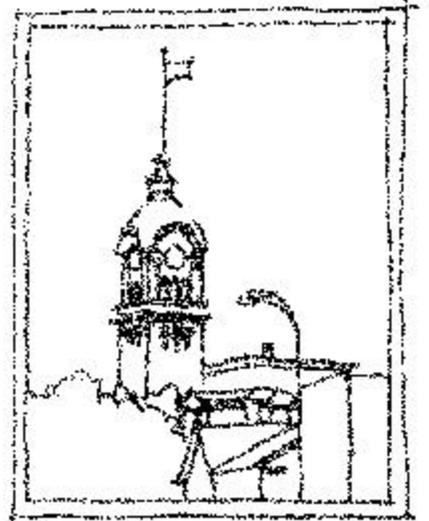


Town Land Use Plan  
Town of Wilson  
Lincoln County, Wisconsin



Adopted by the Town Board:  
March 13, 2001

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## **Town of Wilson Land Use Plan Acknowledgements**

### **Town Board**

Fran Pflum, Chairperson

Jerry Baltich, Supervisor

Scott Welke, Supervisor

Robert Tomaszewski, Former Supervisor

### **Town Land Use Committee**

Ken O'Malley, Member

Ike Corst, Member

Robert Tomasewski, Member

Kevin Ives, Member

Scott Welke, Member

Lewis Arndt, Member

Bear Wadzinski, Member

### **Town Clerk**

Mary Baltich

Elizabeth Chandler, Former Clerk

### **County Staff Liaison**

John Mulder

### **Consultant Lead Staff**

Michael Slavney

## I. Purpose of Town Land Use Plan

The *Town of Wilson Land Use Plan* will allow the Town to guide future land development in a way that preserves the rural character of the community, protects natural resources, enhances recreational tourism opportunities, and provides for efficient service delivery. The *Town Land Use Plan* includes background information, maps, images, goals and objectives, and implementation strategies.

More specifically, the *Town Land Use Plan* recommends how lands within Wilson should be used over the next 20 years, based on public involvement and the Town's vision, goals, and objectives. These recommendations may form the basis for new or updated tools to implement the Plan, such as zoning and subdivision ordinances. The recommendations should also be used as a basis for day-to-day development decisions, such as rezonings, conditional use permits, subdivisions, and parkland acquisitions. After adoption, the Town should occasionally consider logical amendments to the *Plan* based on changing conditions in the community or new information.

Following adoption by the Town Board, this *Land Use Plan* is also intended to be a component of the *Lincoln County Comprehensive Plan*. This dual adoption is important because, under State law, the Town and County share planning, zoning, and land division review authority. Both jurisdictions should be "reading from the same playbook" to ensure consistent, predictable, and desirable decision-making.

## II. Background Information

The following is a summary of background information pertinent to land use planning in the Town of Wilson. More detailed information and maps may be found in the *Lincoln County Comprehensive Plan, Volume I: Inventory and Analysis Report* (November 2000).

### A. Location

Located in the northwestern quadrant of Lincoln County, the Town of Wilson encompasses approximately 36 square miles of land area. From its center, the Town is approximately 12 miles northwest of the City of Tomahawk and 36 miles northwest of Merrill. There are no cities or villages in or adjacent to the Town. McCord is an unincorporated "rail village" (or hamlet) located near the intersections of US Highway 8, Old USH 8 and County Highway CC. Within Lincoln County, the Town of Wilson abuts the Towns of Somo to the west; Bradley to the east; and Tomahawk to the south. The Town abuts land in Oneida County to the north.

### B. Growth Trends

The Town experienced moderate population growth during the 1990s. Between 1990 and 2000, Wilson's population grew from 238 to 299 full-time residents, representing a 26% increase. The number of housing units increased from 283 in 1990 to an estimated 334 in 1999—an 18% increase. According to 1990 census data, nearly 46 percent of all housing units in Wilson were classified as "seasonal" homes.

