

Town of Empire, WI

2040 Comprehensive Plan Update

ADOPTED APRIL 9, 2025



Cedar
CORPORATION



Town of Empire, WI 2040 Comprehensive Plan Update

**Approved
April 9, 2025**

Planning Assistance Provided by:

Cedar Corporation
1695 Bellevue Street
Green Bay, Wisconsin 54311
Phone: 920-491-9081
www.cedarcorp.com



Acknowledgements

Plan Commission

Steve Abel, Chair
Dale Theel
Nikki Pierquet
Joe Miritz
Steven Loehr
Graham Goebel
Bryce Retzer

Town Board

James Pierquet, Chairman
Richard J. Julka, Supervisor
Ted Halbur, Supervisor

Town Clerk

Scott Schnettler

Deputy Clerk

Michael D. Morgan

Treasurer

Gail Schindelholz

Table of Contents

1. Background & Introduction	8
1.1 Introduction	8
1.2 Planning Process	10
2. Issues & Opportunities	12
2.1 Introduction	12
2.2 Identified Issues & Opportunities	12
2.3 Issues & Opportunities Vision (Overall Vision)	13
3. Population & Housing	14
3.1 Introduction	14
3.2 Population Characteristics Summary	14
3.3 Housing Characteristics Summary	16
3.4 Key Facts	20
3.5 Population & Housing Vision	21
3.6 Population & Housing Goals & Strategies	21
3.6 Housing Programs	22
4. Economic Development	24
4.1 Introduction	24
4.2 Economic Characteristics Summary	24
4.3 Analysis of Economic Base	24
4.4 Sites for Business and Industrial Development	27
4.5 Strengths and Weaknesses Analysis	27
4.6 Key Facts & Trends	28
4.7 Economic Development Vision	28
4.8 Economic Development Goals & Strategies	29
4.9 Economic Development Programs	30
5. Transportation	32
5.1 Introduction	32
5.2 Existing Road System & Traffic Counts	32
5.3 Traffic Crashes	33
5.4 Other Transportation Modes	33
5.5 Existing Transportation Plans and Planned Improvements	36
5.6 Key Facts & Trends	37
5.7 Transportation Vision	37
5.8 Transportation Goals and Strategies	38
5.9 Transportation Programs	40

6. Utilities & Community Facilities	44
6.1 Introduction.....	44
6.2 Inventory and Assessment of Utilities & Community Facilities.....	44
6.3 Utilities & Community Facilities Vision.....	50
6.4 Utilities & Community Facilities Goals & Strategies.....	50
7. Agricultural, Natural, and Cultural Resources.....	52
7.1 Introduction.....	52
7.2 Agricultural Resources Inventory.....	52
7.3 Inventory of Natural Resources.....	59
7.4 Inventory of Cultural Resources.....	65
7.5 Inventory and Assessment of Utilities & Community Facilities.....	66
7.6 Agricultural, Natural & Cultural Resources Vision.....	68
7.7 Agricultural, Natural & Cultural Resources Goals & Strategies.....	68
8. Land Use	70
8.1 Introduction.....	70
8.2 Current Land Use Inventory	71
8.3 Land Use & Development Regulations.....	74
8.4 Trends in Supply, Demand, and Price of Land	76
8.5 Future Land Use & 2040 Land Use Map.....	77
8.6 Land Use Vision	85
8.7 Land Use Goals & Strategies	86
9. Intergovernmental Cooperation.....	88
9.1 Introduction.....	88
9.2 Existing Intergovernmental Activities	88
9.3 Existing and Proposed Plans.....	90
9.4 Intergovernmental Cooperation Vision.....	92
9.5 Intergovernmental Cooperation Goals & Strategies.....	92
10. Implementation	94
10.1 Introduction	94
10.2 Priority Implementation Strategies.....	94
10.3 Comprehensive Plan Amendments & Updates	95
10.4 Integration & Consistency of Plan Elements	99
Appendix A - Plan Adoption Documents	102
Appendix B - Public Involvement Meeting Summaries	104

Maps

1-1 Regional Setting..... 8

5-1 Functional Classification, Traffic Counts, and Crashes..... 34

6-1 Existing Community Facilities..... 48

6-2 School Districts..... 49

7-1 Soil Productivity..... 54

7-2 Land Cover and Use (2016)..... 56

7-3 Conversion of Agricultural Lands (2001-2016)..... 57

7-4 Nationally Significant Agricultural Lands..... 58

7-5 Farmland Preservation Plan..... 59

7-6 Environmental Features..... 64

8-1 Existing Land Use..... 74

8-2 Farmland Preservation Areas..... 76

8-3 2040 Future Land Use..... 80



1. Background & Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Location

The Town of Empire, located in east central Fond du Lac County, lies just east of the City of Fond du Lac as shown on Map 1-1. WIS 23 runs east and west through the northern portion of the Town of Empire, and WIS 45 is located in the southwestern portion of the town. The town is about 30 square miles and home to more than 2,700 people. The Town of Empire shares borders with: the Town of Forest, Town of Fond du Lac, Town of Taycheedah, Town of Eden, and City of Fond du Lac.

History

Fond du Lac County's boundaries were finalized in 1840. By 1842, the entire county was divided into three townships: Calumet, Fond du Lac, and Waupun. Between 1846-1851, these three initial townships were further divided into the townships found in the county today. The Town of Empire, Township 15 north, Range 18 east, originally was a part of the Town of Taycheedah. Empire did not become an official separate town until 1851.

The first permanent settlers in the town are believed to be G. de Neveu and his hired help - the family of A. T. Denniston, who worked the large de Neveu farm. Among Mr. G. de Neveu's land holdings was the lake that lies in Sections 30 and 31 of the town. The first schoolhouse in the county was built in Empire, but was never used for school purposes, due to a greater number of scholars living at Taycheedah. The building was constructed of logs and erected by G. de Neveu and others. By 1854, the town contained three schoolhouses, and in 1880 it contained seven. The first births recorded in the town were not far apart, in 1839, in the families of G. de Neveu, A. T. Denniston and Luke La Borde. They were among the first recorded births in the county.

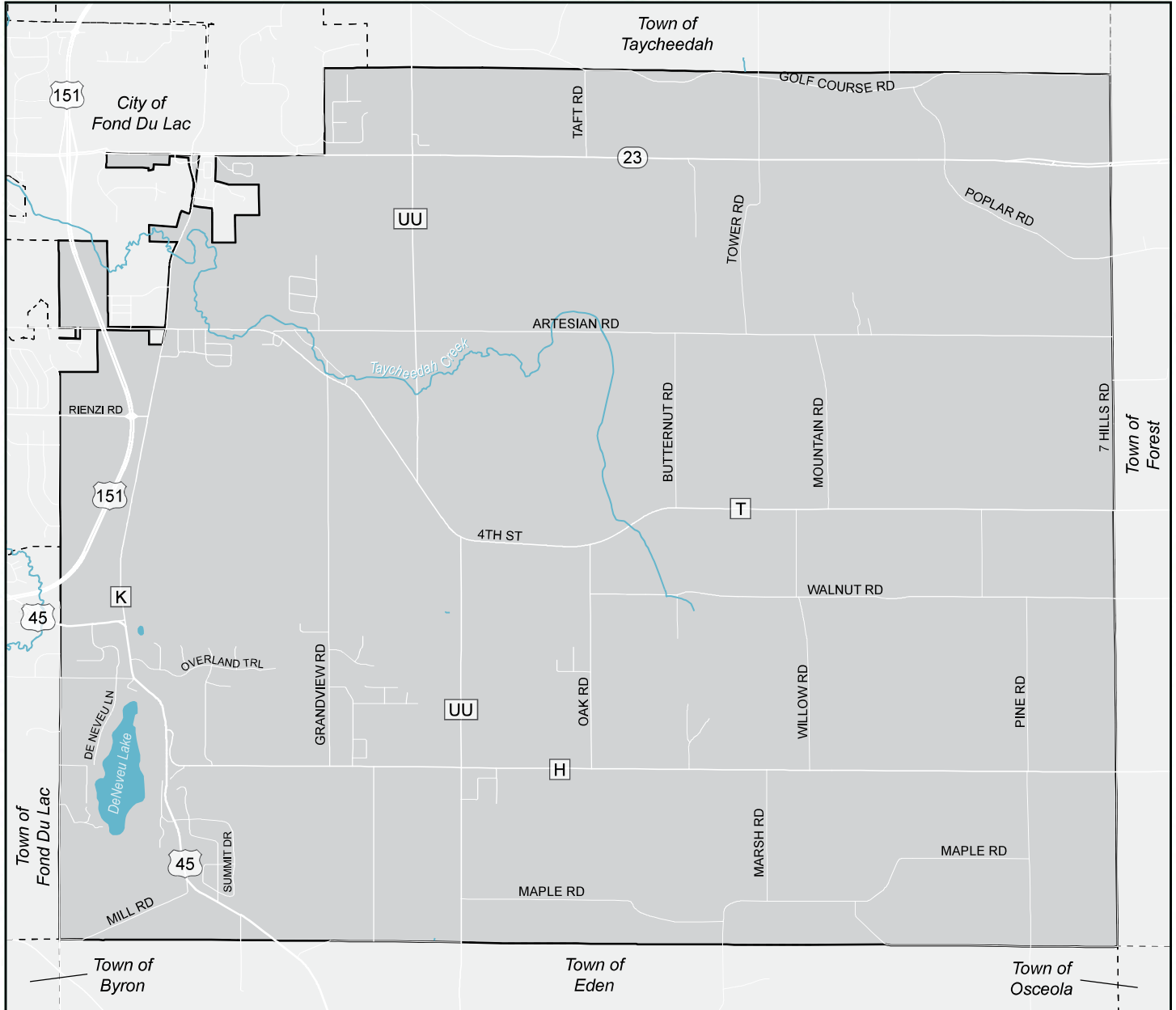
The southeast portion of the town, when initially settled, was heavily timbered and prairies covered the northwest corner of the town. The east and some of the south portions of Empire were noted hay marshes, with the balance composed of oak openings. The earliest records of the town also describe the "Ledge" (Niagara Escarpment) extending the whole distance across the west side of the town. In areas where the dolostone crops out of the ground, being too rough and barren for cultivation, the land was used profitably as sheep pastures, or as source of wood, building-stone and lime. Stone quarries and lime kilns were also commonplace in the Town.

Early records for the Town of Empire also note it lies on many natural springs, especially along the "Ledge." In particular, larger springs were noted F. M. Phelps farm; another on the farm of G. de Neveu; one or more on David Giddings farm; a very large and peculiar one on the Herny Conklin land, and another on the John Westervelt farm.

From its humble beginning, the Town of Empire has grown into a rural residential and agricultural community. Today, farming is still important, but faces several challenges. In more recent decades, residential development has become more and more pervasive as people seek rural "country living" home sites with easy access to the employment opportunities in the Fond du Lac and other nearby employment centers.

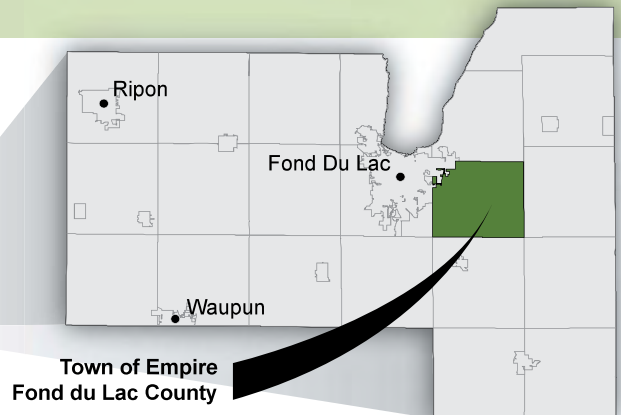
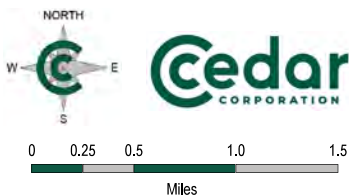


Map 1-1 - Regional Setting



Regional Setting

Town of Empire
Fond du Lac County, WI



1.2 Planning Process

The Town of Empire 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. 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 updated plan document follows the same basic structure as the previous plan by addressing nine comprehensive planning elements:

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

The 2040 *Town of Empire Comprehensive Plan* meets the requirements of Wisconsin’s Comprehensive Planning law, Wisconsin Statutes 66.1001. This law requires all municipalities (counties, cities, 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.

Planning is...

- An orderly, open approach to determine local needs, goals and priorities, and developing a guide for action.
- A concentrated effort by a community to reach a balance between the natural environment and residential, commercial, industrial and agricultural development
- A guide for public officials and private citizens to use in making informed decisions that will affect their community.
- A process that helps a community prepare for change rather than react to it.

Planning is not...

An attempt to replace market forces of supply and demand. It helps shape and channel market forces by establishing certain guidelines to manage development.

- Action. A plan is only a guide for action and implementation.
- An instrument for immediate change. Change will occur incrementally as the plan is implemented.
- Static. Good planning requires continual review of implementation successes and failures, citizen desires and the surrounding environment so that the plan can be adjusted as needed.
- Zoning. A comprehensive plan is a foundation and guide for many tools that may be used to implement the plan. Zoning is one of these tools. Utilities, capital improvements planning, and subdivision regulations are examples of other tools.

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 Empire has adopted a Public Participation Plan in order to comply with the requirements of Section 66.1001(4)(a) of the Wisconsin Statutes. The town's adopted Public Participation Plan is found in Appendix A. Activities related to allowing for and gathering public input during the process is discussed in Chapter 2 – Issues & Opportunities.

Plan Commission Action

On April 9, 2025, the Town of Empire Plan Commission discussed the draft comprehensive plan and passed a resolution (Appendix A) recommending approval of the plan to the Town Board.

Public Hearing

On April 9, 2025, a public hearing was held by the Town Board on the recommended Town of Empire 2040 Comprehensive Plan. The hearing was preceded by the required Class 1 notice and public comments were accepted for 30 days prior to the hearing.

Town Board Action

After completion of the public hearing, the Town Board discussed and adopted the comprehensive plan on April 9, 2025 as an ordinance (Appendix A).

Distribution of Plan Documents

The 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 Plan*.



2. Issues & Opportunities

2.1 Introduction

Wisconsin's Smart Growth Comprehensive Planning Law requires that the Issues and Opportunities Chapter provide background information about the community, as well as overall visions to guide future development and redevelopment over a 20-year planning period. Note that all socio-economic data requirements for this element are addressed in subsequent chapters, leaving this one to focus on the identified issues and opportunities by the public.

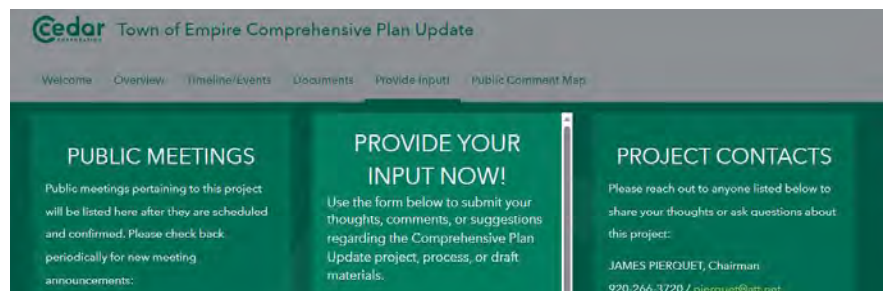
2.2 Identified Issues & Opportunities

Input Methods

The Town of Empire Comprehensive Plan 2040 was developed with numerous opportunities for public input. To gain citizen understanding and support throughout the planning process, the public was provided with a variety of meaningful opportunities to become involved in the effort.

- **Comprehensive Plan Kickoff Meeting:** At this meeting held on February 21, 2024, the public was informed of future opportunities to participate in the planning process. In addition, those in attendance were asked to identify qualities of Empire that they value and to identify Empire's opportunities, and threats. Approximately 40 residents attended this meeting. See Appendix A.
- **Comprehensive Plan On-Line Web Portal:** A custom, on-line web project portal was created by Cedar Corporation to host information pertaining to the Comprehensive Plan update process. The portal offered background information, meeting schedules, draft maps and plan chapters, and general education materials about the Smart Growth Law. Additionally, the opportunity to offer public comments through the use of an input form, as well as an interactive map, were provided as part of the project portal. Throughout the plan's development process, the site was updated about every month to ensure that the information was current.
- **Plan Commission Meetings:** Throughout the planning process, the Plan Commission convened periodically to review draft text, maps, and other information pertinent to the development of the updated Comprehensive Plan. Each of these working meetings was open to the public. At each meeting, participants had the opportunity to discuss their concerns and ideas about each particular chapter, refine chapter text, and review drafts of the relevant plan chapters.

A Comprehensive Plan Update Project Hub Site was created to host information to the Comprehensive Plan Process and gather public feedback



What Do Empire Residents Value?

As part of this public process, the goal was to gather up front citizen input regarding issues and opportunities associated with the Town of Empire which would assist in re-evaluating the current plan's vision, goals, objectives, and future land use map. Citizen engagement is a priority of the town during this process and the opinions of its residents are important to evaluating the past and future trends that have, or will, shape the community.

The following is a short summary from the February 21, 2024 Public Information Meeting which was used to poll participants on items they felt were: 1) either ongoing or future issues which need to be addressed, and; 2) potential opportunities for the town to take advantage of in the future based on trends and needs identified by the public.

Issues	Opportunities
Town of Empire residents really appreciate living in their community and the quality of life it offers.	Town residents understand the town needs to continue its growth for numerous reasons, including tax revenue generation.
There continues to be strong support for agriculture and the natural resource base, especially pertaining to wetlands, woodlands, and water quality.	Balancing future growth within the context of its agricultural base and significant natural features will be the key for this and future planning efforts.
Residents value the benefits of planning and want the town to “stay the course” with respect to how it has managed past development and growth.	Accommodating future commercial development in controlled amounts and locations may offer opportunities for tax base generation. In addition, home-based businesses and resident entrepreneurial activities were generally supported.
Unplanned renewable energy (wind towers, utility scale solar, etc.).	Renewable energy planning is not an exception, and establishing a solid foundation for its potential future growth will be of prime importance.

2.3 Issues & Opportunities Vision (Overall Vision)

Below is the overall vision statement, which represents the broad interests of town residents, elected/appointed officials, business leaders and property owners. This vision was included in the town's 1998 plan and reaffirmed in the 2007 plan, as well as during the 2024 plan update. To expand upon this general overall vision statement, more detailed supporting visions for each of the required plan chapters are provided at the beginning of the chapters of this plan.

Town of Empire 2040 Vision: To preserve our rural character, protect our natural and historical resources, promote sustainable growth, and provide a legacy which will enrich the lives of future generations.



3. Population & Housing

3.1 Introduction

Population and housing are two key indicators that will help the Town of Empire 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.

