent and equitable development standards and processes. To help identify the critical land use issues in the Town of Excelsior, the survey asked participants to rank their top three land use issues. Development vs. overdevelopment turned up as the primary issue, followed by natural resource protection. The continued care of water resources and agricultural activities tied for the third highest ranked land use issue.

Survey participants were asked questions related to Agricultural Zoning, lot size and housing density. When participants were asked what methods should be used to protect agricultural land, over 60% agreed or strongly agreed that regulation (such as zoning and subdivision ordinances) is appropriate. Almost 70% agreed or strongly agreed with using tax incentives (e.g. use-value taxation or the Managed Forest Law). Fifty-three percent agreed or strongly agreed that the Town's zoning density policy should be formalized (currently it is informally set at one residence per five acres by virtue of the current five-acre minimum lot size requirement). Fifty-five percent of participants were in favor of keeping the minimum lot size of five acres to build a new house, while 41% were opposed.

➤ General Opinions

In addition to specific questions asked of the survey participants, there were some more 'open-ended' questions. Among these, participants were asked what they want Excelsior to look like in 20 years. Overall, a large majority of respondents indicated that they wanted Excelsior to look the same as it does today, but planned for growth. One respondent claimed, "Similar to today with balanced growth...." Respondents expressed a variety of opinions, but there is a strong leaning toward keeping the Town looking like it does, with natural resources and farmland protected, limited housing clustered in pockets, with appropriately scaled and carefully located commercial growth.

2.2 Visioning Session

The Town held a Visioning Session Workshop on March 8, 2007. The purpose of the session was to involve residents and landowners in the Town of Excelsior to take part in defining what they believe Excelsior should be in the future. In total, 30 residents took part in the session.

The Vision Session was structured in such a way that participants had an opportunity to express their thoughts on the evolution of a future vision for Excelsior. Participants also had an opportunity to identify what they perceive to be the Town's Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOTs) as related to the future vision as well as the nine elements defined in the comprehensive planning legislation.

Some of the responses included:

- **Strengths:** Small community with a high quality of life, good farmland and natural beauty throughout a diverse landscape, near employment, little traffic on roads, low crime rate in the community.
- **Weaknesses:** City encroachment into the Township, poor internet and cellular telephone services, lack of road maintenance, the Town density policy, low tax base, continued growth of large scale quarry.
- **Opportunities:** Plan and manage growth to maintain the rural flavor of the Township, the use of conservation easements and purchase of development rights to protect land, allow development for an increased tax base, employment opportunities, outdoor recreation.
- **Threats:** Change in culture, excessive tourism, increase in population, bedroom community, lack of future job opportunities, loss of farmland and wildlife habitat to development, ground water and surface water pollution from agricultural runoff and the landfill leaching.

Equally important to identifying the Town's SWOTs, participants had the opportunity to develop key Vision Elements. To develop the key Vision Elements, participants were asked to consider the following questions:

- How should we build on our key strengths, or make sure they remain strengths?
- How can we minimize or overcome our key weaknesses?
- How can we take advantage of our key opportunities?
- How can we avoid or deal with our key threats?

Once the key Vision Elements were identified, participants were asked to rank their top Vision Elements. These top Vision Elements were then incorporated into the Town's overall Vision with an expanded description under each key Vision Element. The top Vision Elements are:

1. Conservation and Environmental Protection
2. Preserve Farmland and Agriculture Industry
3. Managed / Planned Growth / Thoughtful Land Use
4. Quality of Life
5. Economic Opportunity, Stability and Security
6. Efficient Government and Public Services

These Vision Elements were utilized to generate the *Plan's* goals and objectives. The following connections between the Town's *Comprehensive Plan* and the Vision Elements have been identified:

- Vision Elements = Components to be incorporated into the Town of Excelsior Vision (Vision Elements will become the Town's Vision).
- Vision Elements = the foundation for developing Goals.
- Goals = The foundation for developing Objectives (measurable progress toward achieving Goals).

The top two Vision Elements were to emphasize Conservation and Environmental Protection and to Preserve Farmland and Agriculture Industry. Facilitators led participants through an exercise to begin creating strategies, or policies to achieve these top two Vision Elements. This exercise represented the beginnings of policy development. The connection between Objectives and strategies or policy development is as follows:

- Objectives = The foundation of policy development.

Overall, utilizing public input, the Vision Session aimed to help create a Vision for the town as well as provide direction to the *Comprehensive Plan* Committee regarding the development of the *Plan's* Goals, Objectives and Policies. The results and process utilized for the Vision Session can be noted in Appendix B.

2.3 Press Releases/Media Coverage

The Town's planning process received media coverage beginning in March 2007, when the **Reedsburg Times Press** and the **Reedsburg Independent** both published press releases promoting the Town's upcoming Vision Session.

2.4 Open House/Intergovernmental Forum

On April 5, 2008 the Comprehensive Plan Committee conducted an open house and intergovernmental forum to present the draft Town of Excelsior Comprehensive Plan. Through oral discussion and submitted written comments, participants were given an opportunity to comment on the Committee's work and suggest changes. Approximately 50 Town residents attended the open house.

2.5 Formal Consensus Process to Establish Goals, Objectives and Policies

The planning committee utilized a formal consensus process to discuss and agree on all goals, objectives and policies, including the Town's density policy. The Committee chose this process over a vote of a majority for the following reasons:

- First, it was the intent of the comprehensive planning process to incorporate the views of all the community's citizens. These views have been expressed in three primary ways, including the community-wide survey, the vision session and the public meetings of the Comprehensive Plan Committee, which was charged with representing all views in the community.

- Second, the consensus process is based on the premise that it is better to involve as many persons affected by a decision as possible in the decision-making process. Consensus decisions better reflect the will of the entire group, not just the leadership or majority. Also, a community consensus affords those who are charged with implementing the plans more confidence in their work. Through its recognition of broad interests, the plan will stand the test of time.
- Finally, the consensus process required active cooperation, disciplined speaking and listening, and respect for the contributions of every Committee member, within a managed process that ensured everyone in the group with an opportunity to share opinions and ideas, and to fully explore proposals until preferred solutions emerged.

The definition of consensus utilized by the Town during this planning is as follows:

A consensus can only be achieved when a quorum of Committee members is present. A quorum consists of a simple majority of Committee members.

Consensus does not require unanimity, but rather the approval of 80% of members present, assuming there is a quorum.

2.6 Town of Excelsior Vision

Please see pullout on next page.