

# **Town of Sterling 2045**

## **Comprehensive Plan DRAFT**

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## **Element Abbreviations**

IO	Issues and Opportunities
H	Population and Housing
T	Transportation
UCF	Utilities and Community Facilities
ANC	Agricultural, Natural, and Cultural Resources
ED	Economic Development
IC	Intergovernmental Cooperation
LU	Land Use
I	Implementation

# 1. Issues and Opportunities

## 1.1 Introduction

The Town of Sterling is defined by the people who live and work there, the houses and businesses, the parks and natural features, its past, its present, and its future. No matter the location, change is the one certainty that visits all places. No community is immune to its effects. How a community changes, how that change is perceived, and how change is managed are the subjects of community comprehensive planning. An understanding of both the town's history and its vision for the future is essential to making sound decisions. The foundation of comprehensive planning relies on a balance between the past, present, and future by addressing four fundamental questions:

1. Where is the community now?
2. How did the community get here?
3. Where does the community want to be in the future?
4. How does the community get to where it wants to be?

The *Town of Sterling Year 2045 Comprehensive Plan* will guide community decision making in the Town of Sterling for the next 20 years. The town's complete comprehensive plan is composed of two documents. This *Plan Recommendations Report* contains the results of the town's decision-making process as expressed by goals, objectives, policies, and recommendations. The *Condition and Trends Report* is the second component of the comprehensive plan and contains all of the background data for Polk County and the Town of Sterling. Both documents follow the same basic structure by addressing nine comprehensive planning elements in chapters one through nine:

1. Issues and Opportunities
2. Population and Housing
3. Transportation
4. Utilities and Community Facilities
5. Agricultural, Natural, and Cultural Resources
6. Economic Development
7. Intergovernmental Cooperation
8. Land Use
9. Implementation

The *Town of Sterling Year 2045 Comprehensive Plan* meets the requirements of Wisconsin's Comprehensive Planning law, Wisconsin Statutes 66.1001. This law requires all municipalities (counties, villages, towns, and villages) to adopt a comprehensive plan by the year 2010 if they wish to make certain land use decisions. After the year 2010, any municipality that regulates land use must make their zoning, land division, shoreland and floodplain zoning, and official mapping decisions in a manner that is consistent with the community's comprehensive plan.

The Town of Sterling developed this comprehensive plan in response to the issues it must address and the opportunities it wishes to pursue. The Issues and Opportunities element of the comprehensive plan provides perspective on the planning process, public participation, trends and forecasts, and the overall goals of the community. January 19, 2023, Town of Sterling signed a contract with Polk County to use the county's Comprehensive plan for 10 years. As soon as possible the Town of Sterling will complete their own Comprehensive Plan.

## **1.2 Plan Summary**

The Town of Sterling located in northwestern Polk County. It is situated North of the Town of Eureka and West of the Town of Laketown.

With a year-round population of about 724 and a low population density, the Town of Sterling can best be described as rural. As is typical in Polk County, the landscape is characterized mainly by its natural features including large tracts of wetlands and woodlands, and by its surface water. Residential development is primarily clustered around the town's woodland resources, with a scattering of development along the existing road network. The population is expected to remain steady.

Public participation during the planning process identified the town's primary concerns and areas to be addressed by its comprehensive plan. Top issues and opportunities as identified by the planning committee and town citizens include the protection of natural resources and rural character, the need for improved land use planning and managing rural development regulation, and pursuing opportunities for economic development.

### **1.3 Town of Sterling 2045 Vision**

The Town of Sterling planning committee developed a vision statement as a part of the comprehensive planning process. Based on the town's highest priority issues and opportunities, the group identified what they would like to change, create, or preserve for the future of their community. The vision statement then expresses which issues are the most important for the town to resolve and which opportunities are most important to pursue over the long term.

#### **Vision Statement**

The Town of Sterling's vision for the future is simple. Allow Town landowners and citizens the opportunity to do what they want with their property. To ensure that the above statement does not harm or impact the Town or other property owners negatively.

The Town of Sterling's vision for the future is further expressed in its goal statements for each of the comprehensive planning elements. The town's planning goals are broad statements of community values and public preferences for the long term (20 years or more). Implementation of this comprehensive plan will result in the achievement of these goals by the year 2045. For further detail on these goals, including related objectives, refer to the respective element of this comprehensive plan.

#### **Housing Goals**

- Goal 1:** Facilitate opportunities for an adequate housing supply that will meet the needs of the current and future residents to have access to a full range of housing choices for all income levels, age groups, and special needs.
- Goal 2:** To guide new housing development into areas that can be efficiently served in a fashion that does not impact scarce natural resources.

#### **Transportation Goals**

- Goal 1:** Provide for a safe, efficient, and environmentally sound transportation system which, through its location, capacity, and design, will effectively serve the existing land use development pattern and meet anticipated transportation demand generated by existing and planned land uses.
- Goal 2:** Promote cooperation and coordination between state, county, villages, and towns in developing the Town transportation system.

#### **Utilities and Community Facilities Goals**

- Goal 1:** Support the efficiency, quality and coordinated planning of town government, community facilities and services, and utilities.
- Goal 2:** Ensure proper disposal of wastewater to protect groundwater and surface water.

- Goal 3:** Ensure that roads, structures, and other improvements are reasonably protected from flooding.
- Goal 4:** Promote effective solid waste disposal and recycling services that protect the public health, natural environment, and general appearance of land use in the town.
- Goal 5:** Ensure the provision of reliable, efficient, and well-planned utilities to adequately serve existing and planned development.
- Goal 6:** Support access to quality health and child care facilities.
- Goal 7:** Ensure a level of police protection, fire protection, and emergency services that meet the needs of existing and planned future development patterns.
- Goal 8:** Promote quality schools and access to educational opportunities.

### **Agricultural, Natural, and Cultural Resources Goals**

#### **Agricultural Resources**

- Goal 1:** Maintain the viability, operational efficiency, and productivity of the Town's agricultural resources for current and future generations.
- Goal 2:** Balance the protection of farmland with the exercise of development rights.

#### **Natural Resources**

- Goal 1:** Encourage the efficient management of the Town's natural resources.
- Goal 2:** Protect and improve the quality and quantity of the Town's ground and surface water.
- Goal 3:** Preserve the natural and scenic qualities of lakes and shorelines in the Town.
- Goal 4:** Balance future development with the protection of natural resources.
- Goal 5:** Protect air quality.
- Goal 6:** Preserve and protect woodlands and forest resources for their economic, aesthetic, and environmental values.
- Goal 8:** Balance future needs for the extraction of mineral resources with potential adverse impacts on the Town.

#### **Cultural Resources**

- Goal 1:** Preserve the Northwood's character as defined by scenic beauty, a variety of landscapes, undeveloped lands, forest, water resources, wildlife, farms, rural and



small-town atmosphere, buildings integrated with the landscape, and enjoyment of these surroundings.

**Goal 2:** Preserve significant historical and cultural lands, sites, neighborhoods, and structures that contribute to community identity and character.

**Goal 3:** Encourage opportunities for youth in the town including youth-oriented activities and facilities and additional job opportunities and a scholarship program.

### **Economic Development Goals**

**Goal 1:** Maintain and enhance opportunities for agriculturally based industries dependent on rural lands and provide opportunity for compatible economic growth and development.

**Goal 2:** Attract, retain, and expand quality businesses and industries that will improve the employment and personal income base of the Town.

**Goal 3:** Help provide sufficient commercial and industrial land adjacent to public facilities and transportation services that are cost effective and environmentally compatible.

**Goal 4:** Support the organizational growth of economic development programs in the town and region.

**Goal 5:** Maintain the utility, communication, and transportation, infrastructure systems that promote economic development.

**Goal 6:** Maintain a quality workforce to strengthen existing businesses and maintain a high standard of living.

### **Intergovernmental Cooperation Goals**

**Goal 1:** Foster the growth of mutually beneficial intergovernmental relations between the town and other units of government and the county.

### **Land Use Goals**

**Goal 1:** Guide the efficient use of land through a unified vision of planned growth in recognition of resource limitations and town goals and objectives.

**Goal 2:** Plan for a desirable pattern of land use that contributes to the realization of the town's goals and objectives for the future.

### **Implementation Goals**

**Goal 1:** Promote consistent integration of the comprehensive plan policies and recommendations with the ordinances and implementation tools that affect the town.

**Goal 2:** Balance appropriate land use regulations and individual property rights with community interests and goals.

## **1.4 Comprehensive Plan Development Process and Public Participation**

The Wisconsin Comprehensive Planning legislation specifies that the governing body for a unit of government must prepare and adopt written procedures to foster public participation in the comprehensive planning process. This includes open discussion, communication programs, information services, and public meetings for which advance notice has been provided, in every stage of the preparation of a comprehensive plan. Public participation includes wide distribution of proposed drafts, plan alternatives, and proposed amendments of the comprehensive plan. Public participation includes opportunities for members of the public to send written comments on the plan to the applicable governing body, and a process for the governing body to respond. The Town of Sterling has adopted a *Public Participation and Education Plan* in order to comply with the requirements of Section 66.1001(4)(a) of the Wisconsin Statutes.

### **Plan Commission and Town Board Action**

On \_\_\_\_\_, the Town of Sterling Plan Commission discussed the draft comprehensive plan and passed resolution number \_\_\_\_\_ recommending approval of the plan to the Town Board. After completion of the public hearing, the Town of Sterling Town Board discussed and adopted the comprehensive plan by passing ordinance number \_\_\_\_\_ on \_\_\_\_\_.

### **Public Hearing**

On \_\_\_\_\_, a public hearing was held on the recommended *Town of Sterling Year 2045 Comprehensive Plan* at the town hall. The hearing was preceded by Class 1 notice and public comments were accepted for 30 days prior to the hearing. Verbal and written comments were taken into consideration by the Town Board before taking action to adopt the plan.

### **Distribution of Plan Documents**

Both the recommended draft and final plan documents were provided to adjacent and overlapping units of government, the local library, and the Wisconsin Department of Administration in accordance with the *Public Participation and Education Plan*.

## **1.5 Town of Sterling Issues and Opportunities**

The initial direction for the comprehensive planning process was set by identifying community issues and opportunities. Issues were defined as challenges, conflicts, or problems that a community is currently facing or is likely to face in the future. Opportunities were defined as the positive aspects of a community that residents are proud of and value in their community. These could either be current positive aspects of a community or have the potential to be created in the future.

## **1.6 Issues and Opportunities Policies and Recommendations**

Policies and recommendations build on goals and objectives by providing more focused responses to the issues that the town is concerned about. Policies and recommendations become primary tools the town can use in making land use decisions. Many of the policies and recommendations cross element boundaries and work together toward overall implementation strategies. Refer to Section 9.5 for an explanation of the strategies cited as sources for many of the policies and recommendations.

Policies identify the way in which activities are conducted in order to fulfill the goals and objectives. Policies that direct action using the word “shall” are advised to be mandatory and regulatory aspects of the implementation of the comprehensive plan. In contrast, those policies that direct action using the words “will” or “should” are advisory and intended to serve as a guide. “Will” statements are considered to be strong guidelines, while “should” statements are considered loose guidelines.

- IO 1. The Town shall conduct business related to land use decision making by utilizing an open public process and by considering its comprehensive plan.
- IO 2. Public participation shall continue to be encouraged for all aspects of Town governance.
- IO 3. Sustainable business practices should be considered and implemented where possible (being ‘sustainable’ defined as continuing as a viable unit of government focused on the demographic, natural resource, economic, and fiscal sustainability).
- IO 4. Innovative planning or related land use initiatives or ideas will be given full consideration while in Town development review.

## **2. Population and Housing**

### **2.1 Population and Housing Plan**

Population and housing are two key indicators that will help the Town of Sterling plan ahead for future growth and change. Because they are key indicators of potential future conditions, this element of the comprehensive plan provides a brief summary of population and housing data along with projections for the future. For further detail on population and housing in the Town of Sterling and Polk County, please refer to the *Condition and Trends Report*.

The Town of Sterling's plan for population and housing reflects its diverse landscape which includes aspects of both rural and shoreline-oriented, (mainly creeks and rivers) population and housing characteristics. Regardless of which landscape applies, the town's primary concern is to retain rural character as substantial rates of population and housing growth continue into the future. Due to its rural nature, the town anticipates that single family, owner-occupied homes will continue to dominate the housing stock. However, due to the availability of municipal sewers and close proximity to the Town of Cushing, it is expected that there will be opportunities for multi-family structures, mixed use development, and other forms of housing. The relative accessibility of medical services and urban amenities coupled with the town's rural character and natural amenities will continue to make Sterling an attractive location for a variety of housing types.

The town's plan for population and housing is focused on protecting agriculture and forestry, preserving natural resources and rural character, and promoting housing affordability as housing growth takes place. Top issues and opportunities identified during the planning process (refer to *Issues and Opportunities* element) related to housing include potential conflicts between agriculture and rural housing development, the amount of land required to build a house, and the lack of affordable housing. Therefore, opportunities for future housing growth will be provided by protecting the town's best agricultural and forest lands from high density development while allowing more development to take place in other areas of the town. Preventing land use conflicts between intensive agriculture operations and housing development is a primary concern. These issues are addressed in detail by other elements of this plan, and key implementation tools include the management of development density, the use of conservation land division design, and the use of site planning guidelines.

### **2.2 Population Characteristics Summary**

#### **2000 Census**

A significant amount of information, particularly with regard to population, housing, and economic development, was obtained from the U.S. Bureau of the Census. There are two methodologies for data collection employed by the Census, STF-1 (short form) and STF-3 (long form). STF-1 data were collected through a household by household census and represent responses from every household in the country. To get more detailed information, the U.S. Census Bureau also randomly distributes a long form questionnaire to one in six households throughout the nation. Tables that use these sample data are indicated as STF-3 data. It should

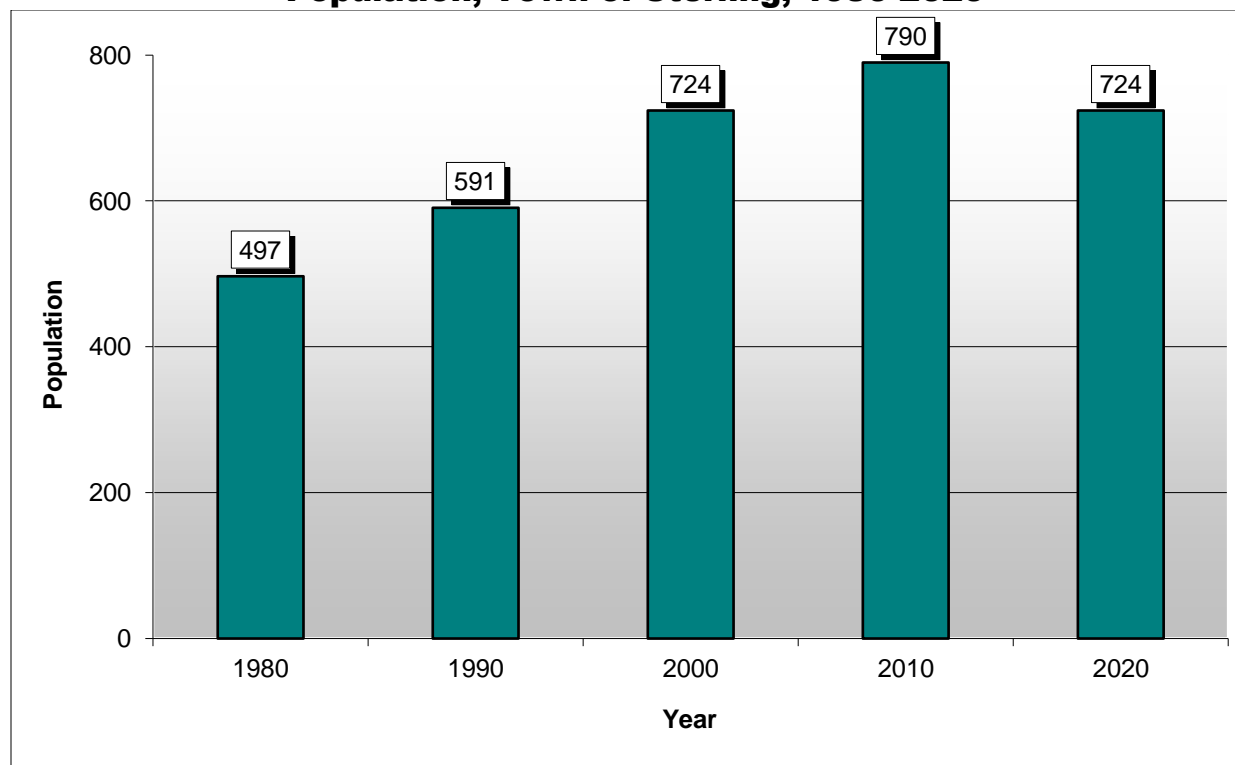
be noted that STF-1 and STF-3 data may differ for similar statistics, due to survey limitations, non-response, or other attributes unique to each form of data collection.

It should also be noted that some STF-3 based statistics represent estimates for a given population, and statistical estimation errors may be readily apparent in data for smaller populations. For example, the total number of housing units will be identical for both STF-1 statistics and STF-3 statistics when looking at the county as a whole – a larger population. However, the total number of housing units may be slightly different between STF-1 statistics and STF-3 statistics when looking at a single community within Polk County – a smaller population.

## Population Counts

Population counts provide information both for examining historic change and for anticipating future community trends. Figure 2-1 displays the population counts of the Town of Sterling for 1980 through 2020 according to the U.S. Census.

**Figure 2-1**  
**Population, Town of Sterling, 1980-2020**



Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1980 to 2020.

As displayed by Figure 2-1, the Town of Sterling has experienced a growing population over the 30 year period. Approximately 133 people were added to the population representing an increase of over 62% from 1980 to 2010. There was a decrease in population of 66 people from 2010 to 2020. While other Polk County communities had greater increases in total population, the Town of Sterling had a average growth rate.

Table 2-1 displays the population trends of Polk County, its municipalities, from 1980 to 2020 according to the U.S. Census.

**Table 2-1**  
**Population Counts, Polk County, 1980 - 2020**

	1980	1990	2000	2010	2020	% Change 1980 - 1990	% Change 1990 - 2000	% Change 2000 - 2010	% Change 2010-2020
Alden	1,862	2,133	2,615	2,786	2,918	14.6%	22.6%	6.5%	4.7%
Apple River	819	815	1,067	1,146	1,173	-0.5%	30.9%	7.4%	2.4%
Balsam Lake	960	1,067	1,384	1,411	1,416	11.1%	29.7%	2.0%	0.4%
Beaver	755	663	753	835	798	-12.2%	13.6%	10.9%	-4.4%
Black Brook	949	964	1,208	1,325	1,425	1.6%	25.3%	9.7%	7.5%
Bone Lake	466	503	710	717	686	7.9%	41.2%	1.0%	-4.3%
Clam Falls	614	596	547	596	554	-2.9%	-8.2%	9.0%	-7.0%
Clayton	789	780	912	975	958	-1.1%	16.9%	6.9%	-1.7%
Clear Lake	777	744	800	899	888	-4.2%	7.5%	12.4%	-1.2%
Eureka	1,135	1,201	1,338	1,649	1,737	5.8%	11.4%	23.2%	5.3%
Farmington	1,195	1,267	1,625	1,836	1,904	6.0%	28.3%	13.0%	3.7%
Garfield	1,010	1,107	1,443	1,692	1,744	9.6%	30.4%	17.3%	3.1%
Georgetown	746	780	1,004	977	1,036	4.6%	28.7%	-2.7%	6.0%
Johnstown	401	410	520	534	499	2.2%	26.8%	2.7%	-6.6%
Laketown	909	921	918	961	1,024	1.3%	-0.3%	4.7%	6.6%
Licolen	1,683	1,835	2,304	2,208	2,099	9.0%	25.6%	-4.2%	-4.9%
Lorain	280	299	238	284	308	6.8%	-20.4%	19.3%	8.5%
Luck	863	880	881	930	979	2.0%	0.1%	5.6%	5.3%
McKinley	337	327	328	347	340	-3.0%	0.3%	5.8%	-2.0%
Milltown	943	949	1,146	1,226	1,219	0.6%	20.8%	7.0%	-0.6%
Osceola	1,066	1,337	2,085	2,855	3,023	25.4%	55.9%	36.9%	5.9%
St Croix Falls	873	1,034	1,119	1,165	1,164	18.4%	8.2%	4.1%	-0.1%
Sterling	497	591	724	790	724	18.9%	22.5%	9.1%	-8.4%
<b>Polk County</b>	<b>19,929</b>	<b>21,203</b>	<b>25,669</b>	<b>28,144</b>	<b>28,616</b>	<b>6.4%</b>	<b>21.1%</b>	<b>9.6%</b>	<b>1.7%</b>

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1980 - 2020

## **2.3 Housing for All Income Levels**

The housing stock in rural Wisconsin communities typically has a high proportion of single-family homes, with few other housing types available. While a range of housing costs can be found in single-family homes, larger communities are generally relied upon to provide a greater variety of housing types and a larger range of costs. It is a benefit to a community to have a housing stock that matches the ability of residents to afford the associated costs. This is the fundamental issue when determining housing affordability and the ability to provide a variety of housing types for various income levels.

The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) defines housing affordability by comparing income levels to housing costs. According to HUD, housing is affordable when it costs no more than 30% of total household income. For renters, HUD defined housing costs include utilities paid by the tenant.