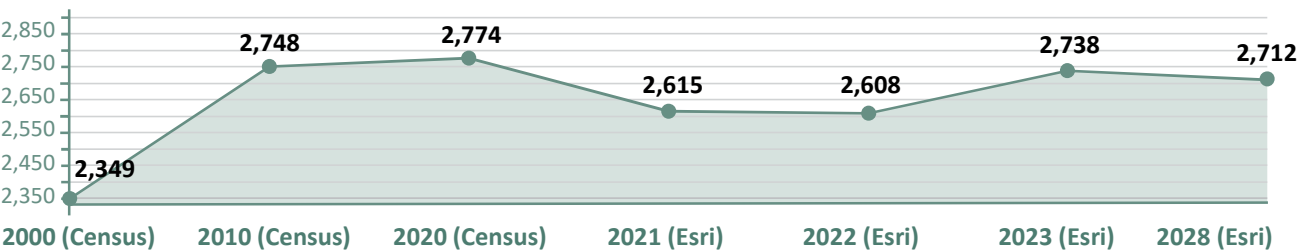
3.2 Population Characteristics Summary

Table 3-1: Town of Empire Historic and Projected Population, Households & Persons Per Household

Community / Data	Year							Change 2020-2040
	2010 Census	2020 Census	2023 Estimate	2025 Projection	2030 Projection	2035 Projection	2040 Projection	
Population	2,797	2,774	2,744	3,030	3,105	3,135	3,130	356
Households	1,059	1,106	n/a	1,215	1,260	1,288	1,299	193
Persons Per Household	2.64	2.53	n/a	2.49	2.46	2.43	2.41	(0.12)

Source: U.S. Census, 2020 & 2010 and WDOA Projections (2013).

Figure 3-1: Town of Empire Historic and Projected Population



Source: U.S. Census, 2020 & 2010 and ESRI (2023, 2028).

Table 3-2: Town of Empire Households by Size

Households by Size	Number	Percent
Total Households	1,066	-
1-Person Household	169	16%
2-Person Household	501	47%
3-Person Household	146	14%
4-Person Household	149	14%
5-Person Household	73	7%
6-Person Household	19	2%
7+ Person Household	9	1%
Average Household Size	2.60	-

Source: U.S. Census, 2020.

Figure 3-2: Town of Empire Daytime Population



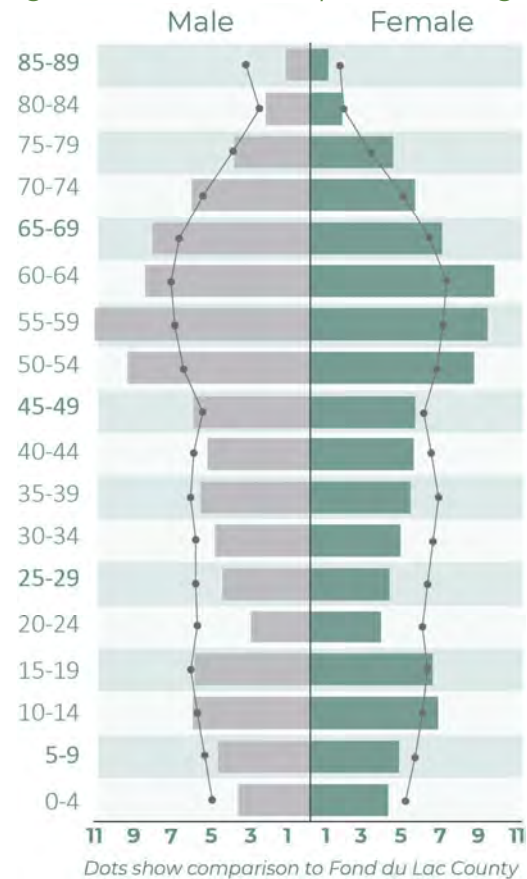
1,462

Daytime
Population



Age Distribution

Figure 3-3: Town of Empire 5-Year Age Profile



Source: ESRI 2024 / U.S. Census, 2020 & 2010 and 2018-2022 ACS 5-Year Summary

Figure 3-4: Town of Empire Population by Generation

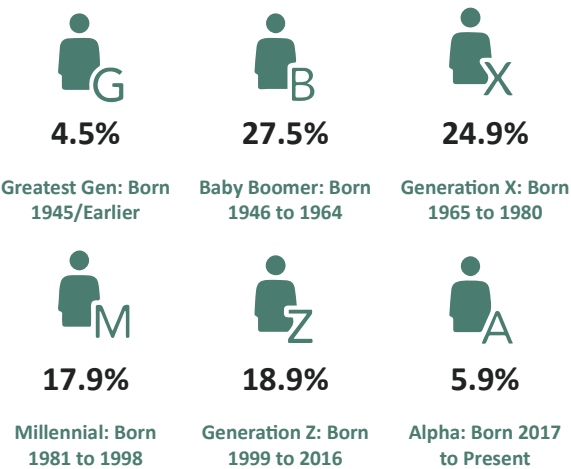
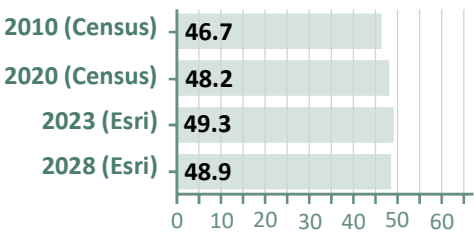
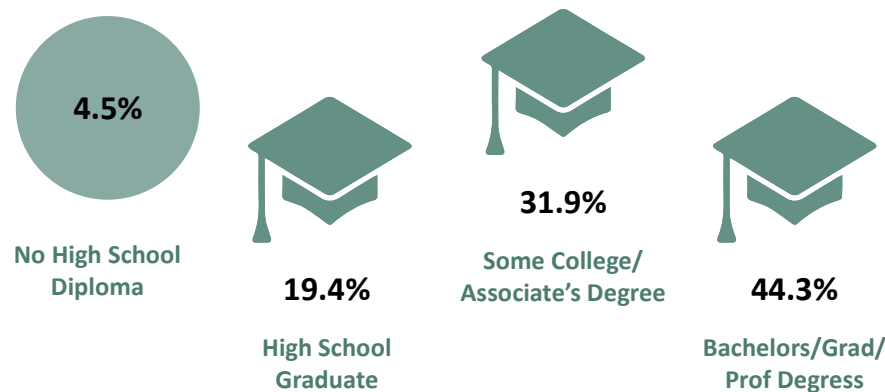


Figure 3-5: Town of Empire Median Age



Education Levels

Figure 3-6: Town of Empire Education Levels

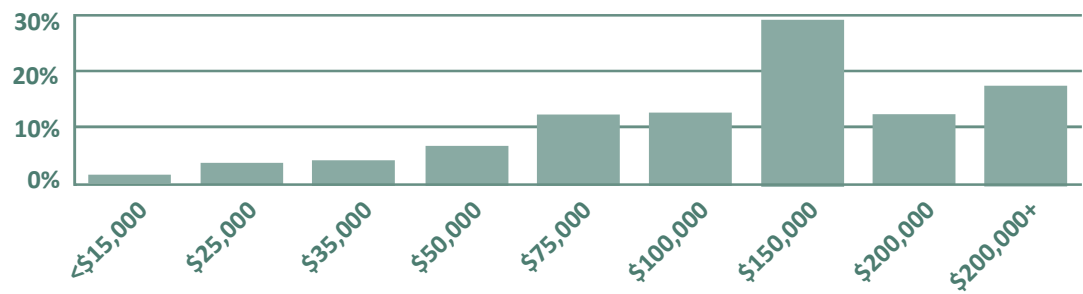


Source: ESRI (2023, 2028).



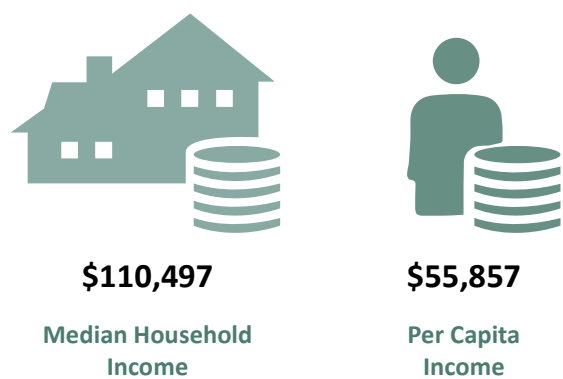
Income Levels

Figure 3-7: Town of Empire Household Income Levels



Source: ESRI, 2023).

Figure 3-8: Town of Empire Median & Per Capita Household Incomes



Source: ESRI, 2023.

3.3 Housing Characteristics Summary

Age Characteristics

Figure 3-9: Town of Empire Age of Housing Stock



Source: ESRI, 2023.



Structural Characteristics

Figure 3-10: Town of Empire Housing Unit Type



Source: ESRI, 2023.

Occupancy Characteristics

Figure 3-11: Town of Empire Home Ownership vs. Renter



Source: ESRI, 2023-2028.



Value Characteristics

Figure 3-13: Town of Empire Housing Values

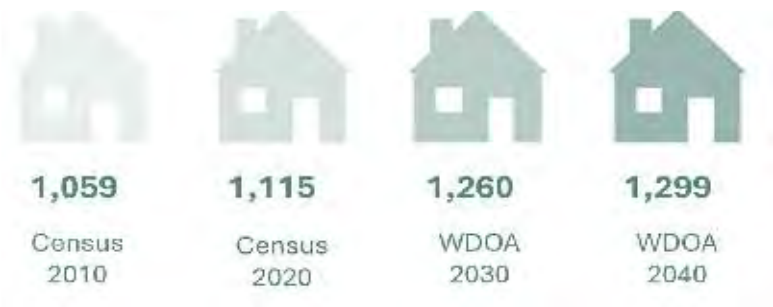


Median Home Value = \$299,300

Source: ESRI, 2023.

Housing Projections

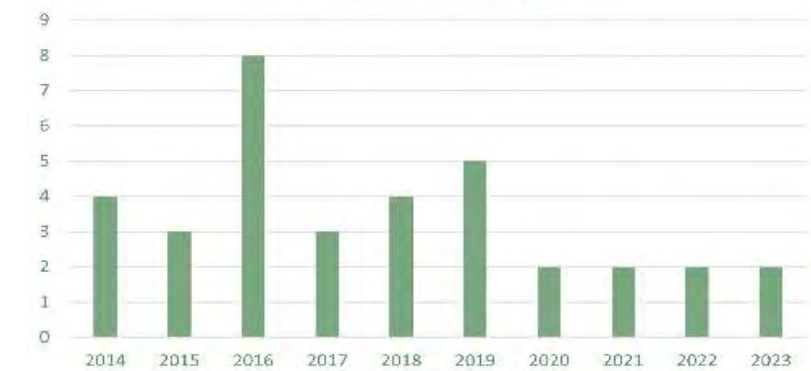
Figure 3-14: Town of Empire Housing Unit Projections



Source: ESRI, 2023.

Residential Growth

Figure 3-15: Town of Empire New Housing Unit Starts



Source: ESRI, 2023-2028.

Housing Affordability

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) defines affordable housing (for rent or purchase) for which the occupant is paying no more than 30% of their household income for gross housing expenses, whether as an owner or renter.

Figure 3-16: Monthly Mortgage Costs as a Percentage of Household Income

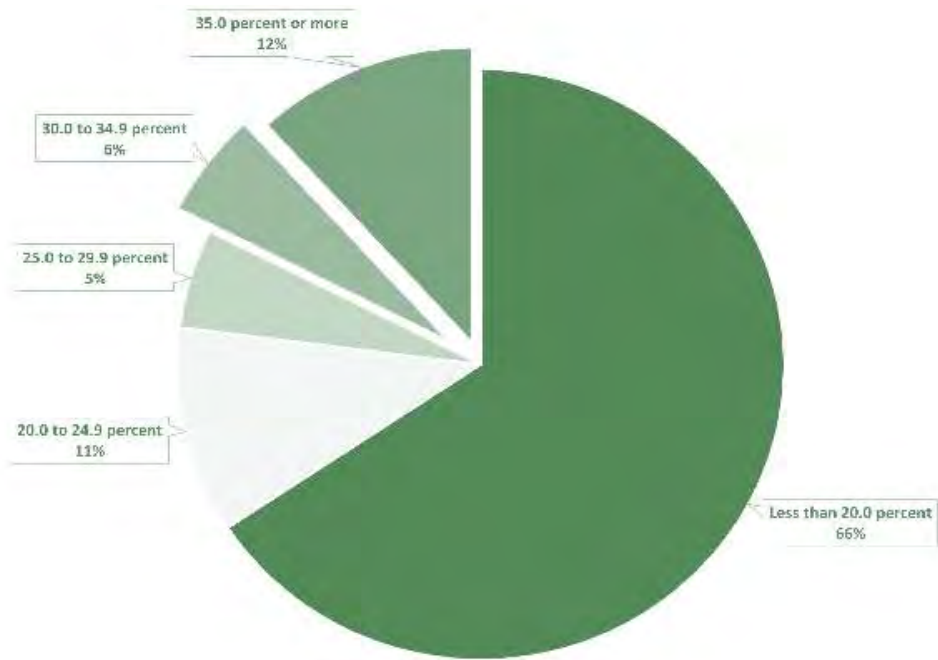
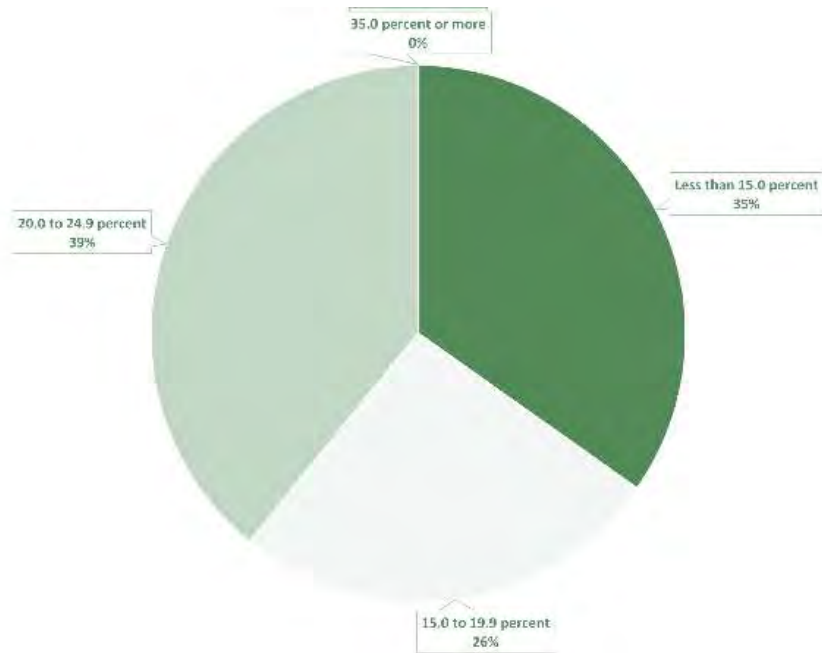


Figure 3-17: Gross Monthly Rent as a Percentage of Household Income



3.4 Key Facts & Trends

Population Growth

- Population growth is projected to increase from 2,744 (2023 est.) to 3,130 in 2040, or 356 persons.
- Persons per household will decrease from 2.53 (2020) to 2.41 by 2040, which means that additional housing units will be needed to accommodate the same population.

Household Characteristics

- A majority of Households (63%) are 1 and 2-person households.
- Household growth is projected to increase from 1,215 in 2025 to 1,299 in 2040. This is an increase of 7%, or about 6 new households per year.

Population Age

- The existing population is aging. The 2010 median age was 46.7 years and increased to 48.2 years of age.
- A majority of the Town's population (52.7%) fell into the Baby Boomer and Generation X age groups

Education

- The Town's population is highly educated with over 75% having at least some college experience and over 44% having graduated a four-year college.

Income

- Household incomes are high as compared to surrounding areas, with the median household income being \$110,497.
- Only 1.7% of the Town's population is considered to be living at or below the poverty level. Although this climbs to 3.0% for children 18 or less.

Housing Characteristics

- A majority of the Town's housing stock (97.6%) is comprised of single-family detached homes.
- The majority of homes within the Town are owner-occupied with only 5.9% being rentals in 2020. This rental rate is expected to nearly double to 11.3% by 2028.
- The Town's housing stock is aging, with most units built between 1970 and 2000. Don't forget that even "newer" homes built in the 1990's housing boom are already 25 to 30 years old and may have maintenance needs.
- According to the 2018-2022 ACS 5-year data, the majority of homes are valued in the \$300,000-\$500,000 with the median home price being \$299,300. A quick search indicated that the current (March, 2024) median "list price" for homes in Empire is \$399,900.
- Housing growth is projected to increase along the lines of household growth, an increase of 84 units (7%) between 2020 and 2040. This equates to approximately 6 new housing units per year.



3.5 Population & Housing Vision

Below is the vision statement which illustrates the aspirations of the Town of Empire with respect to overall levels of growth and its ability to accommodate new and existing residents within housing appropriate to their needs.

2040 Population & Housing Vision: In 2040, the Town of Empire offers rural residential living choices in harmony with the town's natural and geologic landscape. Single-family homes within planned subdivisions designed to be sensitive to their natural setting and on large rural parcels are the town's primary housing choices. Town codes, ordinances, and the comprehensive plan promote attractive housing with abundant green spaces, distant scenic views, trails, and other amenities in areas identified for residential development.

3.6 Population & Housing Goals & Strategies

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. Strategies are more specific than goals and provide a more measurable direction for future actions and implementation of the plan. Strategies can be viewed partially as 'objectives', as well as perhaps containing some 'policy' statements or thoughts. Moving along the path of the indicated strategies contributes to fulfillment of the goal.

Goal 3.1: Maintain the environmental assets and rural character of the Town so that it can be an attractive place to live.

Strategy 3.1.1: Educate new Town residents moving into the area about what it means to live in the country.

Goal 3.2: Preserve or improve the quality of existing housing and maintain housing values over time.

Strategy 3.2.1: Conduct an internal review of Town codes and ordinances every five years to consider amendments to address housing concerns.

Goal 3.3: Provide housing choices for residents in all stages of life (i.e., starter homes, family homes, senior housing, etc.).

Strategy 3.3.1: Form a sub-committee to study the need for elderly and disabled resident housing opportunities. If sufficient need exists, identify preferred locations for these facilities.

Strategy 3.3.2: Utilize the Future Land Use Map to locate and guide future residential development.

Goal 3.4: Promote resident participation in development decisions.

Strategy 3.4.1: Revise the Empire Land Division and Zoning Ordinances to provide for additional opportunities for resident notification and participation in land use decisions.

Strategy 3.4.2: Revise the Empire Land Division Ordinance to require additional points for public input (i.e., neighborhood meetings).

