

TOWN OF PLOVER
SOLAR OVERLAY ADDENDUM TO THE FUTURE LAND USE MAP
(Overlay Map Rationale)

The Town of Plover recognizes the potential impacts to our community of large-scale Solar Energy projects (100 MW or greater) can be both positive and negative. Since the landscape of our Township is attractive for development, the Town recognizes the need to encourage the siting of solar projects to specific areas that best fit the needs and desires of both the citizens and the agricultural community while minimizing negative impacts on existing land use trends and public interests.

The Town of Plover Comprehensive Plan was first developed in 2005 and went through an extensive revision which was adopted by the Town of Plover Town Board and Portage County in 2021. During development of the Plan, a review was done of how the land is currently being used and then an attempt was made to assess current and future trends of that use. These trend factors were then applied to anticipate future land use. Nowhere in this process was it contemplated that large scale solar operations would be displacing our highly productive agricultural industry.

In January, 2023, the Town of Plover Town Board directed the Plan Commission to explore developing a Solar Overlay to our Future Land Use Map. This overlay is not intended to prevent solar displacement of the productive agricultural land, but rather to direct future projects to the areas that best fit the overall future land use visions as well as to offer a potential layer of protection to residents affected by such projects adjacent to their property. The Town understands they do not have direct regulatory/review authority over large scale solar systems, yet it intends to provide recommendations, concerns, and comments to the Public Service Commission (PSC). Each proposed solar project, pursuant to Wis Stat 196.491(3)(d)6, will be evaluated to determine if it is consistent with and does not interfere with our orderly land use development plans.

The overlay map has been discussed and developed by the Town of Plover Plan Commission and is now being presented to the Town Board for their consideration and adoption. It is important to understand the process that the Commission used in developing the overlay. Areas cross-hatched on the map have been identified as not suitable for solar development from a land use perspective. Areas suitable are shown in white and pink. Outlined below are the criteria used in developing both areas:

1. The Plan Commission recognizes that a large-scale solar enterprise is nearly through the permitting process with the Wisconsin Public Service Commission and will be constructed and fully operational in the near future. The lands that have been leased and identified by this filing are integral in the suitable solar areas and identified with the pink coloring.

2. The current Future Land Use Map identifies Enterprise Agriculture as L-1. This classification prevents the splitting of large parcels into sizes less than 35 acres to preserve high intensity agricultural production utilizing our irrigated Central Sands croplands. This land is also attractive to large scale solar footprints. However, within this area there are compelling reasons to consider excluding tracts of land that may be more suitable to other uses or are in direct conflict with solar use. Therefore, the areas in the Town classified as L-1 were scrutinized by the Commission members and tracts of land to exclude were identified and included in the cross-hatched scheme.
3. Environmentally sensitive areas occurring throughout the Town are not compatible with solar use and are shown as cross-hatched on the map. They include:
 - a. Wetlands – DNR classified wetlands as identified in the Portage County GIS system.
 - b. DNR Lands
 - i. Prairie Chicken Preservation Lands
 - ii. Little Plover River fisheries area
 - c. Boston School Forest – A forest maintained for environmental education and owned by the Stevens Point School District.
 - d. Village of Plover Conservancy Areas – Little Plover River Watershed Enhancement Project; owned by the Village, within Town of Plover boundaries.
 - e. Areas identified in our Future Land Use Map as “Natural Areas Protected”. In general, these areas map directly to land zoned Conservancy.
 - f. Any other land that is zoned Conservancy; i.e., floodplains.
4. Areas of the township that are within the 20-year planning boundary of the Stevens Point Urban Area Sewer Service Plan were evaluated and based on existing development trends and suitability, all areas within that boundary were deemed not suitable for solar development because of anticipated need for expansion by the Village of Plover. These are included in the cross-hatched areas on the map.
5. The area to the west of the Village of Plover and north of State Highway 54 was evaluated as not suitable for solar development and is included in the cross-hatched areas on the map. The Town of Plover has historically targeted this area as prime area for residential development with some limited commercial uses. This historical perspective has been in place for well over 40 years.
6. The area to the west of the Village of Plover and south of State Highway 54 has an existing industrial/commercial footprint with multiple facilities that are separated by vacant parcels. These vacant parcels have been identified in the Future Land Use Map as “Industrial”. This narrow corridor is served by infrastructure conducive to industrial growth – an active railroad line, high-capacity natural gas pipeline and high voltage transmission lines as well as an adjacent state highway. The Plan Commission felt it is important to maintain this for potential future growth in the township and felt it has a

higher priority for long term use than a solar farm committing the land to 50 years of use. These areas are included in the cross-hatched areas on the map.

7. Protection of property owners that have residences and/or structures is an important issue that the Plan Commission wanted to address. All parcels in the town containing structures are shown with red dots on the overlay map.

There are two classification of property owners within the area identified as suitable for solar development:

- a. Those who choose to participate by leasing land to the solar project.
- b. Those who are not participating in the solar project.

The Plan Commission felt an obligation to create a level of protection for the non-participating landowners/residents by limiting the closeness of the solar farm to any parcel containing a structure. To achieve that, a 100-foot-wide natural vegetative buffer within the project area must be developed and maintained by the solar company on each side of those abutting parcels. This buffer requirement may be modified or waived in its entirety at the sole discretion of the non-participating landowner. The establishment of this buffer area is intended to mitigate any aesthetic issues as well as concerns regarding loss in property values when a non-participating landowner is adjacent to a solar farm on any or all sides of their property.

The Plan Commission recognizes that all property owners have certain rights in determining the use of the land under their ownership. Fracturing of contiguous parcels under common ownership was avoided as much as possible throughout the township to allow the landowner to have full decision-making capabilities about his/her acreage. However, the landowner's neighbors also have a right to be protected from non-compatible uses of adjacent lands. The area(s) in the township identified as compatible with solar development provides adequate areas for any future solar expansions within our township and is consistent with the current Land Use Plan which was adopted in 2021.