## **2.4 Housing for All Age Groups and Persons with Special Needs**

As the general population ages, affordability, security, accessibility, proximity to services, transportation, and medical facilities will all become increasingly important. Regardless of age, many of these issues are also important to those with disabilities or other special needs. As new residents move into the area and the population ages, other types of housing must be considered to meet all resident needs. This is particularly true in communities where a large proportion of the population includes long-time residents with a desire to remain in the area during their retirement years.

The Wisconsin Department of Administration has projected that a significant shift in Polk County's age structure will take place by 2035. More than 7,100 Polk County residents are expected to be age 65 and older by that time, growing from 21% of the 2005 estimated population to 38% of the projected 2035 population. As this shift in the age structure takes place, communities may find it necessary to further assess the availability of housing for all age groups and persons with special needs.

## **2.5 Promoting Availability of Land for Development/Redevelopment of Low-Income and Moderate-Income Housing**

Promoting the availability of underdeveloped or underused land is one way to meet the needs of low- and moderate-income individuals. One way to accomplish this is to plan for an adequate supply of land that will be zoned for housing at higher densities or for multi-family housing. Another option is to adopt housing policies requiring that a proportion of units in new housing developments or lots in new subdivisions meet a standard for affordability. Two elements of comprehensive planning are important in this equation. In the Housing element, a community can set its goals, objectives, and policies for affordable housing. In the Land Use element, a community can identify potential development and redevelopment areas.

The Town of Sterling will work with Polk County to maintain affordable housing.

## **2.6 Maintaining and Rehabilitating the Existing Housing Stock**

The maintenance and rehabilitation of the existing housing stock within the community is one of the most effective ways to ensure safe and generally affordable housing without sacrificing land to new development. To manage housing stock maintenance and rehabilitation, a community can monitor characteristics including, price, aesthetics, safety, cleanliness, and overall suitability with community character. The goal of ongoing monitoring is to preserve the quality of the current housing supply with the hope of reducing the need for new development, which has far greater impacts on community resources.

## **2.7 Population and Housing Goals and Objectives**

Community goals are broad, value-based statements expressing public preferences for the long term (20 years or more). They specifically address key issues, opportunities, and problems that affect the community. Objectives are more specific than goals and are more measurable statements usually attainable through direct action and implementation of plan recommendations. The accomplishment of objectives contributes to fulfillment of the goal.

***Goal 1: Facilitate opportunities for an adequate housing supply that will meet the needs of the current and future residents to have access to a full range of housing choices for all income levels, age groups and special needs.***

### ***Objectives:***

- A. Assist in planning for increasing housing opportunities for households with special needs including group homes and institutional housing.
- B. Support public and private actions which provide housing choices for town residents.
- C. Ensure that town residents have equal access (antidiscrimination) to housing.
- D. Encourage innovative housing design for efficient, low cost, high density housing where appropriate.
- E. Encourage residential development that provides a balance of low-income, moderate-income, and high-income housing.
- F. Coordinate with the county to plan for the aging population's housing needs.

***Goal 2: To guide new housing development into areas that can be efficiently served in a fashion that does not impact scarce natural resources.***

### ***Objectives:***

- A. Support opportunities for multi-family, group housing. And other high-density residential development in existing neighborhoods with established sewer and water services within Polk County's villages.
- B. Direct residential development to planned growth areas.



## **2.8 Population and Housing Policies and Recommendations**

Policies and recommendations build on goals and objectives by providing more focused responses to the issues that the town is concerned about. Policies and recommendations become primary tools the town can use in making land use decisions. Many of the policies and recommendations cross element boundaries and work together toward overall implementation strategies. Refer to Section 9.5 for an explanation of the strategies cited as sources for many of the policies and recommendations.

Policies identify the way in which activities are conducted in order to fulfill the goals and objectives. Policies that direct action using the word “shall” are advised to be mandatory and regulatory aspects of the implementation of the comprehensive plan. In contrast, those policies that direct action using the words “will” or “should” are advisory and intended to serve as a guide. “Will” statements are considered to be strong guidelines, while “should” statements are considered loose guidelines.

Recommendations are specific actions or projects that the town should be prepared to complete. The completion of these actions and projects is consistent with the town’s policies, and therefore will help the town fulfill the comprehensive plan goals and objectives.

- H1. New housing should be developed at a low density and located in a manner that preserves the rural character of the town.
- H2. Siting and construction of new housing shall be consistent with the purpose, intent, and preferred density established in the applicable Land Use Management Areas and meet the applicable review criteria established by other planning element policies.
- H3. The Town should consider allowing for flexible site design (e.g., lot size) and allow clustering of building sites provided proposals are consistent with other provisions of the comprehensive plan.
- H4. Siting new development within rural areas should be complimentary to the landscape with the intent to reduce impacts to natural vegetation, preserve quality farmland, and reduce woodland fragmentation.
- H5. Support the county’s efforts to review and update the county zoning and land division ordinances to assist with the implementation of the Town plan and local plan policies where applicable.
- H6. Any multi-family residential development that abuts established low-density residential areas should be very carefully designed to minimize potential negative impacts on existing homes.
- H7. Housing ordinances, policies, standards and ideals shall be made available to new homeowners to ensure their knowledge of local housing regulations.

- H8. An Condition of historically significant buildings should be maintained throughout the planning period to ensure that these sites are accurately identified and to promote and target preservation and/or rehabilitation efforts if warranted.

## **2.9 Population and Housing Programs**

For descriptions of housing programs potentially available to the community, refer to the *Population and Housing* element of the *Polk County Condition and Trends Report*.

## **3. Transportation**

### **3.1 Transportation Plan**

The land use patterns of the Town of Sterling, Polk County, and the surrounding region are tied together by the transportation system, including roadways and trails. Households, businesses, farms, industries, schools, government, and many others all rely on a dependable transportation system to function and to provide linkages to areas beyond their immediate locations. The Town of Sterling's transportation network plays a major role in the efficiency, safety, and overall desirability of the area as a place to live and work.

With the amount of population and housing growth that is expected over the next 20 years, the Town of Sterling should also anticipate change to its transportation system. The town's plan for transportation is to be prepared for potential development proposals, to ensure that future expansion of the town's road system is cost-effective, to preserve the mobility and connectivity of local roads, to improve opportunities for pedestrian and bicycle routes, and to ensure that developed properties have safe emergency vehicle access. In order to achieve this, the town should revisit the existing driveway ordinance, coordinate with the county to review all land divisions for access and layout considerations, plan for road improvements, and continue to maintain a set of town road construction specifications. The policies and recommendations of this plan provide guidance on how these tools should be used.

As the town implements its plan, a key dilemma will be balancing the rural character and mobility of existing roads with the maximum use of existing road infrastructure. On one hand, existing roads are already present, new roads are costly, and new development can be more cost effective if it utilizes existing roads. On the other hand, extensive placement of new development in highly visible locations along existing roads will forever change the character and appearance of the town. This may lead to a loss of rural character. Adding access points to serve new development also reduces the mobility of a road. However, this plan also encourages new subdivisions to utilize conservation design which will usually require the construction of new roads, but does a better job of preserving rural character.

In order to balance these competing interests, the town will require the coordinated planning of adjacent development sites by limiting the use of cul-de-sacs and by reviewing Area Development Plans. Over the long term, the town may also develop an official map to preserve planned rights-of-way and connections between developed areas. The town should require that potential traffic and road damage impacts are assessed by developers as part of the development application. When new roads are necessary, the town will require that developers bear the cost of constructing new roads to town standards before they are accepted by the town.

### **3.2 Planned Transportation Improvements**

It is a recommendation of this plan that a five-year road improvement plan be annually updated in the future. Future road improvement plans should attempt to provide integration with the plan for preferred land use. Areas planned for higher density residential growth should receive priority for improvements in order to support such growth. Road improvements that are

necessary in areas where agriculture, forestry, and outdoor recreational are planned as primary uses should be accompanied by zoning regulations, access controls, and other growth management tools.

### **3.3 Comparison with County, State, and Regional Transportation Plans**

State, regional, and county transportation plans have been reviewed for their applicability to the Town of Sterling. No planned state transportation improvement plans directly impact the town.

The Town of Sterling has the following recommendations with regard to the current functional classification of highways in the town. Several roads currently classified as local roads should be considered as potential collectors due to increased traffic, growth and development, and connections provided between other major routes or important destinations. Examples of a potential collector road is River Road and Evergreen.

### **3.4 Transportation Goals and Objectives**

Community goals are broad, value-based statements expressing public preferences for the long term (20 years or more). They specifically address key issues, opportunities, and problems that affect the community. Objectives are more specific than goals and are more measurable statements usually attainable through direct action and implementation of plan recommendations. The accomplishment of objectives contributes to fulfillment of the goal.

***Goal 1: Provide for a safe, efficient, and environmentally sound transportation system which, development pattern and meet anticipated transportation demand generated by existing and planned land uses.***

#### ***Objectives:***

- A. Protect historic, scenic, scientific, and cultural sites when constructing new or improving existing transportation facilities.
- B. Minimize the disruption of environmentally sensitive areas when constructing new or improving existing transportation facilities.
- C. Design transportation facilities to be sensitive to the landscape, including such amenities as buffers and minimizing unsightly views such as junkyards, billboards, and strip commercial development in rural areas.
- D. Manage right-of-way vegetation to protect wildlife, appropriate use of herbicides, reduce maintenance costs, and improve safety.
- E. Reduce accident exposure by improving deficient roadways.
- F. Manage driveway access location and design to ensure traffic safety, provide adequate emergency vehicle access, and prevent damage to roadways and ditches.
- G. Require developers to bear the costs for the improvement or construction of roads needed to serve new development.
- H. Guide new growth to existing road systems so that new development does not financially burden the town or make inefficient use of tax dollars.
- I. Monitor the effectiveness of existing, and opportunities for new, shared service agreements for providing town and local road maintenance.

***Goal 2: Promote cooperation and coordination between state, county, villages, and towns in developing the Town transportation system.***

***Objectives:***

- A. Encourage communication between communities regarding transportation projects that cross municipal boundaries.
- B. Promote a coordinated transportation system consisting of trails, roads, and highways.
- C. Participate in transportation planning at the regional level with Northwest Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission, the Wisconsin Department of Transportation, and Polk County Highway Department.
- D. Communicate with community groups on transportation systems to assist communities in prioritization and funding of projects.
- E. Direct future residential, commercial, and industrial development to roadways capable of accommodating resulting traffic.
- F. Direct truck traffic to appropriate routes and plan cooperatively with neighboring communities.

### **3.5 Transportation Policies and Recommendations**

Policies and recommendations build on goals and objectives by providing more focused responses to the issues that the town is concerned about. Policies and recommendations become primary tools the town can use in making land use decisions. Many of the policies and recommendations cross element boundaries and work together toward overall implementation strategies.

Policies identify the way in which activities are conducted in order to fulfill the goals and objectives. Policies that direct action using the word “shall” are advised to be mandatory and regulatory aspects of the implementation of the comprehensive plan. In contrast, those policies that direct action using the words “will” or “should” are advisory and intended to serve as a guide. “Will” statements are considered to be strong guidelines, while “should” statements are considered loose guidelines.

Recommendations are specific actions or projects that the town should be prepared to complete. The completion of these actions and projects is consistent with the town’s policies, and therefore will help the town fulfill the comprehensive plan goals and objectives.

- T1. Roads that provide access to multiple improved properties shall be built to town standards as a condition of approval for new development.
- T2. A five-year road improvement plan shall be maintained and annually updated to identify and prioritize road improvement projects as well as identify potential funding sources.
- T3. The PASER (Pavement Service and Evaluation Rating System) shall be utilized to annually update the 5-year Road improvement Program.

- T4. The existing road network and public facilities and services will be utilized to accommodate new development to the maximum extent possible.
- T5. Developers shall bear the costs for improvements and extensions to the transportation network.
- T6. Adopt town road construction specifications to include modern requirements for road base, surfacing, and drainage construction. Construction specifications should be adjustable based on the planned functional classification or expected traffic flow of a roadway.
- T7. Create a town road Access Control (driveway) Ordinance to assist towns with implementing access control and emergency vehicle access standards.
- T8. The development of new or improved access points to local roads should meet town standards found in the Driveway Ordinance.
- T9. Support the modification of the county land division ordinance to support local requirements for the execution of a development agreement whenever public roads or other infrastructure is included in a development.
- T10. Actively pursue available funding, especially federal and state sources, for needed transportation facilities. Funding for multimodal facilities should be emphasized where appropriate.
- T11. Proper ditch location, grading practices and shape will be pursued to ensure runoff is adequately given an outlet.
- T12. Residential subdivisions and non-residential development proposals shall be designed to include:
- a) A safe and efficient system of internal circulation for vehicles and pedestrians;
  - b) Trails or sidewalks where applicable;
  - c) Bicycle routes where appropriate;
  - d) Safe and efficient external collector roads where appropriate;
  - e) Safe and efficient connections to arterial roads and highways where applicable;
  - f) Connectivity of the road network with adjacent developments (where practical and desirable);
  - g) Cul-de-sacs or dead-ends, only where connections to other roads are not possible, or temporarily where the right-of-way has been developed to the edge of the property for a future connection to adjacent development.
- T13. Working with the county, develop a consistent approach for the posting of seasonal and permanent weight limits, especially with respect to the conduct of agricultural and forestry operations.
- a) Where road weight limits are posted, access to agricultural and forest lands should be allowed for the conduct of all normal and necessary farming and forestry operations. This can be achieved through the use of Class B weight limits or

through the issuance of exemption permits. Note: No vehicle is automatically exempt from posted weight limits. Exemptions only occur through the issuance of exemption permits or through the use of Class B weight limits.

- T14. Transportation related issues which have effects in neighboring areas should be jointly discussed and evaluated with that neighbor, the county, and the Wisconsin Department of Transportation if necessary.
- T15. Substantial and major development proposals shall provide the Town with an analysis of the potential transportation impacts including, but not necessarily limited to, potential road damage and potential traffic impacts. The depth of analysis required by the Town will be appropriate for the intensity of the proposed development.

### **3.6 Transportation Programs**

For descriptions of transportation programs potentially available to the community, refer to the *Transportation* element of the *Polk County Condition and Trends Report*. The additional programs shown here are of high importance to the Town of Sterling and should be monitored for their applicability to local transportation issues and opportunities.

#### **Additional Programs**

##### Local Roads Improvement Program

Established in 1991, the Local Roads Improvement Program (LRIP) assists local governments in improving seriously deteriorating county highways, town roads, and Village and village streets. A reimbursement program, LRIP pays up to 50% of total eligible costs with local governments providing the balance. In order to be eligible for LRIP funds, a unit of government must have a current road improvement plan.

##### Local Bridge Improvement Assistance Program

The Local Bridge Improvement Assistance program helps rehabilitate and replace, on a cost-shared basis, the most seriously deficient existing local bridges on Wisconsin's local highway systems. Counties, villages, villages, and towns are eligible for rehabilitation funding on bridges with sufficiency ratings less than 80, and replacement funding on bridges with sufficiency ratings less than 50.

##### Pavement Surface Evaluation and Rating (PASER)

PASER is a simple method of rating asphalt and concrete roads on a scale of 1 to 10 and gravel roads on a scale of 1 to 5, based on visual inspection. PASER manuals and a video explain how and why roads deteriorate, and describe proper repair and replacement techniques. PASER rating can be put into PASERWARE, an easy to use pavement management software package. PASERWARE helps to Condition roads and keep track of their PASER ratings and maintenance histories. It also helps to prioritize road maintenance and improvement needs, calculate project costs, evaluate the consequences of alternative budgets and project selection strategies, and communicate those consequences to the public and local officials.

Both PASER and PASERWARE are available from the University of Wisconsin's Transportation Information Center at no charge. The Center also offers free training courses.



## 4. Utilities and Community Facilities

### 4.1 Utilities and Community Facilities Plan

Efficient provision of high quality community facilities and services impacts property values, taxes, and economic opportunities, and contributes to the quality of life in the Town of Sterling. Local features such as parks, schools, utilities, and protective services help define a community. These facilities and services require substantial investment as supported by the local tax base, user fees, and impact fees. As a result, their availability is determined both by public demand for those facilities and services, and by a community's ability to pay for them. Therefore, potential impacts on the cost and quality of utilities and community facilities need to be considered when making decisions concerning the future conservation and development of the Town of Sterling.

For further detail on existing utilities and community facilities in the Town of Sterling and Polk County, please refer to the *Condition and Trends Report*.

With the amount of population and housing growth that is expected over the next 20 years, the Town of Sterling should also anticipate the need to maintain and expand utilities, community facilities, and services. Top issues and opportunities identified during the planning process (refer to the *Issues and Opportunities* element) include the cost of community service and facility improvements and the related tax impacts, the need for additional law enforcement, and the need for improved facilities at public boat landings. The town's vision statement (also refer to the *Issues and Opportunities* element) contemplates the need for improved town administration and professional services. Overall, the town's plan for utilities and community facilities is to monitor changing needs, to be prepared for proposed development, and to make planned improvements as growth warrants the need.

The Town of Sterling understands that government policies and procedures will continue to stress the board's resources. The administrative duties of running the Town will be addressed.

One of the biggest challenges that the town is likely to face with regard to utilities and community facilities is the impact of growth on the cost of providing such services. Research by UW-Extension, the American Farmland Trust, and others has shown that not all new development pays for itself. In other words, the cost of the increased demand on public services and facilities resulting from new development often exceeds the revenue generated in new taxes and fees paid. This seems to be true of residential development in particular. As a result, this plan recommends that substantial new developments provide an analysis of the cost of providing community services as part of the development review process.

The actual pattern of growth on the landscape can also impact the cost and efficiency of delivering services. In general, dispersed development is more costly to service than clustered or concentrated development. This plan recommends that the town carefully manage growth in order to minimize the demand for increased services and facilities and encourages the use of cluster or conservation design in order to avoid a dispersed development pattern policies

## **4.1 Planned Utility and Community Facility Improvements**

1. Comprehensive planning includes identifying the need for expansion, construction, or rehabilitation of utilities and community facilities. In addition to infrastructure needs, there are also service level needs that may arise in the community. For example, additional police service, or additional park and recreation services may become necessary.

The Town of Sterling has determined that the following utilities, facilities, and services will need expansion, construction, rehabilitation, or other improvement over the planning period. Projects are identified as short-term (1-5 years) and long-term (6-20 years).

### **Police Services**

The Town of Sterling currently has Polk County service all police protection and will continue with this partnership. The Town will look into a citation officer to help enforce Town ordinances.

### **Fire Protection and EMT/Rescue Services**

The Town of Sterling is served by the Cushing Fire Dept, which provides fire protection, and also participates with the county in providing emergency medical services, rescue services, and ambulance services. The Town will continue with these two services.

### **Schools**

The St. Croix Falls School District serves residents in the Town of Sterling and includes St. Croix Falls Elementary, St. Croix Falls Middle School, and St. Croix Falls High School.

### **Libraries, Cemeteries, and Other Quasi-Public Facilities**

The Town of Sterling encourages the use of the St. Croix Falls Public Library.

The Town of Sterling supports the maintenance of the Old Settlers cemetery on Evergreen Ave.

### **Parks and Recreation**

The Town of Sterling supports the responsible recreation and use of parks.

### **Solid Waste and Recycling**

There are no licensed solid waste landfills in Polk County. The county currently served by three approved solid waste haulers:

Waterman Sanitation  
Waste Management  
Republic Services

Polk county manages recycling through a primary location on Hwy. 8 in St. Croix Falls and recycling drop off bins in each town. The village of Cushing bin is located on Co. Rd. N just east of the village at the Cushing Cooperative site.

### **Communication and Power Facilities**

No short term or long term recommendations have been identified. Existing communication and power facilities are anticipated to be adequate to meet the needs of the town over the planning period.

### **Sanitary Sewer Service / Private On-Site Wastewater Treatment Systems (POWTS)**

The Wisconsin Department of Commerce (COMM) regulates the siting, design, installation and inspection of most private on-site sewage systems in the state. In 2000, the state adopted a revised private system policy called COMM 83. The revised policy allows for conventional sewage systems and advanced pre-treatment sewage systems. There are several types of on-site disposal system designs authorized for use today: conventional (underground), mound, pressure distribution, at-grade holding tank, and sand filter systems. Sanitary permits are required under state law. To obtain a permit, one must contact a Wisconsin-licensed master plumber who will complete the necessary forms and obtain the sanitary permit. The plumber is also responsible for installing the private sewage system. Under COMM 83, Wisconsin counties can further regulate private on-site waste disposal systems through a sanitary code. Polk County has adopted the Polk County Private Sewage System Ordinance which is enforced through the County Zoning Administrator. The Wisconsin Fund administered by the Wisconsin Department of Commerce provides funding assistance to eligible landowners for the replacement or rehabilitation of failing private on-site wastewater treatment systems.

Refer to page 135 of the Polk County *Condition and Trends Report* for information on private on-site wastewater treatment systems (POWTS) in Polk County.

### **Stormwater Management**

Stormwater Management Stormwater management is important in order to reduce or prevent soil erosion, mitigate flooding, and limit run-off of pollutants, nutrients, and sediment to water bodies. Communities approach stormwater management in a wide variety of ways and solutions are often site specific. For most of Polk County, as well as for most rural areas in the state, stormwater facilities are limited to ditches along roadways, combined with culverts under roads and drives. Many farmers also use drainage tile in their fields to drain stormwater in low areas. More developed areas, villages, and cities have a varying range of ditches, storm water retention areas, curb and gutter, and storm sewer. Most systems in both urban and rural settings use a combination of engineered stormwater solutions and natural approaches which take advantage of existing swales, creeks, ponds, or other potential storage areas.