Strategy 3.4.3: Make available Town development information (agendas, minutes, application forms and information prior to hearings, etc.).

3.6 Housing Programs

[Housing Cost Reduction Initiative \(WDOA\)](#)

The HCRI program provides housing assistance to low- and moderate-income (LMI) households seeking to own or rent decent, safe, affordable housing. Funds are awarded to communities and local housing organizations to fund a range of activities that build, buy, and/or rehabilitate affordable housing for low income homeowners, homebuyers, and renters.

[HOME-Homebuyer and Rehabilitation Program \(WDOA\)](#)

The HOME-Homebuyer and Rehabilitation Program (HHR) provides funding for homebuyer assistance; owner-occupied rehabilitation; and rental rehabilitation. Funds are awarded through a biennial funding cycle with partnership agencies throughout Wisconsin.

[Housing Preservation Grants \(USDA\)](#)

The program provides grants to sponsoring organizations for the repair or rehabilitation of housing owned or occupied by low- and very-low-income rural citizens. Eligible applicants include: most State and local governmental entities, nonprofit organizations and federally Recognized Tribes. Eligible expenses include: Repairing or replacing electrical wiring, foundations, roofs, insulation, heating systems and water/waste disposal systems, handicap accessibility features, labor and materials and administrative expenses.

[Housing Tax Credit Program \(WHEDA\)](#)

The HTC program helps finance a project by granting a proposed development future tax credits. These tax credits are typically sold at a discount to investors who provide the capital to finance the construction.

[WI Housing & Economic Development Authority Foundation – Housing Grants \(WHEDA\)](#)

The Wisconsin Housing and Economic Development Authority (WHEDA) Foundation awards grants to local municipalities and nonprofit organizations through the Persons-in-Crisis Program Fund to support the development or improvement of housing facilities for low-income persons with special needs.

[Financial Information and Services Center](#)

Financial Information and Services Center (FISC) provides financial, housing and bankruptcy information and counseling for primarily low and moderate income clients.

[Single Family Housing Programs \(HUD\)](#)

HUD offers several single-family home programs, including homebuyer education and counseling, down payment assistance, rehabilitation, weatherization, mortgage insurance and reverse mortgages. Some of these products, such as FHA loans, are available through approved lending institutions.

[Multi-family Products \(WHEDA\)](#)

WHEDA offers several multi-family home products, including tax credits, tax exempt bond funding, construction, rehabilitation and accessibility loans, asset management and tax credit monitoring services.

[Single Family Products \(WHEDA\)](#)

WHEDA offers several single-family home products, including home improvement or rehabilitation loans, homebuyer assistance and homebuyer education.

[Wisconsin Affordable Assisted Living \(WDHFS\)](#)

This website is a resource guide for consumers seeking Assisted Living assistance.



Page intentionally left blank.



4. Economic Development

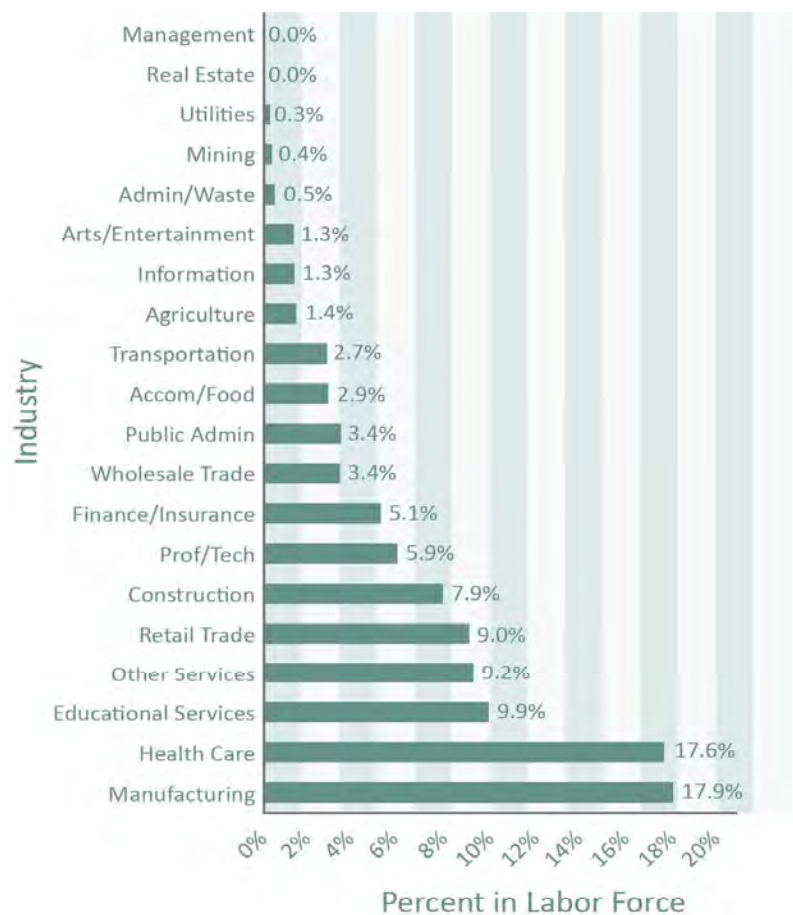
4.1 Introduction

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 Empire related to economic development include enhancing the community’s competitiveness for attracting and retaining businesses, ensuring a vibrant environment to conduct agricultural activities, creating jobs, increasing wages, enhancing worker training, and improving overall quality of life. Because economics is a key indicators of potential future conditions, this element of the comprehensive plan provides a brief summary of current and future directives to enhance economic opportunities and conditions within the Town.

4.2 Economic Characteristics Summary

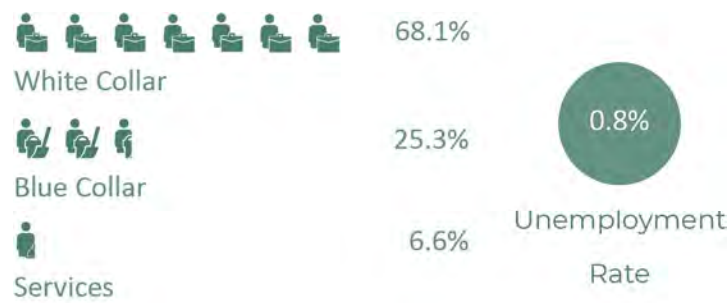
Employment by Industry

Figure 4-1: Town of Empire Labor Force by Industry



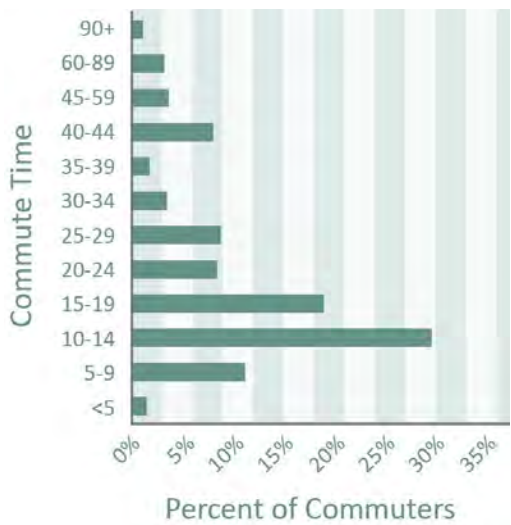
Employment by Occupation

Figure 4-2: Town of Empire Employment Types



Place of Employment & Commuting Patterns

Figure 4-3:: Town of Empire Worker Commute Times



Worker Inflow/Outflow

Figure 4-4: Town of Empire Worker Inflow/Outflow



4.3 Analysis of Economic Base

Existing Business Base

The number of businesses within Empire are impacted by its rural and agricultural nature. That being said, approximately 50 total businesses exist within the Town, with the top ten businesses, based on size, being listed in Table 4-1 below.

Be advised that business and employee numbers are ever changing. This table simply represents a snapshot in time but does show case the diversity of businesses that rural Towns can accommodate.

Table 4-1: Town of Empire Top Employers

Rank (# Empl.)	Company/Business Name	Address	Employee Count	Sales Volume / Assets
1	Tanis Inc	Karen Ct	20	\$4,598,000
2	Rob's Riverwood Salon & Spa	Danny Ln	16	\$564,000
3	Gage Analytics LLC	Valley Dr	8	-
3	Steve Wirtz Construction	US Highway 45	8	\$1,214,000
5	Ledevue Precast Concrete Inc	County Road UU	7	\$1,133,000
5	Red Cabin at Green Acres	4th Street Rd	7	\$545,00
5	Tom Ottery Transit	County Road UU	7	1,059,000
8	Christ Appraisal Service	Pheasant Run	6	\$598,000
8	Forest Athletic Club Newcorp	Golf Course Dr	6	\$350,000
10	Badger Masonry & Supply	County Road K	5	\$5,890,000
10	Davis Consulting & Contracting	Oak Acre Dr	5	\$1,208,000
10	Johnko Express LLC	US Highway 45	5	\$622,000
10	Ledgerock Distillery LLC	Grandview Rd	5	\$3,738,000
10	Pagel's Lawn Service	Poplar Rd	5	\$311,000
10	Shrine Of Rest Mausoleum	County Road K	5	\$488,000
10	Zimmerman's Motor Works LLC	County Road H	5	\$4,349,000

Source: ESRI / Data Axel, 2024.



4.4 Sites for Business and Industrial Development

Based on existing development patterns and the existence of the City of Fond du Lac Growth Area Agreement, the town has limited opportunities for the siting and/or expansion of new businesses. Two areas in particular offer opportunities listed and shown in Figure 4-5 below:

- WIS 23 & CTH UU Interchange: Lands to the west of the interchange are within the Town of Empire, however, they lie within the City's defined growth area. Lands to the east of the interchange are also within the Town, but there is no available sewer or water service, and the lands are not identified as being a Town Growth Area.
- WIS 45 near Lake DeNeveau has two existing lots that are zoned for business and are currently used as such. Over time, these businesses may change, or opportunities to redevelop the sites with new commercial-related structures and/or uses may occur.

Figure 4-5: Town of Empire Business Development Sites



4.5 Strengths and Weaknesses Analysis

The Town of Empire has several positive attributes and strengths to offer potential businesses:

- A great location that is accessible to Fond du Lac and centrally located between the Fox Cities, Milwaukee, and Madison.
- Properties with highway frontage.
- An attractive and safe community atmosphere that provides for a high quality of living.
- Quality school districts that serve the area.
- Reasonable property tax rates.
- High education attainment compared to surrounding communities. and;
- High-income averages compared to surrounding communities – suggesting disposable income to support non-essential businesses (i.e., entertainment, restaurants, and specialty shops).

While the Town of Empire enjoys advantages there are several challenges which must be addressed to be successful at seeing new businesses and industry, including:

- Residents can easily drive to nearby communities to purchase services and products.
- Similarly, most residents travel outside of the town to work and find shopping, dining and entertainment choices conveniently located near their place of work.
- There is a lack of businesses catering to people's everyday needs that further entices residents to drive to other communities for shopping.
- Sewer infrastructure is only available within the sanitary districts and their capacity to serve business development is limited.
- Community water service is not available.
- Competition from existing development center limits the market area for businesses in the Town of Empire.
- Limited town population growth is projected for Empire in comparison to surrounding communities, thereby limiting the market size and demands.
- Opposition to development from town residents who perceive business uses as a threat to the town's rural character and quality of living.

4.6 Key Facts & Trends

Labor Force & Employment Growth

- Health Care and Manufacturing comprise the largest employment sector (~17.5% each).
- Over 68% of residents work at White Collar jobs, and the unemployment rate in the County was 2.5% in 2024.

Job Commuting

- Just over 50% of residents had commute times to work of between 10 and 19 minutes.
- Approximately 1,480 (86%) of employed residents left the Town of Empire for work in a different community. Meanwhile, 210 residents of other communities came to work in the Town of Empire. Only 22 (0.1%) Town residents also worked within the Town of Empire.

Business Base

- Approximately 50 businesses exist within the Town of Empire. The top ten businesses (based on sales volume) have about 100 total employees.

Trends

- Home based businesses and 'work from home' opportunities will continue to be the norm for many Town residents.
- Commercial and retail space markets have declined recently due in part to lingering impacts of the 2020 COVID Pandemic.
- Agricultural uses and related uses continue to invest in supporting infrastructure.



4.7 Economic Development Vision

2040 Economic Development Vision: In 2040, agriculture has been joined by support services, light manufacturing, small shops, and home-based businesses diversifying the economic environment of Empire. A weekly farmer's market offers opportunities for local farmers, artists, and artisans to sell locally-grown foods and products and provides a community gathering place for residents and visitors alike.

4.8 Economic Development Goals & Strategies

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. Strategies are more specific than goals and provide a more measurable direction for future actions and implementation of the plan. Strategies can be viewed partially as 'objectives', as well as perhaps containing some 'policy' statements or thoughts. Moving along the path of the indicated strategies contributes to fulfillment of the goal.

Goal 4.1: Preserve productive agricultural land for long-term farm uses.

Strategy 4.1.1: Restrict non-farm residential development to a low density in accordance with local farmland preservation zoning requirements.

Strategy 4.1.2: Protect farming operations from nuisance issues (odor, noise etc.) created by the development of incompatible adjacent land uses.

Strategy 4.1.3: Revise the Empire Subdivision Ordinance to require residential and other potentially sensitive developments to consider prevailing winds, buffering requirements and access issues when permitting development adjacent to farm areas.

Goal 4.2: Maintain farming as the economic base of the community.

Strategy 4.2.1: Direct farmers seeking to innovate or modernize their operations to information and resources available through the UW-Extension by providing a link on the Town's web page.

Strategy 4.2.2: Adopt minor amendments to the local zoning ordinance to more clearly permit ag-related accessory uses and structures in agricultural areas to support value added opportunities for local farmers (i.e. roadside stands, home occupations, corn mazes, bed and breakfasts, petting zoos, farmer-for-a-day camps, etc.).

Goal 4.3: Encourage local economic development opportunities that exist in harmony with Empire's rural atmosphere and support the local tax base.

Strategy 4.3.1: Update the Empire web page to function as a targeted economic marketing tool for desired local business endeavors.

- Provide demographic, market, site locations, cost, and other information about the community for prospective entrepreneurs.
- Include information from this plan with respect to visions, strengths and the survey results.
- Maintain a list of current businesses within the Town for promotion.



Strategy 4.3.2: Amend the Zoning Ordinance to require a Property Tax Impact Statement to be submitted with new development proposals.

Strategy 4.3.3: Update the sign ordinance and lighting requirements in the zoning ordinance to reflect the residential character of the community when permitting business uses.

Strategy 4.3.4: Continue to coordinate with local farmers by hosting a Farmer’s Market to showcase local agricultural products in Empire and surrounding communities.

Strategy 4.3.5: Utilize the Future Land Use Map to locate and guide future commercial and light industrial development.

4.9 Economic Development Programs

There are numerous programs and resources at the local, regional, state, and federal level. These entities can be of great help when pursuing a specific project, and the town should leverage all possible resources to promote the development of new businesses within the areas identified on the Future Land Use map. Table 4-2 list the various economic development agencies and programs that directly or indirectly affect the Town of Empire. These entities and programs primarily result in improving the livelihoods of town residents because they provide quality employment opportunities and increase the area’s tax base, which helps keep property taxes down.

Table 4-2: Economic Development Programs & Resources

Agency / Entity	Program
Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC)	State agency with funding programs for communities and businesses. Promotes and markets the state for business expansions and relocations
Office of Rural Prosperity	As part of the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC), the Office of Rural Prosperity seeks to foster vibrant, prosperous and resilient rural communities across Wisconsin. The Office of Rural Prosperity aims to be a one-stop shop to help rural stakeholders navigate programs and resources serving rural communities and businesses. The Office of Rural Prosperity was formed in January 2020 along with Governor Tony Evers’ Blue Ribbon Commission on Rural Prosperity.
Wisconsin Housing and Economic Development Authority (WHEDA)	State level entity providing affordable housing and business financing products.
Wisconsin Department of Administration – Division of Energy, Housing & Community Resources (DEHCR)	State agency providing variety of CDBG block grants and other programs related to infrastructure and housing.
New North	Regional entity promoting and marketing eighteen counties in northeastern Wisconsin for business expansions and relocations and talent attraction.
East Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (ECWRPC)	Regional entity which administers and coordinates EDA funding programs through the Department of Commerce.
Envision Greater Fond du Lac	Envision Greater Fond du Lac was formed on July 1, 2017, as the unified organization of the former Fond du Lac Area Association of Commerce (AC) and former Fond du Lac County Economic Development (FCEDC) organizations. The organization has been busy striving to enhance and grow existing programs and service offerings through attraction of new businesses, growth of existing businesses, strengthening of workforce and community development, and development of new areas of opportunity throughout the county.





5. Transportation

5.1 Introduction

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

5.2 Existing Road System & Traffic Counts

The existing road system for the Town of Empire is represented on Map 5-1. The Town's road configuration is influenced by the many natural and man-made features of the land. Major highways such as USH 151 and WIS 23 are categorized as Principal Arterials handle major amounts of traffic from within and outside of the Town. Private access is extremely limited for safety reasons.

USH 45 is classified as a Minor Arterial and provides more localized access to lands in the eastern portion of the Town. The remaining County Highways (UU, T, K, and H) serve as Major and Minor Collectors which provide access to the many town roads within the community.

Annual average daily traffic (AADT) counts are presented in Map 5-1 for selected roadways and time periods. AADT counts are calculated by multiplying raw hourly traffic counts by seasonal, day-of-week, and axle adjustment factors. The daily hourly values are then averaged by hour of the day and the values are summed to create the AADT count. The largest volumes are associated with the aforementioned Principal and Minor Arterials.

There are two primary functions of streets and roads. One is to provide access to land: that is to homes, workplaces, shopping areas, schools, churches, recreational areas, etc. The other is to provide ease of movement from one location (point of origin) to another location (point of destination). While these functions are not diametrically opposed to one another, they do compete. Numerous points of closely spaced access along a road creates conflicts with vehicles making turning movements. This reduces the ease with which other vehicles can freely travel along the route. More access points along a route result in slower travel speeds which results in lower traffic carrying capacity and longer travel times. Higher speed makes turning movements more difficult resulting in reduced safety. More of one results in less of the other.

Table 5-1: Road Mileage by Jurisdiction

Category	Mileage	Percent
Federal	6.81	7.46%
State	10.67	11.68%
County	21.17	23.19%
Municipal	50.95	55.81%
Private/Other	1.70	1.86%
Total	91.30	100.00%

Source: WisDOT, 2015, 2017, 2024.

Table 5-2: Road Mileage by Functional Classification

Category	Mileage	Percent
Principal Arterial	14.93	16.36%
Minor Arterial	6.88	7.54%
Major Collector	11.59	12.70%
Minor Collector	3.75	4.11%
Local	54.14	59.29%
Total	91.30	100.00%

Source: WisDOT, 2015, 2017, 2024.