### C. Summary of Significant Natural Resources

The Town of Wilson is predominately forested. The Town's northeastern and southwestern corners contain large contiguous blocks of County-owned forestland (nearly 45% of the Town's land area is contained in the Lincoln County Forest system). The intervening area – running northwest to southeast through the Town along the Little Somo River and CTH CC – is characterized by tracts of privately-owned forestland, the Somo Lake flowage, and scattered pockets of open land and agricultural land.

The Little Somo River begins in neighboring Oneida County and flows diagonally through the Town through the Somo Lake Flowage and on to Lake Mohawksin at its confluence with the Wisconsin River in the City of Tomahawk. In the southeastern quadrant of the Town – at the extreme western end of Lake Mohawksin, the Little Somo River is joined by the Big Somo River, flowing easterly through the southern third of the Town, and Hay Creek flowing southerly through the eastern third of the Town.

Most of the sensitive natural areas within the Town are located along the wetland and woodland areas away from the Little Somo River, in the County forestlands. The State's Natural Heritage Inventory program suggests the presence of rare plant or animal species in most of these sensitive natural areas. According to the Natural Resources Conservation Service, most of the mapped "prime farmland" soils – concentrated in the north central area of the Town – are in areas currently used for forestry.

### D. Existing Land Use

Providing an accurate depiction of the Town's *existing* land use pattern is an early step in planning for a desired *future* land use pattern. Map 1 presents the existing (Year 2000) land use within the Town, divided into several land use designations.

A vast majority of Wilson is forested, and either contained within the County Forest system (designated as "Public Forest") or held under private ownership (designated as "Private Forest"). Large tracts of this private forestland, particularly in the south central portion of Wilson, are owned by commercial forest product companies. Map 1 shows small pockets of land in Town being used for cropland or pasture, particularly along County Highway CC.

Most of the developed lands within the Town of Wilson are used for single-family residences. Subdivisions and smaller clusters of lots are concentrated on waterfront properties along the Somo Lake flowage and along the County Highway CC corridor. Map 1 shows a small cluster of development at the hamlet of McCord.

### E. Existing Transportation System

The Town is well connected to the region through the existing roadway network. US Highway (USH) 8 runs east west along the northern tier of Wilson. USH 8 also provides the most direct connection to USH 51 / Interstate 39 across the Town of Bradley to the east. County Trunk Highway (CTH) CC provides the best access to residential development along the Little Somo River, Somo Lake, and Lake Mohawksin. Honey Road and Somo Dam Road provide access to the western and central areas of the Town. Zenith Tower Road serves the south central portion of the Town and provides a connection to STH 86 to the south. Between 1992 and 1998, traffic volumes increased by approximately 60% along USH 8 in the northern portion of Town. The Tomahawk Airport is located in the southeastern corner of the Town.

F. Existing Utilities, Community Facilities, Parks, Historic and Cultural Resources

The Town Hall building is located along CTH CC in the east central portion of the Town. Neither the Town nor the County own or operate any parkland in the community. The Tomahawk School Forest is located in the southwestern portion of the Town.

The Town does not provide public sanitary sewer or water services. No properties in Wilson are listed on the National or State Register of Historic Places. A comprehensive survey of historic or archeological resources has not been conducted in Wilson.

SEE MAP ONE: EXISTING LAND USE

### III. Results of Public Participation Exercises

To guide the planning process, the Town Board appointed a Town Land Use Committee. The Committee led and participated in a number of participation exercises to ensure that this *Plan* is based on vision of the Town residents. These exercises are summarized in the following paragraphs.

#### A. Vision Setting Workshop

A town vision setting workshop was held on May 25, 2000, to understand key issues and obtain participants' vision for the future. Twenty Wilson residents attended.

Many participants stressed their desire to preserve scenic beauty, waters, forest, hunting, and fishing. Sentiments were expressed to improve communication between Lincoln County and Towns, prevent transmission lines, and encourage citizen input.