Refer to page 137 of the Polk County Condition and Trends Report for further information on storm water management,

### **Health Care and Child Care Facilities**

Health Care and Child Care Facilities for residents in the Town of Sterling are available in numerous surrounding communities.

### **Local Roads and Bridges**

Refer to the *Transportation* element of this plan and the *Transportation* element of the *Condition and Trends Report* for information on roads and bridges in Polk County.

The Town of Sterling currently uses an annual road improvement plan. The Town uses state funding programs as available.

## **4.2 Utilities and Community Facilities Goals and Objectives**

Community goals are broad, value-based statements expressing public preferences for the long term (20 years or more). They specifically address key issues, opportunities, and problems that affect the community. Objectives are more specific than goals and are more measurable statements usually attainable through direct action and implementation of plan recommendations. The accomplishment of objectives contributes to fulfillment of the goal.

***Goal 1: Support the efficiency, quality and coordinated planning of town government, community facilities and services, and utilities.***

***Objectives:***

- A. Improve the efficiency of both town service delivery, and town facilities operation. While striving to meet public expectations with respect to both service levels and costs.
- B. Consider the impacts of development proposals on the cost and quality of town and community facilities and services.
- C. Guide intensive development to area where appropriate utilities, community facilities, and public services are available.
- D. Determine the need for new, expanded, or rehabilitated services and town government facilities.
- E. Maintain an adequate level of properly trained town staff and volunteers.
- F. Explore opportunities to provide or improve town facilities, equipment, and services cooperatively with other unites of government.
- G. Encourage increased coordination between community facilities and utilities planning and planning for other elements such as land use, transportation, natural resources and cultural resources.

***Goal 2: Ensure proper disposal of wastewater to protect ground water and surface water.***

***Objectives:***

- A. Assess the potential to groundwater when reviewing a proposed development that will rely on private onsite wastewater treatment systems.
- B. Work cooperatively with providers of public wastewater treatment when reviewing a proposed development that will rely on public sewer service.
- C. Encourage the use of alternative wastewater treatment options (i.e., new technologies group sanitary systems, public sewer, etc.) where appropriate.

***Goal 3: Ensure that roads, structures, and other improvements are reasonably protected from flooding.***

***Objectives:***

- A. Support the preservation of environmental features that minimize flooding such as wetlands and floodplains.
- B. Consider the potential impacts of development proposals on the adequacy of existing and proposed stormwater management features including stormwater storage areas, culverts, ditches and, bridges.

- C. Prevent increased runoff from new developments to reduce potential flooding and flood damage.
- D. Encourage the use of stormwater management practices to abate non-point source pollution and address water quality.

***Goal 4: Promote effective solid waste disposal and recycling services that protect the public health, natural environment, and general appearance of land use in the town.***

***Objectives:***

- A. Support public involvement in decisions involving the type, location, and extent of disposal facilities and services provided in the town.
- B. Continually evaluate town provisions for solid waste, hazardous waste, and recycling services and opportunities for greater cooperation or cost-effectiveness.
- C. Require substantial development proposals to adequately address solid waste disposal and recycling needs.

***Goal 5: Ensure the provision of reliable, efficient, and well-planned utilities to adequately serve existing and planned development.***

***Objectives:***

- A. Cooperate in the planning and coordination of utilities with other agencies and units of government where possible.
- B. Minimize conflicts between land uses and balance desired service levels with potential negative impacts to the environment, community character, and planned growth areas when reviewing the proposed design and location of telecommunication, wind energy, or other utility towers.
- C. Encourage development of alternative and renewable energy sources.

***Goal 6: Support access to quality health and child care facilities.***

***Objectives:***

- A. Carefully consider requests for the development of properly located and operated health care and child facilities.
- B. Support school districts and community organizations in their sponsorship of child care programs and early development programs.
- C. Support improved transportation options to and from regional health care facilities.

***Goal 7: Ensure a level of police protection, fire protection, and emergency services that meets the needs of existing and planned future development patterns.***

***Objectives:***

- A. Support an adequate level of police protection, law enforcement, and emergency response through Sheriff and Emergency Management programs.
- B. Support the provision of fire protection and emergency services through local fire departments, ambulance services, and first responders.
- C. Encourage the continued use of police, fire, and emergency medical service mutual aid and cooperative agreements.

- D. Support the formation of community watch programs in the town.
- E. Promote continued long range planning with local emergency services organizations.

**Goal 8: *Promote quality schools and access to educational opportunities.***

***Objectives:***

- A. Coordinate planning efforts with the school districts that serve the town in order to allow them to anticipate future growth and demographic changes.
- B. Support school districts, technical colleges, University of Wisconsin Extension, and community libraries in their efforts to increase community education.

**4.3 Utilities and Community Facilities Policies and Recommendations**

Policies and recommendations build on goals and objectives by providing more focused responses to the issues that the town is concerned about. Policies and recommendations become primary tools the town can use in making land use decisions. Many of the policies and recommendations cross element boundaries and work together toward overall implementation strategies. Refer to Section 9.5 for an explanation of the strategies cited as sources for many of the policies and recommendations.

Policies identify the way in which activities are conducted in order to fulfill the goals and objectives. Policies that direct action using the word “shall” are advised to be mandatory and regulatory aspects of the implementation of the comprehensive plan. In contrast, those policies that direct action using the words “will” or “should” are advisory and intended to serve as a guide. “Will” statements are considered to be strong guidelines, while “should” statements are considered loose guidelines.

Recommendations are specific actions or projects that the town should be prepared to complete. The completion of these actions and projects is consistent with the town’s policies, and therefore will help the town fulfill the comprehensive plan goals and objectives.

- UCF1. Capital expenditures for the major expansion or rehabilitation of existing facilities or services shall be supported by an approved Capital Improvement Plan. Capital expenditures for the establishment of new facilities or services shall be handled on a case-by-case basis.
- UCF2. Continue to bi-annually update a detailed capital improvement plan that includes transportation, public facility, and other capital needs. The plan should prioritize short-term and long-term needs, include equipment needs, identify potential funding sources, and discuss contingency plans in the event that funds are not available.
- UCF3. Substantial development proposals shall provide an assessment of potential impacts to the cost of providing Town facilities and services. The depth of analysis required by the Town will be appropriate for the intensity of the proposed development.

- UCF4. Planned utilities, service facilities and roads shall be designed to limit the impact to environmental corridors, natural features and working lands (farmland and woodlands).
- UCF5. A proportional share of the cost of improvement, extension, or construction of public facilities shall be borne by those whose land development and redevelopment actions that made such improvement, extension, or construction necessary.
- UCF6. New utility systems should be required to locate in existing rights-of-way whenever possible.
- UCF7. Telecommunication and other utility towers should be designed to be as visually unobtrusive as possible, support multi-use and reuse, and be safe to adjacent properties.
- UCF8. The Town shall encourage the shared development of all public capital facilities including community facilities such as parks, libraries, schools and community meeting facilities.
- UCF9. The Town shall consider intergovernmental and other cooperative options before establishing, expanding, or rehabilitating community facilities, utilities, or services.
- UCF10. All Town buildings shall meet ADA (American With Disabilities Act) requirements and have adequate capacity to facilitate community meetings or gatherings.
- UCF11. The Town should support efforts that are consistent with the comprehensive plan to expand public recreational resources such as parks, trails, waterway access, public hunting and fishing areas, wildlife viewing areas, and the like.
- UCF12. The Town should coordinate park and recreation planning with Polk County to meet the demands of a changing and increasing population where feasible.
- UCF13. Trail development projects supported by the Town shall have a long term development plan that addresses ongoing maintenance and funding, presents solutions for possible trail use conflicts, and enhances opportunities for interconnected trail networks.
- UCF14. New development and planned utilities should use best management practices for construction and site erosion control.
- UCF15. Support the responsible use of all types of watercraft in regard to noise, visual disturbances and water quality.
- UCF16. Support the responsible use of motorized recreational vehicles in regard to such issues as noise, erosion, light, odor and aesthetics.
- UCF17. All unsewered subdivisions shall be designed to protect the immediate groundwater supply through the proper placement and operation of private wells and on-site wastewater treatment systems.



- UCF18. In areas adjacent to incorporated communities or where there is a public well and/or distribution system, well-head planning should be completed and well-head protection shall be a priority when reviewing development proposals.
- UCF19. The Town shall review new multi-residential projects for the availability of an adequate water supply.
- UCF20. Proposed developments shall not increase flooding potential to adjacent lands or adversely affect the water supply to adjacent land.
- UCF21. Erosion and sediment control practices should be used when removing the vegetative cover of the land or exposing the soil.
- UCF22. Stormwater runoff as the result of development shall not be discharged into wetlands and closed depressions, except for those associated with approved stormwater management.
- UCF23. The Town will require new development projects to include approved stormwater management facilities, as needed.
- UCF24. The Town shall maintain adequate staffing and professional service levels relative to planning, ordinance development and enforcement, and other governmental services to successfully implement the comprehensive plan.
- UCF25. The Town shall maintain partnerships with emergency service organizations.
- UCF26. The Town shall continue to work with police, fire and rescue service providers to anticipate and plan for service requirements and capital improvements.
- UCF27. Work with local school districts in order to anticipate future service and facility needs.

#### **4.4 Utilities and Community Facilities Programs**

For descriptions of utilities and community facilities programs potentially available to the community, refer to the *Utilities and Community Facilities* element of the *Polk County Condition and Trends Report*.

## **5. Agricultural, Natural, and Cultural Resources**

### **5.1 Agricultural, Natural, and Cultural Resources Plan**

Land development patterns are directly linked to the agricultural, natural, and cultural resource base of a community. This resource base has limitations with respect to the potential impacts of development activities. Development should be carefully adjusted to coincide with the ability of the agricultural, natural, and cultural resource base to support the various forms of urban and rural development. If a balance is not maintained, the underlying resource base may deteriorate in quality. Therefore, these features need to be considered when making decisions concerning the future conservation and development of the Town of Sterling. For further detail on agricultural, natural, and cultural resources in the Town of Sterling and Polk County, please refer to the *Condition and Trends Report*.

The *Agricultural, Natural, and Cultural Resources* element may be the most important element in the *Town of Sterling Year 2045 Comprehensive Plan*. Many of the issues and opportunities identified by the town during the planning process (refer to the *Issues and Opportunities* element) are related to these resources. The town is concerned with preserving surface water and groundwater quality, preserving woodlands and wildlife, protecting rural character and scenic views, limiting noise and light pollution, preserving agricultural lands, preventing conflicts between agriculture and rural housing development, preventing conflicts over mineral resources, and preserving historic and archeological sites. Some of the strongest points of consensus on the public opinion surveys (see Appendix A) were related to these resources and include:

- ♦ Protecting groundwater, wetlands, and waterways.
- ♦ Protecting forests and wildlife habitat.
- ♦ Protecting farmland and productive soils.
- ♦ Supporting the agriculture industry.
- ♦ Protecting rural character.
- ♦ Protecting historical sites and structures.

#### **Agricultural Resources**

The town's plan for agricultural resources is to preserve agricultural lands and the right to farm while also allowing for planned development. Higher density residential development is planned on lands that are less suitable for agricultural use. Lower density development would be allowed on lands critical to the town's agricultural base. Key components and considerations of the town's approach include establishing a maximum lot size in certain areas, limiting major subdivisions to planned growth areas, encouraging conservation land division design, establishing site planning guidelines, and potentially revising the zoning map that applies to the town. The town also plans to explore the creation of a purchase of development rights (PDR) or purchase of conservation easement (PACE) program in cooperation with Polk County.

According to the 2007 Land Use Assessment data, there were approximately 2,828 acres of farmland in the town, with 1,919 acres considered prime farmland, prime if drained, and

farmland of statewide importance. The prime farmland areas are concentrated in the northeast section of the town.

Agriculture lands are significant to the Town of Sterling, and these lands are expected to continue in agricultural use over the long term. This sentiment is reflected in the preferred future land use plan (refer to the *Land Use* element) as most of the town's agricultural lands have been mapped for Agricultural Enterprise (AE). The AE Preferred Future Land Use Management Area seeks to preserve and promote a full range of agricultural uses.

## **Natural and Cultural Resources**

The Town of Sterling's plan for natural and cultural resources is to help ensure that existing regulations are followed in the town and to manage growth to prevent negative impacts to these resources. Natural and cultural resources are abundant in the town and are highly valued by the town's residents. In fact, environmental features cover nearly 60% of the total area in the town. Substantial natural and cultural resources are present in the town which need continued protection, and those include the following:

- Wetlands
- Floodplains
- Surface and ground waters
- Glacial drift
- Federally protected Riverway and several important connecting tributaries
- Protected forests and associated habitat and wildlife
- Prairies and savannas
- Rare pine barrens ecotype and habitat

Many of the same tools that will be used to protect agriculture could also be used to protect natural and cultural resources, including a maximum residential lot size, conservation land division design, site planning guidelines, the zoning map, and a possible transfer or purchase of development rights program. In addition the town shall require substantial development proposals assess potential natural and cultural resources impacts. Other tools recommended for cultural resources include maintaining the condition of historic and archeological sites and creating a historic preservation ordinance.

## **5.2 Agricultural, Natural, and Cultural Resources Goals and Objectives**

Community goals are broad, value-based statements expressing public preferences for the long term (20 years or more). They specifically address key issues, opportunities, and problems that affect the community. Objectives are more specific than goals and are more measurable statements usually attainable through direct action and implementation of plan recommendations. The accomplishment of objectives contributes to fulfillment of the goal.

### **Agricultural Resources**

**Goals 1: *Maintain the viability, operational efficiency, and productivity of the town's agricultural resources for current and future generations.***

***Objectives:***

- A. Help protect through local and state measures the town's productive lands from accelerated erosion and unwise development.
- B. Protect productive farmland from fragmentation and conflicts with non-agricultural uses.
- C. Allow for farming expansion in areas where conflict with existing residential land uses can be prevented or mitigated.
- D. Protect the investments made, in both public infrastructure (roads) and private lands and improvements, that support the agricultural industry.
- E. Encourage creative, unique and niche forms of agriculture.
- F. Promote opportunities to allow farmers and farmland owners to secure financial benefits for the preservation of agricultural lands.
- G. Encourage the use of agricultural science-based Best Management Practices to minimize erosion and ground water and surface water contamination.
- H. Identify programs that provide mentoring of younger farmers.
- I. Increase awareness relative to the importance of protecting the viability of the town's agricultural industry.
- J. Increase awareness and understanding of farming operations, noises, odors and use of roadways by farm vehicles and equipment.

***Goal 2: Balance the protection of farmland with the exercise of development rights.***

***Objectives:***

- A. Identify lands where the primary intent is to preserve productive farmland and to allow for farming expansion.
- B. Identify lands where the primary intent is to allow for rural residential development.
- C. Encourage adequate buffers between agricultural uses and residential neighborhoods to minimize potential conflicts.
- D. Consider establishing site design requirements and standards that direct low density rural residential development to areas that minimize conflicts between residential and agricultural land uses and maintain the rural character of the town.

**Natural Resources**

***Goal 1: Encourage the efficient management of the Town's natural resources.***

***Objectives:***

- A. Work with the county to implement and maintain a town wide recreation plan.
- B. Support the maintenance of the county's farmland preservation plan.
- C. Promote sound forest management practices on private forest lands.
- D. Protect the public's access to public hunting and fishing areas.
- E. Encourage management strategies to create a sustainable relationship between recreational vehicles, watercraft, and natural resources.
- F. Encourage communication between communities regarding the protection of natural resources that cross municipal boundaries.
- G. Educate resource users of the town's environmental quality goals and objectives.

***Goal 2: Protect and improve the quality and quantity of the town's ground and surface water.***

***Objectives:***

- A. Ensure that land use practices do not have detrimental impacts on the town's water and wetlands.
- B. Support wetlands protection in the town.
- C. Prevent the introduction of new contaminants into the town's ground and surface water systems while reducing and possibly eliminating existing sources of contamination.
- D. Increase awareness relative to the potential shoreline development impacts on water quality.
- E. Support data collection and monitoring efforts that further the understanding of factors influencing the quantity, quality, and flow patterns for ground water.
- F. Support the preservation of natural buffers and building setbacks between intensive land uses and surface water features.
- G. Continue to develop partnerships with neighboring communities, conservation organizations, county and state agencies to address water quality issues.

***Goal 3: Preserve the natural and scenic qualities of lakes and shorelines in the town.***

***Objectives:***

- A. Support the protection of lakes and rivers.
- B. Support the County's continued evaluating of the lakes and rivers classification system which recognizes that different lakes have varying natural conditions affecting their environmental sensitivity or vulnerability to shore land development. The lake classification system should take into account lake surface areas, lake depth, lake type, length of shoreline, size of watershed, and existing degree of development.
- C. Balance the needs for environmental protection and responsible stewardship with reasonable use of private property and economic development.
- D. Carefully manage future development and land divisions on lakes that are developed or partially developed to prevent overcrowding that would diminish the value of the resource and existing shore land property; minimize nutrient loading; protect water quality; preserve spawning grounds, fish and wildlife habitats, and natural shore cover.

***Goal 4: Balance future development with the protection of natural resources.***

***Objectives:***

- A. Consider the potential impacts of development proposals on groundwater quality and quantity, surface water quality, open space, wildlife habitat, woodlands, and impact of light intrusion on the night sky.
- B. Direct future growth away from regulated wetlands and floodplains.
- C. Promote public and private efforts to protect critical habitats for plant and animal life.
- D. Promote the utilization of public and non-profit resource conservation and protection programs such as Managed Forest Law (MFL), Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), and conservation easements.
- E. Promote renewable energy conservation within new and existing developments.

**Goal 5: *Protect air quality.***

***Objectives:***

- A. Encourage alternative garbage disposal to maintain the air quality.
- B. Manage growth to minimize conflict between residences and agricultural odors and dust.

**Goal 6: *Preserve and protect woodlands and forest resources for their economic, aesthetic, and environmental values.***

***Objectives:***

- A. Conserve large contiguous wooded tracts in order to reduce forest fragmentation, maximize woodland interiors, and reduce the edge/ area ratio.
- B. Consider the use of conservation land division design, which reduces further forest fragmentation.
- C. Support efforts that preserve the integrity of managed forest lands.
- D. Support educational resources on forestry practices and the benefits to a healthy forest.

**Goal 7: *Balance future needs for the extraction of mineral resources with potential adverse impacts on the town.***

***Objectives:***

- A. Encourage the documentation of known economically viable non-metallic mineral deposits to ensure proper coordination with any new proposed development.
- B. Support the county efforts to regulate non-metallic mineral extraction operations to minimize adverse impacts on adjacent land uses and to ensure proper site reclamation.
- C. Consider the potential adverse impacts of proposed metallic mineral extraction operations, and ensure that the sighting of such facilities will not negatively impact town and county resources.

**Cultural Resources**

**Goal 1: *Preserve the Northwood's character as defined by scenic beauty, a variety of landscapes, undeveloped lands, forest, water resources, wildlife, farms, rural and small town atmosphere, buildings integrated with the landscape, and enjoyment of these surroundings.***

***Objectives:***

- A. Consider the potential impacts of development proposals on those features that the town values.
- B. Discourage the accumulation of junk vehicles, poorly maintained properties, unsightly advertising, and roadside litter.
- C. Support the efforts of Polk County's villages to preserve a small town atmosphere including attractive community entrances, small businesses, a vital downtown, and community culture and events.
- D. Encourage the growth and development of visual, performance, and cultural arts.

**Goal 2: *Preserve significant historical and cultural lands, sites, neighborhoods and structures that contribute to community identity and character.***

**Objectives:**

- A. Identify, record, and protect community features with historical or archaeological significance.
- B. Consider the potential impacts of development proposals on historical and archeological resources.
- C. Promote the history, culture, and heritage of the town.

**Goal 3: *Encourage opportunities for youth in the town including youth-oriented activities and facilities and additional job opportunities.***

**Objectives:**

- A. Involve youth in the comprehensive planning process.
- B. Establish the involvement of youth in town decision making.
- C. Support youth development.

### **5.3 Agricultural, Natural, and Cultural Resources Policies and Recommendations**

Policies and recommendations build on goals and objectives by providing more focused responses to the issues that the town is concerned about. Policies and recommendations become primary tools the town can use in making land use decisions. Many of the policies and recommendations cross element boundaries and work together toward overall implementation strategies. Refer to Section 9.5 for an explanation of the strategies cited as sources for many of the policies and recommendations.

Policies identify the way in which activities are conducted in order to fulfill the goals and objectives. Policies that direct action using the word “shall” are advised to be mandatory and regulatory aspects of the implementation of the comprehensive plan. In contrast, those policies that direct action using the words “will” or “should” are advisory and intended to serve as a guide. “Will” statements are considered to be strong guidelines, while “should” statements are considered loose guidelines.

Recommendations are specific actions or projects that the town should be prepared to complete. The completion of these actions and projects is consistent with the town’s policies, and therefore will help the town fulfill the comprehensive plan goals and objectives.

#### **Agricultural Resources**

- ANC1. New development should be directed to the least productive soils to conserve remaining land for continued agricultural uses, whenever possible.
- ANC2. Work with the county to recognize preferred areas for agricultural expansion and to preserve the best agricultural lands for agricultural use.
- ANC3. Utilize site planning and a maximum residential lot size to preserve agricultural lands.

