

TOWN OF ELLSWORTH COMPREHENSIVE PLAN UPDATE

Introduction

In 2009, the Town of Ellsworth adopted a Comprehensive Plan, creating a long term vision for the community and a series of goals to ensure orderly development that met community priorities. Over the last 14 years, the Town has worked to implement this plan and determined to undertake an update process in early 2023. This update is intended to provide renewed direction for action that is aligned with the existing plan, but recognizes changes that have occurred since the original plan was adopted. This new plan is the result of community engagement with Town residents and review by elected and appointed Town officials. It is intended to guide decision making for the next 10 years, but should be reviewed and revised regularly to reflect changing conditions and issues that may arise over that timeframe.

The Town of Ellsworth has limited staff and capacity, so the goals are an effort to provide a balance between community goals and the ability to implement. Although the plan is not organized explicitly around the nine required elements of the Wisconsin Comprehensive Planning law, the goals do reflect those elements, which are:

- Issues and Opportunities
- Housing
- Transportation
- Utilities and Community Facilities
- Agricultural, Natural, and Cultural Resources
- Economic Development
- Intergovernmental Cooperation
- Land Use
- Implementation

Vision Statement

In 2009, the Town adopted the following Vision Statement, which remains the guiding principle for this planning document.

The vision of the Town of Ellsworth is to maintain an environment where residents share a strong sense of pride in their community. We will strive to make the Town of Ellsworth a place where agriculture and industry co-exist and cooperate to

preserve the rural character of our town. We will work with our neighboring towns, the Village of Ellsworth, and Pierce County to address the issues and needs of all residents and landowners. The Town of Ellsworth will strive to ensure a safe, friendly environment for future generations, while fostering respect for the peace, safety, and order of the Town.

The plan is organized into three sections, the first is the Demographic and Economic Analysis which provides data about the Town of Ellsworth's population and economic characteristics. This data provides a foundation to understand how Ellsworth has changed in the last several years, and what changes can be expected going forward as it includes population projections. This allows community leaders to make more informed decisions grounded in data and aligned with State information. The second section is a discussion of the goals and objectives explaining the rationale for identified goals, expected benefits, and process for achieving the goals. The final section is an Implementation Guide which provides clear direction for action necessary to achieve identified goals. Taken together, this report provides the Town of Ellsworth with a clear guide for implementing the vision of the community.

Demographic and Economic Profile

The Town of Ellsworth is located in Pierce County, Wisconsin, near the West-central border of Minnesota. Its’ neighboring towns include Trimble, Martell, El Paso, Hartland, and the Village of Ellsworth is adjacent to the Town of Ellsworth. The rural community is surrounded with woodlands and creeks, as well as agricultural land – one of the town’s most prominent industries. The following analysis breaks down local data that will be of aid for town planning relating to infrastructure, employment, land use, and emergency services.

Population

The chart below displays the population changes from 2000. The population within the Town has grown very little over the last 20 years, even as Pierce County and the Village of Ellsworth have seen more consistent growth. This has allowed the Town to maintain its rural character and limited growth pressure on prime agricultural lands located within the Town. It has also constrained revenue growth and funding for necessary Town projects and improvements even as costs have continued to increase.

Table 1: Population

	2000	2010	2020
Town of Ellsworth	1,064	1,146	1,121
Pierce County	36,804	41,019	42,212
Village of Ellsworth	2,909	3,284	3,348

Source: US Census Bureau

Looking to the future, the Town can expect continued slow growth over the next 20 years or so. However, issues such as the COVID pandemic, increased opportunity to work from home with high speed internet available, and other issues may contribute to faster growth than currently projected. Given the Town’s proximity to the Twin Cities and high quality of life, people may decide to take advantage of these amenities and cause faster growth than expected.

Table 2: Population Projections

	2030	2040
Town of Ellsworth	1,290	1,305
Pierce County	46,125	46,825
Village of Ellsworth	3,670	3,725

Source: Wisconsin Department of Administration

Age and Gender

The median age in the Town of Ellsworth is 38. The highest percentage of the population is between the ages of 30 and 39, and just under that is ages 0 to 9. While the lowest percentage of the population is 70+. Over 20% of the population is aged 60+, which is fairly high, given these residents are often the most likely to vote and participate in community activities, they are often over-represented in community decision-making. It will be important to ensure all residents have opportunities to engage and feel connected to the Town.