When asked to describe the Town's strengths, common responses included: lake frontage areas, accessibility to the City of Tomahawk, and recreational opportunities. When asked to describe weaknesses, common responses included: poor enforcement of laws, lack of development standards, and poor communication between County, Town, and residents

#### B. Visual Preference Exercise

In Summer 2000, the Committee completed a visual preference exercise to capture the Town's defining character as seen from the eyes of residents. Committee members photographed the "special places" that capture this character. These photographs suggest places that Committee members wish to preserve or see more of in the future. Members also photographed places that they felt hurt the character and appearance of the Town.

Of the 62 photos taken in Wilson, 56 of them were of "good" or "special" places. These photos can be grouped into three main categories:

1. Water resource-related photos including images of Lake Somo (pictured below), the Somo River, streams, and wetlands.



2. Forestry – a local industry. These images were of newly cut and regenerating forest (pictured below), as well as logging roads and equipment.



3. Neatly kept country homes, with cut lawns, landscaped yards and no clutter.



Locations of these categories appear clustered in certain areas: (1.) Lakeshore, wetland and river photos were taken primarily around the southern end of Somo Lake, (2.) Forestry photos were taken primarily west of Somo Lake, (3.) Most of the photos of residential areas/country homes were taken along Highway CC just east of Somo Lake.

Photos of places that Committee members felt hurt the character of Wilson were primarily of unkempt residential lots, mixed-use zoning (such as business/industry adjacent to residential), power lines, and new subdivisions south of Somo Lake.

### C. Summary of Participation Efforts

Several common themes emerged from the participation exercises, including the following:

- Strong desire to preserve scenic beauty through regulation and enforcement of existing, updated, and new ordinances.
- Strong interest in improving communication between the County and the Town.
- Strong support in preventing the construction of the proposed power transmission line.
- Desire to preserve the Town of Wilson as a good place to live.
- Desire to encourage Town resident involvement and for the town to have more strength in the decision-making process.

## IV. Planning Framework

### A. Town Vision Statement

A community vision statement is an expression of the direction the Town wishes to head over the next 20 years and beyond. In Summer 2000, the Town Land Use Committee developed the following vision statement:

- To preserve the beauty of our township, and the waters and forests for hunting and fishing.
- Provide a balance between maintaining the quiet and peaceful nature of our township and encouraging the various recreational activities that many of our residents / part-time residents want to engage in.
- To promote communication between the county and our town board.
- Encourage the input by the citizens of Wilson to the town board.
- Work for more consistent land use within the township.
- Because Somo Lake is such an important part of the Wilson Township, we need to address proper boating etiquette and safety for all its users.

### B. Town Goals and Objectives

The development of goals and objectives is an important step in the planning process because these statements represent the basic values of the community. Goals are broad statements that express general preferences for the long-term development of the community. Objectives are more specific than goals and are usually attainable through implementation activities, described later in this *Plan*. The following goals and objectives emerged from the Town's vision statement and public participation results.

#### **Goal 1: Preserve scenic beauty and unique Town features**

##### *Objectives:*

1. Regulate and manage growth.
2. Improve the enforcement of existing rules.
3. Preserve the Town as a good place to live and retire.
4. Preserve recreational opportunities, including but not limited to ATV and snow mobile trails, the Somo Game Club, hunting, and fishing.

**Goal 2: Promote the health, safety, and general welfare of all Town residents**

*Objectives:*

1. Discourage transmission lines in the Town.
2. Maintain a viable mix of land uses.
3. Raise tax base strategically.

**Goal 3: Encourage citizen input in Town and County processes**

*Objectives:*

1. Improve communication between County and Towns.
2. Encourage citizen input to Town Board.
3. Coordinate and establish County communications.
4. Promote meetings and special activities to residents through a newsletter or mailings.
5. Establish a Town reporter position.
6. Publicize Town business.

**Goal 4: Enhance zoning and development standards**

*Objectives:*

1. Assign specific areas for commercial development.
2. Regulate building permits and strengthen enforcement.
3. Create, strengthen, and update development ordinances.
4. Regulate and discourage conditional uses.
5. Review, regulate, and enforce proper land use.
6. Identify and resolve non-conforming land uses.
7. Require Town Board action on conditional uses.