5.3 Traffic Crashes

To further analyze the Town of Empire's road system the frequency of motor vehicle accidents is studied to identify problem areas. The frequency of motor vehicle accidents tends to correlate with traffic volumes, but that is not always the case. A review of reported crashes between 2013 and 2024 reveals the patterns shown on Map 5-1. The highest concentration of accidents near USH 151's and CTH K's intersection with Rienzi Road. Other crash 'hot spots' are shown at WIS 23 and CTH UU (although many of these accidents pre-date the opening of the new interchange), as well as various locations along USH 45 near Lake DeNevue.

5.4 Other Transportation Modes

Trucking

WIS 23, WIS 45 and USH 151 are the primary trucking routes through the Town of Empire. WisDOT has officially designated these corridors as truck routes. This designation is based on the design of the roadway to withstand truck weight and traffic. The Wisconsin Statutes define standards for the length, width and weight of trucks allowed on certain roadways to prevent road degradation and untimely maintenance. In the Town the option exists to designate roadways as "Class B Highways" by ordinance. At this time there are no Class B Highways in the Town.



Freight Rail / Passenger Service

A Canadian National Railroad corridor runs near the southwestern corner of the Town of Empire. This railroad corridor runs between the City of Fond du Lac and Eden. South of Eden, the track has been abandoned and is being considered as a potential trail route. There are no plans to establish new rail corridors in Empire. Passenger rail service is not immediately available to Town of Empire residents, but a high speed passenger rail line extension from Milwaukee to Green Bay is currently being evaluated as part of the Midwest Regional Rail Initiative (MRRI). If this service is implemented, it will provide passenger rail service with a stop in the City of Fond du Lac making it very accessible to Town residents.

Transit Services

Fond du Lac Area Transit - a joint and cooperative effort between the City of Fond du Lac and Fond Lac County - serves portions of the Town of Empire with bus, JOBTRANS, and Paratransit services:

- Bus route #120 runs parallel to STH 23 on weekdays as a 'school tripper' route to serve Saint Mary Springs High School and the Aurora Health Care Center, but only has two trips per day.
- Paratransit service offered through Fond Du Lac Area Transit provides curb-to curb service to residents of Empire living within 3/4 of a mile from a fixed bus route (i.e. route #120). This program offers a reduced fare to senior citizens (65 years of age or older) and qualifying handicapped individuals.

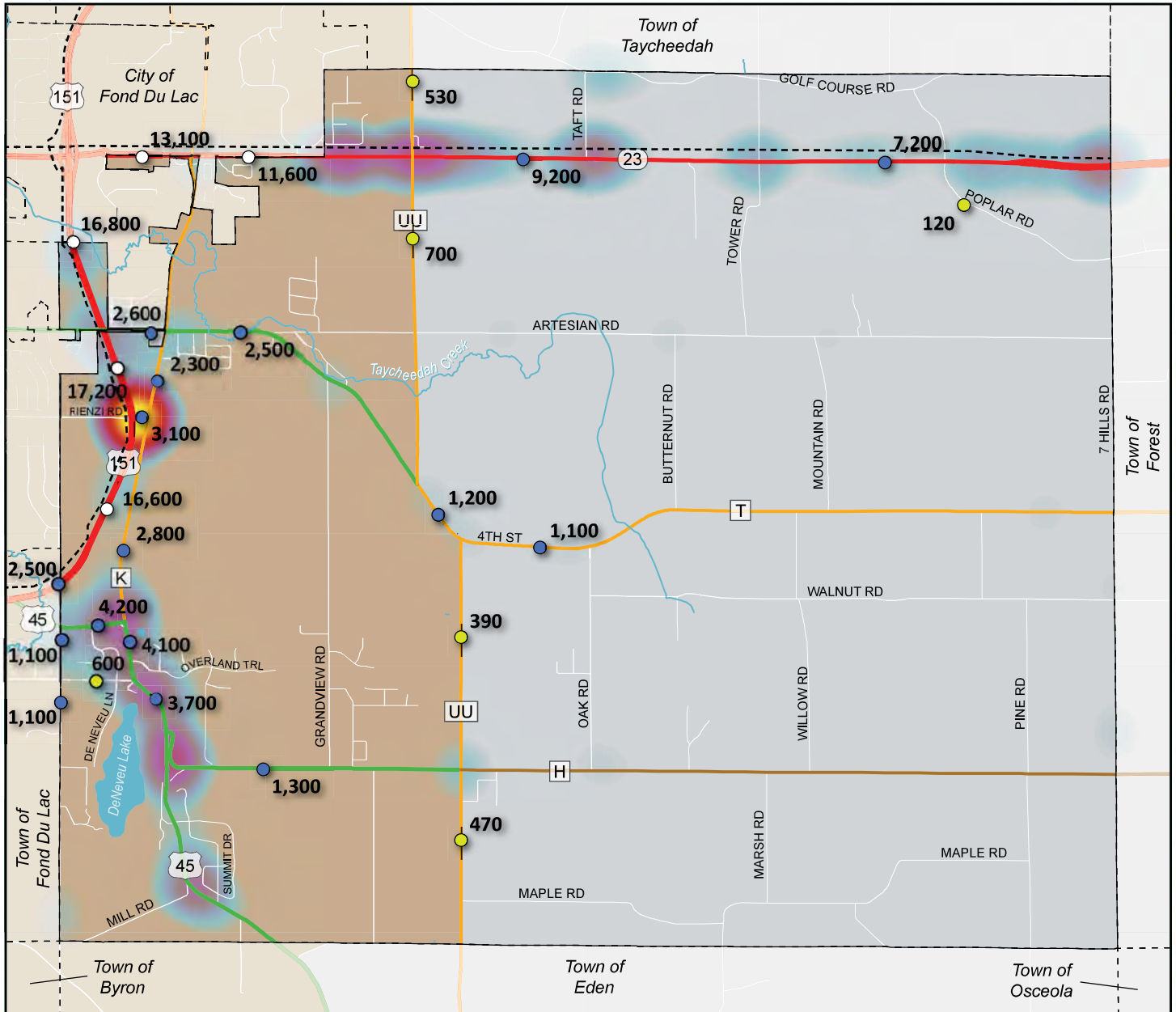
Mass transit via bus, high-speed rail, or other means is not likely to be established throughout Empire in the next 20 years given limited demand, low population density and a small overall population base. Simply put, Empire cannot provide the ridership needed to support a complete transit system serving all areas of the Town. There are also several private bus, taxi, and ridesharing services available throughout Fond du Lac County. Private ridesharing services, such as Uber and Lyft, have emerged in the marketplace and have become a popular option, especially for younger generations. Their popularity is driven by the increased cost of vehicle ownership and for many, a concern over the recreational use of alcohol and its associated impacts.

Water Transportation

There are no water features in Empire used as transportation routes. The nearest port facilities to the Town of Empire are located in Sheboygan, Green Bay, and Milwaukee.



Map 5-1 - Functional Classification, Traffic Counts and Crashes



Functional Classification

Town of Empire
Fond du Lac County, WI

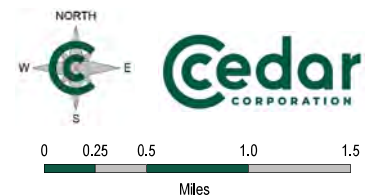
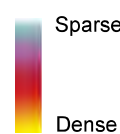
Annual Average Daily Traffic (2022)

- 0 - 999
- 999 - 9,999
- 9,999 - 49,999
- Fond Du Lac Urbanized Area Boundary

Functional Classification

- Principal Arterial
- Minor Arterial
- Major Collector
- Minor Collector
- Prairie Trail
- Old Plank Road Trail

Crashes (2013 - 2024)



This base map was created with data from Fond du Lac County who assumes no liability for the accuracy of this data and any use or misuse of its content is the responsibility of the user. Changes were made by Cedar Corporation under the direction of the Town of Empire. Map Date: April 1, 2024.



Air Transportation

There are no airports in the Town of Empire. The nearest airport to the Town of Empire is the Fond du Lac County Airport. This facility is classified as a transport/corporate airport intended to serve corporate jets, small passenger and cargo jet aircraft. Commercial passenger service is not available at the Fond du Lac County Airport. The nearest airports which provide regular commercial passenger service are Appleton International Airport (ATW) and the General Mitchell International Airport (MKE) in Milwaukee.

Bicycle & Pedestrian Transportation

The safest areas for walking in the Town are within the rights-of-way of existing subdivisions as no sidewalks currently exist within the Town. Town and County roads have limited shoulder areas and posted speed limits of 45 miles per hour or more in most areas which hinder safe pedestrian travel. Walking to places of work, shopping or entertainment is not realistic for most residents, however; lightly traveled Town road are often used for walking by area residents.

Previous State assessments conducted by WisDOT identified CTH H and CTH UU as having the best conditions for a cycling route. CTH T was also identified (east of CTH UU) as having moderate conditions for a bicycle route. At this time there are two established trail routes in the Town of Empire but no officially designated bicycle routes or corridors. Trails within the Town include:

- **Prairie Trail.** This 7-mile long trail was created and extended as part of the USH 151 bypass project and has a connection to the Wild Goose Trail and the Peebles Trail.
- **Old Plank Road Trail.** Running west from the City of Sheboygan, the trail follows WIS 23 through Sheboygan Falls, Plymouth, Greenbush, Forest, Empire, and into the City of Fond du Lac where it connects to the Prairie Trail.

Other nearby trails include:

- **Peebles Trail.** The Peebles Trail is a two and one-half mile segment of abandoned railroad right-of way between Fond du Lac and Peebles. The trail was acquired from the Wisconsin Department of Transportation in 1994 and is currently undeveloped. When developed, the trail will be utilized for walking, running, bicycling and cross-country skiing.
- **Ice Age National Scenic Trail.** One of only eight national scenic trails in the United States, the Ice Age Trail when completed will be a 1,000-mile walking/hiking trail located in and unique to Wisconsin. About 600 miles of the trail are now available for use. A segment of the trail is open east of Empire in Sheboygan County. For more information about the trail visit www.iceagetrail.org.
- **Wild Goose State Trail.** This trail is located on the west side of the City of Fond du Lac. It runs south from the CTH VVV (near the Rolling Meadows Golf Course) to STH 60 in Dodge County. The Wild Goose State Trail runs along an abandoned railroad corridor and passes through the Horicon Marsh.

5.5 Existing Transportation Plans and Planned Improvements

WisDOT, the Fond du Lac Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) with support from the East Central WI RPC, and Fond du Lac County have all prepared and maintained various plans policies, and recommendations, and projects regarding various aspects of transportation. These plans should be taken into consideration when making transportation decisions.

Table 5-2: Summary of State, Regional, and County Transportation Plans

Plan Name	T. Empire Project?	Description
Connection 2050 Wisconsin's Statewide Long-Range Transportation Plan	No	
Wisconsin State Highway Plan 2020.	No	
Statewide Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP)	No	
Six-Year Highway Improvement Program, 2023-2028	No	
Wisconsin State Airport System Plan 2030	No	
Wisconsin Rail Plan 2050	No	
2023 Wisconsin State Freight Plan	No	
Wisconsin Pedestrian Policy Plan 2020 / Wisconsin Bicycle Transportation Plan 2020 (currently being updated as the Wisconsin Active Transportation Plan 2050)	No	
Fond du Lac MPO: Long Range Transportation / Land Use Plan Fond du Lac Urb. Area 2050	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CTH V, DeNeveu Creek Bridge
Fond du Lac MPO Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP)		
Fond du Lac County Capital Improvement Plan, 2024-2028	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CTH K (STH 23 N. 0.50 mi.) - Reconstruction 2026 • CTH K (USH 151 S. 0.75 mi.) - Reconstruction 2027 • CTH V/Reinzi Rd (Nat. Ave. to USH 151, 1.35 mi.) - Reconstruction 2028
Fond du Lac MPO Bicycle & Pedestrian Plan	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4th Street west of USH 151 • Reinzi Road west of USH 151
Fond du Lac Transit - Transit Development Plan	No	
Town of Empire Capital Improvement Plan (CIP),	n/a	The Town does not have an adopted CIP



5.6 Key Facts & Trends

Town Roads

- Town roads are generally in good shape based on current PASER ratings.
- The Town regularly assesses road conditions and plans for maintenance and re-construction projects using the PASER rating system as a guide.
- Seasonal postings of weight limits will be required to avoid town road degradation.
- Local road construction costs have increased significantly due to both materials and labor prices. Funding local road improvements will continue to be a challenge for the Town in the future.
- Grant funding through programs such as STP, LRIP, and ARIP are increasingly available for road improvements. Documentation of required needs is critical for obtain such funds.

Road Safety

- Crash rates are higher on the higher traffic roads in the eastern portion of the Town.
- Slow moving and large agricultural equipment can cause user conflict and safety issues in the rural portions of the Town.

Bicycle & Pedestrian Facilities

- The Town does not have a separate bicycle and pedestrian plan.
- Previous State assessments conducted by WisDOT identified CTH H and CTH UU as having the best conditions for a cycling route. CTH T was also identified (east of CTH UU) as having moderate conditions for a bicycle route.
- Increased usage of, and demands for, trail and bicycle facilities has occurred since the 2020 COVID-19 Pandemic. Lightly traveled local roads are often used for walking and biking.

Proposed Projects & Improvements

- Future planned projects include the reconstruction of portions of CTH K and CTH V (Reinzi Rd.).
- Proposed trail connections are called for along 4th Street and Reinzi Road, west of USH 151.

5.7 Transportation Vision

2040 Transportation Vision: A well-maintained system of roads and highways accommodates automobile and farm equipment needs and provides easy access to Fond du Lac and other communities. By 2040, personal vehicles remain the primary choice for transportation, however, pedestrians, bicyclists, and other alternative modes of transportation utilize a network of designated routes linking Town of Empire with surrounding areas.



5.8 Transportation Goals and Strategies

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. Strategies are more specific than goals and provide a more measurable direction for future actions and implementation of the plan. Strategies can be viewed partially as 'objectives', as well as perhaps containing some 'policy' statements or thoughts. Moving along the path of the indicated strategies contributes to fulfillment of the goal.

Goal 5.1: Maintain and improve Town Roads in a timely and well-planned manner.

Strategy 5.1.1: Use a Capital Improvements Plan, PASER results, traffic counts, and accident rates to coordinate and plan for annual roadway improvements and maintenance as well as other capital projects (i.e., municipal building upgrades, equipment purchases, etc.).

Strategy 5.1.2: In accordance with state law, using PASER, continue to update road ratings, as required. Seek to increase local funds for road maintenance to support PASER recommendations.

Strategy 5.1.3: Utilize the 2024 WisDOT Culvert and Small Bridge Inventory results to manage road drainage improvements.

Goal 5.2: Promote a multi-modal transportation system for efficient, safe, and convenient movement of people, goods, and services.

Strategy 5.2.1: To implement any adopted Pedestrian Plan, consider adopting trail and path requirements for new residential subdivisions to provide safe and convenient opportunities for walking and connections to adjacent trail and path systems.

Strategy 5.2.2: Using the Pedestrian Plan, devise a construction and maintenance schedule to be incorporated into a Capital Improvement Plan and Official Map.

Strategy 5.2.3: Pursue grant funds to develop the recommended trail and bicycle routes through the Town and County.

Strategy 5.2.4: Periodically update the Pedestrian Plan as new areas are developed.

Strategy 5.2.5: Seek to minimize the potential for farm vehicle conflicts on local roads.

Strategy 5.2.6: Encourage farmers to provide adequate warning signage/lighting on their vehicles.

Strategy 5.2.7: Include information about these practices in a Town Newsletter and on the Town Website.

Strategy 5.2.8: Provide additional signs notifying motorists that the Town is a farming community and to beware of farm vehicles on the roads

Strategy 5.2.9: Consider opportunities to provide gravel pull-offs on particularly congested roads as a means for farm equipment to pull off and allow faster moving vehicles to safely pass.

Goal 5.3: Support the long-term viability of area roads.

Strategy 5.3.1: Support the efforts of law enforcement officials to enforce required stops and speed limits along area roads by posting speed limits and maintaining town roadways.

Strategy 5.3.2: Consider adding language in the Town of Empire Land Division Ordinance requiring residential developers to complete a traffic impact analysis for new subdivisions to ensure the road network can accommodate the additional traffic volumes resulting from the proposed development.

Goal 5.4: Continue to keep residents informed of pending transportation improvements.

Strategy 5.4.1: Provide information about road improvement projects at public meetings.

Strategy 5.4.2: Provide information about transportation improvements on the Town web site, via newsletters, and other media sources as needed.

Goal 5.5: Partner with the County, ECWRPC, WisDOT and the WDNR to plan and coordinate transportation improvements.

Strategy 5.5.1: Communicate and coordinate transportation improvements and plan with WisDOT, WDNR, ECWRPC and the Fond du Lac County Highway Department.

Strategy 5.5.2: Provide copies of this plan and subsequent updates to WisDOT, ECWRPC, and Fond du Lac County

Strategy 5.5.3: Provide assistance such as links to the Town website, as requested by WisDOT, WDNR, Fond du Lac County and ECWRPC, to enable them to directly notify residents and businesses of anticipated transportation projects, as well as provide regular work schedule updates

Strategy 5.5.4: Form a sub-committee of Town residents to work with WisDOT, Fond du Lac County, and ECWRPC to identify and designate Town roads as Wisconsin Rustic Roads.

5.10 Transportation Programs

State Programs

Adopt-A-Highway Program

The Adopt-A-Highway program to allow groups to volunteer and support the state's anti-litter program in a more direct way. Each qualified group takes responsibility for litter control on a segment of state highway. The group picks up litter on this segment at least three times per year and do not work in dangerous areas like medians, bridges, or steep slopes.

Transportation Economic Assistance Program

The Transportation Economic Assistance (TEA) Program is a rapid response grant program designed to create new employment, to retain existing employment, and to encourage private investment in Wisconsin. Communities can apply for TEA funds to encourage new businesses or business expansions in their regions by building such transportation improvements as access roads, highway improvements, or rail spurs. The program covers up to 50% of the total cost of eligible projects.

Local Roads Improvement Program (LRIP)

Established in 1991, the Local Roads Improvement Program (LRIP) assists local governments in improving seriously deteriorating city highways, town roads, and city and village streets. A reimbursement program, LRIP pays up to 50% of total eligible costs with local governments providing the balance.

Statewide Multi-modal Improvement Program (SMIP)

As part of the 2021 Further Surface Transportation Extension Act (H.R. 5763) WisDOT receives federal funds to provide a variety of improvement programs, including the Local Transportation Enhancements (TE) program. The program is designed to fund projects that increase multi-modal transportation alternatives and enhance communities and the environment.

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, cities, villages, and towns are eligible for rehabilitation funding on bridges with sufficiency ratings of less than 80, and replacement funding on bridges with sufficiency ratings less than 50.