Table 3: Age

0-9	10-19	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	70-79	80+
18%	14%	7%	21%	11%	12%	10%	6%	2%

Source: US Census Bureau

Looking at the percentages of age ranges, this community seems to be a desirable place to raise families. It is important to have facilities and amenities to cater to families. This may include parks, a good school district, and ensuring safe roads, crosswalks, and sidewalks. The ratio of male to female residents is relatively even. It is 54% male and 46% female.

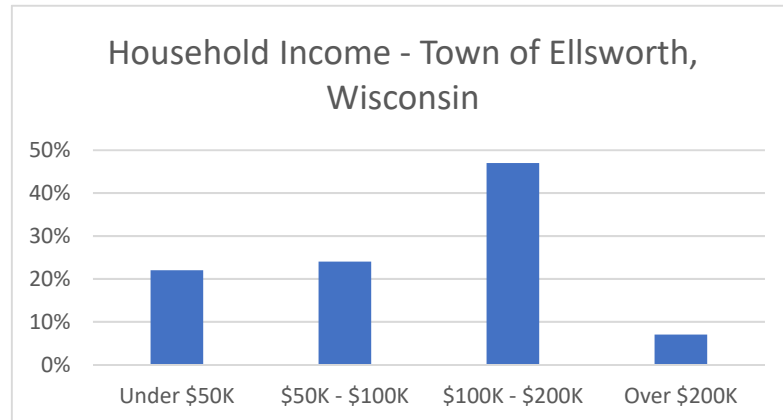
Race and Ethnicity

The Town of Ellsworth is predominately white being 94% of the population. 4% of the population is two or more races, and 2% is Hispanic. These statistics are common in a rural Wisconsin community.

Employment and Income

There are a few employment opportunities in the Town of Ellsworth. There is Alcivia, formerly known as Countryside Cooperative, on Highway 63, which is an agricultural based business, Plummer Concrete, Harrington's Greenhouses, J & S Machine, Ellsworth Country Club, the restaurant Shady Grove, the 715 Steer and Beer, and Lawton Bar. There is also dairy, beef, and crop farms. Looking at the types of business they have, and population, most residents are most likely employed outside of the town. The town has an employment rate of 74.0%, and 34.6% of the population has obtained a bachelor's degree or higher. The Median household income is \$105,580, this is significantly higher than Pierce County (\$75,603) and the State of Wisconsin (\$61,747) indicating that the Town's population is doing fairly well financially. Of persons under the age of 18, only 1% are considered to be below the poverty line, and 6% the age of 65 and over are considered to be below the poverty line. It is still important to consider economic opportunities to ensure residents have reason to stay in the Town of Ellsworth and not leave for better opportunities elsewhere.

Table 4: Household Income



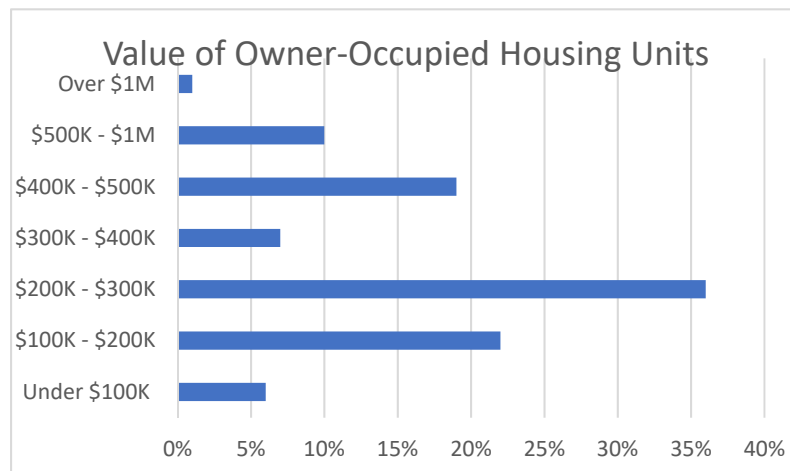
Source: US Census

Housing

There are a total of 512 housing units in the Town of Ellsworth as of 2020. 96% are occupied while 4% in vacant. (90% are owner occupied, and 10% is renter occupied). The overwhelming majority (95%) of housing units are single unit, with very few being multi-family units, or

