

INTRODUCTION

The concept of citizens participating in government decision-making is fundamental to our system of governance. While it is true that our government officials are elected to represent citizens, it is also true that elected officials need to inform, be informed by, and interact with the public on an ongoing basis if their representation is to be meaningful. Regular and continuing involvement in government decision-making is the very basis for the idea of citizenship. Citizen participation is likely to produce better decisions by utilizing the knowledge of the populace and by allocating part of the responsibility for formulating and implementing decisions to the citizens.

The Wisconsin Working Lands Initiative was passed as part of the 2009-2011 State budget, and created a new framework for farmland preservation in Wisconsin. This law requires Winnebago County, and other fast-growing counties, to adopt a new farmland preservation plan by December 31, 2011. After requesting and receiving a one year extension of this requirement by the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) the Winnebago County Board of Supervisors adopted a farmland preservation plan in August of 2012, which was subsequently certified by DATCP for five years (expires on December 31st, 2017).

In an effort to ensure Winnebago County's farmland preservation plan represents the needs of county residents and property owners, citizen input will be encouraged throughout the preparation, review, and adoption of the plan. This public participation plan forms the basic framework for achieving an interactive dialogue between local decision makers, county staff, and the citizens of Winnebago County. This plan outlines the public participation strategy for soliciting public review and input, and its adoption is the first step in meeting the requirements of Wisconsin's Farmland Preservation Planning and "Smart Growth" legislation.

OBJECTIVES FOR PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

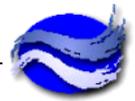
Public participation is intended to achieve the following objectives:

- The process engages people of all races, ethnic backgrounds, and income levels.
- The public has opportunities to provide input (both formally and informally) to the County.
- The public has access to technical information and analyses performed during the process.
- Members of the County Board of Supervisors have input from a broad range of perspectives and interests in the community.
- Public input is elicited through a variety of means (electronic, printed, and oral) in such a way that it may be carefully considered and responded to in a timely fashion.
- The process strengthens the sense of community and civic engagement.
- The process furthers the vision of having active and positive participation throughout the process by those most directly affected by County decision making.

RESPONSIBILITY FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Each of the following will share the responsibility for implementing the public participation activities described in this plan:

- County of Winnebago Board of Supervisors
- Winnebago County Planning and Zoning Committee



- Winnebago County Planning and Zoning Department

However, the County Board of Supervisors will ultimately determine the direction and content of the farmland preservation plan.

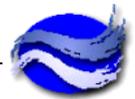
PLANNED PUBLIC PARTICIPATION ACTIVITIES

- Establish a Steering Committee to promote feedback and oversee the plan development
- Create a website to post information related to the project
- Committee meeting updates
- Conduct one or more public hearings
- Meet with each of the Town Boards in the county
- Conduct two rounds of regional meetings with town officials to share information and obtain feedback
- Conduct one or more community open houses
- Issue news releases when appropriate
- County Board meetings
- Provide opportunities for the public to submit oral and written comments
- Post various drafts of the plan on a project website along with other supporting information as appropriate
- Provide copies of all public documents upon request

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION GUIDELINES

A public hearing will be conducted as part of the plan amendment process to allow for formal public testimony. All other public meetings will follow the following format:

- An agenda will be established that clearly defines the purpose of the meeting, the items to be discussed, and any actions that may be taken.
- The scheduled date, time, and place will be convenient to encourage participation by county residents.
- A clearly identifiable facilitator or chair will conduct the meeting in an orderly fashion to ensure that all attendees have an opportunity to offer comments, discuss issues, or provide testimony.
- The facilitator or chair will provide opening remarks outlining the purpose of the meeting, procedures attendees should use during the meeting when offering input, and how the input will be used.
- As appropriate, an overview of documents or proposals to be considered will be discussed.
- All persons attending the meeting that desire to participate should be allowed to do so. However, specific factors, such as the meeting or hearing purpose, number in attendance, time considerations, or future opportunities to participate, may require that appropriate constraints be applied. These constraints will be clearly outlined by the facilitator.
- Meeting summaries or minutes of all public meetings will be posted on the project website.



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- Special arrangements will be made under the provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) with sufficient advance notice.

OPPORTUNITY FOR WRITTEN COMMENTS

- The project website will include the name, address, and e-mail address (if applicable) of a person(s) to whom written comments should be sent, along with any deadlines for submitting comments.
- At public meetings or hearings, the facilitator or chair will clearly announce any deadline for submitting written comments, if such comments are allowed subsequent to the meeting or hearing.
- Persons speaking or testifying will be encouraged to concisely express their comments and if appropriate provide specific details in writing.

CONSIDERATION OF PUBLIC COMMENTS

- Decision makers may continue a public hearing for the purpose of addressing public comments, provided the time and date of the public hearing is announced at the time the public hearing is tabled.
- Prior to the public hearing conducted by the Board of Supervisors, a report containing written comments received during the planning process and written responses, if any, and meeting summaries related to the plan will be made available to the Board of Supervisors for their review and consideration.
- Substantive written comments relating to studies, analyses, or reports, along with appropriate responses, will be included in published documents if deemed appropriate.

PUBLIC NOTICES FOR MEETINGS AND HEARINGS

Public notices of all meetings and public hearings will be prepared and distributed consistent with applicable notice requirements of the Wisconsin Open Meetings Law, and any other notice requirements imposed by local ordinance or bylaws. At a minimum, the requirements of §19.31, Wisconsin Statutes, pertaining to public meetings and notification will be met. Public notices for public hearings will be placed in the County's official paper and posted on the project website.

The following information should be included in any notice:

- Name of the governmental body that will meet.
- Date, time and location of the hearing.
- General description of the matter to be discussed and acted upon.
- Notice that interested persons may present testimony regarding matters on the agenda at the meeting/hearing or in writing to the board or committee prior to a specified deadline.
- Contact information for further information about the proposal.

FARMLAND PRESERVATION PLAN ADOPTION PROCESS

Winnebago County and participating municipalities will follow the procedures for amending the Farmland Preservation Plan as listed in §66.1001 and Chapter 91, Wisconsin Statutes. The first step in the adoption process is being met by the adoption of this document which details written procedures that are designed to foster public participation throughout the planning process.