

Land Use

1. Overview

Land Use is probably the most important link to any comprehensive planning effort. Evaluating past and present land-use patterns will assist in identifying needed future land use acreage for residential, commercial, industrial, and other types of land uses. Also, sewer service areas, environmental limitations, proximity to existing uses, access to public services, future road improvements and extensions, farmland preservation areas, and other factors will affect how and where future development occurs.

Chapter Contents

1. Overview
2. Existing Land Use
3. Land Use
4. Subdivision Development

Land use in Winnebago County has evolved since the first settlers arrived, slowly at first, but more rapidly in recent years. The major communities in the County (Oshkosh, Neenah, Menasha, Omro and Winneconne) grew up in areas, not because it was the best place to develop environmentally, but rather because it was most convenient for the purpose of transportation and commerce. Therefore, settlements occurred in proximity to lakes, rivers, and railroad lines with little regard to locating development based on environmental constraints or compatibility with services and surrounding land uses.

Today, however, these factors play an important role in development decisions. Since the lakes, rivers, and railroads played an important role in the original location of settlement patterns in the County, primary development activity continues to occur in general proximity to these developed areas, as citizens rely on them for services, employment, shopping, and entertainment.

2. Existing Land Use

Agriculture has historically been, and still is, the predominant land use in Winnebago County (Table 8-1 and Maps 28-34). About 130,100 acres were in agricultural use in 2010, which represents nearly one-half of the county. Woods and other open lands accounted for more than 30 percent of the county.

Residential uses (single-family, multi-family, and mobile home parks) accounted less than 10 percent of the area. The other half of the developed acreage is attributed to a mix of uses including commercial, industrial, transportation (primarily roadway pavement), utilities/public facilities, and recreation/conservation.

Scattered residential uses dot the rural areas, and the more urbanized towns have higher density residential areas due to the proximity to nearby incorporated areas and access to public sewer systems. The Town of Menasha has more of a mixture of uses with residential subdivisions, mixed with distinctive areas for industrial and commercial activity.

Higher density residential areas are also evident along the shorelines of the various lakes in the County due to the desires of people to live and recreate on the water.

Existing Land Use Maps (in map series)

28. City of Appleton
29. City of Menasha
30. City of Neenah
31. City of Omro
32. City of Oshkosh
33. Village of Winneconne
34. Unincorporated Winnebago County

When the different areas of the county are evaluated using both the amount of land devoted to various uses and the population, a useful picture emerges especially when comparing the incorporated municipalities with the unincorporated areas (Table 8-1). The amount of land devoted to single family uses shows a pronounced difference in per capita values. The urban areas have higher densities, while the rural areas have lower densities. However, when looking at commercial land uses, there is little difference between urban areas (0.023 acres per capita) and rural areas (0.022 acres per capita). The same pattern is true for industrial uses.

Table 8-1. Land Use, Incorporated and Unincorporated Winnebago County: 2010

Land Use	Incorporated Areas [1]			Unincorporated Areas			Winnebago County		
	Acres	Percent of Total [2]	Acres per Capita	Acres	Percent of Total [2]	Acres per Capita	Acres	Percent of Total [2]	Acres per Capita
Single family residential	7,664	27.0	0.072	14,329	5.7	0.272	21,993	7.9	0.139
Farmsteads	36	0.1	0	4,593	1.8	0.087	4,629	1.7	0.029
Multi-family	1,026	3.6	0.010	254	0.1	0.005	1,280	0.5	0.008
Mobile home parks	97	0.3	0.001	108	0.0	0.002	205	0.1	0.001
Commercial	2,402	8.5	0.023	1,136	0.5	0.022	3,538	1.3	0.022
Industrial	1,802	6.4	0.017	1,102	0.4	0.021	2,904	1.0	0.018
Quarries	149	0.5	0.001	1,267	0.5	0.024	1,416	0.5	0.009
Institutional facilities	2,216	7.8	0.021	353	0.1	0.007	2,569	0.9	0.016
Transportation	5,481	19.3	0.052	11,878	4.8	0.225	17,359	6.2	0.109
Utilities/Communications	442	1.6	0.004	362	0.1	0.007	804	0.3	0.005
Non-irrigated cropland	1,711	6.0	0.016	128,190	51.3	2.432	129,901	46.7	0.818
Irrigated cropland	0	0.0	0	206	0.1	0.004	206	0.1	0.001
Open other land	2,875	10.1	0.027	55,636	22.3	1.056	58,511	21.0	0.369
Recreational facilities	1,825	6.4	0.017	2,065	0.8	0.039	3,890	1.4	0.025
Planted woodlands	11	0.0	0	2,351	0.9	0.045	2,362	0.8	0.015
General woodlands	610	2.2	0.006	26,054	10.4	0.494	26,664	9.6	0.168
Total	28,347	100	-	249,884	100	-	278,231	100	-