WEDC Office of Rural Prosperity

As part of the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC), the Office of Rural Prosperity seeks to foster vibrant, prosperous and resilient rural communities across Wisconsin. The Office of Rural Prosperity aims to be a one-stop shop to help rural stakeholders navigate programs and resources serving rural communities and businesses. The Office of Rural Prosperity was formed in January 2020 along with Governor Tony Evers' Blue Ribbon Commission on Rural Prosperity.



Regional Programs

Safe Routes to School Program

The SRTS programs encourage children ages K-8 to walk and bike to school by creating safer walking and biking routes. SRTS programs improve walking and biking travel options, promote healthier lifestyles in children at an early age, and decrease auto-related emissions near schools. Funds will be awarded to competitive eligible projects within two miles of a K-8 school. Currently, a regional SRTS program is available and administered by the East Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission.

Local Programs & Funding Methods

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 re-placement techniques. PASER rating can be put into PASERWARE, an easy to use pavement management software package. PASERWARE helps to inventory roads and keep track of their PASER ratings and maintenance histories. PASERWARE can also be used to help 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 and also offers free training courses.

Safety Evaluation for Roadways (SAFER)

SAFER is a practical, systematic approach to reviewing safety issues on and along roads. Potential hazards are grouped into categories such as roadsides, intersections, railroad crossings, warning signs, pavement markings, road maintenance, and special conditions. The SAFER manual recommends a rating system and using this system the Town can choose which conditions need to be addressed immediately and which to include in future plans or improvements.

General Tax Levy / Bonding

Infrastructure and community facilities can be paid for directly using the Town's property tax levy as determined by the Town Board. This can be done with direct fund allocations or through general obligation bonding whereby monies are borrowed and paid back over time. To aid in the planning, the Town utilizes their Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) which is updated regularly.



Special Assessments

Special assessments are charges for a portion of the cost of street, alley, drive approach, and sidewalk improvements that are assessed, per State Statute, to abutting properties by action of a governing body. Assessments are used as a method of financing major construction to offset the principal and interest of loans used for construction and major maintenance. Assessments per property typically only occur once every 20–25 years. Assessments help keep the property taxes lower for a community. The process apportions the cost to those properties which are most benefited by the improvements. The costs associated with the project are divided up between the total numbers of lots in the project area. Therefore, the size of lots or lot frontage does not impact the cost per lot. The entire special assessment process is governed by State Statutes and municipal ordinances.

Wheel Tax

Wisconsin law allows a town, village, city, or county to collect an annual municipal or county vehicle registration fee (wheel tax) in addition to the regular annual registration fee paid for a vehicle. The fee applies to vehicles kept in the municipality or county and applies to motorcycle, automobile and truck (8,000 lbs. or less, except dual purpose farm) registrations. This includes most special license plates. State law does not specify the amount of the wheel tax. However, the municipality or county must use all revenue from the wheel tax for transportation related purposes. In 2023, just over 50 communities in Wisconsin do have wheel tax provisions in place according to WisDOT.

Transportation Grant Programs

Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) Program

Signed on November 15, 2021, the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) updates federal law and potential federal funding levels across federally funded Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT) Local Programs. It is expected that new federal funds will be distributed over the next five fiscal years, beginning in Federal Fiscal Year 2022 (FFY 2022).

Local Roads Improvement Program (LRIP)

The Local Roads Improvement Program was established by the State to assist local units of government in improving seriously deteriorating county highways, municipal streets in cities and villages, and town roads. Cities and villages apply for funding through the Municipal Street Improvement Program (MSI, formerly known as MSIP). Only work on existing county trunk highways, city and village streets, and town roads under the authority of the local unit of government are eligible for funding.



Agricultural Roads Improvement Program (ARIP)

In June 2023, Senate Bill 247 (Act 13) established the Agricultural Roads Improvement Program (ARIP) as part of the 2023-2025 biennium budget to improve highways functionally classified as local roads, or minor collectors, or culverts, that provide access to agricultural lands or facilities used to produce agricultural goods, including forest products. Two application periods were established in 2024 for this program, with the second being in the Fall. The ARIP program may be integrated into the LRIP program for 2025.

Statewide Enhancement Program

The Wisconsin DOT offers enhancement funds for transportation-related projects that are within the right-of-way of highways controlled by the state.

Highway Safety Improvement Program (HISP)

The Town should consider applying for grants from the HISP Program administered by WisDOT to correct existing or potential transportation safety problems. Other grant programs through WisDOT's Bureau of Transportation Safety should also be investigated by the Town to address safety issues.

Local Transportation Enhancement (TE), Bicycle and Pedestrian Facilities Program (BPFP) and STP-Discretionary (STP-D) programs

These programs have been collectively funded under the Statewide Multi-modal Improvement Program (SMIP). The TE program promotes projects that "enhance" the surface transportation system. There are 12 federally eligible categories, with bicycle and pedestrian categories typically making up almost two-thirds of Wisconsin projects awarded. The STP-D program funded projects such as bicycle and pedestrian facilities that foster alternatives to single-occupancy vehicle travel. The Bicycle and Pedestrian Facilities Program (BPFP) was primarily used to fund bicycle planning related activities.

WisDNR Stewardship Program

The Wisconsin's Stewardship Program provides funding for the construction of a community's bicycle and pedestrian system. Applications are accepted yearly on May 1st. The Town would be responsible for up to 50% of project costs.

Safe Routes to School (SRTS) Program

The 2005 federal transportation act, SAFETEA-LU, added a new bicycle and pedestrian program called Safe Routes to School (SRTS). The program addresses a long-term trend away from children bicycling and walking to school to being transported by car or bus. The trend has not only been part of the increasing levels of traffic congestion and air pollution, but also linked to child health and obesity problems. SRTS is an effort to reverse these trends by funding bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure, planning and promotional projects. Projects must be within two miles of a kindergarten to 8th Grade school. Funding is currently on a two-year cycle.





6. Utilities & Community Facilities

6.1 Introduction

To plan effectively for future land uses, the Town must have a clear understanding of the location, use and capacity of existing utilities and community facilities. This information, coupled with demographic trends and projections, provides a realistic picture of service supply and demand. Identifying current conditions of services can also help to “document need” which could help the town access any available state or federal funds which could become available. The community facilities and utilities discussed in this chapter were carefully considered in the development of the Future Land Use Map presented later in this plan.

6.2 Inventory and Assessment of Utilities & Community Facilities

All public and private utilities and facilities (services) as listed in the previous comprehensive plan were reviewed and brief summaries of each service are contained in Table 6-1. This easy to read table fulfills the statutory requirements for information in terms of identifying the service, the responsible entity(provider), service location(s), and whether issues regarding capacity are likely based on the expected growth within the community.

Several additional visuals follow the table and include the location of various community facilities (Map 6-1), existing school district boundaries (Map 6-2). Lastly Figure 6-1 illustrates the levels of broadband internet service as determined by surveys conducted by New North, the regional economic development entity.

The information in Table 6-1 in particular should be reviewed on a regular basis to determine if changes have, or may, occur in the status of providers, service locations, or the capacity and quality of services. Having timely information about services can assist in economic development efforts, planning for specific developments, budgeting, grant-writing, and general community awareness.



Table 6-1: Summary of Community Facility and Utility Services, Town of Empire

Service	Provider	Location	Capacity
Wastewater Collection & Treatment	T. Empire Sanitary District No. 1	Lake DeNeveau Area	Can continue to serve to East within Town Growth Area. Capacity governed by Intermunicipal Agreement.
	T. Empire Sanitary District No. 2	Mary Hill Park	Near capacity, could expand within Town Growth Area if interceptor size increased. Capacity governed by Intermunicipal Agreement
	T. Empire Sanitary District No. 3	CTH T/Artesian Rd. & CTH K	Near capacity, could expand if relief sewer is constructed. Capacity governed by Intermunicipal Agreement.
Water Supply	Individual Private Wells	Entire Town.	No capacity issues presently.
Stormwater Management	Town of Empire	System of open ditches and grassed waterways throughout entire Town. This includes culverts and bridges.	No capacity issues presently. Land Division Ordinance requires stormwater management controls as part of platted subdivisions.
Electricity & Natural Gas	Alliant Energy	Entire Town.	No capacity issues presently.
Wind Energy	Alliant Energy	Cedar Ridge Wind Farm - T. Empire and T. Eden (68 MW, 41 turbines)	No capacity issues presently.
Communication Facilities	Phone: SBC Ameritech and TDS	Entire Town.	No capacity issues presently.
	Broadband Internet: Spectrum, TDS, Bug Tussel / Additional wireless suppliers.	Reliable broadband in western one-third of Town.	Underserved areas in eastern two-thirds of Town. See Figure 6-1.
	Cellular Towers: Various entities.	3 Towers in Town: CTH H & Pine Road (energy related), Maple Road (WisDOT dispatch), WIS 23 (various cellular providers)	No capacity issues presently.
Solid Waste & Recycling	Harter's Lakeside Disposal	Entire Town.	No capacity issues presently.
Park & Recreation Facilities	Town of Empire	No Town parks currently.	Approx. 25-acre deficiency based on National standards. No Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (CORP) so ineligible for DNR grant funds.
Postal Service	United States Postal Service (USPS)	Nearest Post Offices in Fond du Lac, Eden, and Mount Calvary	No capacity issues presently.

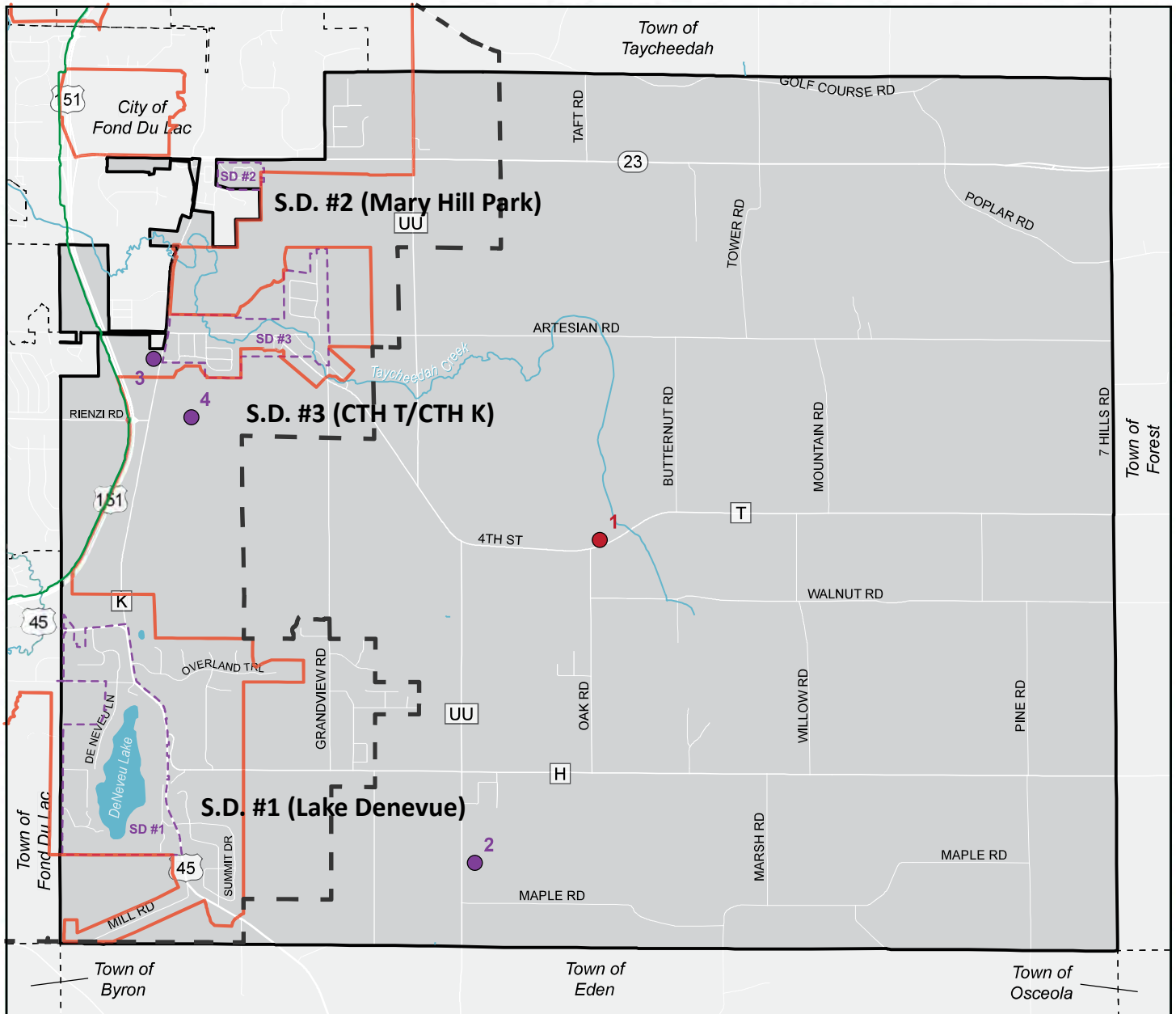


Table 6-1: Summary of Community Facility and Utility Services, Town of Empire, continued

Service	Provider	Location	Capacity
Postal Service	United States Postal Service (USPS)	Nearest Post Offices in Fond du Lac, Eden, and Mount Calvary	No capacity issues presently.
Cemeteries	Various Entities	3 cemeteries within Town (Reinzi, Ledgeview Memorial, and Empire [Methodist])	No capacity issues presently. Town manages Empire Cemetery.
Health Care Facilities	Aurora Health Care, Agnesian Healthcare Network	Facilities at USH 151 & WIS 23, and East Division St. respectively.	No capacity issues presently.
Child Care Facilities	Various Entities	Well over a dozen facilities in C. Fond du Lac. None within T. Empire but there may be some home-based businesses. Potential for new facility to be built at Moraine Park Tech College	Possible capacity issues due to statewide trends.
Libraries	Fond du Lac Public Library Board of Trustees	Fond du Lac Public Library - 32 Sheboygan Ave., Fond du Lac	No capacity issues presently.
School Districts	Fond du Lac School District and Campbellsport School District	See Map 6-2 for boundaries. Closest schools are Lakeside Elementary School, Woodworth Middle School, Fond du Lac High School.	No capacity issues presently, but monitor for needs.
Higher Education	Various State and Private Entities	Closest facilities are Marian College, Moraine Park Tech., Ripon College, Marquette University, UW-Milwaukee, UW-Oshkosh, UW-Green Bay, UW-Madison	No capacity issues presently.
Police Protection	Fond du Lac County Sheriff's Dept.	Entire Town.	No capacity/coverage issues presently.
Fire Protection	Mount Calvary Fire Dept. and Eden Fire Dept.	30% of Town in Mt. Calvary F.D. and 70% Eden F.D.	No current capacity issues, but being volunteer fire departments can make it challenging to keep service levels.
Emergency Response (EMT, Ambulance)	Mout Calvary Fire Dept. and City of Fond du Lac	Entire Town. Dispatched by Fond du Lac County 911.	No capacity issues presently, but being volunteer fire departments can make it challenging to keep service levels.
Town Government	Town of Empire	Town Hall located on CTH T.	Dated facility and may need upgrades in future.



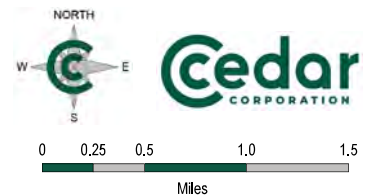
Map 6-1: Existing Community Facilities



Community Facilities

Town of Empire Fond du Lac County, WI

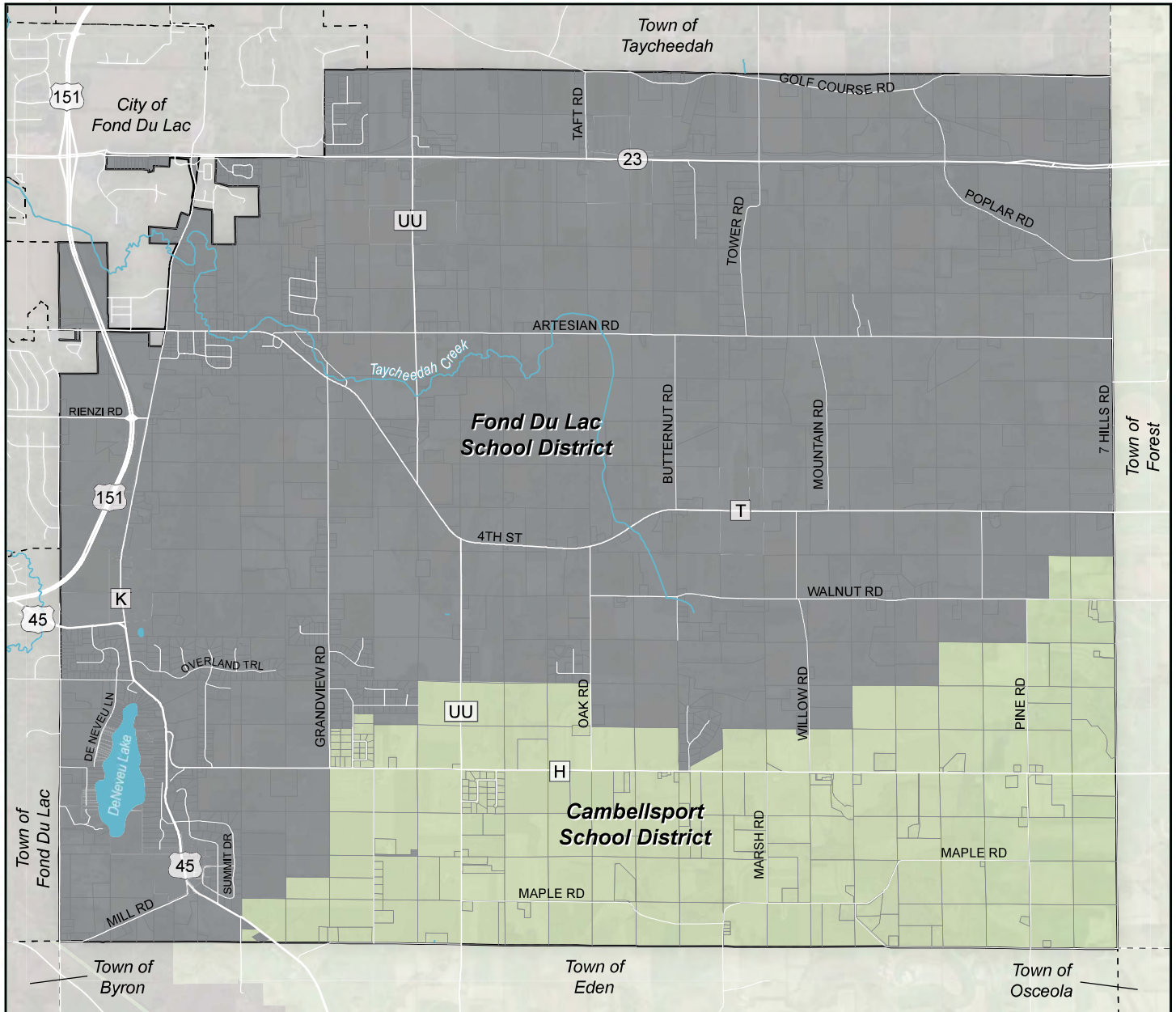
- Administration
 - 1. Town Hall
- Cemetery
 - 2. Empire Cemetery
 - 3. Ledgewood Memorial Park Cemetery
 - 4. Rienzi Cemetery
- Prairie Trail
- Sanitary District Boundary
- Fond du Lac's 20 Year Sewer Service Area
- Fond du Lac's Sewer Service Planning Area Boundary



This base map was created with data from Fond du Lac County who assumes no liability for the accuracy of this data and any use or misuse of its content is the responsibility of the user. Changes were made by Cedar Corporation under the direction of the Town of Empire. Map Date: October 1, 2024.



