

New opportunities with Comprehensive Planning

Last spring the Governor signed the first major rewrite of land use planning laws in more than 30 years. The new regulations spell out nine required elements and set 2010 as a deadline for completing comprehensive plans. Transportation is one of the nine required elements.

"It's a local community by community decision what to include in the plan," says Rick Stadelman, Executive Director of the Wisconsin Towns Association. "There is no mandate to plan, per se. However, if a community doesn't have a comprehensive plan, it will have no authority to enforce land use activities and zoning regulations after 2010."

For most smaller communities, the road system is the transportation system. For the first time, however, they must coordinate it with land use plans.

"In the past plans primarily had a land use focus. They didn't plan transportation, utilities, sewer, water, or how it would affect the neighbors," says Stadelman. "They didn't start with *what*

is our vision of our communities?"

People looking to develop housing or expand businesses were often frustrated because plans were incomplete.

The new process also requires sharing plan information with neighboring communities. In the past that often hasn't been the case. Now, annexations, boundary issues, and extra-territorial powers have to be consistent with the comprehensive plan. "It will force cities and villages to plan for annexations and talk to towns before they get into these things," Stadelman says.

Plenty of help will be available. Regional Planning and Metropolitan Planning Commissions will be deeply involved, as will state agencies. WisDOT is developing a handbook for the transportation element. Most communities will work with consultants who are also gearing up to provide assistance.

The first round of state-funded planning grants will be announced in late winter. The application deadline was

November 15. Another grant cycle is anticipated for next year to help communities.

"I think it's important for people to realize that there's lots of help out there, and the process can be broken down into bite-sized pieces," says Phil Scherer, Executive Director of the Transportation Development Association and a former town chairman. "Also, the plans are not cast in stone. They're made to be reviewed. Folks should look at it as a continuing process."

Stadelman agrees. "A plan at maximum is good for 5-10 years, and then it has to be revisited. There's been a lot of planning done in recent years. People don't have to go back and recreate everything. What has been done recently is a basis for comprehensive planning."

To get communities started with Comprehensive Planning, the T.I.C. is cooperating with the UW Local Government Center to present an ETN program on Transportation Planning on Jan 18. See Calendar on page 7.

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