mobile homes. Given the rural character of the Town, it is expected to see few multi-family developments. Families in this type of community desire a single detached home with a yard. However, having more options for multi-family units may allow more growth within the community and offer more options for lower income residents wanting to live in the Town. Below is the valuation of owner-occupied housing units. The median price for a home in the Town of Ellsworth is \$269,800. Given the fairly high household income, this is an indication that housing is affordable for most Ellsworth residents. However, given the small number of housing units in the Town, housing availability remains a challenge as there are few options for prospective residents wanting to move to the area.

Table 4: Housing Value



Source: US Census

Conclusion

Taking all these statistics and demographics into account, planning for the town’s future planning, infrastructure, employment, emergency services, and land use can be better executed. The Town of Ellsworth has a small, low density population spread throughout the township. Families make up a significant portion of households within the Town. The male to female ratio is quite even. The lack of diversity through race and ethnicity is to be expected in a small rural Wisconsin community. Looking at the employment opportunities within the township, a lot of the population commutes outside of the township for work. There are farmers, and some other small-scale businesses. However, the township of Ellsworth is within proximity to main roadways to bring them to Red Wing, Hudson, Twin Cities, etc. for work. The median household income is above average for both the county and state, as well as the median worth of owner-

occupied homes – taking this into account, middle ranged housing developments may make sense for this community. There is a very low number of renter-occupied homes, which is also common amongst rural Wisconsin communities. However, it never hurts to have options.

As the Town of Ellsworth can expect relatively slow growth for the future, it is important to ensure that growth is managed wisely. This means identifying areas where growth is most appropriate, preserving prime agricultural lands, and ensuring future growth happens in an efficient and cost-effective manner. This may be a challenge for the Town given limited staffing and capacity; however, by coordinating with Pierce County and encouraging growth that meets local values and priorities, the Town of Ellsworth can ensure a bright future.

Plan Goals and Objectives

The goals are divided into Short, Mid, and Long term goals to allow flexibility in implementation and as an attempt to balance desired changes with the reality of limited capacity and resources for the Town. Many of the goals focus on promoting coordination with other jurisdictions, notably the Village of Ellsworth and Pierce County to ensure efficient use of resources and support for achieving common goals. As the Town moves forward with implementation, they should continue to look for all opportunities to engage with partners and leverage resources available that can expand local capacity and ensure success.

Short Term / On-going Goals

Goal: Identify areas most suitable for continued residential growth that protects prime agricultural lands while allowing for efficient and orderly growth

This goal supports continued agricultural use for the majority of the Town while recognizing that expected population growth will continue to put pressure on those properties for development. It is important to develop a strategy that allows for efficient and orderly growth in areas most suitable for residential development without encouraging sprawling development that erodes the agricultural heritage and rural identity of the Town.

The 2009 Comprehensive Plan includes an inventory of agricultural lands defined by value, this represents a starting point for identifying desired development zones within the Town. Additionally, other resources from the 2009 map including the soil limitations maps can inform decision-making on areas suitable for different types of development as they show areas where septic systems and basements may be problematic. Overlaying these maps can provide insight into areas that are most suitable for new residential development. The purpose is to allow for needed residential development while not encouraging sprawl and loss of prime agricultural lands.

Once method of doing this is by supporting clustered development, preferably on wooded land, undeveloped land, or lower quality agricultural land. This can include the development of neighborhoods with a limited number of homes (10-20) that are clustered on smaller lots, rather than requiring large individual lots. The lots would need to be large enough to accommodate on-site well and septic, unless shared infrastructure were possible; however, by clustering the homes

onto 2.5 acre lots (minimum lot size in Town of Ellsworth – adopted June 5, 2006)) rather than 5 acre or larger, less agricultural land would be necessary for development, and the character of the Town would not be severely impaired by large lot sprawl. As mentioned, the goal is to allow for new housing to be built to support expected growth without surrendering the agricultural identity and economy. These clustered developments should be targeted to those areas most suitable for septic system installation and that will not infringe on the most desirable agricultural properties. Access to existing transportation networks and adjoining existing developments should also be a metric used to identify suitable areas.