Map 6-2: School Districts

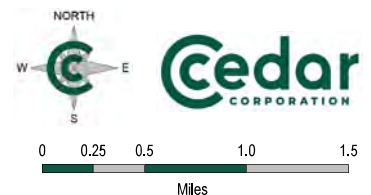


School Districts

Town of Empire
Fond du Lac County, WI

- | | |
|--|--|
| Fond Du Lac School District | Parcel Boundary |
| Cambellsport School District | Town of Empire |
| | Municipal Boundary |

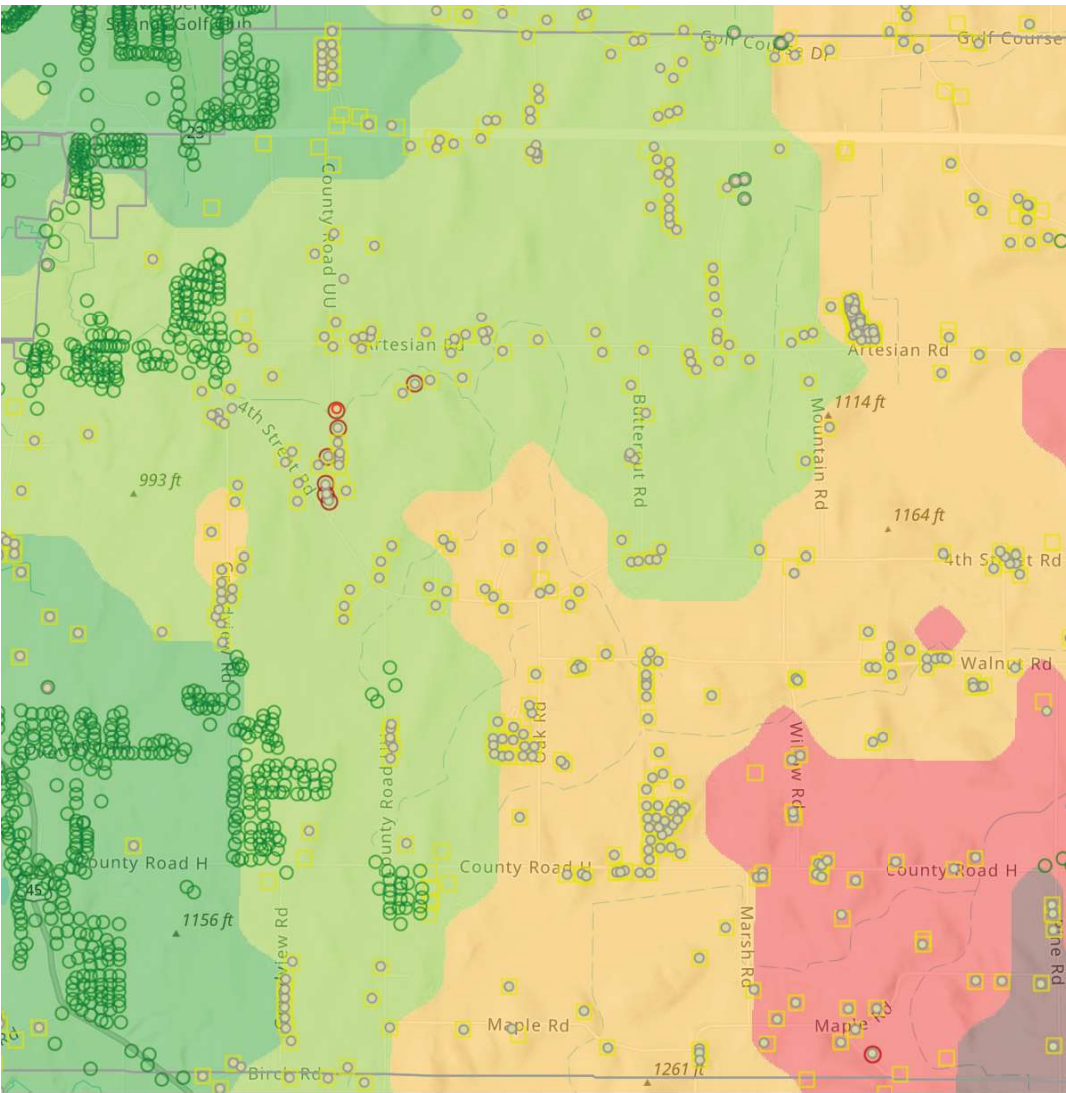
Source: WDPI, 2024.



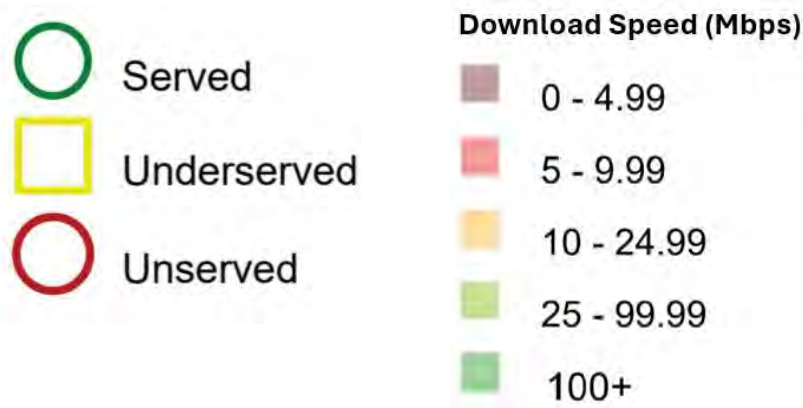
This base map was created with data from Fond du Lac County who assumes no liability for the accuracy of this data and any use or misuse of its content is the responsibility of the user. Changes were made by Cedar Corporation under the direction of the Town of Empire. Map Date: April 1, 2024.



Figure 6-1: Broadband Internet Service Availability and Quality, Town of Empire



Source: NEW North Broadband Overview Map, 2024



6.3 Utilities & Community Facilities Use Vision

The Town of Empire coordinates with neighboring communities, the County, and other government agencies to ensure Town residents have easy access to efficient utilities and quality facilities. through fiscal responsibility and shared service agreements with its neighbors, the Town continues to provide high-quality and cost-effective services to residents.

6.4 Utilities & Community Facilities Goals & Strategies

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. Strategies are more specific than goals and provide a more measurable direction for future actions and implementation of the plan. Strategies can be viewed partially as 'objectives', as well as perhaps containing some 'policy' statements or thoughts. Moving along the path of the indicated strategies contributes to fulfillment of the goal.

Goal 6.1: Provide efficient facilities to serve the needs of the Town of Empire.

Strategy 6.1.1: Complete a facilities assessment of the Town Hall to consider space needs/reallocation for office and storage as well as desirable communication technology upgrades. Complete desired improvements.

Strategy 6.1.2: Update the Town of Empire Zoning Ordinance to include Child Care Facilities in the Business (BD) Zoning District with a conditional use permit and site plan approval.

Strategy 6.1.3: A Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (CORP) should be prepared to identify needed park and open space improvements and expenses included in proposed improvements.

Goal 6.2: Ensure that all Town development is served by efficient, cost-effective services and infrastructure within the Town's capacity to provide services and facilities.

Strategy 6.2.1: Develop a Capital Improvements Program (CIP) as a central tool to implement this Comprehensive Plan. The CIP should help the Town plan for needed utilities and community facilities improvements, as well as transportation, recreation, and other improvements.

Strategy 6.2.2: Explore the potential for adopting local impact fees (Compliant with Act 477) to help pay for new construction and improvements to local facilities.

Strategy 6.2.3: Require developers to pay their "fair share" for improvements needed to support new development requests.

Strategy 6.2.4: Continue attending Outlying Sewer Group (OSG) meetings (the group meets as needed with representatives from each sanitary district and Town served by the City of Fond du Lac sewage treatment plant.)

Goal 6.3: Continue to ensure that Empire is a safe community by meeting or exceeding recognized standards for public safety.

Strategy 6.3.1: Pursue shared service opportunities when mutually beneficial (i.e. cost savings) to improve the efficiency and quality of utilities and community facilities.

Strategy 6.3.2: Coordinate with neighboring communities to maintain adequate fire department staff coverage.

Strategy 6.3.3: When new subdivision, commercial, or industrial development requests are submitted to the Town, submit the requests to the applicable fire department for review and recommendation.

Strategy 6.3.4: Consider revisions to the Empire Zoning Ordinance related to wind turbine and solar energy system siting requirements.

Strategy 6.3.5: Coordinate with the Fond du Lac County Sherrif's Department for services.



Chapter 7 - Agricultural, Natural, and Cultural Resources

7.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the agricultural, natural, and cultural resources found within and around the Town of Empire. The conservation and wise use of agricultural and natural resources and the preservation of cultural resources are fundamental to achieving strong and stable environment for the physical development of the Town, as well as maintaining community identity.

The natural environment of the Town of Empire contributes greatly to the residents' quality of life. A variety of natural resources are contained within the Town and are described and depicted in this chapter. The preservation of historic and cultural resources is also important to the vitality of any community. It fosters a sense of pride and provides an important context for social and cultural continuity between the past, present, and future. Agriculture has an important impact on land use in the Town, accounting for nearly 72% of the total land use. The majority of agriculture activity occurs east of CTH UU. Productive agricultural soils are found across the Town of Empire. While farming is encouraged across the Town, a variety of factors combine to make it a target for future non-farm development.

Wisconsin's Comprehensive Planning Law includes 14 goals for local comprehensive planning. Of those goals, the residents of the Town of Empire believe that those listed below specifically relate to local planning for agricultural and natural resources:

- Protection of natural areas, including wetlands, wildlife habitats, lakes, woodlands, open spaces and environmental corridors.
- Protection of economically productive agricultural areas.
- Protection of agricultural lands for agricultural purposes.

7.2 Agricultural Resources Inventory

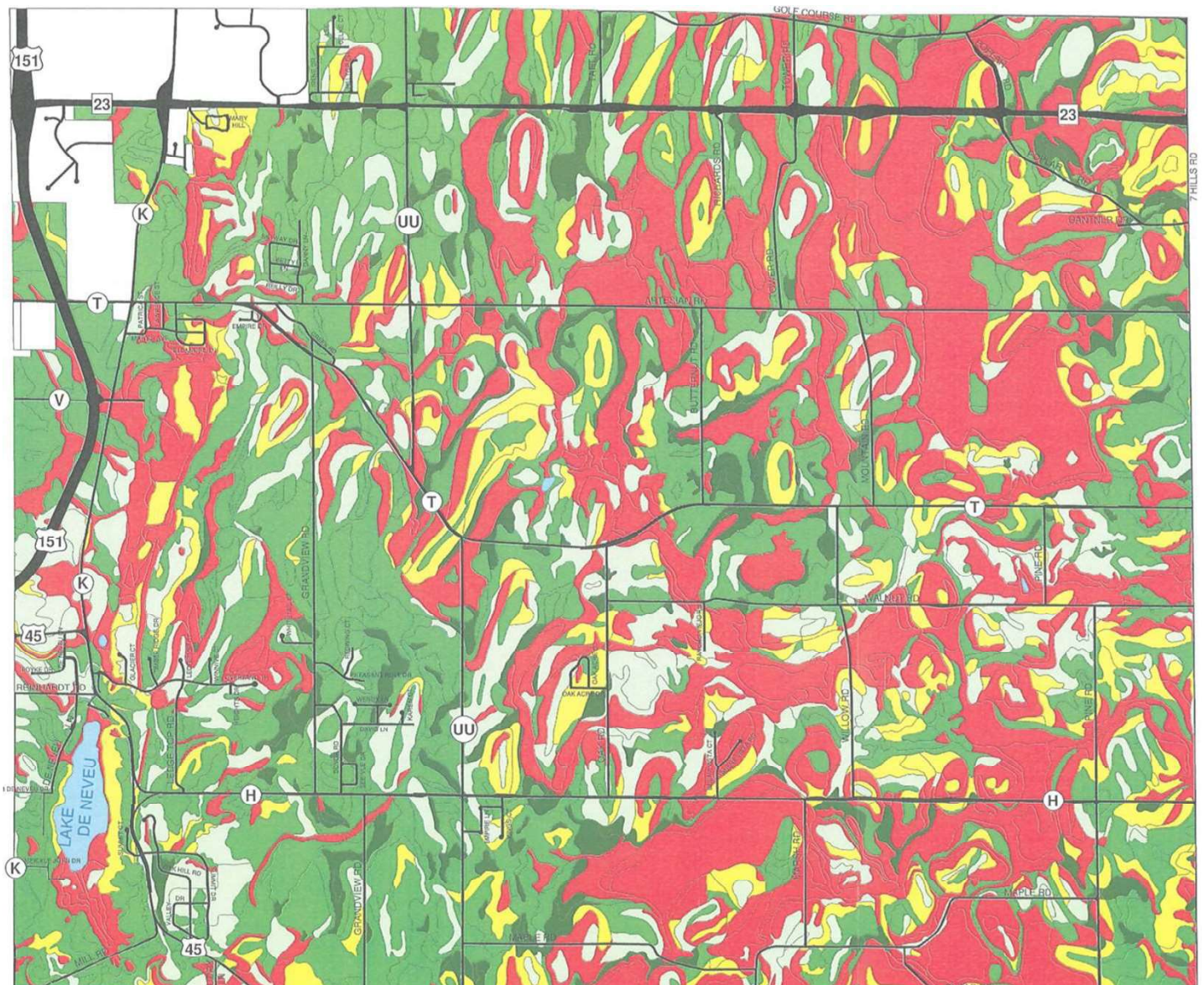
Productive Agricultural Lands

Productive Agricultural Lands - NRCS Soils

Productive farm soils are illustrated on Map 7.1 based on the National Resource Conservation Service's (NRCS) soil suitability. Prime farmlands (productive agricultural areas) are determined by soil types that are capable of producing high yields of crops under a high level of management. Productive soils are considered to be those soils that are capable of producing an average of 4 tons per acre per year of grass-legume hay, or 100 bushels per acre of corn. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Soil Conservation Service (SCS) considers a "high level of management" to include provisions for adequate drainage, appropriate tillage, planting and seeding with high yielding varieties, control of weeds, diseases, insects, optimum fertilizer application and timely, efficient harvesting techniques.



Map 7-1: Soil Productivity



Soil Productivity

Town of Empire Fond du Lac County, WI

Legend

- ROADS
- BEST
- VERY GOOD
- GOOD
- FAIR
- POOR
- CITY OF FOND DU LAC
- WATER



This base map was created with data from Fond du Lac County who assumes no liability for the accuracy of this data and any use or misuse of its content is the responsibility of the user. Changes were made by Cedar Corporation under the direction of the Town of Empire. Map Date: April 1, 2024.



Productive Agricultural Lands - American Farmland Trust

The American Farmland Trust's *Farms Under Threat Productivity, Versatility, and Resiliency* (PVR) analysis was designed to identify the agricultural lands best suited for intensive cultivation, with a focus on production of human-edible food crops. It provides relevant information about the land's PVR. American Farmland Trust developed a detailed spatial dataset representing soil productivity and capacity, land cover and use, food production for direct human consumption, production limitations, and length of growing season. The PVR model combined these datasets using weights elicited from a group of national agricultural experts. The higher the PVR value, the more productive, versatile, and resilient the land is for long-term cultivation. These values were then used to identify two important land classifications: Nationally Significant agricultural land, which is the land best-suited to long-term, intensive crop production within the contiguous United States; and each state's "best land," which is approximately the better half of all agricultural land in each state.

Map 7.2 shows land cover and use as of 2016. This map represents national land use with a special focus on agricultural land. It includes four distinct agricultural land classes: cropland, pastureland, rangeland, and woodland associated with farms. Federal lands used for grazing are also indicated. In addition, this layer includes a new land use class, low-density residential, in which the average housing density is above the level where agriculture is typically viable.