## V. Land Use Plan Map and Description

This part of the *Town of Wilson Land Use Plan* presents the planned land use map, intended to guide growth and development decisions over the next 20 years. Map 2 presents desired *future* land uses for different properties within the Town.

### A. Land Use Plan Map Designations

The land use designations shown in Map 2 are designed to reflect both desired land *use* and development *character*. These planned use designations have been divided into three general categories: rural/environmental, residential, and nonresidential. A complete description of the categories and specific designations is provided as Attachment A. (Not all the designations described in Attachment A have been used in Map 2.) To achieve the desired future land use pattern in Wilson, new or revised zoning districts will have to be created and mapped after the land use planning process is complete.

In general, differences between the three general *categories* of land use (e.g., between “rural/environmental” and “residential”) are intended to be greater than differences between the multiple *designations* within each category (e.g., between “rural lands” and “agriculture”). As such, following initial adoption of this *Town Land Use Plan*, the Town and County should not require a formal *Plan* amendment before acting on a development proposal which suggests a change in land use designation within the same category (e.g., when a land owner proposes to remove land from the “private forest” designation to the “rural lands” designation.) In contrast, the Town and County should require a formal *Plan* amendment before acting on a development proposal which suggests a change in land use designation that would also change the category (e.g., from “rural/environmental” to “residential”). Such changes lead to more significant shifts in land use policy and development impacts.

### B. Description of Land Use Plan Map

In general, Map 2 recommends the continuation of a land use pattern in the Town that is focused on the preservation of Wilson’s unique environmental features, lakes, large blocks of public and private forestlands, and smaller areas of agricultural lands. A second important strategy is to accommodate projected development in areas of the Town already experiencing development. Map 2 shows how these two objectives will be met. In total, the amount of land designated for development far exceeds the anticipated land use demand within the Town over the next 20 years. In fact, approximately 40 to 50 years of projected development will be accommodated by the land use pattern shown on Map 2. The following paragraphs describe the locations and recommendations for each of the major land use designations shown in Map 2.

SEE MAP TWO: PLANNED LAND USE

## 1. Agriculture

The *Agriculture* planning district has been mapped over two small areas of active farmland underlain by prime soils and in agricultural zoning. These include two areas located along the south side of CTH CC in the east central portion of the Town. The Town should promote continued agricultural operations in these areas. Compatible small non-farm businesses should also be allowed to provide supplemental income opportunities. New housing should be limited in these areas to a density of one home per 35 acres owned to prevent incompatibilities with agricultural operations (e.g., noise, dust, smells, and traffic). If new housing development occurs in this *Agricultural* area, it should be located in woodlots, at the edges of fields, and on non-productive lands (see design examples in Attachment A).

## 2. Rural Lands

The *Rural Lands* designation has been mapped in a few areas scattered throughout the Town, over areas generally exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics: open lands not being farmed; isolated tracts of marginal farmland; “buffer” areas between planned residential development and planned agricultural use; and lands adjacent to other environmentally sensitive areas. Substantial areas are shown in the Rural Lands category along CTH CC in the northwestern portion of the Town, along Somo Dam Road, and along Zenith Tower Road in the southwestern portion of the Town.

New development in *Rural Lands* areas should generally be limited to housing at a density not exceeding one home per 20 acres owned. This *Plan* supports the clustering of these homes on smaller lots—rather than 20+ acre lots—per the density and design recommendations presented in Attachment A.

## 3. Private Forest

The *Private Forest* designation was mapped over privately-held lands that are currently:

- used for forestry and zoned for forestry, or
- used for forestry, not currently zoned for forestry, but enrolled in State Forest Crop Land or Managed Forest Land (Open) programs, or
- used for forestry, not currently zoned for forestry, not enrolled in State Forest Crop Land or Managed Forest Land (Open) programs, but owned by a commercial forest products company.