The 2009 Comprehensive Plan also has a Conceptual Land Use map for the Extraterritorial Zone with the Village of Ellsworth. It identifies the area between Hwy 72 and Hwy 10 east to County Road DD as being an area with commercial, industrial, or residential development potential. This makes sense as the area has good transportation access via the state highways and less prime agricultural land. It is identified as having limitations for septic and basements so that might be a constraint. Another identified growth area is north of the Town of Ellsworth along Hwy 65, which again provides good transportation access and fewer issues with soils and ag lands. These areas provide adequate land to absorb expected development over the next 10 – 20 years.

Finally, the Town will strive to work with Pierce County to ensure that the County zoning regulations that affect the Town remain aligned with Town goals and support desired development in the Town. Given the limited staff of the Town, it is not expected that the Town should take responsibility for zoning administration but work with County staff to ensure the County is aware of Town goals and interests and are supportive of them. This will ensure the County is a partner in supporting quality growth that reflects community values and priorities.

Goal: Support continue economic development and diversification

As discussed on the demographic profile, the Town of Ellsworth has limited employment opportunities and few retail and service outlets. Most residents are employed in agriculture and supporting businesses or travel to nearby communities for employment. This is expected in a rural community and there is limited interest in encouraging major development of employment centers within the Town. However, there is a desire to support economic development that will provide additional revenue for the Town and support additional employment options within the

Town. The first step to this is in line with the land use goals discussed above and to support and promote ag businesses, small businesses, and home based businesses. It is important to identify the areas most suitable for commercial development. These will likely be at intersections of major roadways and in areas with existing infrastructure to support commercial growth (e.g. in proximity to the Village of Ellsworth with access to central water and wastewater facilities}. The Town will coordinate such development with the Village of Ellsworth and Pierce County to identify suitable locations.

Additionally, the Town has the benefit of high-speed internet infrastructure that is available to all. This is an asset that can be leveraged to support home-based businesses and those able to work from home. This is a growing trend that has accelerated with the COVID pandemic as people are looking to rural communities that provide high quality of life with accessibility. The Town of Ellsworth is ideally located in proximity to the Twin Cities, so access to an international airport and other urban amenities is available while providing rural quiet and excellent schools. The Town should partner with Pierce County Economic Development and other partners to promote itself as a destination for those who can work from anywhere with reliable, high speed internet.

Given the agricultural foundation in the Town, it may be beneficial to focus on ag-related businesses as targets to attract to the community. Again, communication with Pierce County Economic Development and other partners in this leadership role and implementation is essential given the limited staff and capacity of the Town.

Goal: Continue planning for future capital expenses, equipment replacement, and staff retirements and replacements

The Town has responsibly managed its budget and is appropriately planning for expected capital expenses that can be foreseen. There should be continued efforts to ensure adequate funding is set aside for needed repairs and replacements over time within the constraints of current levy limits and funding. Additionally, the Town contributes to employee retirement accounts and budgets appropriately to continue those contributions for Town staff. This is something that will require on-going awareness and monitoring to ensure that the Town continues to responsibly manage its budget to provide necessary services to its constituents.

Mid-Term Goals

Goal: Provide connection to WestCAP and other organizations that support low income families with housing and other services

The Town of Ellsworth is not equipped to provide a wide range of social services and support for residents; however, they can provide information for residents and help them connect with providers including Pierce County, the State of Wisconsin, WestCAP, and others. This is an opportunity for the Town to leverage existing providers and connect with those most suited to provide assistance rather than trying to reinvent the wheel. There is a wealth of resources available and the Town can be a conduit to those resources, providing information and connection for those looking for assistance to connect with the appropriate providers by having this information on their website and by contacting the Town Clerk.