Source: East Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission

Notes:

1. Includes the Village of Winneconne and the cities of Appleton, Menasha, Neenah, Omro, and Oshkosh
2. Total may not equal 100 due to rounding

In terms of land area, the City of Oshkosh is the largest municipality (Table 8-2). Of the municipalities wholly located in Winnebago County, the Village of Winneconne is the smallest with 924 acres. Residential uses and transportation facilities account for most of the land area in each of the incorporated municipalities.

Table 8-2. Land Use (Acres), Incorporated Areas of Winnebago County: 2010

Land Use	City of Appleton [1,2]	City of Menasha [1,2]	City of Neenah	City of Omro	City of Oshkosh	Village of Winneconne	Total
Single family residential	18	1,041	2,034	379	3,889	303	7,664
Farmsteads	0	0	5	13	16	2	36
Multi-family	58	93	145	15	699	16	1,026
Mobile home parks	0	54	0	11	32	0	97
Commercial	74	202	449	62	1,588	27	2,402
Industrial	0	221	454	53	1,054	20	1,802
Quarries	0	16	4	6	123	0	149
Institutional facilities	3	156	284	59	1,647	67	2,216
Transportation	48	596	1,224	196	3,263	154	5,481
Utilities/Communications	0	39	10	11	376	6	442
Non-irrigated cropland	0	0	117	226	1,281	87	1,711
Irrigated cropland	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Open other land	37	154	691	312	1,546	135	2,875
Recreational facilities	1	147	305	96	1,214	62	1,825
Planted woodlands	0	0	0	11	0	0	11
General woodlands	19	148	160	78	160	45	610
Total	258	2,867	5,882	1,528	16,888	924	28,347

Source: East Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (ECWRPC)

Notes:

1. Municipality located in Winnebago County and another county
2. Data for Winnebago County only

3. Land Use Density

The type of existing land uses (residential, commercial, industrial, agricultural, and so on) and their geographic arrangements in the County are described in the previous sections. In this section, an evaluation on patterns of land use density provides another indicator on where the development activity is occurring in the county and what areas are experiencing more compact development than other areas.

Map 34 shows that land use density is highest in areas closest to the urban areas as well as along the various lakeshores and some of the roadways. Many of these areas have a density of one development (i.e., a house) on a parcel under 10 acres. Pockets of higher density development exist in the older rural communities of Fisk, Pickett, Waukau, Eureka, Winchester, and Larsen.

In addition, isolated pockets of higher density development are appearing in rural areas experiencing newer subdivision development on private sanitary systems, especially in the Town of Clayton. Lower density development on parcels more than 20 acres in size are typically found in agricultural areas and near environmentally sensitive areas.

4. Land Division Activity

The creation of new parcels is another benchmark for assessing land development activity over time. New parcels are created in two ways. The first way is by using a subdivision plat, which is required when five or more lots are created. As a general rule, lots in a subdivision are primarily created for residential purposes, particularly in the rural areas; lots in the more urban areas may be used for a mix of uses.

Map 35 shows subdivision activity dating back to 1847, and clearly illustrates the progression of development activity over time. Early development of the county shows up in the central parts of the cities, particularly Oshkosh, Neenah, and Menasha, as well as the unincorporated communities of Eureka and Waukau. Newer developments ring the older central city areas as development progressed outward. Subdivision activity over the last 20 years has been primarily located west and south of the Neenah-Menasha area and west of Oshkosh.

The second way parcels are created is with a certified survey map (CSM), which is used when fewer than five lots are created (as a general rule). CSMs have replaced the use of metes and bounds descriptions, which were used in the past to divide a larger parcel into a small number of lots.

An evaluation in the change in the number of parcels and the change in the average parcel size within each town are more specific indicators of development activity and increased density within the County. These recent trends are evaluated using parcel information from 1985, 2003, and 2014 (Table 8-3).