- ANC4. Work with the county to develop a county-wide right to farm policy and ordinance. Encourage options for towns that wish to require right to farm language to be shown on recorded land divisions.
- ANC5. New non-farm residential development shall be directed away from existing agricultural operations on large tracts of undeveloped land and directed toward those areas that have existing non-farm development.
- ANC6. New non-farm residential development should be subject to a “nuisance disclaimer”, stringent deed restrictions or other mutual agreement intended to protect the “right-to-farm” of existing and future agricultural operations.
- ANC7. Work with the county to update the existing Farmland Preservation Plan.
- ANC8. Conservation and cluster land division design shall be supported as options for proposed major land divisions to minimize the negative impacts to agriculture, active farms, natural resources, cultural resources, and rural character while accommodating residential development.
- ANC9. The expansion or establishment of agricultural operations resulting in 500 or more animal units shall be preferred no closer than 2,640 feet (1/2 mile) of sewer service areas or incorporated areas.
- ANC10. Consistent with Wisconsin Act 235, the establishment of new or expansion of existing animal agriculture operations that result in farms with more than 500 animal units shall comply with performance standards for setbacks, odor management, waste and nutrient management, waste storage facilities, runoff management, and mortality management.

### **Natural Resources**

- ANC1. Environmental corridors shall be defined by location of WDNR designated wetlands and FEMA designated floodplains.
- ANC2. Substantial development proposals within the Town shall provide an analysis of the potential natural resources impacts including, but not necessarily limited to, potential impacts to groundwater quality and quantity, surface water, wetlands, floodplains, and woodlands. The depth of analysis required by the Town will be appropriate for the intensity of the proposed development.
- ANC3. Federal, state and county regulation changes or additions regarding agricultural, natural and cultural resources will be consistently monitored for their impact on local resources.
- ANC4. Development proposals in shoreland areas shall demonstrate compliance with the Polk County Shoreland Zoning Ordinance.



- ANC5. Conservation and cluster land division design shall be supported as options for proposed major land divisions to minimize the negative impacts to agriculture, active farms, natural resources, cultural resources, and rural character while accommodating residential development.
- ANC6. Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources Best Management Practices and USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service standards and specifications shall be utilized to the maximum extent possible for activities approved in forests, shorelands, and wetlands.
- ANC7. Lakeshore development shall be in concert with lakes classification and the county zoning ordinance.
- ANC8. The development of lake associations and districts will be supported.
- ANC9. Work to ensure secure public lake access where possible.
- ANC10. New development shall be placed on the landscape in a fashion that minimizes potential negative impacts to natural resources such as shoreline areas, wetlands, and floodplains.
- ANC11. Work with the County to identify preferred areas for forestry and forestry production.
- ANC12. Educate the citizens on the enrollment of private lands into local, state, and federal resource protection programs (such as Managed Forest Law etc.).
- ANC13. Trail development in forested areas will be required to have a long-term development plan. to consider management of trail use and consider future conditions.
- ANC14. Establish a permit system and town review for events which have the potential to negatively impact the natural resources of the Town (these events may include, but are not limited to: fishing contests, land and water and motorized vehicle races).
- ANC15. Support the county's efforts in development of comprehensive river, stream and lake management plans which include surveys, assessment and monitoring, and recommendations for restoration and improvement.
- ANC16. Evaluate the community's ability to respond to a spill of contaminated or hazardous material and make changes as necessary to ensure that spills will be remediated as soon as possible to decrease the effects on groundwater.

## **Cultural Resources**

- ANC1. Substantial development proposals shall provide the Town with an analysis of the potential cultural resources impacts including, but not necessarily limited to, potential impacts to historic sites, archeological sites, and other cultural resources. The depth of analysis required by the Town will be appropriate for the intensity of the proposed development.

- ANC2. New development shall be placed on the landscape in a fashion that minimizes potential negative impacts to Northwoods character as defined by locally significant landmarks, scenic views and vistas, rolling terrain, undeveloped lands, farmlands and woodlands, aesthetically pleasing landscapes and buildings, limited light pollution, and quiet enjoyment of these surroundings.
- ANC3. Work with communities and groups/organizations such as the Wisconsin Historical Society and the Polk County Historical Society to maintain the map and database of historic and archeological sites.
- ANC4. Identify, record and promote preservation of historical, cultural and archaeological sites within the town.
- ANC5. A community survey of historical and archeological resources will be conducted at least once every twenty years.
- ANC6. Review proposals for the development of properties abutting historic resources to ensure that land use or new construction does not detract from the architectural characteristics and environmental setting of the historic resource.

## **5.4 Agriculture, Natural, and Cultural Resources Programs**

For descriptions of agricultural, natural and cultural resources programs potentially available to the community, refer to the *Agricultural, Natural and Cultural Resources* element of the *Polk County Condition and Trends Report*.

## **6. Economic Development**

### **6.1 Economic Development Plan**

Economic development planning is the process by which a community organizes, analyzes, plans, and then applies its energies to the tasks of improving the economic well-being and quality of life for those in the community. Issues and opportunities in the Town of Sterling related to economic development mainly includes supporting regional economic development efforts in Polk County Villages and in areas that have the necessary infrastructure to support intensive commercial development, and supporting tourism, agriculture, forestry, home-based business. and the surrounding region, the community's competitiveness for attracting and retaining businesses, establishing commercial and industrial development policies, encouraging sustainable development, creating jobs, increasing wages, enhancing worker training, and improving overall quality of life. All these issues affect residents of the Town of Sterling and are addressed directly or indirectly in the comprehensive plan.

The reason to plan for economic development is straight-forward - economic development provides income for individuals, households, farms, businesses, and units of government. It requires working together to maintain a strong economy by creating and retaining desirable jobs which provide a good standard of living for individuals. Increased personal income and wealth increases the tax base, so a community can provide the level of services residents expect. A balanced, healthy economy is essential for community well-being. Well planned economic development expenditures are a community investment. They leverage new growth and redevelopment to improve the area. Influencing and investing in the process of economic development allows community members to determine future direction and guide appropriate types of development according to their values.

Successful plans for economic development acknowledge the importance of:

- ♦ Knowing the region's economic function in the global economy.
- ♦ Creating a skilled and educated workforce.
- ♦ Investing in an infrastructure for innovation.
- ♦ Creating a great quality of life.
- ♦ Fostering an innovative business climate.
- ♦ Increased use of technology and cooperation to increase government efficiency.

The Town of Sterling's plan for economic development is to maintain the quality of life that attracts residents, visitors, and businesses to the area, to support wireless and hard-line broadband service infrastructure to the area to promote tele-commuting and home-based business development. Sterling does not have intensive areas planned for commercial uses by design; the plan is to retain existing businesses and have a mixed use area that focuses on local service delivery and uses. Sterling does not envision significant local administration to function and deliver services to residents and property owners, and is not positioning for regional community competitiveness related to attracting new business. Sterling has established commercial and industrial development policies as necessary, but the long term economic development focus is related to encouraging sustainable residential development, supporting tourism, agriculture, forestry, home-based business, and improving overall quality of life. In the event that new local

commercial or industrial uses are found to be consistent with the plan, it will be important to address the site design and development characteristics to ensure compatibility with surrounding development and preservation of the areas rural character. The Town of Sterling exhibits some unique economic characteristics. The town's rural land base also plays an important economic role by supporting tourism and outdoor recreation, and by providing opportunities for quality, affordable housing.

Many of the top issues and opportunities identified during the planning process (refer to the *Issues and Opportunities* element) center around natural resources, lakefront and water related development, costs and delivery of services, and management of rural character. The rural character and low population concentration of the town does not support typical economic development strategy in the sense of new commercial buildings or a business park, but rather one focused on capitalizing on existing strengths such as waterfront development, home-based business, and natural resource management. The town is concerned with the amount and design of commercial development, the potential for light and noise pollution, and the negative economic and environmental impacts that might accompany such development, recruiting and retaining businesses that contribute to the tax base, and the potential for expanded employment in the services sector. In order to address these issues and opportunities and to implement the town's plan for economic development, this plan includes recommendations to develop a site and architectural design review ordinance. Commercial and industrial development will be required to meet certain standards for building and site design as guided by the town's economic development policies. The plan also recommends supporting the enhancement of relationships between educational institutions and potential employers.

or equivalence level of attainment, smaller shares have some college or a bachelor, graduate, or professional degree when compared to both Polk County and the State of Wisconsin. These data suggest that residents of the Town of Sterling can improve its position in the marketplace if more people were to reach a high school graduate level of attainment.

We recommend the town of Sterling in the future when needed to research the following economic issues; education, Employment by industry and employment by occupation.

## **6.2 Desired Business and Industry**

Similar to most communities in Polk County, the Town of Sterling would welcome most economic opportunities that do not sacrifice community character or require a disproportionate level of community services per taxes gained. In this context, "business" could include any type of commercial use from a home-based business to a retail store, office, or other similar use. The categories or particular types of new businesses and industries that are desired by the community are generally described in the goals, objectives, and policies, and more specifically with the following. Desired types of business and industry in the Town of Sterling include, but are not necessarily limited to:

- ♦ Business and light industry that retain the rural character of the community.
- ♦ Business and light industry that utilize high quality and attractive building and landscape design.
- ♦ Business and light industry that utilize well planned site design and traffic circulation.
- ♦ Business and light industry that revitalize and redevelops blighted areas of the town.

- ♦ Businesses that provide essential services that are otherwise not available in the surrounding neighborhood, such as retail stores, personal services, and professional services.
- ♦ Home based businesses that blend in with residential land use and do not harm the surrounding neighborhood.
- ♦ Business and light industry that provide quality employment for local citizens.
- ♦ Business and light industry that support existing employers with value adding services or processes.
- ♦ Business and light industry that bring new cash flow into the community.
- ♦ Business and light industry that fill a unique niche in the town and complement economic development efforts in the town of Cushing.
- ♦ Business and light industry that capitalize on community strengths.
- ♦ Business and light industry that do not exacerbate community weaknesses.

### **6.3 Sites for Business and Industrial Development**

Generally speaking, the Town of Sterling is not planning for significant areas of commercial and/or industrial development. The primary economic development opportunities will be through the expansion of home-based businesses in the town's residential and rural areas, including some limited waterfront-oriented businesses where appropriate. The expansion and access of wireless broadband internet technology will be a significant driver to stimulation the expansion or opportunity of home-based business development. Such uses will be required to meet the applicable *Land Use* element policies, and policies of other relative element included in this plan. Other areas of the town might also be considered for more intensive business development upon approval of a plan amendment or rezoning as appropriate. The Town of Sterling is pro economic growth and opportunity, as generally described in the Town's Goals, Objectives, Policies, and Recommendations; however, most of the business development within the County is encouraged to take place within the Town of Cushing where adequate utilities and infrastructure exist or are planned for expansion.

While there are no industrial parks in the Town of Sterling, there are industrial, and business parks located in Polk County.

#### **Environmentally Contaminated Sites**

We believe the Town of Sterling should oversee current businesses and future business for contamination.

### **6.4 Economic Development Goals and Objectives**

Community goals are broad, value-based statements expressing public preferences for the long term (20 years or more). They specifically address key issues, opportunities, and problems that affect the community. Objectives are more specific than goals and are more measurable statements usually attainable through direct action and implementation of plan recommendations. The accomplishment of objectives contributes to fulfillment of the goal.

***Goal 1: Maintain and enhance opportunities for agricultural based industries dependent on rural lands and provide opportunity for compatible economic growth and development.***

***Objectives:***

- A. Encourage resource based industries including agriculture, forestry, and tourism which are consistent with the goals of this plan.
- B. Support agricultural and forestry working lands through appropriate utilization of land use planning and regulations.
- C. Encourage county efforts to establish the value of existing and potential agricultural land and help preserve them through the development of an agricultural “Transfer of Development Rights” (TDR) and/or “Purchase of Development Rights” (PDR) program. These shall be supported by a priority system, a revenue mechanism, and an information/education program.
- D. Discourage any type of development, not agriculturally related, on prime agricultural soils or lands designated for exclusive agriculture.
- E. Encourage continuation of the family farm.
- F. Encourage creative, unique and niche forms of agriculture.
- G. Support programs that coordinate the selling of local products within local establishments.
- H. Support programs that provide opportunities for farmers to network to increase the potential to share knowledge, resources, and equipment.

***Goal 2: Attract, retain, and expand quality businesses and industries that will improve the employment and personal income base of the Town.***

***Objectives:***

- A. Encourage long term business investments that generate net fiscal benefits to the town, protect environmental quality, and provide increase to net personal income.
- B. Support incentives to those businesses of all sizes which demonstrate a commitment to protecting the environment and enhancing the town’s quality of life.
- C. Promote economic opportunity for all residents, including unemployed, underemployed, and special needs populations.
- D. Encourage diversified economic development to achieve and maintain a balanced tax base.
- E. Support agriculture, forestry, manufacturing, tourism, and related support services as strong components of the local economy.
- F. Support the further development of an ecological tourism (ecotourism) industry in the town and region to build environmental and cultural awareness, and benefit the local economy.
- G. Support the further development of an agricultural tourism (agri-tourism) industry in the town and region to build awareness of the importance of agriculture, an understanding of operations, and benefit the local economy.
- H. Support the increase of businesses that serve the ageing and retirement population.
- I. Encourage the growth of business clusters based on similar or complementary industries.
- J. Promote business retention, expansion, and recruitment efforts that are consistent with the town’s comprehensive plan.
- K. Support the pursuit of local, state and federal funding and assistance that will help local businesses become more competitive.
- L. Distinguish and promote features unique to the town in order to compete and complement the region.

M. Encourage and support home-base businesses.

***Goal 3: Help provide sufficient commercial and industrial land adjacent to public facilities and transportation services that are cost effective and environmentally compatible.***

***Objectives:***

- A. Encourage appropriate re-use and development of older buildings.
- B. Plan for areas of industrial and commercial use that will be accessible from roadways of arterial class or higher, potentially served with utilities, and free of major environmental constraints.
- C. Encourage infrastructure development and services necessary to serve new development, while influencing the new commercial and industry to locate in the village industrial parks.

***Goal 4: Support the organizational growth of economic development programs in the town and region.***

***Objectives:***

- A. Encourage increased cooperation between the county and surrounding areas regarding comprehensive planning and economic development issues.
- B. Support the regional efforts of the International Trade, Business and Economic Development Council (ITBEC) for Northwest Wisconsin and the Northwest Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission.
- C. Support the efforts of the Polk County Development Association, community development organizations, and local chamber of commerce.
- D. Promote dialogue and continue to strengthen relationships between the town and local businesses and agricultural.

***Goal 5: Maintain the utility, communication, and transportation, infrastructure systems that promote economic development.***

***Objectives:***

- A. Work to maintain an effective and efficient government to reduce the tax burden.
- B. Improve economic development opportunities along highway corridors.
- C. Support the development of regional facilities, cultural amenities, and services that will strengthen the long-term attractiveness of the town, county, and region.
- D. Monitor the infrastructure needs when they are consistent with the town's comprehensive plan.
- E. Support the development of world class communication systems.

***Goal 6: Maintain a quality workforce to strengthen existing businesses and maintain a high standard of living.***

***Objectives:***

- A. Support local employment of area citizens, especially efforts that create opportunities for local young adults.
- B. Support home-based businesses that do not significantly increase noise, traffic, odors, lighting, or would otherwise negatively impact the area.

- C. Support area school districts, technical colleges, universities, and other non-profit agencies that promote workforce development.
- D. Support a continuum of educational opportunities responsive to the needs of the town work place.
- E. Encourage greater interaction between the schools and businesses in order to better coordinate the required education and skills.
- F. Promote and encourage community development that creates and enhances vibrant neighborhoods, and shopping, entertainment and recreational opportunities that will attract and retain younger families and employers.
- G. Support intergovernmental efforts to sustain area technical schools.

## **6.5 Economic Development Policies and Recommendations**

Policies and recommendations build on goals and objectives by providing more focused responses to the issues that the town is concerned about. Policies and recommendations become primary tools the town can use in making land use decisions. Many of the policies and recommendations cross element boundaries and work together toward overall implementation strategies. Refer to Section 9.5 for an explanation of the strategies cited as sources for many of the policies and recommendations.

Policies identify the way in which activities are conducted in order to fulfill the goals and objectives. Policies that direct action using the word “shall” are advised to be mandatory and regulatory aspects of the implementation of the comprehensive plan. In contrast, those policies that direct action using the words “will” or “should” are advisory and intended to serve as a guide. “Will” statements are considered to be strong guidelines, while “should” statements are considered loose guidelines.

Recommendations are specific actions or projects that the town should be prepared to complete. The completion of these actions and projects is consistent with the town’s policies, and therefore will help the town fulfill the comprehensive plan goals and objectives.

- ED1. Agriculture should be supported as a vital component of the Town’s economic base.
- ED2. Forestry will be supported as a vital component of the Town’s economic base.
- ED3. Tourism should be supported as a vital component of the Town’s economic base.
- ED4. Support home-based business as a primary economic development tool.
- ED5. Intensive commercial and industrial development should be located in and/or directed toward areas within which adequate public facilities and services already exist, are programmed for expansion, or will be provided concurrent with development.
- ED6. Industrial development should be steered to villages capable of providing sewer and water services.
- ED7. Highway corridor development shall be directed to designated planned commercial areas and address building signage, lighting, service and land use standards.



- ED8. The Town should support existing business expansion and retention efforts and new business development efforts that are consistent with the comprehensive plan.
- ED9. Coordinate regularly with the County and the Northwest Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission to evaluate economic development related grants, programs, and tax incentives for their applicability to the Town.
- ED10. Economic development programs and incentives should focus on development and businesses that include higher quality buildings and facilities, as well as, provide greater job opportunities with competitive wages.
- ED11. The retention and expansion of existing businesses should be supported through facility improvements and the implementation of increased technology.
- ED12. Continue to work with the County and Polk County Development Association as a resource to achieve local and regional economic development goals and objectives.
- ED13. When evaluating substantial development proposals, the Town should consider market interactions with the existing local and regional economy, and impacts to the cost of providing community services. The depth of analysis required by the Town will be appropriate for the intensity of the proposed development.
- ED14. The Town will encourage economic development that are beneficial to the sustainability of the Town and the region and consistent with the comprehensive plan.
- ED15. Support and participate in the organization of apprenticeship, on-the-job training, student touring and visitation, and student work-study programs with local industry, schools, and government.

## **6.6 Economic Development Programs**

For descriptions of economic development programs potentially available to the community, refer to the *Economic Development* element of the *Polk County Condition and Trends Report*.

## **7. Intergovernmental Cooperation**

### **7.1 Intergovernmental Cooperation Plan**

From cooperative road maintenance, to fire protection service districts, to shared government buildings, Polk County and its communities have a long history of intergovernmental cooperation. As social, economic, and geographic pressures affect change in the Town of Sterling, the community will increasingly look to cooperative strategies for creative and cost-effective solutions to the problems of providing public services and facilities.

Intergovernmental cooperation is any arrangement by which officials of two or more jurisdictions coordinate plans, policies, and programs to address and resolve issues of mutual interest. It can be as simple as communicating and sharing information, or it can involve entering into formal intergovernmental agreements to share resources such as equipment, buildings, staff, and revenue. Intergovernmental cooperation can even involve consolidating services, consolidating jurisdictions, modifying community boundaries, or transferring territory. For further detail on intergovernmental cooperation in the Town of Sterling and Polk County, please refer to the *Condition and Trends Report*.

The Town of Sterling's plan for intergovernmental cooperation is to continue to rely on intergovernmental arrangements for the efficient provision of community facilities and services, to improve the planning and regulation of development along community boundaries, and to continue ongoing communication with other units of government. The Town of Sterling has been involved in intergovernmental cooperation with Polk County, neighboring towns for many years, but hopes to build on these past successes to accomplish even more in the future. Top issues and opportunities identified during the planning process include services, transportation issues and economic development.

In order to implement the town's plan for intergovernmental cooperation, this plan recommends continuing to meet and plan together on a multi-jurisdictional basis. Over the long term, the town will continue to support sharing of services and facilities where there are sustainable benefits to town taxpayers. The town will also review opportunities to share equipment with neighboring jurisdictions, pursue cost-sharing or purchase agreements to help drive down costs, and review opportunities to consolidate services while maintaining service levels.

### **7.2 Condition of Existing Intergovernmental Agreements**

- Community Center shared between the Town of Sterling and the Town of Laketown. An appointed board oversees operation.
- Emergency Management Agreement with the towns of Laketown and Eureka and Cushing Fire Dept.
- Shared road maintenance and plowing for the shared border road(s) in Cushing with the Town of Laketown.