Goal: Continuing planning for new Town Hall and Shop facility

The Town staff recognizes the need for a new Town Hall and shop to effectively serve the community; however, this is a significant investment and cost that will require long term planning to achieve. Town staff should continue to work to identify what necessary facilities and amenities will be included in a new facility to develop a vision for the project. This plan will also serve as the foundation for developing the Scope of Work and Budget necessary to build the desired facility, so should be completed with attention to detail that ensures the new facility will be adequate to serve the Town for the foreseeable future.

Substantial support from the community will be essential to provide funding for the project, so on-going outreach and communication with the town residents about the need and justification for the facility is also essential. The Town will make an effort to search for grants and other financial assistance that can be leveraged to help fund the project. This may include working with Pierce County or the Village of Ellsworth, and the School District to determine if some type of shared facility for vehicle maintenance, etc. may be an option. This would allow for cost sharing and the development of a facility that would support the larger community.

Long-Term Goals

Goal: Work to increase revenue for the Town to fund needed infrastructure maintenance and facilities

One of the most significant challenges facing the Town is the fundamental lack of financial resources. Current state law limits the capacity of the Town to raise necessary revenue to address rising costs for fuel, materials, equipment, and other necessary expenses. This means the Town is forced to continually cut its ability to provide basic services like road maintenance, plowing, etc. which has a significant impact on community safety and quality of life. This is another opportunity for inter-governmental cooperation as the Town can work with Pierce County, neighboring Towns, and other jurisdictions to encourage the State Legislature to revisit policies limiting local funding.

The other opportunity as discussed above is the need to expand and diversify the local economy. By encouraging retail and commercial growth in appropriate areas, the Town can increase its tax base and revenue potential. Again, the challenge is to balance the desire to maintain the rural character and agricultural identity of the Town while also supporting development that will enhance revenue generation.

Goal: Support outdoor recreation

The Town of Ellsworth has extensive opportunities for outdoor recreation. Residents and visitors enjoy snowmobiling, hunting, fishing, and other activities on public and private lands across the Town. The Town supports these activities and can provide information to those interested in recreating in the Town. This can include information on available public recreation spaces as well as information related to regulations and safety to ensure those engaging in outdoor activities do so safely and within existing laws and standards.

It may be appropriate for the Town to consider the development of a Town park to serve area residents. This should only be done when the Town is in a financial position to both build a park and ensure adequate maintenance and service necessary to keep the park functional and safe. This could be done in conjunction with planning for the new Town Hall and shop discussed above. Again, given current financial constraints, the Town should focus on other priorities and only consider developing park spaces when the financial situation allows.

Goal: Explore potential for use of 20 acre Town parcel on east side of Town as Recreation Space

Another opportunity for added recreation is the Town owned property on the east side off of 530th Ave. Currently there are limited activities on the site and much of it is undeveloped. There may be an opportunity to work with local organizations, such as Ellsworth Trails, to create trails through the property. This can be a relatively low-cost option for the Town to provide a recreational amenity to residents and serve the desire for walking trails and accessible outdoor space.

The Town will have to determine how to manage access and safety if the space is to be used for recreation. This may include the need to provide parking spaces. Another issue may be how accessible the space would, for example, to be ADA compliant would require significantly more investment than simple walking trails. Finally, supervision and safety must be considered to ensure the space is used appropriately and people feel safe walking in the area. These challenges would have to be considered and a plan in place to ensure access and safety before moving forward with trail development. Again, this should be considered as recreational amenities are important; however, given the limited capacity of the Town, and access to parks and open spaces provided by the Town of Ellsworth and Pierce County make this a lower priority effort.

Conclusion

The goals discussed above provide direction for the Town of Ellsworth to address identified challenges while supporting the existing quality of life and rural character that residents enjoy. They recognize the financial and staff constraints under which the Town operates but do provide opportunity for providing new opportunities. These goals should be considered as supporting the goals from the 2009 Comprehensive Plan and reflect the input from residents and community leaders. By implementing this Plan, the Town of Ellsworth will encourage development that reflects community values and priorities while protecting the values and heritage that make the Town a desirable place to live.

8/28/2023 accepted by Town of Ellsworth Plan Commission and submitted to Ellsworth Town Board to proceed with public hearing