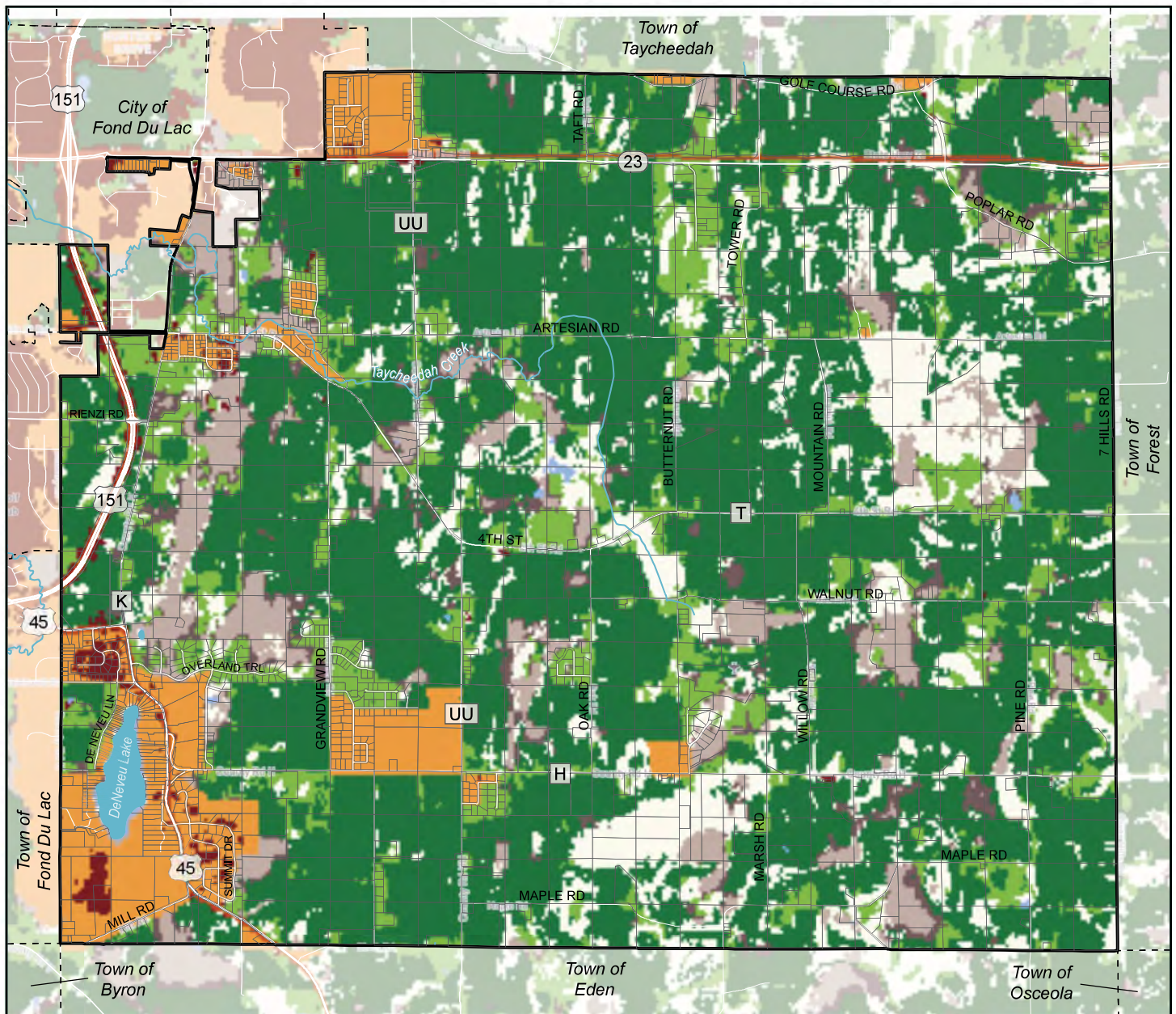
Map 7.3 shows where non-federal farmland and rangeland were converted to urban and highly developed and low-density residential land uses from 2001-2016. Conversion to UHD or LDR has occurred in all areas shown in red, but this does not indicate that every acre in those areas has been converted. Farmland includes cropland, pastureland, and woodland associated with farms. Land with PVR values above the state median are shown in dark green and dark yellow, respectively. Lands with PVR values below the state median are shown in lighter shades.

Map 7.4 shows Nationally Significant agricultural land is the land best suited for long-term production of food and other crops. To identify Nationally Significant land, a team of experts calculated a minimum PVR value threshold. All agricultural land with PVR values above this threshold was classified as Nationally Significant.

Productive Agricultural Soils - Fond du Lac County Farmland Preservation Plan

The Town of Empire's involvement with the Fond du Lac County Farmland Preservation Plan and utilization of Farmland Preservation Zoning, was a significant step in moving the Town towards a level of sustainability for agricultural activity. The farmland preservation plan and ordinance (Map 7.5) does so by creating opportunities for farmers to make an economic living and protecting their right to farm. Hence, sustaining the farming culture. It also opens the door for ag-related businesses and agri-tourism which have also grown in popularity. The farmland preservation efforts also make clear the responsibility by agricultural producers to use best management practices in preserving these resources for today, tomorrow, and beyond.

Map 7-2: Land Cover and Use (2016)

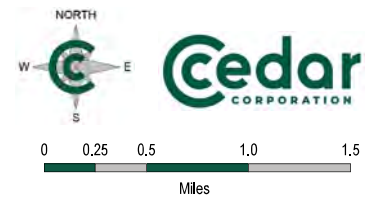


Land Cover and Use (2016)

Town of Empire
Fond du Lac County, WI

- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| ■ Cropland | ■ Low-Density Residential | □ Parcel Boundary |
| ■ Pastureland | ■ Water | □ Town of Empire |
| ■ Woodland | ■ Transportation | □ Municipal Boundary |
| ■ Forestland | ■ Other | |
| ■ Urban and Highly Developed | | |

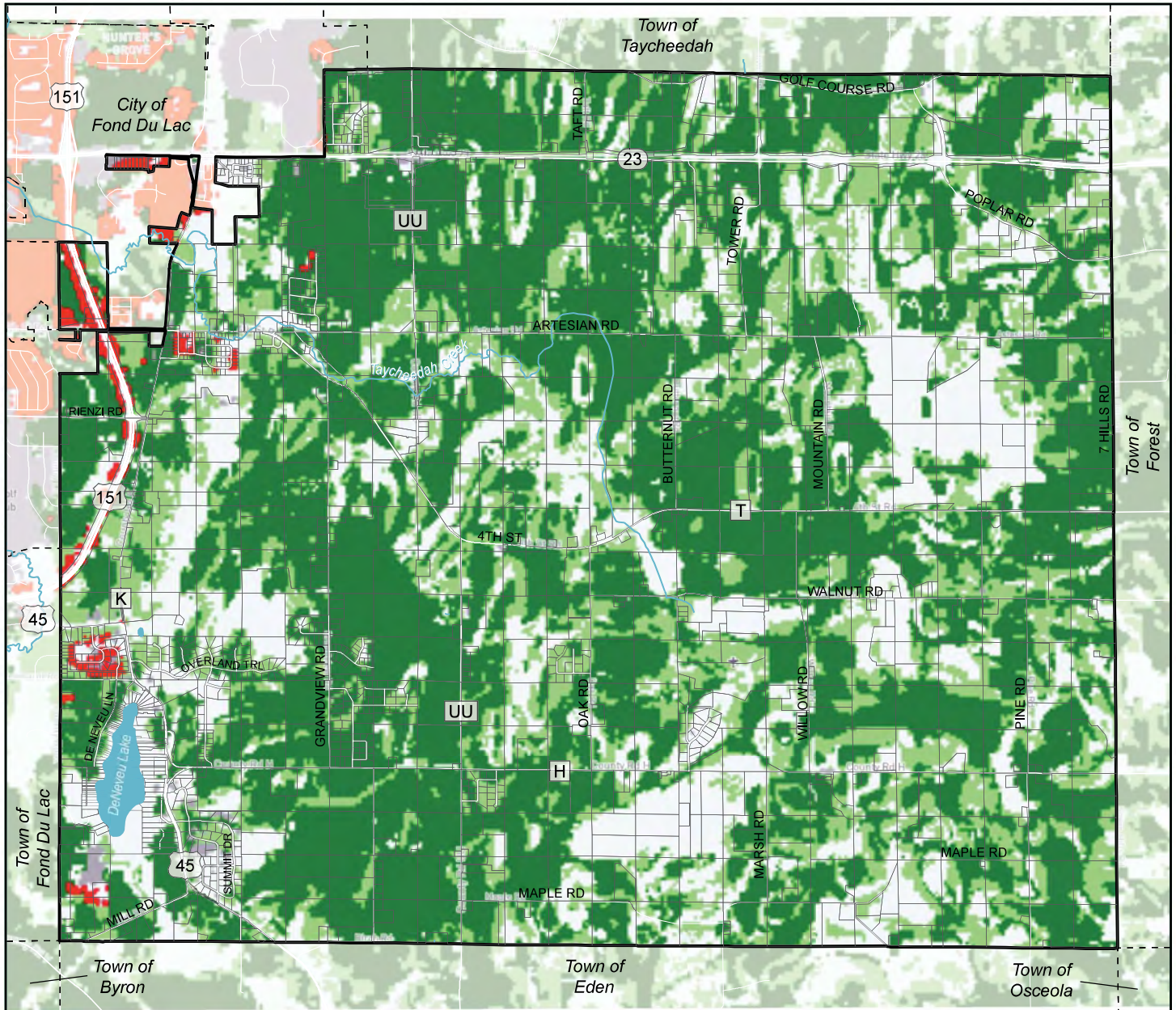
Sources: American Farmland Trust, 2016.



This base map was created with data from Fond du Lac County who assumes no liability for the accuracy of this data and any use or misuse of its content is the responsibility of the user. Changes were made by Cedar Corporation under the direction of the Town of Empire. Map Date: December 4, 2024.



Map 7-3: Conversion of Agricultural Land (2001 - 2016)

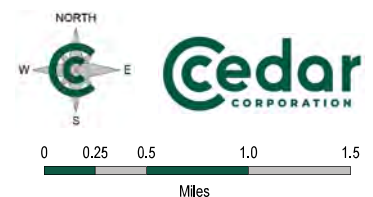


Conversion of Agricultural Land (2001 - 2016)

Town of Empire
Fond du Lac County, WI

- Conversion of Agricultural Land to UHD and LDR Land Uses
- Farmland (Above State Median PVR)
- Farmland (Below State Median PVR)
- Federal, Forest, and Other Lands
- Urban Areas

- Parcel Boundary
- Town of Empire
- Municipal Boundary

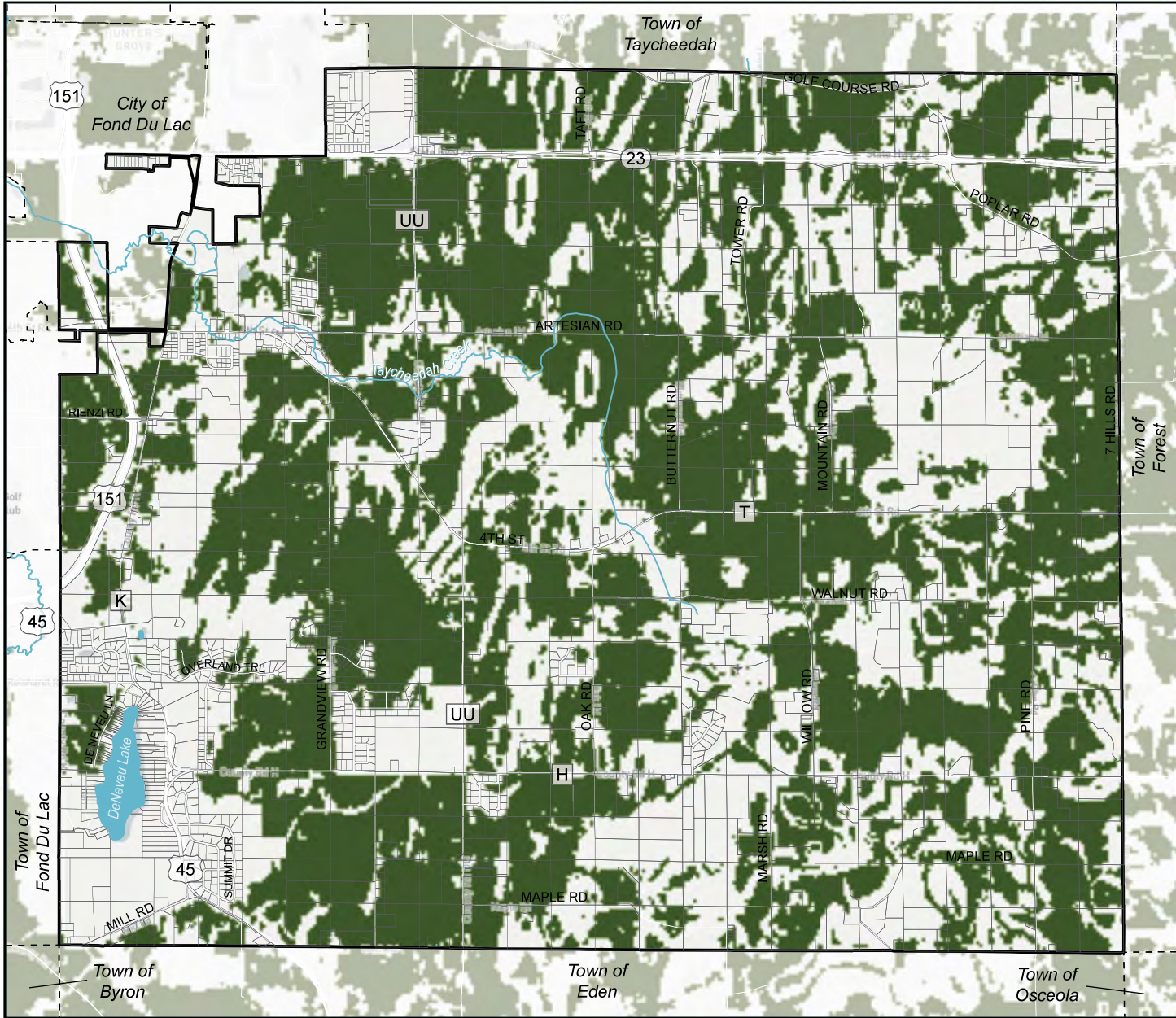


This base map was created with data from Fond du Lac County who assumes no liability for the accuracy of this data and any use or misuse of its content is the responsibility of the user. Changes were made by Cedar Corporation under the direction of the Town of Empire. Map Date: December 4, 2024.

Sources: American Farmland Trust, 2016.






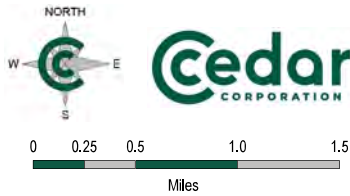
Map 7-4 Nationally Significant Agricultural Land (2019)



Nationally Significant Agricultural Land (2016)

Town of Empire
Fond du Lac County, WI

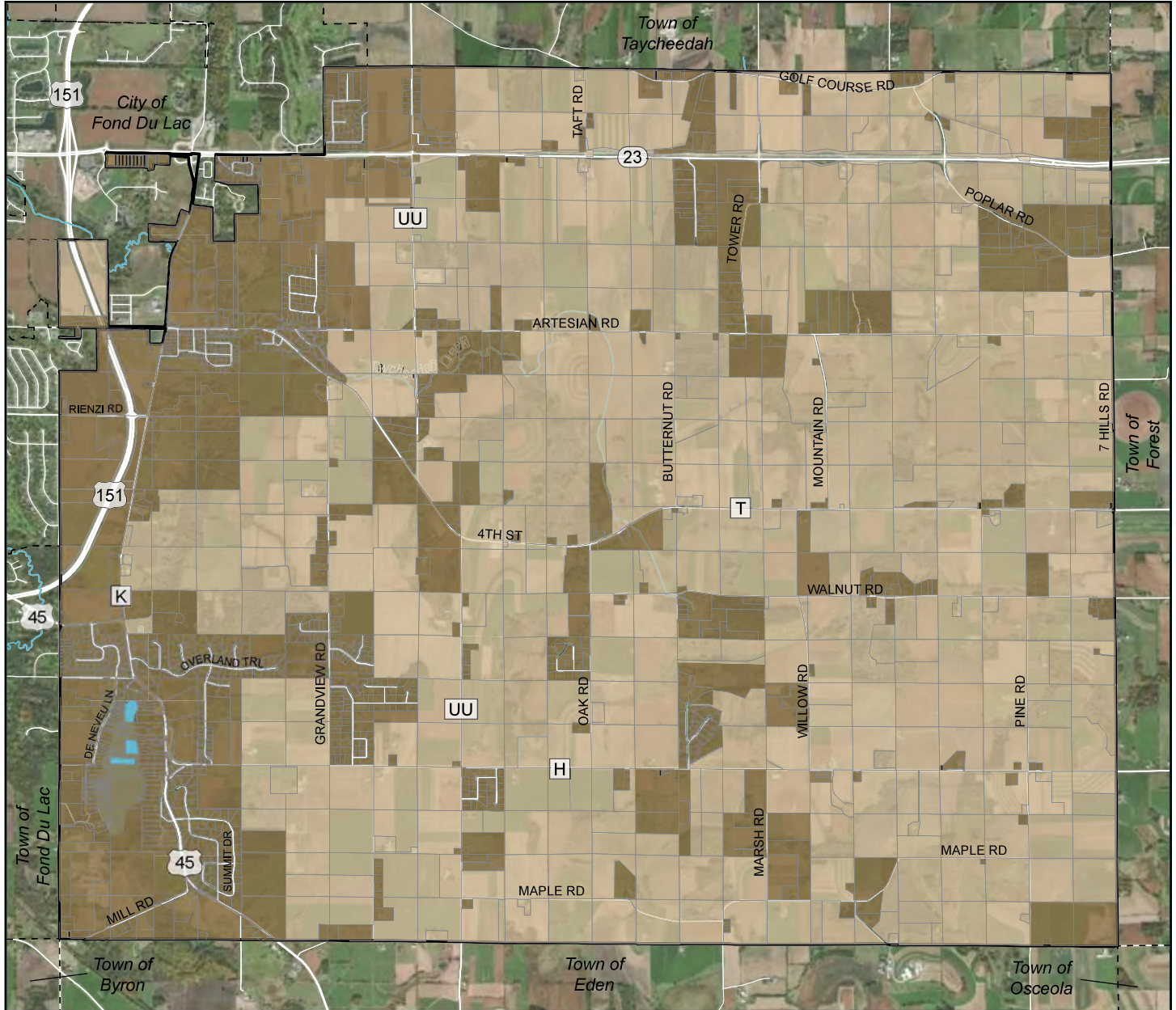
-  Nationally Significant Agricultural Land
-  Parcel Boundary
-  Town of Empire
-  Municipal Boundary



This base map was created with data from Fond du Lac County who assumes no liability for the accuracy of this data and any use or misuse of its content is the responsibility of the user. Changes were made by Cedar Corporation under the direction of the Town of Empire. Map Date: December 4, 2024.

Sources: American Farmland Trust, 2016.



Map 7-5 - Farmland Preservation Plan



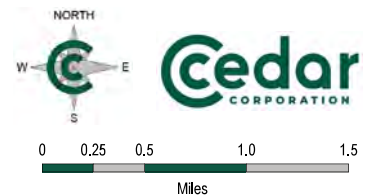
Farmland Preservation

Town of Empire
Fond du Lac County, WI

Farmland Preservation Areas*

- | | |
|---|--|
|  Areas of Agricultural Use and Agriculture Related Use |  Parcel Boundary |
|  Areas of Nonagricultural Development |  Town of Empire |
| |  Municipal Boundary |

*Farmland Preservation Plan, Fond du Lac County, 2021.



This base map was created with data from Fond du Lac County who assumes no liability for the accuracy of this data and any use or misuse of its content is the responsibility of the user. Changes were made by Cedar Corporation under the direction of the Town of Empire. Map Date: April 4, 2024.