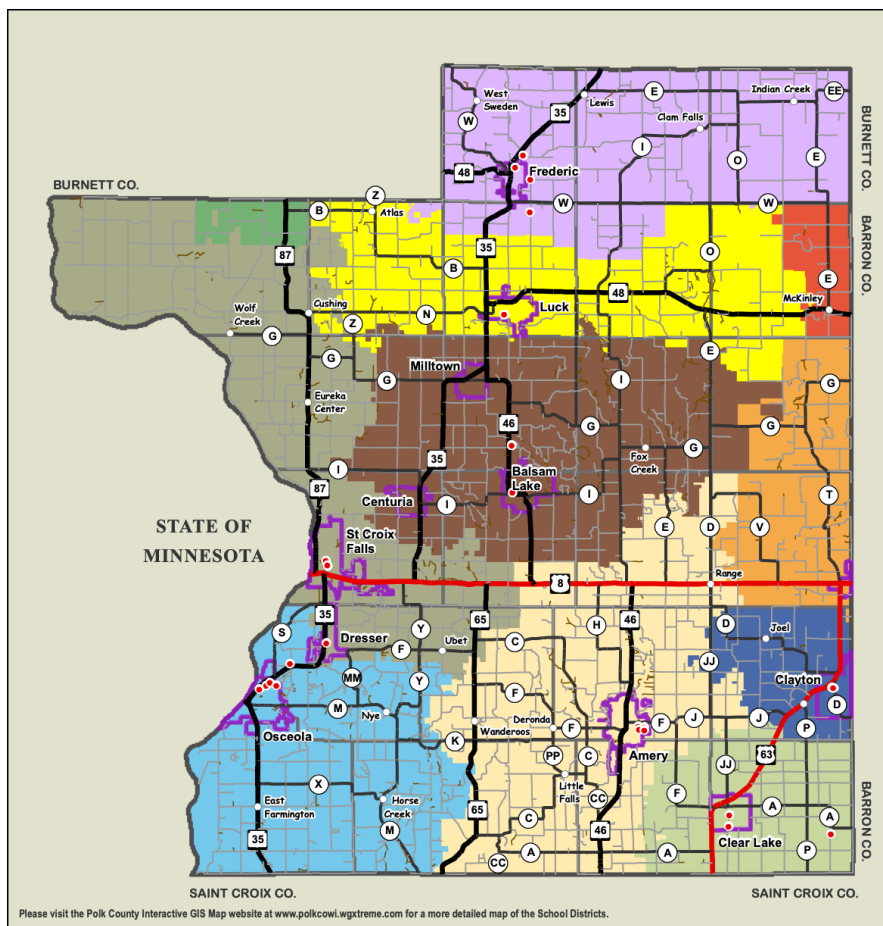
- Shared road maintenance and plowing for county border roads with the Town of Anderson.

### **7.3 Analysis of the Relationship with School Districts and Adjacent Local Governmental Units**

#### **School Districts**

The Town of Sterling is located primarily within the St. Croix Falls School District and partially the Grantsburg School District. The Town generally has a good relationship with the districts.

Polk County and its communities maintain cooperative relationships with their school districts. Partnership between communities and schools is seen in the use of school outdoor athletic facilities. Indoor facilities are also available for a nominal fee for use by community members.



## Lake Protection and Sanitary Districts

Lake Protection and Sanitary Districts are controlled by the Polk County Lake Classification system.

## 7.4 Intergovernmental Opportunities, Conflicts, and Resolutions

Intergovernmental cooperation opportunities and potential conflicts were addressed as part of the comprehensive plan development process. The entire structure of the multi-jurisdictional planning process was established to support improved communication between communities and increased levels of intergovernmental coordination.

The intent of identifying the intergovernmental opportunities and conflicts shown below is to stimulate creative thinking and problem solving over the long term. Not all of the opportunities shown are ready for immediate action, and not all of the conflicts shown are of immediate concern. Rather, these opportunities and conflicts may further develop over the course of the next 20 to 25 years, and this section is intended to provide community guidance at such time. The recommendation statements found in each element of this plan specify the projects and tasks that have been identified by the community as high priorities for action.

## Opportunities

Opportunity	Potential Cooperating Units of Government
♦ Develop a for plan implementation ordinances and other tools simultaneously	Polk County Town of Laketown Town of Eureka
♦ Assistance in rating and posting local roads for road maintenance and road improvement planning	Polk County
♦ Utilize a coordinated process to update and amend the comprehensive plan	Polk County Town of Laketown Town of Eureka
♦ Work with the school district to anticipate future growth, facility, and busing needs	St. Croix Falls School District, Grantsburg School District
♦ Share the use of school district recreational and athletic facilities	St. Croix Falls School District
♦ Share excess space at the town's garages	Town of Laketown Town of Eureka
♦ Share community staff	Town of Laketown Town of Eureka
♦ Share office equipment	Town of Laketown (Cushing Community Center).
♦ Share construction and maintenance equipment	Town of Laketown Town of Eureka
♦ Continue to coordinate shared services and contracting for services such as police protection, solid waste and recycling, recreation programs, etc.	Cushing Fire Association Polk County
♦ Reduce conflict over boundary issues through cooperative planning	Town of Laketown Town of Eureka
Reduce development pressure on productive lands and rural character by directing growth to urban areas	Town of Laketown (Cushing development)

## Potential Conflicts and Resolution

Potential Conflict	Process to Resolve
♦ Concern over too much intervention by Polk County and the state relative to local control of land use issues.	<p>Adopt a local comprehensive plan</p> <p>Take responsibility to develop, update, and administer local land use ordinances and programs</p> <p>Maintain communication with Polk County on land use issues</p> <p>Provide ample opportunities for public involvement during land use planning and ordinance development efforts</p>
♦ Siting of large livestock farms near incorporated areas	<p>Town to consider establishing an Agriculture/Urban Interface area that prevents new farms over 500 animal units from locating within ½ mile of incorporated areas</p> <p>Polk County to administer ACTP51 performance standards for livestock operations over 500 animal units</p>
♦ Residential development planned adjacent to agriculture or forestry enterprise areas across a town boundary	<p>Distribution of plans and plan amendments to adjacent and overlapping governments</p> <p>Establishment of local Plan Commissions in every Polk County community - joint community Plan Commission meetings</p> <p>Continued meetings of the County Planning Committee with representation from every Polk County community</p>

Potential Conflict	Process to Resolve
♦ Concern over the ability or willingness of Polk County to implement the recommendations of town plans	<p>Distribution of plans and plan amendments to adjacent and overlapping governments</p> <p>Continued meetings of the County Planning Committee with representation from every Polk County community</p> <p>After plan adoption, a locally driven process to develop revisions to the county zoning and land division ordinances</p>
♦ Vastly different zoning and land division regulations from one town to the next	<p>Distribution of plans and plan amendments to adjacent and overlapping governments</p> <p>After plan adoption, a locally driven process to develop revisions to the county zoning and land division ordinances</p> <p>Continued meetings of the County Planning Committee with representation from every Polk County community</p>
♦ Low quality commercial or industrial building and site design along highway corridors, community entrance points, or other highly visible areas	<p>Establishment of local Plan Commissions in every Polk County community - joint community Plan Commission meetings</p> <p>Continued meetings of the County Planning Committee with representation from every Polk County community</p> <p>Cooperative design review ordinance development and administration</p>
♦ Concern over poor communication between the town and lake districts	Distribution of plans and plan amendments to adjacent and overlapping governments
♦ Concern over poor communication between the town and the school district	Distribution of plans and plan amendments to adjacent and overlapping governments

## **7.5 Intergovernmental Cooperation Goals and Objectives**

Community goals are broad, value-based statements expressing public preferences for the long term (20 years or more). They specifically address key issues, opportunities, and problems that affect the community. Objectives are more specific than goals and are more measurable statements usually attainable through direct action and implementation of plan recommendations. The accomplishment of objectives contributes to fulfillment of the goal.

**Goal 1: *Foster the growth of mutually beneficial intergovernmental relations between the town and other units of government, and the county.***

**Objectives:**

- A. Reduce the cost and enhance the provision of coordinated or consolidated public services and facilities with other units of government including the St. Croix Tribe.
- B. Continue the use of joint purchasing and shared service arrangements with other units of governments where applicable to lower the unit cost of materials and supplies for such things including, but not limited to, office supplies, roadwork supplies, vehicles, equipment, professional services, and insurance.
- C. Provide leadership for community cooperation efforts in the comprehensive plan development, adoption, and implementation processes.
- D. Encourage and facilitate the use of cooperative agreements between municipalities for such things including but not limited to annexation, expansion of public facilities, sharing of services and property, and land use regulation.

## **7.6 Intergovernmental Cooperation Policies and Recommendations**

Policies and recommendations build on goals and objectives by providing more focused responses to the issues that the town is concerned about. Policies and recommendations become primary tools the town can use in making land use decisions. Many of the policies and recommendations cross element boundaries and work together toward overall implementation strategies.

Policies identify the way in which activities are conducted in order to fulfill the goals and objectives. Policies that direct action using the word “shall” are advised to be mandatory and regulatory aspects of the implementation of the comprehensive plan. In contrast, those policies that direct action using the words “will” or “should” are advisory and intended to serve as a guide. “Will” statements are considered to be strong guidelines, while “should” statements are considered loose guidelines.

Recommendations are specific actions or projects that the town should be prepared to complete. The completion of these actions and projects is consistent with the town’s policies, and therefore will help the town fulfill the comprehensive plan goals and objectives.

- IC1. Transportation issues that affect the town and neighboring communities should be jointly discussed and evaluated with that community and with the Polk County Highway Department and the Wisconsin Department of Transportation, if necessary



- IC2. Where practical, the Town shall work to maintain ongoing communication and positive relationships with the local, county, state, and federal agencies, districts, and organizations.
- IC3. Educational efforts regarding planning, land use regulation, implementation, or natural resource management should be discussed as multi-jurisdictional efforts between the Town, neighboring communities, the county, and WDNR.
- IC4. Town facilities that have available capacity shall be considered for joint use with other units of government or community organizations.
- IC5. The Town should consider intergovernmental and other cooperative options before establishing, reinstating, expanding, constructing or rehabilitating community facilities, utilities or services.
- IC6. The Town shall support the consolidation or shared provision of public services where the desired level of service can be maintained, where the public supports such action, and where sustainable cost savings can be realized.
- IC7. Annually review intergovernmental agreements for their effectiveness and efficiency.
- IC8. Continue cooperative planning efforts with surrounding towns, villages, districts, associations, service providers and the county.
- IC9. Before the purchase of new Town facilities or equipment or the re-instatement of service agreements, the Town will pursue options for trading, renting, sharing, or contracting such items from neighboring jurisdictions.
- IC10. Opportunities for sharing Town staff or contracting out existing staff availability will be pursued should the opportunity arise.
- IC11. Where applicable, the Town shall seek cooperative boundary plans with adjacent villages in compliance with Wis. Stats. 66.0307 within the planning period.

## **7.7 Intergovernmental Cooperation Programs**

For descriptions of intergovernmental cooperation programs potentially available to the community, refer to the *Intergovernmental Cooperation* element of the *Polk County Condition and Trends Report*.

## **8. Land Use**

### **8.1 Introduction**

Land use is central to the process of comprehensive planning and includes both an assessment of existing conditions and a plan for the future. Land use is integrated with all elements of the comprehensive planning process. Changes in land use are not isolated, but rather are often the end result of a change in another element. For example, development patterns evolve over time as a result of population growth, the development of new housing, the development of new commercial or industrial sites, the extension of utilities or services, or the construction of a new road.

This chapter of the comprehensive plan includes local information for both existing and planned land use in the Town of Sterling. For further detail on existing land use in Polk County, please refer to the *Conditions and Trends Report*.

### **8.2 Existing Land Use**

Evaluating land use entails broadly classifying how land is presently used. Each type of land use has its own characteristics that can determine compatibility, location, and preference relative to other land uses. Land use analysis then proceeds by assessing the community development impacts of land ownership patterns, land management programs, and the market forces that drive development. Mapping data are essential to the process of analyzing existing development patterns, and will serve as the framework for formulating how land will be used in the future.

### **8.3 Land Ownership and Management**

Land ownership and management is comprised of several components that significantly affect land use. The type of land ownership (public, private, land trust, etc.) has a direct impact on how property is managed and how lands may be used in the future. Public ownership of land in Polk County consists of municipal, county, town and state owned lands. As land management takes place under both private and public ownership, resource management programs may prescribe certain requirements and limitations that affect how lands may be used in the future. Voluntary land and resource management protection programs with significant utilization on private lands in Polk County include Managed Forest Land (MFL) and Forest Crop Land (FCL).

Understanding land ownership and management patterns provides a link to a host of voluntary and non-regulatory plan implementation tools. Valued community features and resources can be protected for future generations not only through regulatory approaches like zoning and land division ordinances, but also through public ownership or programs like MFL and FCL. Polk County will be best positioned to achieve its desired future when land use, land management, and land regulation are working in concert.

## **8.4 Density Management - A Different Approach to Managing Development**

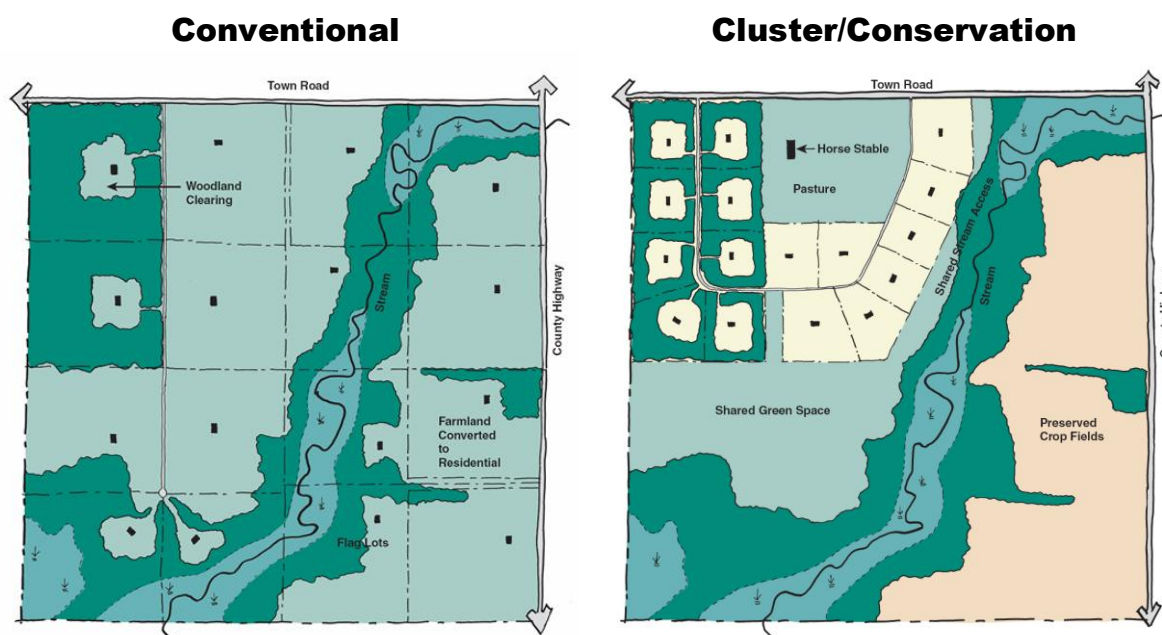
Polk County manages growth through a zoning code that generally regulates the types of uses allowed and the associated minimum lot sizes that are required. This Plan and the County Plan advocates an approach to establish certain maximum densities for development within some of the planned rural and use designations as managed by Polk County ordinances. Specific recommendations are included within the Future Land Use Management Areas outlined in Section 8.8.

It is critical to understand the difference between how density is used to manage development in comparison to minimum lot size. Minimum lot size requirements set how big individual lots need to be. Maximum density requirements set how many new homes or lots can be divided from a larger parcel, regardless of how big individual homesites or lots need to be. Establishing density standards typically works in conjunction with minimum lot sizes (and sometimes maximum lot sizes) to ensure the goals of the area (such as very low density in the agriculture classification) are met while ensuring standards are applied for health and safety (minimum lot size areas for adequate septage treatment and replacement). For more information refer to the *Polk County Comprehensive Plan*.

## **8.5 Cluster/Conservation Development**

In concert with adding density management provisions to achieve town and county goals of farmland preservation and maintaining rural character, the town and county should also consider adding residential clustering/conservation provisions as a primary development option for rural land development. Clustering typically allows relatively small residential lots, but still large enough to ensure adequate septage treatment and replacement systems. Clustering residential lots on a portion of a development tract (in conjunction with density management) allows a number of benefits including the conservation of farmland, forest, open space and natural resources, the ability to place homesites where the most suitable soils exist, and the potential for lower infrastructure costs. For more information refer to the *Polk County Comprehensive Plan*. The following images show the difference between conventional residential lot development and cluster/conservation development:

**Figure 8-1**



## 8.6 Future Land Use Plan

The future land use plan is one of the central components of the comprehensive plan that can be used as a guide for local officials when considering community development and redevelopment proposals. When considering the role of the future land use plan in community decision making, it is important to keep the following characteristics in mind.

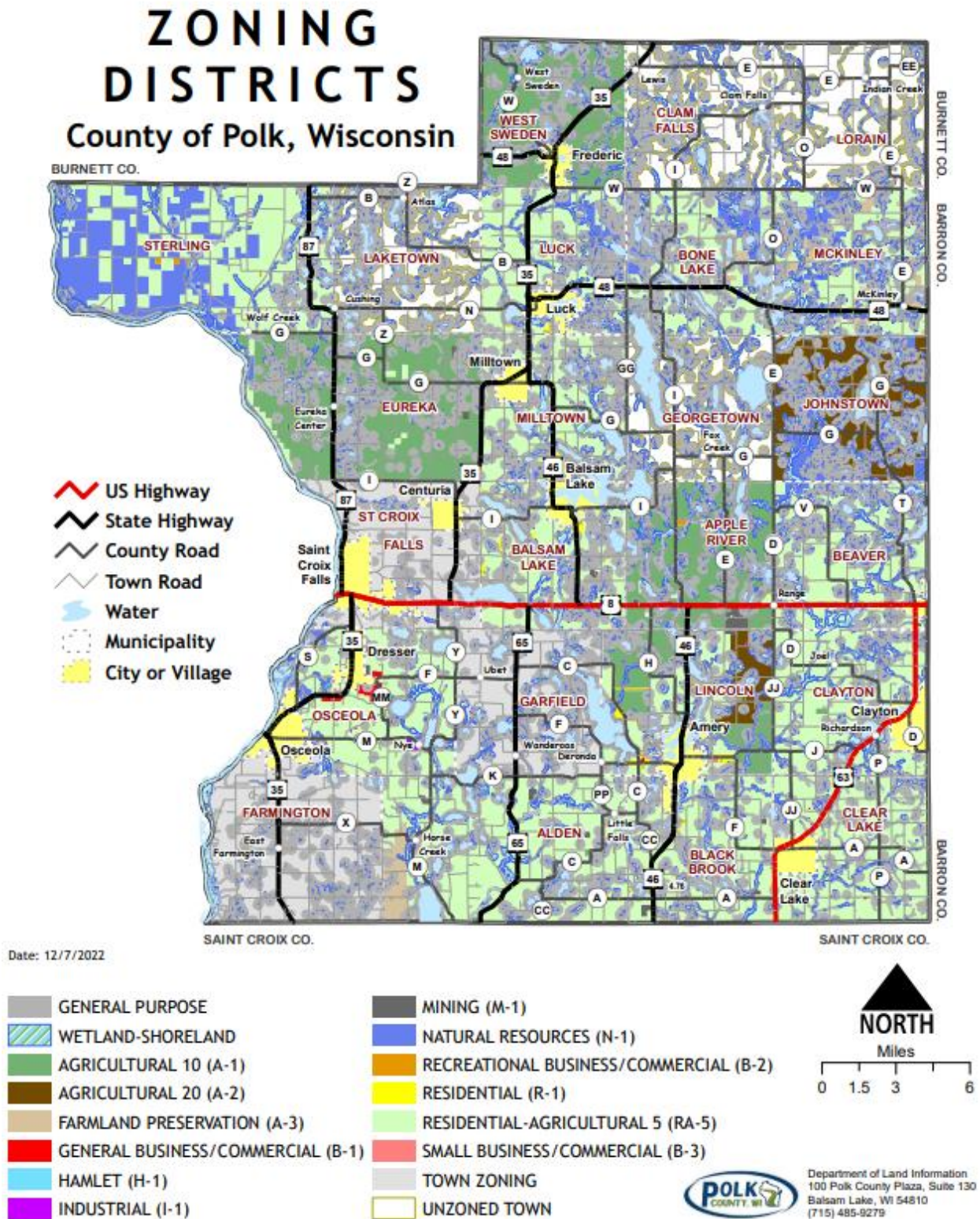
- ♦ A land use plan is an expression of a preferred or ideal future – a vision for the future of the community.
- ♦ A land use plan is not the same as zoning. Zoning is authorized and governed by a set of statutes that are separate from those that govern planning. And while it may make sense to match portions of the land use plan map with the zoning map immediately after plan adoption, other portions of the zoning map may achieve consistency with the land use plan incrementally over time.
- ♦ A land use plan is not implemented exclusively through zoning. It can be implemented through a number of fiscal tools, regulatory tools, and non-regulatory tools including voluntary land management and community development programs.
- ♦ A land use plan is long range and will need to be reevaluated periodically to ensure that it remains applicable to changing trends and conditions. The plan is not static. It can be amended when a situation arises that was not anticipated during the initial plan development process.

- ♦ A land use plan is neither a prediction nor a guaranty. Some components of the future vision may take the full 20 to 25 years to materialize, while some components may never come to fruition within the planning period.

The primary components of the future land use plan include the Future Land Use and the Future Land Use Management Areas. These components work together with the Implementation element to provide policy guidance for decision makers in the town.

The Town of Sterling's plan for future land use is intended to protect agricultural, natural, and cultural resources for future generations while also allowing reasonable opportunities for land development and making efficient use of existing infrastructure. The town will accomplish this by managing the use of lands and the density of development. Most locations in the town will allow for development to take place, but the density of development will be planned in order to preserve valued features of the landscape and to encourage growth in areas that are most suitable for development.

Map 8.1 – Polk County Zoning Districts





## 8.7 Future Land Use Management Areas

The following Land Use Management Areas (LUMAs) have been utilized on the County Zoning Map. These descriptions give meaning to the map by describing (as applicable) the purpose, primary goal, preferred development density, preferred uses, and discouraged uses for each management area. They may also include policy statements that are specific to areas of the community mapped under a particular LUMA. Any such policies carry the same weight and serve the same function as policies found elsewhere in this plan.