Table 8-3. Parcels, Unincorporated Areas of Winnebago County: 1985, 2003, and 2015

	1985	2003	2015	Percent Change 1985-2003	Percent Change 2003-2015
Algoma	1,933	3,208	3,316	66.0	3.4
Black Wolf	1,682	1,866	1,978	10.9	6.0
Clayton	1,760	2,715	2,944	54.3	8.4
Menasha	5,555	6,947	7,367	25.1	6.0
Neenah	1,646	1,933	2,102	17.4	8.7
Nekimi	1,157	1,330	1,391	15.0	4.6
Nepeuskun	944	1,101	1,192	16.6	8.3
Omro	1,442	1,863	2,080	29.2	11.6
Oshkosh	2,246	2,030	2,136	-9.6	5.2
Poygan	1,050	1,365	1,471	30.0	7.8
Rushford	1,546	1,857	1,855	20.1	-0.1
Utica	1,217	1,384	1,451	13.7	4.8
Vinland	1,306	1,659	1,730	27.0	4.3
Winchester	1,253	1,620	1,789	29.3	10.4
Winneconne	1,773	2,168	2,314	22.3	6.7
Wolf River	1,526	1,750	1,899	14.7	8.5
Total	28,036	34,796	37,015	24.1	6.4

Source: Winnebago County Tax Lister and GIS Department

Table 8-3 shows that there were 6,761 new parcels created in the unincorporated areas of the County between 1985 and 2003, an increase of 24 percent. The Town of Algoma had the highest rate of increase of new parcels with 66 percent, followed closely by the Town of Clayton with a 54 percent increase.

The Town of Oshkosh was the only Town experiencing a decline in parcels during that period, primarily due to annexation from the City of Oshkosh.

While the period from 1985 to 2003 saw a significant rise in the number of parcels being created, the period from 2003

to 2014 was significantly different. The number of parcels during that period followed the real estate market which dropped significantly with the national recession beginning in 2007.

As land divisions occur, the average parcel size naturally decreases as depicted in Map 37.

Table 8-4 shows that the average parcel size in unincorporated areas was 11.8 acres in 1985, 9.4 acres in 2003, and 6.77 acres in 2015. Between 1985 and 2003, the Town of Algoma witnessed the largest percentage change (55.6%).

In 2015, the Town of Menasha had the smallest average parcel size (0.90 acres), while the Town of Nepeuskun had the largest (18.21 acres).

The decreases in average parcel size seen in Clayton and other more rural towns indicate increased development activity, which may be reducing the ability of farmers to operate without conflict from non-agricultural uses, primarily residential.

Table 8-4. Average Parcel Size, Unincorporated Areas of Winnebago County: 1985, 2003, and 2015

	1985	2003	2015	Percent Change 1985-2003	Percent Change 2003-2014
Algoma	4.19	1.86	1.64	-55.6	-0.12
Black Wolf	6.1	5.37	5.39	-12.0	0
Clayton	13.2	8.52	8.50	-35.5	0
Menasha	1.41	1.03	0.90	-27.0	-0.13
Neenah	4.01	2.71	2.41	-32.4	-0.11
Nekimi	16.61	13.82	14.59	-16.8	0.06
Nepeuskun	20.97	18.03	18.21	-14.0	0.01
Omro	15.33	11.69	11.38	-23.7	-0.03
Oshkosh	4.47	3.40	2.98	-23.9	-0.12
Poygan	14.17	10.87	11.01	-23.3	0.01
Rushford	14.57	12.12	13.22	-16.8	0.09
Utica	18.86	16.54	17.00	-12.3	0.03
Vinland	14.17	11.11	11.70	-21.6	0.05
Winchester	18.3	14.09	14.16	-23.0	0
Winneconne	8.88	7.75	7.67	-12.7	-0.01
Wolf River	13.8	11.73	11.32	-15.0	-0.03
Winnebago County	11.82	9.40	6.77	-20.5	-0.28

Source: Winnebago County Tax Lister and GIS Department

In general, the smallest average parcel sizes correlate with areas of development activity, primarily in the sewer service areas (available public sewer systems) and along the lakeshores. Some pockets of smaller parcel sizes show up where rural subdivisions have sprung up outside of the sewer service areas. In addition, towns experiencing higher levels of development activity are shown to have greater rates of average parcel size decrease overtime.