In very limited situations, certain inaccessible forested lands not fitting within the above categories were also included in the *Private Forest* category. *Private Forest* lands are generally concentrated in the far northwestern corner of Town. Year-round housing is not recommended for these areas due to impacts associated with forestry activities.

## 4. Public Forest and Public Recreation

The *Public Forest* designation was mapped over lands currently contained in the Lincoln County Forest. These areas predominate in the northeastern and southwestern corners of the Town.

No areas within the Town are shown in the *Public Recreation* designation, which is reserved for specially designated DNR areas.

5. Environmental Corridors

*Environmental Corridors* are mapped over Wisconsin DNR-identified wetlands and FEMA-designated floodplains (both subject to county zoning), slopes of 15 percent or greater, and soils with a majority hydric content (i.e. soils formed under wetland-type conditions). *Environmental Corridors* are not shown within the existing and planned County Forest. New development should generally be discouraged in these areas to protect the environmental resources, prevent property damage, and preserve wildlife habitat. The large amount of Environmental Corridors in the Town is attributable to the wetlands and floodplains in this region.

6. Rural Single Family Residential

*Rural Single Family Residential* areas are planned for homes at a density of between one residence per 30,000 square feet (about 2/3 acre lots) and one residence per 20 acres. However, to provide for adequate lands for private wastewater disposal and to avoid wasteful use of these lands, this *Plan* recommends lot sizes of between 1½ and 5 acres. Planned *Rural Single Family Residential* areas may be served by individual well and septic systems or by approved group systems.

These areas are concentrated along the Little Somo River, Somo Lake, Lake Mohawksin, and along CTH CC. These new development areas have been chosen because they are adjacent to existing residential development areas and are convenient to existing roads – principally CTH CC, north and south of the flowage. Development in these areas should be regulated to prevent shoreline damage and designed in a manner that does not detract from the character of surrounding residential areas. Lots should be of adequate size to promote safe waste disposal and ensure shoreland protection. Public access points (such as a neighborhood parks with a public beach) should be preserved in these waterfront areas as lands develop. The principles of “conservation neighborhood design” should be used for new developments in these areas, particularly near the highways where homes should ideally not front on this highway. (For more information on “conservation neighborhood design,” see Section VI (D) below and Attachment A). These new residential areas should provide neighborhood parks, interconnected local road networks, and use natural stormwater management and progressive erosion control techniques.

7. Nonresidential Development Districts

Map 2 recommends the concentration of nonresidential development only in an historic Crossroads Commercial pattern at the intersection of USH 8 and CTH CC. This area should be designed in a way that enhances the “northwoods” character of Wilson.

## VI. Other Plan Recommendations

### A. Agricultural, Natural, and Cultural Resources

- Keep intensive non-farm development away from planned *Agriculture*, *Public Forest*, and *Private Forest* areas, and locate the new homes that are built in *Agriculture* areas out of productive fields.
- Support logical additions to the County Forest, with particular focus on acquiring gaps of privately owned forestland in between larger sections of the existing County Forest system.
- Work with the County to assure that a full range of recreational and forestry uses are allowed in the County Forest.
- Ensure that forestry personnel are actively enforcing the recommended forestry management practices within each of the designated “aesthetic management zones” as described in the *Lincoln County Forest Comprehensive Land Use Plan*.
- Provide logical public access points to the Town’s developed lakes.
- Encourage private landowners to participate in industrial tree farm programs to protect open space and diverse habitats.
- Preserve environmental corridors and large blocks of open lands to protect water quality, maintain connections among habitats, and provide appropriate hunting grounds.
- Conduct or require viewshed analyses before approving new developments. New development should be designed, located, and landscaped in a manner that does not detract from the rural character of the Town.
- Cooperate with the County and other communities on comprehensive survey of historic and archaeological resources in the Town, and preserve these resources.