### Agricultural (A1)

- ♦ Purpose: To prevent the conversion of agricultural land to other uses that are not consistent with agriculture while optimizing agricultural production areas. The purpose is also to implement comprehensive plan goals by encouraging livestock and other agricultural uses in areas where soil and other conditions are best suited to these agricultural pursuits. This area provides consistency with the County designated farmland preservation areas and establishes the farm and woodlands character of this part of the County.
- ♦ Primary Goal: To preserve and promote a full range of agricultural uses. In addition, this management area is intended to maintain a viable agricultural base to support the agricultural processing and service industries, help control public service costs in rural areas thereby avoiding the need to extend urban services to scattered, isolated residential areas, help to preserve productive soils, and help to maintain the scenic beauty, rural character, and cultural heritage of the community.
- ♦ Preferred Use: All agricultural uses, regardless of size. Specific preferred uses could include livestock production, dairy, agriculturally-related residences, greenhouses, horse facilities, agriculture sales and service, agricultural storage, agricultural research and development, fish and wildlife management activities, timber harvest and milling, and aqua culture. Sand and gravel extraction and home based businesses would be permitted in accordance with county regulations governing such activity. The Agricultural Enterprise Management Area could include a limited amount of residential development at various levels of density, but the predominant land use would be agricultural in nature.
- ♦ Recommended Policies:
  - ▶ The maximum preferred housing density is 1 unit per 20 acres.
  - ▶ In areas identified by a town with the AE future land use management areas, new non-farm residential development should be placed on the landscape in a fashion that prevents conflicts between agricultural and residential land uses.
  - ▶ Promote clustering of homes and preservation of land for open space use within mapped agriculture enterprise areas.
  - ▶ Utilize maximum and minimum lot size provisions to ensure the lots created are large enough to accommodate development (say one acre) and yet small enough not to consume prime agricultural lands (say 3 or 5 acres).
  - ▶ Consider soil characteristics when siting new buildings to maintain as much of the prime soils in production as possible.

- Encourage new development that is allowed in agricultural enterprise to be designed and located in a manner that does not detract from the area's rural character, and which may be easily served by county, town, and emergency services. The county may want to work with interested towns in developing a driveway ordinance that guides the placement of driveways in new developments. For example, new driveways could be placed along existing contours, property lines, fencerows, lines of existing vegetation, or other natural features wherever possible.

### **Residential – Agricultural (RA5)**

- ♦ Purpose: To maintain the rural and open character of these areas while accommodating limited residential uses. Rural residential activity has been significant as the off lake property becomes more in demand for seasonal use. This area includes marginal or abandoned farmlands that have become attractive for rural residences.
- ♦ Primary Goal: Preserve the rural landscape, open space, and natural features of the area, while accommodating residential development. Promote infill of areas which have already experienced development in order to increase overall density without sacrificing community character.
- ♦ Preferred Use: Limited residential development generally located along existing roadways, in clusters, and on larger lots than found in an urban area. Commercial uses are discouraged except those of very low intensity such as golf courses or home-based businesses.
- ♦ Recommended Policies:
  - The preferred housing density should range from 1 unit per 2 1/2 acres to 1 unit per 10 acres.
  - Lots smaller than one acre should be allowed with conservation or cluster design.
  - Density bonuses for conservation or cluster design should be considered.

### **Wetland / Shoreland**

- ♦ Purpose: To recognize the shore lands adjacent to lakes, rivers, and streams in Polk County as areas historically prone to development pressure. Further residential development is regulated by the lakes and rivers classification development standards and accompanying shoreland ordinances.
- ♦ Primary Goal: Establishing appropriate strategies for the management of future development of these areas that address: ensuring environmental quality, maintaining views and open space, maintaining community character, and potential recreational activity conflicts.
- ♦ Preferred Use: Residential uses that are compatible with their immediate surroundings. Limited commercial uses including lodging, resorts and associated retail and services should be compatible with immediate surroundings and located in areas of established commercial uses.



- ♦ Recommended Policies: Stay consistent with Lakes Classification strategy for lot size and density.

### **Private Natural Resources (N1)**

- ♦ Purpose: To maintain the character, and viability of forestry of private forest lands while accommodating limited residential uses. The forestry residential areas are private forest lands adjacent to public forest holdings.
- ♦ Primary Goal: Maintain the area as primarily well-managed large parcels of contiguous land to ensure the viability of forestry uses, while accommodating limited residential development. Promote infill of areas which have already experienced development in order to increase overall density without sacrificing community character and causing further fragmentation of parcels.
- ♦ Preferred Use: Forestry uses, agricultural uses, with some size limitations. Limited residential development generally located along existing roadways, in clusters, and integrated with the natural landscape. Commercial uses are discouraged.
- ♦ Recommended Policies: The preferred housing density should range from 1 unit per 20 acres to 1 unit per 40 acres.
  - New development should be placed on the landscape in a fashion that minimizes the fragmentation of large forest tracts.
  - Promote clustering of homes and preservation of land for open space and forestry.
  - Lots smaller than one acre should be allowed with conservation or cluster design.
  - New residential subdivisions with 5 lots or more should not be allowed in areas planned for forestry residential unless site planning or conservation design can be effectively used to minimize negative impacts to forestry.

### **Public Natural Resources (N1) including Sterling Town owned-lands.**

- ♦ Purpose: A Land Use Management Area to designate existing public lands and wetlands that are not planned for development.
- ♦ Primary Goal: To maintain natural features and areas as community assets and conserve these features for future generations. In addition, to prohibit development in areas which are not suited. Implementation of a management plan for Sterling town-owned forest lands.
- ♦ Preferred Use: Allowable uses may include forestry, passive recreation, wildlife protection activities, and fisheries as possible uses.

## **8.8 Existing and Potential Land Use Conflicts**

The following existing and potential unresolved land use conflicts have been identified by the Town of Sterling. While the multi-jurisdictional planning process was designed to provide maximum opportunities for the resolution of both internal and external land use conflicts, some issues may remain. Due to their complexity, the long range nature of comprehensive planning,

and the uncertainty of related assumptions, these conflicts remain unresolved and should be monitored during plan implementation.

### **Potential Land Use Conflicts**

- ♦ Lack of property and building maintenance.
- ♦ Lack of land use ordinance enforcement.
- ♦ Telecommunication towers.
- ♦ Wind energy towers.
- ♦ Residential development next to high intensity agricultural land use and threats to the right-to-farm.
- ♦ Residential development next to extraction land uses.
- ♦ Poorly designed commercial or industrial development.
- ♦ Lack of screening or buffering between incompatible uses.
- ♦ Home based businesses that take on the characteristics of primary commercial or industrial uses.
- ♦ Sitting of undesirable or poorly designed land uses in the interim between plan adoption and development of implementation tools.
- ♦ Meeting the service needs of newly developed areas.
- ♦ Controlling and managing development along major highway corridors and interchanges.
- ♦ The over-consumption of rural lands by large lot subdivisions.
- ♦ The loss of rural character in some locations.

## **8.9 Opportunities for Redevelopment**

In every instance where development is considered in the *Town of Sterling 2045 Comprehensive Plan*, redevelopment is also considered as an equally valid option. Infill development is the primary type of redevelopment that is likely to occur in the town.

### **8.10 Land Use Goals and Objectives**

Community goals are broad, value-based statements expressing public preferences for the long term (20 years or more). They specifically address key issues, opportunities, and problems that affect the community. Objectives are more specific than goals and are more measurable statements usually attainable through direct action and implementation of plan recommendations. The accomplishment of objectives contributes to fulfillment of the goal.

***Goal 1: Guide the efficient use of land through a unified vision of planned growth in recognition of resource limitations and town goals and objectives.***

#### ***Objectives:***

- A. Maintain a current, long-range comprehensive plan, which will serve as a guide for future land use and zoning decisions.
- B. Develop procedures and policies that ensure a balance between appropriate land use and the rights of property owners.
- C. Ensure all landowners have equitable options for proposing land use change.

- D. Coordinate land use planning and growth management throughout the town to facilitate efficient resource investments while allowing for local autonomy where warranted.
- E. Help identify, evaluate, and preserve historic, archaeological, and cultural resources.
- F. Encourage town planning goals that are specific to the town goals and policies.
- G. Identify areas of potential conflict between the land use plans of the Town, surrounding communities, and the county and provide a process for the discussion and resolution of such conflicts.

***Goal 2: Plan for a desirable pattern of land use that contributes to the realization of the town's goals and objectives for the future.***

***Objectives:***

- A. Restrict new development from areas shown to be unsafe or unsuitable for development due to natural hazards, contamination, access, or incompatibility problems.
- B. Establish a range of preferred land use classifications and a range of preferred development densities and assign them to areas of the town in order to identify planning guidelines within which a variety of local land use planning and implementation options will achieve long term land use compatibility.
- C. Seek a pattern of land use that will preserve large tracts of productive agricultural areas and resources.
- D. Seek a pattern of land use that will preserve productive forestry areas and resources.
- E. Seek a pattern of land use that will preserve green spaces in developed areas, and natural resources, with a focus on ground water and surface water resources.
- F. Seek a pattern of land use that will maintain and enhance the town economy.
- G. Focus areas of substantial new growth within or near existing areas of development where adequate public facilities and services can be cost-effectively provided or expanded.
- H. Promote growth patterns that result in compact, distinct and separate communities rather than continuous linear strips of development.
- I. Encourage cluster development to assure conservation of land, efficient provision of public services, and accessibility.
- J. Help promote the provision of public facilities and services when sufficient need and revenue base to support them.
- K. Consider a variety of planning tools such as area development plans, density management regulations, purchase or transfer of development rights programs, site and architectural design review guidelines, and voluntary land management programs to achieve the town's desired pattern of future land use.
- L. Encourage land division layouts that incorporate the preservation of valued community features, that fit within the character of the local community, and that are suited to the specific location in which the development is proposed.
- M. Require intensive uses such as salvage yards to be reviewed and permitted by the Town.
- N. Coordinate with the County, Department of Natural Resources, and the National Park Service where applicable to ensure that land management decisions provide maximum benefits.
- O. Review land use maps, surveys and public meetings for inclusion in the land use ordinances.

## **8.11 Land Use Policies and Recommendations**

Policies and recommendations build on goals and objectives by providing more focused responses to the issues that the town is concerned about. Policies and recommendations become primary tools the town can use in making land use decisions. Many of the policies and recommendations cross element boundaries and work together toward overall implementation strategies.

Policies identify the way in which activities are conducted in order to fulfill the goals and objectives. Policies that direct action using the word “shall” are advised to be mandatory and regulatory aspects of the implementation of the comprehensive plan. In contrast, those policies that direct action using the words “will” or “should” are advisory and intended to serve as a guide. “Will” statements are considered to be strong guidelines, while “should” statements are considered loose guidelines.

Recommendations are specific actions or projects that the town should be prepared to complete. The completion of these actions and projects is consistent with the town’s policies, and therefore will help the town fulfill the comprehensive plan goals and objectives.

- LU1. The comprehensive plan shall identify anticipated areas for future growth, the preferred land uses within growth areas, and policies that guide the review of proposed developments.
- LU2. Work with the county to improve zoning and land division ordinance provisions toward improved management of land use and development and toward overall comprehensive plan implementation.
- LU3. Work with the County to update zoning, subdivision, and other land use management tools as necessary to implement the Preferred Land Use Plan.
- LU4. All development proposals should meet the intent of the Preferred Land Use Management Areas as described within the Land Use element.
- LU5. Provide the county input and recommendations prior to a rezoning, conditional use, land division (including plats and certified survey maps), or site plan approval.
- LU6. Where a proposed development is found to be inconsistent with comprehensive plan policies, an applicant shall be advised to petition the local unit of government for a revision to the comprehensive plan preferred land use map (note: the applicant may also revise the design of the proposed development to attempt to achieve consistency with the plan).
- LU7. The Town should review growth and development applications to address service demands on community services or facilities.
- LU8. At a minimum, the following characteristics shall be used to define a cluster or conservation design development:

- a) Residential lots or building sites are concentrated and grouped.
  - b) The number of lots (density) takes into account the standards of the overlying zoning district.
  - c) The lot size is reduced from what is normally required.
  - d) A maximum lot size is employed to support open space requirements and manage density.
  - e) There are residual lands that are preserved as green space in perpetuity for the purpose of limiting density, protecting valued community features such as agriculture, natural resources, or cultural resources.
- LU9. Home-based business shall maintain the following characteristics:
- a) They are conducted in a zoning district where such use is allowed.
  - b) They maintain compliance with the specific requirements of the zoning ordinance.
  - c) They are a secondary use of a primarily residential property.
- LU10. At such time that a home-based business takes on the characteristics of a primary commercial or industrial use, it shall be relocated, discontinued, or rezoned (as necessary) to be consistent with the applicable adopted comprehensive plan and overlying land use regulation (zoning) to appropriately reflect the a commercial or industrial use.
- LU11. Proposed conditional uses shall meet the following criteria in order to gain Town approval:
- a) Complies with the requirements of the applicable zoning district.
  - b) Use and density are consistent with the intent, purpose, and policies of the applicable preferred land use classification.
  - c) Use and site design are compatible with adjacent uses in terms of aesthetics, scale, hours of operation, traffic generation, lighting, noise, odor, dust, vibration, and other external impacts.
  - d) Does not diminish property values in the surrounding neighborhood.
  - e) Provides assurance of continuing maintenance.
  - f) Addresses parking and site layout requirements.
- LU12. Assess the need for the development of a Town ordinance regulating the storage of non-functioning vehicles, junk, scrap and related “eye sores”.
- LU13. Ensure that existing land use activities currently in the Town are “grand-fathered” into any new regulatory practice.
- LU14. If consistent with the Town’s comprehensive plan, the design of new commercial development should employ shared driveway access, shared parking areas, shared internal traffic circulation, and coordinated site planning with adjacent businesses, as warranted.
- LU15. New commercial and industrial development should employ site and building designs that include:

- a) Signage and building architecture;
- b) Shared highway access points;
- c) Parking and loading areas;
- d) Landscaping;
- e) Lighting;
- f) Efficient traffic and pedestrian flow.
- g) All mechanical equipment (i.e. air conditioners, ventilation equipment, etc.) should be screened from public view. This includes roof-top equipment and equipment on the ground.
- h) Future business and industrial development in the Town should be reviewed for potential financial, service and visual impacts to surrounding landowners.

## 9. Implementation

### 9.1 Action Plan

In order for plans to be meaningful, they must be implemented, so the Town of Sterling's comprehensive plan was developed with implementation in mind. Not only can useful policy guidance for local decision making be found in each planning element, but an action plan is also provided containing specific programs and recommended actions.

An action plan is intended to jump start the implementation process and to provide continued focus over the long term. During the comprehensive planning process, a detailed framework for implementation was created which will serve to guide the many steps that must be taken to put the plan in motion. This action plan outlines those steps and recommends a timeline for their completion. Further detail on each task can be found in the policies and recommendations of the related planning element as noted in the *Task* statement. Recommended actions have been identified in the following four areas:

- ♦ Plan Adoption and Update Actions
- ♦ Intergovernmental Cooperation Actions
- ♦ Ordinance Development and Update Actions
- ♦ Strategic Planning Actions

The recommended actions are listed in priority order within each of the four implementation areas as noted in the *Timing* component. Highest priority actions are listed first, followed by medium and long term actions, and ongoing or periodic actions are listed last.

#### Plan Adoption and Update Actions

##### Priority (Short Term) Actions

1. Task: Pass a resolution recommending adoption of the comprehensive plan by the Town Board (*Implementation* element).  
Responsible Party: Plan Commission  
Timing: TBD
2. Task: Adopt the comprehensive plan by ordinance (*Implementation* element).  
Responsible Party: Town Board  
Timing: TBD

##### Periodic Actions

1. Task: Review the comprehensive plan for performance in conjunction with the budgeting process (*Implementation* element).  
Responsible Party: Plan Commission  
Timing: Annually

2. Task: Conduct a comprehensive plan update (*Implementation* element).  
Responsible Party: Plan Commission, Town Board  
Timing: Every five years  
Consideration: The 2030 census data will be available in 2032. The updated housing and population counts and projections can be applied and planning documents modified based on the new data.

## **Intergovernmental Cooperation Actions**

### Priority (Short Term) Actions

1. Task: Meet with other units of local government to assess/discuss plan review issues, implementation coordination, and consistency requirements (*Intergovernmental Cooperation* element).  
Responsible Party: Town Board  
Timing: TBD (within one to two years)

### Medium Term Actions

1. Task: Distribute an intergovernmental cooperation update (*Intergovernmental Cooperation* element).  
Responsible Party: Town Board  
Timing: TBD (within three to five years)
2. Task: Review and evaluate existing intergovernmental agreements and services (*Intergovernmental Cooperation* element).  
Responsible Party: Plan Commission and Town Board  
Timing: TBD (within three to five years)

### Long Term Actions

1. Task: Work with Polk County to create a Purchase of Development Rights PDR Program or Donated Easement Program (*Agricultural, Natural, and Cultural Resources* element).  
Responsible Party: Plan Commission and Town Board  
Timing: TBD (five years or more)

### Periodic Actions

1. Task: Utilize intergovernmental options to provide needed service and facility improvements.  
Responsible Party: Town Board  
Timing: Ongoing



## Ordinance Development and Update Actions

### Short Term Actions

1. Task: Work with Polk County to modify the zoning ordinance and map toward implementation of the town's comprehensive plan (*Transportation; Utilities and Community Facilities; Agricultural, Natural, and Cultural Resources; Land Use* element).  
Responsible Party: Plan Commission and Town Board  
Timing: TBD
2. Task: Work with Polk County to modify the county land division ordinance toward implementation of the town's comprehensive plan (*Transportation; Utilities and Community Facilities; Agricultural, Natural, and Cultural Resources; Land Use* element).  
Responsible Party: Plan Commission and Town Board  
Timing: TBD
3. Task: Adopt a driveway ordinance (*Transportation* element).  
Responsible Party: Plan Commission and Town Board  
Timing: TBD (within two years)

### Medium Term Actions

1. Task: Develop a site plan and architectural design review standards. The standards could be guidelines or an ordinance. Related provisions may be developed at the county level which may apply, therefore it is recommended the town work with Polk County within the construct of the county zoning and land division ordinance updates prior to pursuing this strategy (*Agricultural, Natural, and Cultural Resources* element).  
Responsible Party: Plan Commission and Town Board  
Timing: TBD (within three to five years)

### Long Term Actions

1. Task: Develop an official map (*Transportation* element). The need may not be applicable town-wide; consider designating road corridors for higher density development areas, lakeshore areas, or areas of long term planned development  
Responsible Party: Plan Commission and Town Board  
Timing: TBD
2. Task: Consider development of a historic preservation ordinance (*Agricultural, Natural, and Cultural Resources* element).  
Responsible Party: Plan Commission and Town Board  
Timing: TBD (five years or more)

### Periodic Actions

1. Task: Update the town road construction specifications (*Transportation* element).

Responsible Party: Town Board  
Timing: Periodic as needed

## Strategic Planning Actions

### Periodic Actions

1. Task: Review land use and density policies for residential development to ensure longer term plan recommendations are coordinated with shorter term market conditions (*Housing* element).  
Responsible Party: Plan Commission  
Timing: Annually
2. Task: Review ordinances and fees for their impacts on town administration and development applicants (*Housing* element).  
Responsible Party: Plan Commission  
Timing: Annually
3. Task: Update the five-year road improvement plan (*Transportation* element).  
Responsible Party: Town Board  
Timing: Annually
4. Task: Pursue funding for transportation improvements (*Transportation* element).  
Responsible Party: Town Board  
Timing: Annually
5. Task: Assess staffing, training, and equipment needs (*Utilities and Community Facilities* element).  
Responsible Party: Town Board  
Timing: Annually
6. Task: Assess building and public facility capacity (*Utilities and Community Facilities* element).  
Responsible Party: Town Board  
Timing: Every five years
7. Task: Maintain an Condition of active farms, feedlots, and manure storage facilities (*Agricultural, Natural, and Cultural Resources* element).  
Responsible Party: Plan Commission  
Timing: As needed
8. Task: Maintain an Condition of historic and archeological sites (*Agricultural, Natural, and Cultural Resources* element).  
Responsible Party: Plan Commission  
Timing: As needed

## **9.2 Status and Changes to Land Use Programs and Regulations**

The following provides an Condition of the land use regulations that are in effect in the Town of Sterling and summarizes recommended changes to each of these ordinance types. For basic information on regulatory plan implementation tools, please refer to the *Condition and Trends Report*. For further detail on the status of each type of implementation ordinance in Polk County, please refer to the *Condition and Trends Report*.

### **Code of Ordinances**

#### Current Status

The Town of Sterling has not adopted its ordinances as a code of ordinances. The town currently administers ordinances individually. Town ordinances are listed on the town's website at <https://www.townofsterling.com/ordinances-resolutions/>

#### Recommended Changes

Follow the statutory procedure for creating a code of ordinances. All existing and future ordinances should be adopted as part of the town's municipal code. The code is easier to manage and more efficient, especially during times of political and administrative succession or transition.

### **Zoning**

#### Current Status

The Polk County Zoning Ordinance establishes the county's basic land use, lot size, and building location and height requirements. The Polk County Zoning Ordinance applies to unincorporated areas of the county in towns that have adopted the ordinance. The Town of Sterling's zoning information is displayed on Map 8-1.

#### Recommended Changes

Zoning ordinances will be one of the key tools that the Town of Sterling will need to utilize to implement its comprehensive plan. For the sake of efficiency and consistency, the town prefers to work with Polk County to modify county zoning ordinances for achievement of the town's vision for the future. A more effective zoning ordinance will be utilized to:

- ♦ Promote housing options
- ♦ Preserve agricultural lands and the right to farm
- ♦ Preserve natural resources and cultural resources including rural character
- ♦ Implement the town's site planning policies
- ♦ Better achieve the town's desired development pattern
- ♦ Better manage potentially conflicting land uses.

On a fundamental level, the town will need to work with Polk County to amend or create new zoning districts and to revise the town zoning map. This will help implement the town's preferred land uses and densities as established under the Future Land Use Management Areas. Coordination will be necessary between the towns in Polk County as efficiency and cost management will be primary considerations at the county level.

**Figure 9-1**  
**County Zoning Coordination Evaluation Criteria**

<b>Zoning Draft Development:  Coordination and Evaluation Criteria  Critical to County/Town Mutual Benefits</b>	
<u><b>Effectiveness</b></u> Effectiveness in implementing local and County Comprehensive Plans	<u><b>Simplicity</b></u> Ease of understanding by the general public
<u><b>Ease of Ongoing Administration and Cost Efficiency</b></u> Time and effort required to administer and use the density management system on a day to day basis	<u><b>Flexibility</b></u> Amount of options available to individual towns to implement preferred land use management density and lot size provisions (within County Framework)
<u><b>Ease of Initial Implementation and Cost Efficiency</b></u> Time, effort, and cost to initially implement the density management system	<u><b>Potential for Success</b></u> Potential for success in achieving local and county goals – developing win-win solutions

Polk County and all towns under county zoning or considering adopting zoning administered through Polk County will need to consider the evaluation criteria as represented in Figure 9-2. Each town in Polk County has their own ideas on how to manage land use, but there is similarity in the goals in which the comprehensive plans were developed. The County and Town Comprehensive Plans were developed based on an overall county-wide framework to establish consistency across the county, yet provide enough local flexibility for towns to manage their respective community per their individual plan. Towns were encouraged to develop specific strategies and policies to best fit local needs during the planning process. The intent of coordination a County Zoning Ordinance update is to help implement both county and local plans by providing a framework of consistent regulations that will implement many of the local strategies and policies. Assuming the process will be coordinated similar to the county planning process, the Zoning Ordinance revisions will also provide many options for the Towns to customize the zoning districts to meet local needs while recognizing the constraints of administrative costs.

In regard to modifying or updating the zoning maps to help implement the comprehensive plan, the Future Land Use Map should not simply become the zoning map. The comprehensive plan and associated Future Land Use Map are not intended to be so detailed that they try to predict what the future land uses might be (no one has a crystal ball). The Future Land Use Map is intended to be more general to reflect the goals and capture the long

term intent of creating or preserving community character. The Future Land Use Map should be kept more general and have written policy guidance for how to address rezonings, land division, development applications, etc. In many instances the plan goals, objectives, policies and recommendations will be more important than the future land use map as they collectively manage community decisions.

In addition to the revision of the basic zoning districts and map, the town hopes to employ several tools to help review and coordinate development including the following:

- ♦ Development review standards and processes
- ♦ Conditional use review criteria
- ♦ Site planning regulations (further detailed under *Land Division Regulations* below)

Proposed modifications to the County Zoning Ordinance should also include provisions for impacts assessment. Land divisions, conditional uses, and other substantial development projects should be required to include an assessment of potential transportation, natural resource, and cost of community service impacts. The level of impacts assessment required should be reasonable and proportional to the intensity of the proposed development. In addition to requesting developers and permit applicants to provide an assessment of these potential impacts, the town should request that multiple site development alternatives are provided as part of the development review process.

## **Land Division Regulations**

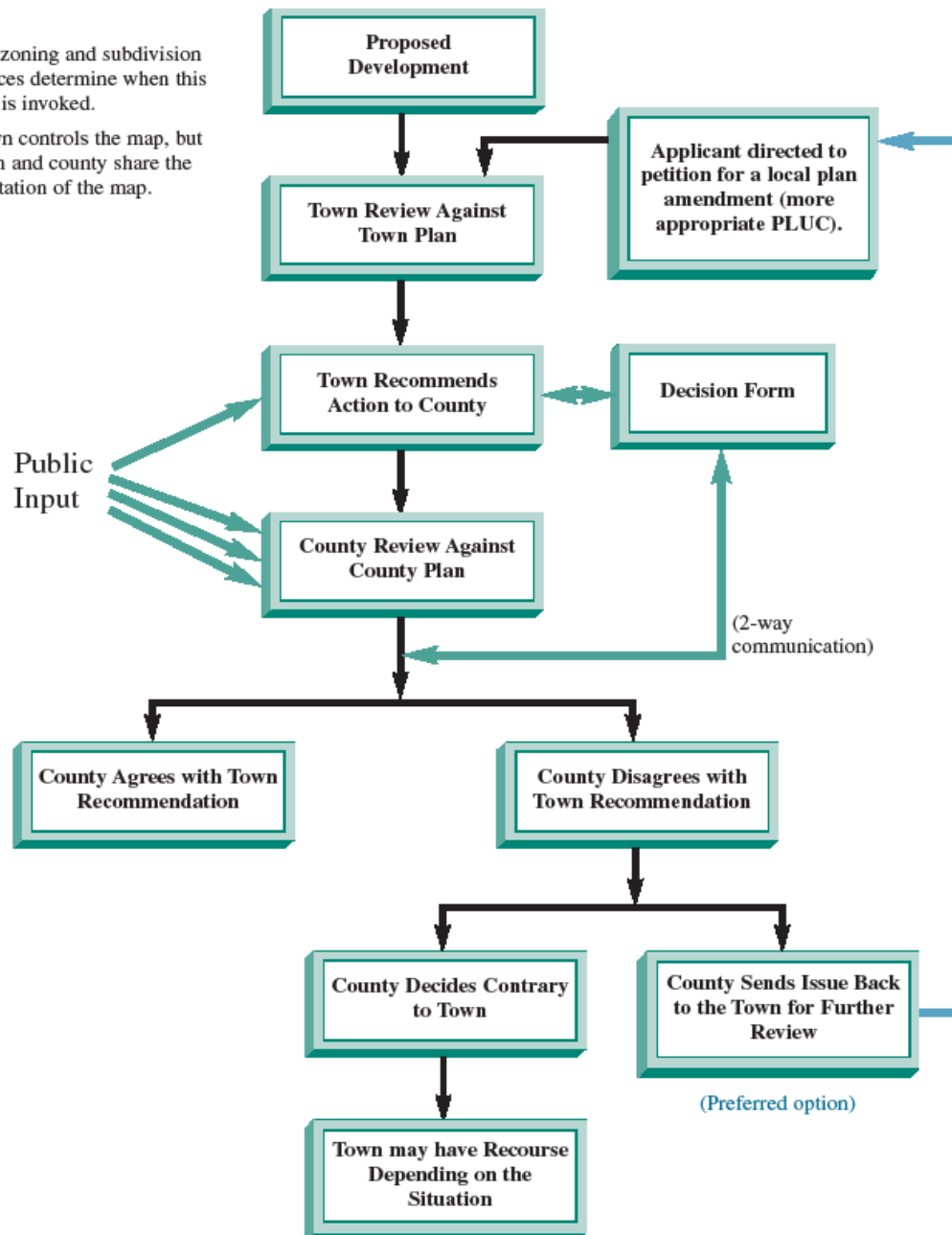
### Current Status

The Polk County Subdivision Ordinance applies to the town and requires county approval of land divisions that result in the creation of one or more parcels of five acres or less in size. Refer to the *Condition and Trends Report* for details on existing county ordinances.

### Recommended Changes

Land division ordinances will be another key tool that the Town of Sterling will need to utilize to implement its comprehensive plan. For the sake of efficiency and consistency, the town prefers to work with Polk County to modify the County Subdivision Ordinance for achievement of the town's vision for the future. Similar to the Zoning Ordinance, the town and county must cooperate and coordinate the proposed modifications in accordance with Figure 9-2 to seek the win-win solutions that benefit both parties without negative impact to administration. However, should this approach fall short in implementing the town's plan, the town would consider adopting a local ordinance.

**Figure 9-2**  
**Polk County Comprehensive Planning County/Local Coordinated**  
**Decision Making Process**



In order to better manage new town roads or other public infrastructure dedications associated with new development, the town should improve subdivision ordinance provisions for the execution of development agreements. A standard development agreement should be assembled that includes provisions for financial assurance, construction warranties, construction inspections, and completion of construction by the town under failure to do so by the developer.

In accordance with Figure 9-3, clear communication between the town and the county is paramount if a shared development review process is to work correctly. It is important to note that the county zoning and subdivision ordinances determine when this process is invoked as the ordinances are administered by Polk County.

Opportunities for town involvement occur when proposed land uses or land developments require a decision on the part of Polk County. Such decisions include rezones, conditional uses, and land divisions, and could be expanded to include site plan review. As a town reviews a proposed land use and forwards its decision or recommendation to the county, town decisions should be documented and copied to the county. County decisions should be documented in this same manner and copied to the applicable towns. This process tool gets both units of government using their plans and speaking the same language.

This approach has several advantages. Even if it is the county's position that it will generally follow a town's recommendation, the communication still needs to be clear. The reason for this is because the town and the county are not the only ones involved. The public is also involved, so just agreeing with the town will not eliminate the potential for conflict. And after 2010, the comprehensive planning law makes it even more important that communities clearly document their reasoning when making decisions that should be "consistent" with the comprehensive plan. If a citizen, applicant, developer, etc. challenges a decision of a town or county, they will have a much more difficult challenge winning against the unit of government if the reasoning for a decision is clearly documented and connected to comprehensive plan policies.

## **Site Plan and Design Review**

### Current Status

Site plan and design review standards are not currently administered by the town. Refer to Section 9.3 of the *Condition and Trends Report* for details on related, Polk County ordinances. Site design refers to the overall layout of the site and the relationship of major features such as buildings, streets, parking and supporting elements.

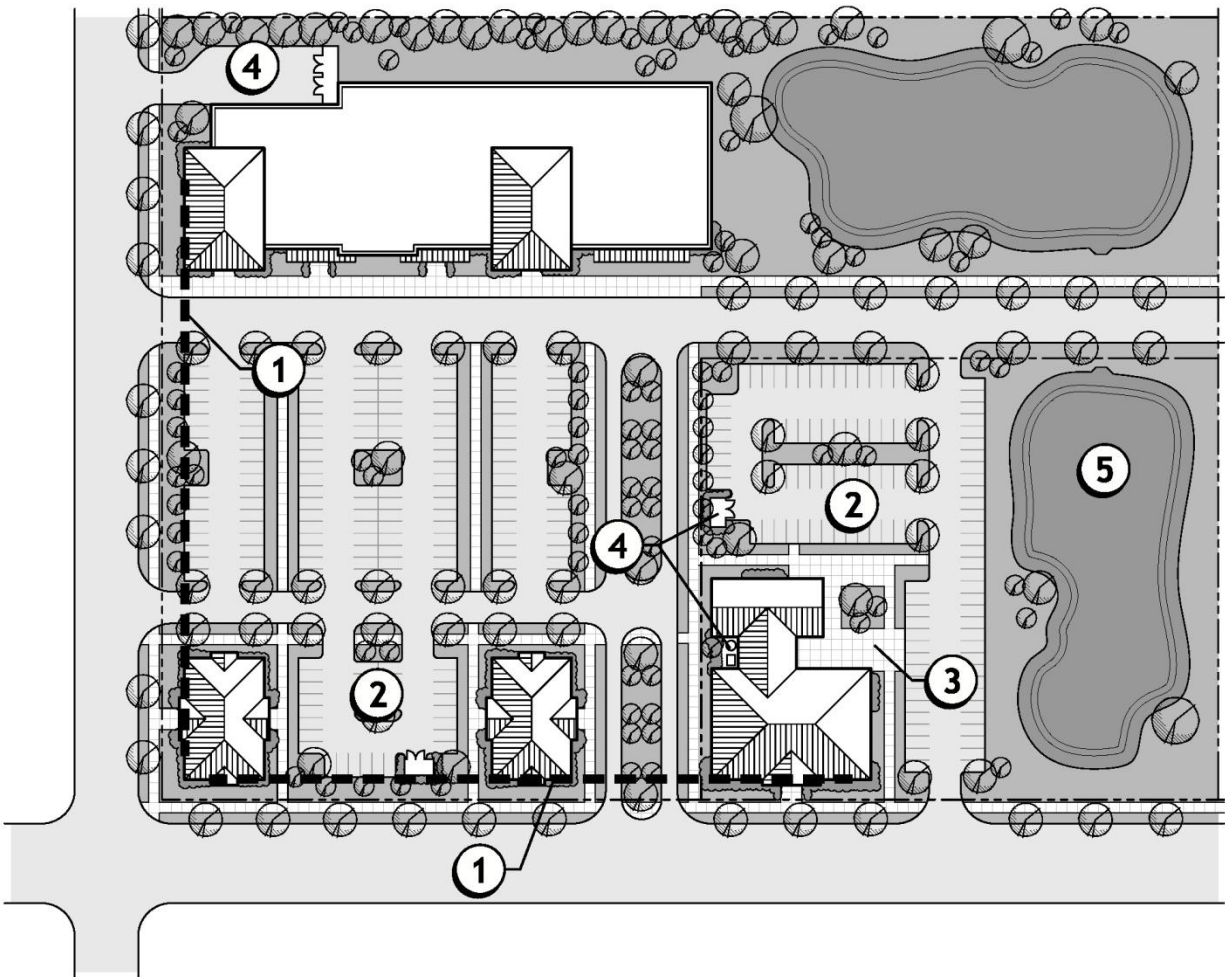
### Recommended Changes

The town does intend to review development applications in conjunction with the Plan Commission. Site planning is not intended to be invasive to the applicant, but is intended to allow the town to manage growth in conjunction with property owners to accomplish town goals. Similar to the zoning and land division ordinance discussions, it is anticipated Polk County will incorporate basic site design requirements and standards as part of the county code, especially for proposed commercial, industrial, institutional, and multi-family residential developments. This will likely be a cooperative effort with Polk County, the



surrounding towns, and possibly with incorporated communities as well. Site plan and design review requirements may address the desired characteristics of building layout and architecture, park areas, green space and landscaping, lighting, signage, grading, driveway access, and internal traffic circulation. The example denoted in Figure 9-3 represents a sample of potential considerations associated with site review.

**Figure 9-3 Typical Site Design Example**



**1 Building Location and Setbacks**

Buildings should be located to strengthen the definition of street edges and public areas. Building setbacks should also be consistent with those of buildings located on adjacent properties.

**2 Parking Lot Configurations and Location**

Parking lots should be designed to accommodate convenient vehicular navigation. Generally, two-way drive aisles should be 24 feet wide and non-handicapped accessible spaces should be 9 wide by 18 feet deep. Dead-end aisles should be avoided where possible, but shall include a vehicle turn-around when used.

Parking lots should also be arranged to provide convenient access to buildings and primarily located to the sides or rear and between buildings.

### **3 Public Space**

The integration of public areas including court yards, plazas and gardens into the site is encouraged. These spaces should be defined by surrounding buildings, street edges, landscaping and natural areas.

### **4 Service/Mechanical/Refuse Location**

Service and storage areas, building mechanicals, and refuse/recycling containers should be located so that they are hidden from public view to the greatest extent possible.

### **5 Storm Water Configuration**

Storm water retention and detention areas should be designed to enhance the landscape through the use of natural forms and grading as opposed to rigid geometric shapes.

#### **Additional Standards:**

- **Building Elevation Priority** – Building elevations visible from public streets, public spaces, and residential areas shall receive the highest priority for architectural treatment and design treatment.
- **Fences** – Decorative fences made of wood, masonry, stone and ornamental metal are preferred over chain link fences. Chain link fences should be used only when there is a demonstrated security need.
- **Lighting** – Site lighting shall be provided for safety and security and directed away from adjacent properties.

Figure 9-3 represents a sample of what the town/county might assess if a development is proposed. It may not be typical or even necessary that all of the site plan criteria be included on a submitted site plan. Figure 9-3 was included to allow a reference in the need of an advanced development review. In addition, the town/county should seek public input on the establishment of these desired characteristics. The policies of the *Economic Development* element provide some initial guidance on potential design review standards.

Site planning can not only be used to provide for aesthetically pleasing development and protection of valued features of the landscape, but also to ensure that future road extensions will not be blocked by the construction of buildings or other structures. Area development plans will be required of major land divisions and commercial or industrial development proposals. These plans will lay out potential road extensions on adjacent lands. To ensure potential future road connectivity between development sites, the town's policies regarding the use of cul-de-sacs should be included in a revised land division ordinance. Temporary cul-de-sacs should be limited, but when allowed, should be constructed to the outside property line of the development site.

## **Official Map Regulations**

### Current Status

An official map is not currently administered by the town. Refer to the *Condition and Trends Report* for details on related, Polk County ordinances.

### Recommended Changes

Area development planning and site planning will be used to encourage coordinated planning between development sites, but the need for an official map may also develop over the planning period. The town should monitor the need to develop an official map that designates planned, future rights-of-way for roads and utilities in areas of expected growth.

## **Sign Regulations**

### Current Status

Sign regulations are not currently administered by the town. Refer the *Condition and Trends Report* for details on related, Polk County ordinances.

### Recommended Changes

No specific recommendations regarding sign regulations have been identified, however, sign placement and design should be addressed by the site plan and design review ordinance.

## **Erosion Control and Stormwater Management**

### Current Status

Erosion control and stormwater management ordinances are not currently administered by the town. Erosion control and stormwater management are addressed by the Polk County Zoning, Subdivision, Shoreland Zoning, and Non-Metallic Mining Reclamation Ordinances, which are in effect in the Town of Sterling. Refer to the *Condition and Trends Report* for details on related, Polk County ordinances.

### Recommended Changes

The town will modify applicable land division, zoning, and building code ordinances to include improved stormwater management and construction site erosion control requirements. Development proposals will be required to address stormwater management, construction site erosion control, and potential increased risk of flooding in accordance with existing state and county standards.

## **Historic Preservation**

### Current Status

Historic preservation ordinances are not currently administered by the town. Refer to the *Condition and Trends Report* for details on related, Polk County ordinances.

### Recommended Changes

The town would like to create a local historic preservation document that recognizes, but does not regulate, historic sites in the town. To support this effort, the town will maintain the map and database of historic and archeological sites and will conduct a community survey of historical and archeological resources at least once every 20 years. Additional research and public outreach are necessary before proceeding with creating such an ordinance.

## **Building, Housing, and Mechanical Codes**

### Current Status

Building, housing, and mechanical codes are not currently administered by the town. Refer to the Condition and Trends Report for details on related ordinances.

### Recommended Changes

No specific recommendations have been brought forward in regard to creating building, housing, and mechanical codes.

## **Sanitary Codes**

### Current Status

The Polk County Sanitary Ordinance applies to the town. Refer to the *Condition and Trends Report* for details on related Polk County ordinances.

### Recommended Changes

- ♦ No specific changes to sanitary codes are recommended at this time, but the town should continue to work with Polk County for the regulation of POWTS.

## **Driveway and Access Controls**

### Current Status

Driveway and access controls are not currently administered by the town. Refer to the *Condition and Trends Report* for details on related, Polk County ordinances.

### Recommended Changes

The town should adopt a driveway ordinance to implement access control and emergency vehicle access policies as they apply to town roads. The following areas of concern should be addressed by the ordinance.

- ♦ Minimum distance between access points
- ♦ Maximum number of access points per parcel
- ♦ Minimum site distance
- ♦ Minimum driveway surface width and construction materials
- ♦ Minimum clearance width and height
- ♦ Maximum driveway length
- ♦ Minimum turnaround areas for longer driveways
- ♦ Minimum intersection spacing.

## Road Construction Specifications

### Current Status

Road construction specifications are not currently administered by the town. Refer to the Condition and Trends Report for details on related ordinances.

### Recommended Changes

The town utilizes Wisconsin State Statutes 82.50 which provides minimum standards for roads. The town should develop a set of road construction specifications to include modern requirements for road base, surfacing, and drainage construction. Construction specifications should be adjustable based on the planned functional classification or expected traffic flow of a roadway.

## 9.3 Non-Regulatory Land Use Management Tools

While ordinances and other regulatory tools are often central in plan implementation, they are not the only means available to a community. Non-regulatory implementation tools include more detailed planning efforts (such as park planning, neighborhood planning, or road improvement planning), public participation tools, intergovernmental agreements, land acquisition, and various fiscal tools (such as capital improvement planning, impact fees, grant funding, and annual budgeting). For basic information on non-regulatory plan implementation tools, please refer to the *Condition and Trends Report*.

The *Town of Sterling Comprehensive Plan* includes recommendations for the use of non-regulatory implementation tools including the following:

- ♦ Assess the availability of land for residential development (*Housing* element).
- ♦ Review ordinances and fees for their impacts on housing (*Housing* element).
- ♦ Pursue funding for needed transportation facilities (*Transportation* element).
- ♦ Utilize intergovernmental efficiencies to provide services and facilities (*Utilities and Community Facilities* element).
- ♦ Assess service and capacity needs including town buildings, staffing, and equipment (*Utilities and Community Facilities* element).
- ♦ Maintain the map and database of historic and archeological sites (*Agricultural, Natural, and Cultural Resources* element).
- ♦ Work with the County on the purchase of development rights and/or a donated easement program (*Agricultural, Natural, and Cultural Resources* element).