### B. Transportation

- Continue to work with the Lincoln County Highway Department to update and implement the Town Road Improvement Program (TRIP) to provide for the appropriate upgrading of Town roads.
- Consider implementing Town road impact fees for new development projects that place a burden on or require the upgrading of Town roads.
- Plan for a network of interconnected new roads in planned residential development areas, for reasons of highway access control, rural character preservation (visibility of development), and the current inaccessibility of certain planned development areas. Map 2 shows conceptual local road networks for *Rural Single Family Residential* areas.
- Consider applying to the State for “rustic road” status along one or more Town roads. To qualify, a roadway must have outstanding natural features, including native vegetation, abundant wildlife, open areas or agricultural vistas that make the area unique.
- Support access control and rural character objectives by discouraging large amounts of “side of the road” development on State and County highways.

### C. Utilities and Community Facilities

- Provide new neighborhood parks within the areas planned for significant *Rural Single Family Residential* uses. The Town may acquire at least some of that land through requiring parkland dedications and/or park impact fees from new subdivisions.

- Work with Lincoln County on the possibility of providing shared park facilities within the Town.
- Follow the recommendations of the County's *Outdoor Recreation Plan* when making park acquisition and development decisions. Encourage the County to update this plan.

#### D. Housing and Economic Development

- Work with Lincoln County to address housing, zoning, or property maintenance code violations on existing residential or commercial properties.
- Encourage developers to plan for new neighborhoods using the principles of "conservation neighborhood design," particularly in areas with significant natural resources. These principles emphasize providing housing in proximity to parks, open spaces, and services; blending automobile convenience with the creation of safe, comfortable places to live and walk; preserving and enhancing natural systems that define, sustain, and connect neighborhoods; and promoting rural character by "hiding" development from main roads through natural topography, vegetation, and setbacks. The principles are reflected in the illustrations in Attachment A.

#### E. Intergovernmental Cooperation

- Provide a copy of this *Town Land Use Plan* to all surrounding local governments in Lincoln County and surrounding counties.
- Work with Lincoln County on zoning ordinance administration, day-to-day decision-making (e.g., conditional use permits), and eventual updating.
- Work with surrounding towns to address any unforeseen conflicts between local plans.

#### F. Plan Adoption and Implementation

Once the Town Land Use Committee was comfortable with the recommendations of the *Town Land Use Plan*, the Committee forwarded a recommendation for approval to the Town Board. The Town then posted and published a Class 1 notice for a public hearing on the *Plan* before the Town Board. Following the public hearing, the Town Board approved a resolution which (a) adopted the *Town Land Use Plan* and (b) forwarded the Plan to the County for inclusion in the *Lincoln County Comprehensive Plan*. The *Town Land Use Plan* will be adopted by the County Board as a component of the *Lincoln County Comprehensive Plan*.

This Plan includes many recommendations for guiding land development and preservation within the Town over the next 20 years. Some of the recommendations may be applied immediately, such as recommendations for where new subdivisions would and would not be appropriate. Other recommendations will require subsequent Plan implementation activities, including the following:

- Adopt a Town subdivision ordinance to provide for appropriately designed development patterns, interconnected road networks, parkland dedication and park impact fees, and advancement of "conservation neighborhood design" principles.
- Consider implementing a driveway ordinance and design standards to encourage the appropriate siting of homes in areas where limited development is proposed.
- Participate to the full extent allowed by law in the County zoning process to assure that Town desires are brought forward in zoning decisions.
- Work with Lincoln County on an update of the County's zoning ordinance to properly implement the land use recommendations of this *Plan*. Many provisions of this *Plan* cannot be implemented without a new or substantially revised zoning ordinance.

- Appoint a permanent Town Planning Committee to be responsible for reviewing and recommending Town Board actions on development proposals, ordinances, and long-range planning issues.
- Annually review this *Plan* to gauge progress on implementation and consider logical amendments based on changes in conditions. A more detailed review and update should be performed every five to ten years. Forward all adopted *Plan* amendments to the County for incorporation into the *Lincoln County Comprehensive Plan*.