- ♦ Support and participate in educational and training programs with local industry, schools, and government (*Economic Development* element).
- ♦ Meet with other units of government (*Intergovernmental Cooperation* element).
- ♦ Review and update the comprehensive plan (*Implementation* element).

## 9.4 Comprehensive Plan Amendments and Updates

### Adoption and Amendments

The Town of Sterling should regularly evaluate its progress toward achieving the goals, objectives, policies, and recommendations of its comprehensive plan. It may be determined that amendments are needed to maintain the effectiveness and consistency of the plan. Amendments are minor changes to the overall plan and should be done after careful evaluation to maintain the plan as an effective tool upon which community decisions are based.

According to Wisconsin's Comprehensive Planning law (Wis. Stats. 66.1001), the same process that was used to initially adopt the plan shall also be used when amendments are made. The town should be aware that laws regarding the amendment procedure may be clarified or changed as more comprehensive plans are adopted, and should therefore be monitored over time. Under current law, adopting and amending the town's comprehensive plan must comply with the following steps:

- ♦ **Public Participation Procedures.** The established public participation procedures must be followed and must provide an opportunity for written comments to be submitted by members of the public to the Town Board and for the Town Board to respond to such comments.
- ♦ **Plan Commission Recommendation.** The Plan Commission recommends its proposed comprehensive plan or amendment to the Town Board by adopting a resolution by a majority vote of the entire Plan Commission. The vote shall be recorded in the minutes of the Plan Commission. The resolution shall refer to maps and other descriptive materials that relate to one or more elements of the comprehensive plan.
- ♦ **Recommended Draft Distribution.** One copy of the comprehensive plan or amendment adopted by the Plan Commission for recommendation to the Town Board is required to be sent to: (a) every governmental body that is located in whole or in part within the boundaries of the town, including any school district, sanitary district, public inland lake protection and rehabilitation district, or other special district; (b) the clerk of every Village, village, town, county, and regional planning commission that is adjacent to the town; (c) the Wisconsin Land Council; (d) the Department of Administration; (e) the Regional Planning Commission in which the town is located; (f) the public library that serves the area in which the town is located; and (g) persons who have leasehold interest in an affected property for the extraction of non-metallic minerals. After adoption by the Town Board, one copy of the adopted comprehensive plan or amendment must also be sent to (a) through (f) above.

- ♦ **Public Notification.** At least 30 days before the public hearing on a plan adopting or amending ordinance, persons that have requested to receive notice must be provided with notice of the public hearing and a copy of the adopting ordinance. This only applies if the proposed plan or amendment affects the allowable use of their property. The town is responsible for maintaining the list of persons who have requested to receive notice, and may charge a fee to recover the cost of providing the notice.
- ♦ **Ordinance Adoption and Final Distribution.** Following publication of a Class I notice, a public hearing must be held to consider an ordinance to adopt or amend the comprehensive plan. Ordinance approval requires a majority vote of the Town Board. The final plan report or amendment and adopting ordinance must then be filed with (a) through (f) of the distribution list above that received the recommended comprehensive plan or amendment.

## Updates

Comprehensive planning statutes require that a comprehensive plan be updated at least once every 10 years. However, it is advisable to conduct a plan update at a five year interval. An update requires revisiting the entire planning document. Unlike an amendment, an update is often a substantial re-write of the text, updating of the Condition and tables, and substantial changes to maps, if necessary. The plan update process should be planned for in a similar manner as was allowed for the initial creation of this plan including similar time and funding allotments. State statutes should also be monitored for any modified language.

## 9.5 Integration and Consistency of Planning Elements

### Implementation Strategies for Planning Element Integration

While this comprehensive plan is divided into nine elements, in reality, community planning issues are not confined to these divisions. Planning issues will cross these element boundaries. Because this is the case, the policies and recommendations of this plan were considered by the Town of Sterling in the light of overall implementation strategies. The following implementation strategies were available for consideration.

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**Housing**

1. Create a range of housing options
2. Create opportunities for siting of quality affordable housing
3. Change the treatment of mobile and manufactured homes

**Transportation**

1. Create efficiencies in the cost of building and maintaining roads (control taxes)
2. Preserve the mobility of collector and/or arterial roads
3. Create safe emergency vehicle access to developed properties
4. Create improved intersection safety
5. Create more detailed plans for transportation improvements
6. Create road connectivity
7. Create bicycle and pedestrian options

**Utilities and Community Facilities**

1. Create efficiencies in the cost of providing services and facilities (control taxes)
2. Create more detailed plans for facility and service improvements
3. Create intergovernmental efficiencies for providing services and facilities
4. Create improved community facilities and services
5. Preserve the existing level and quality of community facilities and services
6. Preserve the quality of outdoor recreational pursuits.
7. Create additional public recreation facilities
8. Create opportunities to maximize the use of existing infrastructure

**Agricultural, Natural, and Cultural Resources**

1. Preserve agricultural lands
2. Preserve the right to farm
3. Preserve active farms
4. Preserve natural resources and/or green space
5. Preserve rural character
6. Create targeted areas for farming expansion
7. Create targeted areas for forestry expansion
8. Preserve historic places and features

**Economic Development**

1. Change community conditions for attracting business and job growth
2. Change community conditions for retaining existing businesses and jobs
3. Create additional tax base by requiring quality development and construction
4. Create more specific plans for economic development

**Intergovernmental Cooperation**

1. Create intergovernmental efficiencies for providing services and facilities
2. Create a cooperative approach for planning and regulating development along community boundaries
3. Preserve intergovernmental communication

**Land Use**

1. Preserve the existing landscape by limiting growth
2. Preserve valued features of the landscape through site planning
3. Preserve development rights
4. Create an overall pattern of growth that is dispersed
5. Create an overall pattern of growth that is clustered
6. Create an overall pattern of growth that is concentrated
7. Preserve the influence of market forces to drive the type and location of development
8. Create a system of development review that prevents land use conflicts
9. Create a system of development review that manages the location and design of non-residential development



These overall strategies are grouped by element, but are associated with goals, objectives, policies and recommendations in multiple elements.

Wisconsin's Comprehensive Planning law requires that the *Implementation* element describe how each of the nine elements of the comprehensive plan will be integrated with the other elements of the plan. The implementation strategies provide planning element integration by grouping associated policies and recommendations in multiple elements with coherent, overarching themes.

The Town of Sterling selected from the available strategies to generate its policies and recommendations. The selected implementation strategies reflect the town's highest priorities for implementation, and areas where the town is willing to take direct implementation responsibility. Each planning element has very detailed goals and objectives that set the course of action, followed and supported by detailed and specific policies and recommendations that enable the goal fulfillment. The goals, objectives, policies and recommendations represent the selected strategies the town felt were important enough to focus on over the planning period.

### **Planning Element Consistency**

Wisconsin's Comprehensive Planning law requires that the *Implementation* element describe how each of the nine elements of the comprehensive plan will be made consistent with the other elements of the plan. The planning process that was used to create the *Town of Sterling Year 2045 Comprehensive Plan* required all elements of the plan to be produced in a simultaneous manner. No elements were created independently from the other elements of the plan, therefore reducing the threat of inconsistency.

There may be inconsistencies between the goals and objectives between elements or even within an individual element. This is the nature of goals and objectives. Because these are statements of community values, they may very well compete with one another in certain situations. The mechanism for resolving any such inconsistency is the policy statement. Where goals or objectives express competing values, the town should look to the related policies to provide decision making guidance. The policies established by this plan have been designed with this function in mind, and no known policy inconsistencies are present between elements or within an individual element.

Over time, the threat of inconsistency between the plan and existing conditions will increase, requiring amendments or updates to be made. Over time, additional plans regarding specific features within the community may also be developed (e.g., outdoor recreation plan, downtown development plan, etc.). The process used to develop any further detailed plans should be consistent with this *Town of Sterling Year 2045 Comprehensive Plan*.

## 9.6 Measurement of Plan Progress

Wisconsin's Comprehensive Planning law requires that the *Implementation* element provide a mechanism to measure community progress toward achieving all aspects of the comprehensive plan. An acceptable method is to evaluate two primary components of the plan, policies and recommendations, which are found in each plan element.

To measure the effectiveness of an adopted policy, the community must determine if the policy has met the intended purpose. For example, the Town of Sterling has established a Transportation element policy that states, "Dead-end roads and cul-de-sacs shall be avoided to the extent practicable and allowed only where physical site features prevent connection with existing or planned future roadways." To determine whether the policy is achieving the community's intention a "measure" must be established. In the case of this policy, the measure is simply how many dead-end roads or cul-de-sacs have been constructed since the plan's adoption, and how many of those were necessitated by the site conditions. Each policy statement should be reviewed periodically to determine the plan's effectiveness.

Likewise, recommendations listed within each element can be measured. For recommendations, the ability to "measure" progress toward achievement is very straight forward in that the recommendations have either been implemented or not.

To ensure the plan is achieving intended results, periodic reviews should be conducted by the Plan Commission and results reported to the governing body and the public.

## 9.7 Implementation Goals and Objectives

Community goals are broad, value-based statements expressing public preferences for the long term (20 years or more). They specifically address key issues, opportunities, and problems that affect the community. Objectives are more specific than goals and are more measurable statements usually attainable through direct action and implementation of plan recommendations. The accomplishment of objectives contributes to fulfillment of the goal.

***Goal 1: Promote consistent integration of the comprehensive plan policies and recommendations with the ordinances and implementation tools that affect the town.***

***Objectives:***

- A. Update and/or revise the comprehensive plan on a regular schedule (at least every 5 years) to ensure that the plan remains a useful guide for land use decision making.
- B. Require that administration, enforcement, and implementation of land use regulations are consistent with the town comprehensive plan, where applicable.
- C. Develop and update as needed an "Action Plan" as a mechanism to assist the Town Board to bring implementation tools into compliance with the comprehensive plan.

***Goal 2: Balance appropriate land use regulations and individual property rights with community interests and goals.***

***Objectives:***

- A. Provide continuing education to the public that will lead to a more complete understanding of planning and land use issues facing the town.
- B. Create opportunities for citizen participation throughout all stages of planning, ordinance development, and policy implementation.
- C. Maintain an implementation tool development review process whereby all interested parties are afforded an opportunity to influence the outcome.
- D. Maintain a land use (agricultural, industrial, commercial, and residential) development review process whereby all interested parties are afforded an opportunity to influence the outcome.

## **9.8 Implementation Policies and Recommendations**

Policies and recommendations build on goals and objectives by providing more focused responses to the issues that the town is concerned about. Policies and recommendations become primary tools the town can use in making land use decisions. Many of the policies and recommendations cross element boundaries and work together toward overall implementation strategies. Refer to Section 9.5 for an explanation of the strategies cited as sources for many of the policies and recommendations.

Policies identify the way in which activities are conducted in order to fulfill the goals and objectives. Policies that direct action using the word “shall” are advised to be mandatory and regulatory aspects of the implementation of the comprehensive plan. In contrast, those policies that direct action using the words “will” or “should” are advisory and intended to serve as a guide. “Will” statements are considered to be strong guidelines, while “should” statements are considered loose guidelines.

Recommendations are specific actions or projects that the town should be prepared to complete. The completion of these actions and projects is consistent with the town’s policies, and therefore will help the town fulfill the comprehensive plan goals and objectives.

- I1. The Town shall maintain the comprehensive plan as an effective tool for the guidance of Town governance, and will update the plan as needed to maintain consistency with state comprehensive planning requirements.
- I2. Town policies, ordinances, and decisions relative to zoning, land divisions and subdivisions, shoreland and shoreland-wetland zoning, and official mapping shall be made in conformance with the comprehensive plan.
- I3. Maintain funding for continued provision of professional planning services toward the implementation of the comprehensive plans.
- I4. Develop and maintain an action plan that identifies specific projects that are to be completed toward the implementation of the comprehensive plan. An action plan identifies an estimated time frame and responsible parties for each project or action.
- I5. The action plan located within the comprehensive plan will be updated when tasks are accomplished and new items will be added when appropriate.

- I6. Review the comprehensive plan annually (in conjunction with the Town budgeting process) for performance on goals, objectives, policies, and recommendations, for availability of updated data, and to provide an opportunity for public feedback. This review does not need to be as formal as the comprehensive review required at least every 10 years by Ch. 66.1001, Wisconsin Statutes.
- I7. The Town shall revise or amend its comprehensive plan no more than two (2) times per year.
- I8. The Town Planning Commission has the responsibility to review and make a recommendation on any proposed amendments to the zoning ordinance, official map, shoreland zoning ordinance and subdivision ordinance, etc. affecting the Town.
- I9. State of Wisconsin Comprehensive Planning statutes will be monitored by an assigned official to ensure that statute changes, additions or deletions are appropriately accounted for with respect to the community comprehensive plan.
- I10. If the Town should experience substantial land use or land use regulation changes within the planning period, maps which represent these features will be updated to ensure the most accurate information is utilized in community decision making.
- I11. Maps will be used in coordination with established Town goals and objectives to ensure the consistency between the comprehensive plan's text as well as maps and/or other graphics.
- I12. Every five years the Town will evaluate the availability of funds for updating the comprehensive plan. If adequate funds are not available then a strategy will be developed to ensure that sufficient funds are available for a comprehensive plan update.
- I13. The annual review of the comprehensive plan will be done in a committee format with public involvement including citizens, landowners, community officials and staff to evaluate the plan in an un-biased manner.

## **Appendix A**



## **TOWN OF STERLING COMMUNITY SURVEY REPORT**

## **THE SURVEY RESEARCH CENTER**

The Survey Research Center (SRC) is a research organization at the University of Wisconsin – River Falls in River Falls, Wisconsin. Since 1990, the SRC has provided statistically sound, lowcost information gathering services for academics, local units of government, non-profit groups, school districts, and other organizations. The SRC conducts surveys on a wide variety of topics including customer satisfaction, resident experience, business climate, equity and inclusion, labor needs, etc. and completes about 25 to 30 survey projects per year. In alignment with its mission of strengthening communities and supporting education, all SRC projects have the goal of improving the welfare and quality of life for community residents, along with furthering the advancement of scientific research.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The SRC would like to thank Tom Schneider, Scott Lines, and other Town of Sterling Board members for working with the SRC to develop a productive survey instrument, providing their input throughout the survey process, and promoting the survey. In addition, the SRC would like to thank the residents of the Town of Sterling for taking the time to complete the survey. Without their robust engagement, the successful completion of this project would not have been possible.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The survey aimed to gauge residents' opinions on the Town of Sterling's Comprehensive Plan. The SRC distributed a mail-out survey to all **334 residents** of Sterling. The SRC received a total of **170 responses** for a response rate of about **47%**. This sample size was somewhat smaller than the minimum sample size needed of 179 responses and allows for the construction of estimates with a margin of error of 5.2%. Key survey findings are as follows:

## Quality of Life

- About 96% of respondents expressed satisfaction with the quality of life in the Town of Sterling, with more than two-fifths (44%) of residents indicating that they were “very satisfied”. Female residents are more likely to be “very satisfied” with the quality of life in Sterling compared to male residents.
- The top reason for why residents chose to live in the Town of Sterling was the region's smalltown atmosphere and rural lifestyle, selected by over six in ten (65%) respondents. Other reasons in the top three included the natural features of Sterling (41%), and the cost of a home/land (33%).
- Over nine in ten respondents agreed that the overall character of the Town should continue to be much like it is today (90%), that preserving and celebrating the community's history is important (92%) to their quality of life, and that seniors can live safely, independently, and comfortably in the area (94%). However, senior residents are less likely to “strongly agree” that the overall character of the Town should continue like it is today.

## Facilities and Services

- The facilities and services with the highest “good” and “excellent” ratings among Sterling residents (selected by at least eight in ten respondents) were fire protection/EMS/ambulance services (87%), garbage service/recycling (86%), schools (83%) and street and road maintenance/snow plowing (80%).
- Facilities like library services and cell services were the lowest ranked services among Sterling residents, with over one-third of respondents selecting “poor” for these services. Senior residents are less likely to rate cell services as “excellent” compared to their younger counterparts.
- Over half (51%) of the respondents in Sterling indicated that the most important function of the Town was to preserve the small-town character, which was the top-ranked function among the list of functions in the question. Other top functions included measures to plan for and maintain roads and infrastructure (selected by 45% of residents) and to ensure public safety (selected by 42% of residents). Seniors are less likely than younger residents to select preservation of small-town character as the most important function.

## Housing

- About 98% of respondents in the Town of Sterling indicated that they would prefer to own a home in the next five years, including residents who are currently homeowners.
- Larger, single-family homes are not only the most prevalent current type of housing, with over half (54%) of respondents living in one, but also the most preferred type of housing among residents, with over half (58%) stating that they would prefer to live in one.
- Over nine in ten residents in Sterling indicated that they were satisfied with the location (95%), size (94%), and affordability (94%) of their current housing. Around nine in ten (88%) were also satisfied with the condition of their current housing. Low-income households are less likely to be satisfied with the location and size of their current housing compared to higher income households. Senior residents are less likely to be satisfied with the condition of their current housing compared to younger residents.
- Over eight in ten (88%) respondents stated that they did not need financial assistance with housing costs.
- About two-thirds (66%) of respondents indicated that the quality and appearance of housing in the Town of Sterling was either “excellent” or “good”, with only 6% of respondents who selected “excellent”. Senior residents are less likely to be satisfied with the housing quality than younger residents.

## Transportation

- A majority (70%) of the residents from Sterling indicated that the condition of local roads were “excellent” or “good”, but only 12% of respondents classified local road conditions as “excellent”.
- Over nine in ten (94%) residents agreed that the overall road network in the Town meets the needs of its residents.
- Over six in ten (67%) respondents agreed that the Towns of Sterling and Cushing should work together to create ATV/UTV connections in the Town. Low-income residents are less likely to strongly agree that the Towns should work together to create ATV/UTV connections compared to higher income residents.
- Over two-fifths (44%) of the residents disagreed that there should be more off-road biking and walking trails in Sterling and over half (56%) disagreed that there should be more biking and walking lanes along public roadways.

Natural and Cultural Resources



- Over two-thirds of residents indicated that it is “very important” to preserve the area's groundwater (77%), lakes, rivers and streams (73%), and air quality (69%). Meanwhile, more than three in ten residents stated that becoming a more environmentally sustainable community (32%) is either only “somewhat important” or “not at all important”.
- Well over half (61%) of residents with a private well indicated that their water had been tested for bacteria and nitrates in the last three years. Among those who got their wells tested, only 6% indicated that the tests concluded that the level of nitrates present is considered not safe by the EPA, while 69% stated that this safety level was met for their private wells.
- Over half (56%) of Sterling residents stated that they “agree” or “strongly agree” with the need for additional public outdoor recreational opportunities in the region. However, a large percentage of residents also disagreed, with over two-fifths (43%) expressing disagreement.

## **Land Use and Growth**

- Over seven in ten (76%) residents of Sterling supported the statement that the Town of Sterling should seek agreements with the Town of Cushing on future land use and growth.
- At least half of the respondents from the Town of Sterling “strongly agreed” that maintaining the Town’s rural character is important (53%) and that quality of life and property values from impacts of activities or development on neighboring properties (53%) should be protected. Female residents are more likely than male residents to “strongly agree” that maintaining the Town’s rural character is important.
- On the other hand, about 43% of the residents disagreed that landowners should be allowed to develop land any way they want. Senior residents are less likely than younger residents to strongly agree that landowners should be allowed to develop land any way that they want.
- The most popular locations for future housing development among the residents of Sterling are near the Town of Cushing (46%) and scattered along Town and County roads (23%).
- A large majority of Sterling residents (69%) are in favor of a traditional design for housing development over an open space/cluster design.
- Around nine in ten (89%) residents of the Town of Sterling do not plan to sell their property for residential or commercial development.

## Economic Development

- A little less than half of residents from the Town of Sterling “agree” or “strongly agree” that the Town should support alternative energy as a form of economic development (47%) and that more new businesses and light industry are needed (45%).
- About two-thirds (68%) of residents disagreed that the Town should use incentives to recruit or promote new business and industry. Over half (59%) of the residents disagreed that salvage and junkyards should be allowed to operate in Sterling.
- A large majority of residents agreed that new home-based businesses (92%) and agriculture related businesses and ag-tourism (88%) are appropriate for the region. On the other hand, over half of the respondents agreed that manufacturing and warehousing development (64%) and technology related developments (57%) are inappropriate for the area. Senior residents are less likely than younger residents to “strongly agree” that technology related developments are appropriate for the region.
- Over two-fifths of residents stated that they want to see new development near existing commercial and industrial development (43%) and near the Town of Cushing (41%). Only 10% of residents stated that development can occur anywhere in Town. Senior residents are more likely than younger ones to select near the Town of Cushing as a preference for new development.

## Agriculture

- Nearly half (48%) of the residents answered that large-scale farming should not be allowed in the Town and around two-fifths (40%) stated that large-scale farming should be restricted to areas designated for agricultural use. Only 12% stated that it should be allowed anywhere in Town. Female residents are less likely than male residents to support large scale farming anywhere in Sterling.
- A majority of residents agreed that local agricultural products should be encouraged and marketed locally (97%) and that too much farmland is being converted to non-farming uses (72%), and over three-quarters (75%) disagreed that conflicts between farms and neighbors are common in the Town. Female residents are more likely than male residents to “strongly agree” that local agriculture should be encouraged and marketed locally.
- Over one in four (28%) residents indicated that they own farmland in the Town, either farmed by the residents or leased/rented for farming. Senior residents are more likely than younger residents to own farmland.