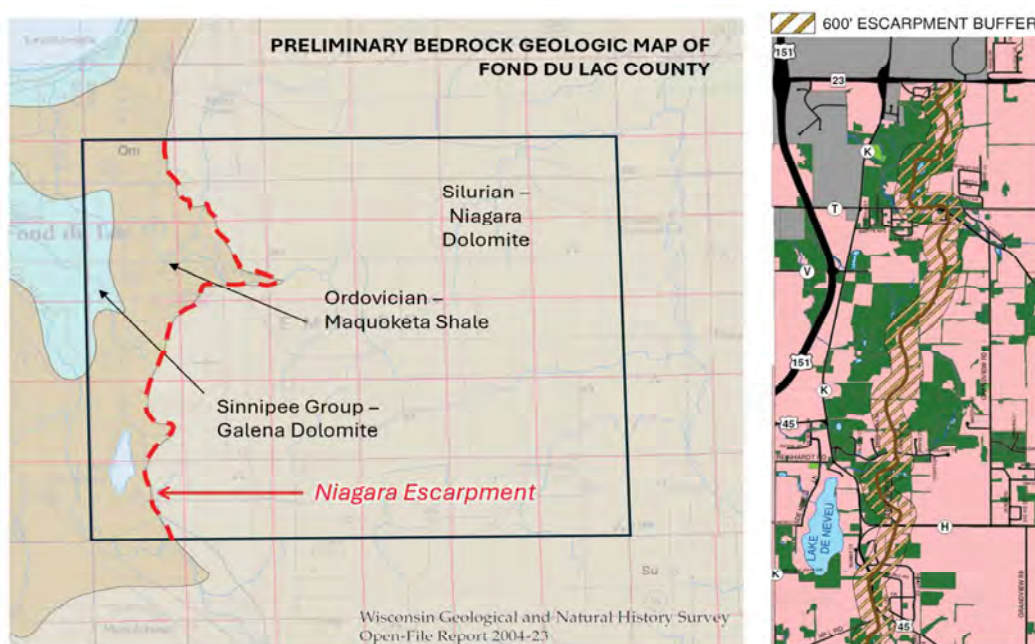
7.3 Inventory of Natural Resources

Bedrock Geology

The bedrock geology of a community can influence many aspects of land use within a community. Geologic features and conditions can change across a community and therefore a review of geologic maps is useful.

As shown on Figure 7-1, three different geologic units exist within the Town of Empire. A majority of the Town is comprised of Niagara Dolomite, a highly fractured and dissolvable bedrock which can allow surface contaminants like manure or pesticides to seep into the groundwater very quickly. These are often known as karst environments and may contain cracks, fissures, sinkholes, and even caves.

Figure 7-1: Bedrock Geology & Niagara Escarpment Buffer Zone



Bedrock is also used in many industries in Wisconsin with some units better than others as sources of road aggregate materials or building stone. Some geologic units have higher risk of rockfalls along roads, and some may be more likely to contain metallic mineral deposits. Groundwater wells drilled into certain rocks may also be more at risk for water contamination.

Niagara Escarpment

The Niagara Escarpment is a globally unique natural feature which reflect the outer edge of a 420-million year old lake basin centered on the lower Michigan peninsula. Exposed by the glaciers, the Niagara Escarpment's bedrock ridge extends approximately 1,000 miles. Starting in the east, the escarpment runs along the southern edge of Lake Ontario's basin and extends across New York State into the Canadian Niagara Falls (Figure 7-2). At Niagara Falls, the formation continues east to Lake Huron, hooks around northern Lake Michigan through the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, and runs down through eastern Wisconsin, terminating in Waukesha County at Brady's Rocks near Eagle.

The lands located east of the escarpment is known as the Niagara Cuesta. The escarpment consists primarily of dolomitic limestone, which is called Silurian Dolomite. This dolomite is highly fractured horizontally and vertically letting groundwater move quickly. Below these layers of dolomite exists a layer of shale called the Maquoketa Shale. This highly impermeable material diverts rainwater and groundwater from the top of the escarpment forming numerous springs and seeps at the bottom of the escarpment. This groundwater interaction creates the unique moist cliff environment at its base. The escarpment runs continuously from Section 6 in the northern portion of the Town of Empire to Section 31 (Figure 7-1) with a vertical relief of approximately 60 to 100 feet.

Figure 7-2: Location of Niagara Escarpment



Portions of the Niagara Escarpment are protected to some degree by Section 13-1-36 of the Zoning Ordinance which contains the Critical Area Overlay District, or CAO. Any request for action (re-zoning, land division, building permit, ec.) to alter lands within this overlay needs to meet certain conditions prior to consideration of such action. A Critical Areas Plan is required to be prepared to the standards of the ordinance and any parcel of land for which action is proposed, if containing a Protected Critical Area area, shall only be approved as a conditional use permit.

The Niagara Escarpment is specifically called out as a Protected Critical Area whose “regulated area” is defined as a buffer area extending six hundred (600) feet in each direction (total buffer width = 1,200 feet) from the ridgeline of the Niagara Escarpment as generally depicted in the Comprehensive Plan. The term ridgeline is defined as the ground line located at the highest elevation of the ridge, within the buffer area, and running parallel to the long axis of the ridge. Prohibited or regulated activities include all non-metallic mining, and telecommunications towers if within 5,000 feet of an existing tower. Additional limitations exist on: building/structure height (not exceed the highest point of the ridgeline nearest the building site unless screened); the preservation of existing mature vegetation along the ridegline; the preservation of visible rock outcroppings; site grading provisions, and; replanting of disturbed areas with common vegetation.

Metallic and Non-Metallic Mining

The bedrock geology of the area makes it very suitable for non-metallic mining as the Niagara Dolomite is a highly valued building and construction material. The location of existing quarries is shown on the Existing Land Use Map. Conditional Use Permits are required by the Town as well as meeting the County's NR-135 Reclamaion Planning requirements.

Glacial Geology & Soils

The Town of Empire owes its unique landscape to the cumulative effects of past ice ages. The Wisconsin Glacial stage began approximately 65,000 years ago and lasted about 54,000 years. The ice that covered most of Wisconsin was up to one mile thick and extended in five sections (i.e. lobes): the Superior, Chippewa, Wisconsin Valley, Green Bay, and Lake Michigan. The Green Bay lobe extended along the eastern part of the state carving out Green Bay, the Fox River, and Lake Winnebago and reaching as far south as Madison. As these lobes receded, they left glacial lakes, moraines, drumlins, and kames in their path. The last glacier in Wisconsin began receding about 11,000 years ago. This area of Wisconsin contains the Kettle Moraines, drumlins, and kames.

West of the Niagara Escarpment, the topography is nearly level to sloping and includes some of the best farming soils in Fond du Lac County. East of the escarpment are two major drumlin fields. One is located in the northern-most part of the Town trending south toward the other in the extreme southeastern corner of the Town. Drumlins located in Empire are generally aligned in a parallel fashion with their major (or long axis) oriented north-south, in the direction of ice flow.. The drumlins vary in elevations, but are generally between 60 to 120 feet above the surrounding countryside.

There are four general associations of soils found in and around Empire.

- **Theresa-Pella-Lamartine Association.** It is the largest continuous block in the eastern third of the County and encompasses significant portions of Empire. This association is easy to farm and is largely used for crop production. The two main limitations of these soils are erosion and wetness.
- **Kewanee-Manawa-Poygan Association** These soils are well to poorly drained and moderately permeable. Most of this association is used for crop production. Sugar maples, basswoods and oak trees are common to these soils.
- **Beecher-Elliott Association** soils are somewhat poorly drained and moderately permeable due to its clay content. Like the other associations in the Town, most of the Beecher-Elliott soils are used for cropland and some areas are used as pasture or woodlots.
- **Houghton-Palms Association** soil occupy large, nearly level depressions and wetland areas of Fond du Lac County and can be found in some areas of Empire. These soils are poorly drained and are subject to ponding. Native vegetation includes marsh grasses, white cedar, black spruce, elm and willow trees. These soils are illustrated on the Soil Association Map within the mucky peat category.



Surface Water Features

There are three watersheds in the Town of Empire. The western sections of the Town are in the Taycheedah Creek and de Neveu Creek drainage areas which flow northwesterly into Lake Winnebago and eventually into Green Bay. A small area in the southeastern part of the Town drains southerly and is part of the Milwaukee River drainage basin. The eastern sections of the Town are part of the Sheboygan River water system, which drains directly into Lake Michigan. Taycheedah Creek and Pipe Creek (located in Section 27, approximately two miles in length, draining to Lake Winnebago) are the only named waterways in the Town, but there are many other smaller, unnamed creeks and streams that are tributaries of the Sheboygan River.

There are a total of 31 named lakes in Fond du Lac County. Two of these, Lake de Neveu and Devils Lake, are in Empire (Map 7.6).

- **Lake de Neveu:** Located in the eastern part of the Town, this lake cover 79 acres. The maximum depth of the lake is 67 feet. The lake has no public access. It is classified as a seepage lake containing northern pike, walleye, largemouth bass and panfish. Lands surrounding Lake de Neveu are within a sanitary district designed to protect the quality of the lake from the dangers of failing septic systems.
- **Devils Lake:** Devils Lake covers 2 acres. The maximum depth of this seepage lake is 5 feet. It contains no known fish. It is located east of the CTH K and USH 45 intersection.

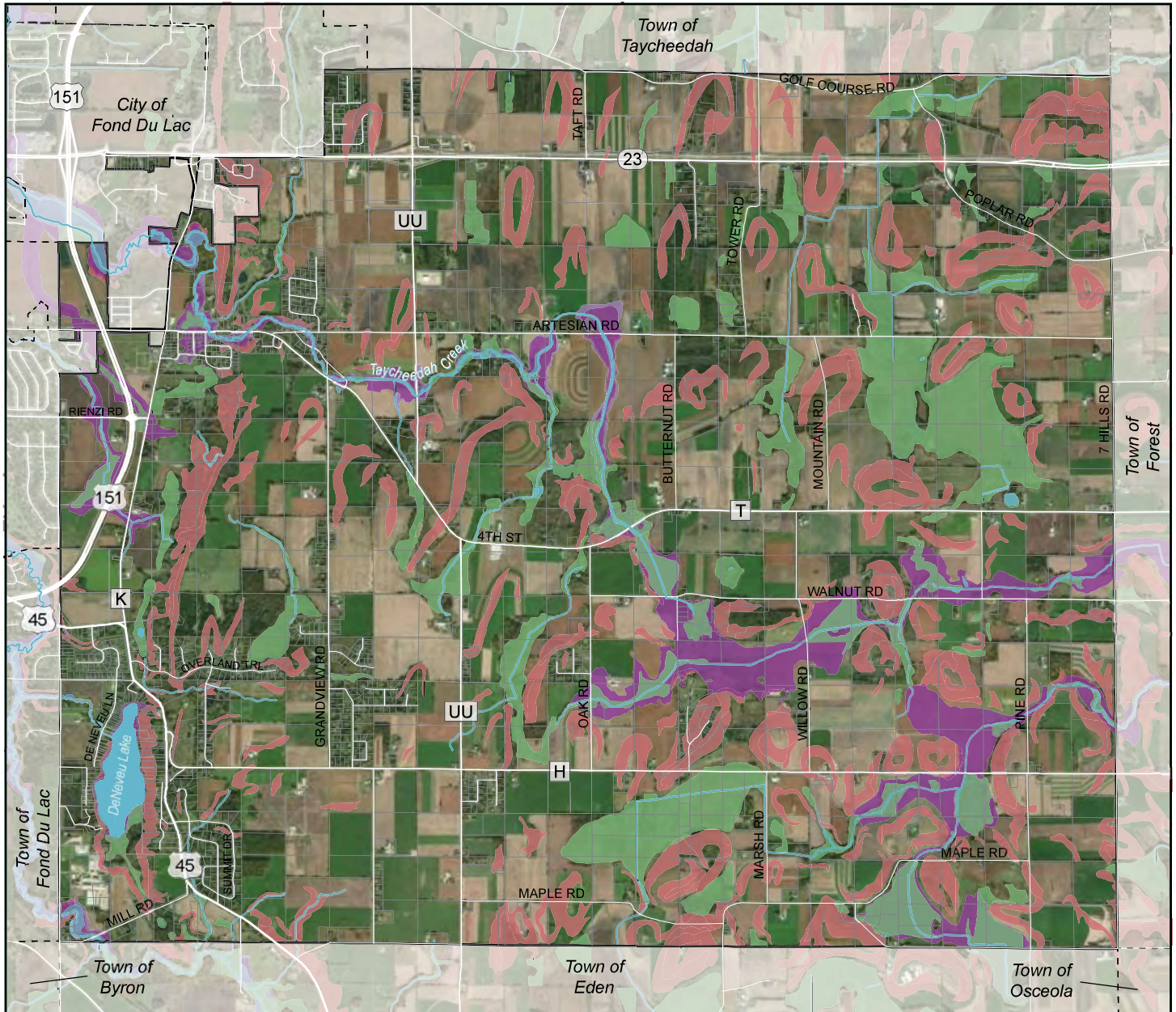
Shorelines are often thought of as a boundary between the land and water, but shorelines are also a transition area within which the health of land and water ecosystems can be positively or negatively affected. Shoreland vegetation traps and filters sediment and debris from rainfall and snow melt. Shorelines, riverbanks, and floodplains in Empire are protected and regulated by the WDNR and Fond du Lac County. Shoreland zoning regulations are enforced by Fond du Lac County and are designed for efficient use, conservation, development, and protection of water resources.

Wetlands

Wetlands act as a natural filtering system for sediment and nutrients such as phosphorus and nitrates. They also serve as a natural buffer, protecting shorelines and stream banks from erosion. Wetlands are essential in providing wildlife habitat, flood control, and groundwater recharge. At the state level, the WDNR regulates the placement of structures and other alterations below the ordinary high water mark of any navigable lake or stream. The Army Corps of Engineers has federal authority when fill is placed in any wetland 5 acres or greater in size. In the Town of Empire, wetlands are found along portions of Taycheedah Creek, tributaries to the Sheboygan River, Pipe Creek, and the southern end of Lake de Neveu (Map 7-6). In total, approximately 1,525 acres (8%) of the Town are classified as wetlands, not including wetlands less than 5 acres.



Map 7-6 - Environmental Features

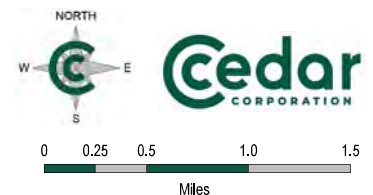


Environmental Features

Town of Empire Fond du Lac County, WI

- | | |
|---|---|
| ■ Wetlands | □ Parcel Boundary |
| ■ Surface Water | □ Town of Empire |
| ■ 0.2% Annual Chance Flood Hazard | □ Municipal Boundary |
| ■ 1% Annual Chance Flood Hazard | |
| ■ Steep Slope (12% or Greater) | |

Sources: WDNR, 2024; FEMA, 2024; NRCS, 2023.



This base map was created with data from Fond du Lac County who assumes no liability for the accuracy of this data and any use or misuse of its content is the responsibility of the user. Changes were made by Cedar Corporation under the direction of the Town of Empire. Map Date: April 1, 2024.



Floodplains

Floodplains, like wetlands, serve many important functions related to flood and erosion control, water quality, groundwater recharge and fish and wildlife habitats. Areas susceptible to flooding are considered unsuitable for development because of risks to lives and property. The Flood Insurance Rate Map identifies Taycheedah Creek, Pipe Creek and tributaries of the Sheboygan River as areas subject to flooding (Map 7.6). An unnamed, marshy pond in the southern section of the Town drains into de Neveu Creek and is identified as being subject to flooding. The Town of Empire has approximately 1,300 acres of land classified as floodplain/floodway, which are largely unsuitable for development. Regulations place limitations on the development and use of wetlands and floodplains. Fond du Lac County enforces a floodplain ordinance requiring certain land use controls in designated flood hazard areas. Under sections 87.3 and 144.26 of the Wisconsin Statutes, a municipality has the authority to give greater protection to wetlands, shoreland and floodplain areas. The Town of Empire does this through enforcement of its Critical Overlay Zoning District.

Woodlands, Wildlife Habitat & Environmental Corridors

As shown on the Existing Land Use Map in Chapter 8, nearly 2,600 acres, or 14% of the Town of Empire is covered in woodlands. Primary wildlife habitat areas correspond to these woodlands and other undeveloped natural areas shown on Map 7.6. These areas provide food and cover for deer, raccoons, skunk and other small animals common in the area. Nearby farm fields also serve as a food source for deer, sandhill cranes, turkeys and waterfowl. Farmland is also very important to wildlife because it provides travel corridors between waterways and woodlands. Farmland also provides cover opportunities and large contiguous open spaces needed by wildlife. Aquatic habitats in the Town of Empire include Lake de Neveu, Devils Lake, and area streams. The quality of these water resources as aquatic habitats was discussed in earlier sections of this chapter. The Niagara Escarpment is also an important and unique wildlife habitat area. Many woodlands areas are associated with farming operations.

Environmental corridors connect natural areas and open spaces. They provide physical linkages between fragmented habitat areas and, as such, provide animals and insects a means of travel to and from feeding and breeding places. In Empire, important environmental corridors include the Niagara Escarpment, farm fencerows, and areas along local creeks and streams. Protection of the latter is addressed through the Fond du Lac County Shoreland / Wetland Zoning Ordinance. Some protection of the Niagara Escarpment is provided through the Empire Zoning Ordinance. Farm fencerow protection is not regulated at this time. Protection of these areas is at the discretion of local landowners.

Threatened & Endangered Species

There are many threatened and endangered plant and animal species in Fond du Lac County. Unfortunately, there is not a list or map available specific to Empire. The WDNR has county-level maps of threatened and endangered species but they do not precisely identify habitat areas as the WDNR does not want people to visit or otherwise intrude upon them. The WDNR continues to identify and catalog endangered plant and animal species across the state. For a complete, up-to-date list, refer to www.dnr.state.wi.us.



Exotic and Invasive Species

Non-native, or exotic, plant and animal species have been recognized in recent years as a major threat to the integrity of native habitats and species, as well as a potential economic threat (damage to crops, tourist economy, etc). The WDNR requires that any person seeking to bring a non-native fish or wild animal for introduction in Wisconsin obtain a permit.

Air Quality

Air pollutants can impair human health, harm the environment and cause property damage. The primary contributors to diminished air quality in Empire include emissions from automobiles, trucks, farm equipment and industry. The United States Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) evaluates air quality using health-based criteria and identifies non-attainment areas which do not meet the standards. Fond du Lac County is an attainment area and therefore air quality is not of major concern in the area. The nearest air quality monitoring station to Empire is located in the City of Fond du Lac. More information on air quality is available at www.dnr.state.wi.us/org/aw/air/.

7.4 Inventory of Cultural Resources

Historic Resources

The Wisconsin Historical Society identifies 35 historical sites in the Town of Empire. The following are a few from the AHI list. The complete list is available on-line at: www.wisconsinhistory.org/ahi.

- **John B. Macy House.** Located at N5620 USH 45, this brick Italianate style home constructed in 1850. On the same property, the AHI identifies the Macy Library (an octagon style building built between 1850 and 1865), three barns, tool shed, stagecoach house and summer kitchen as historical features.
- **Phillips, L.H. House.** Constructed in 1873, the Phillips, L.H. House is located on the eastside of CTH K, 0.4 miles south of STH 23. The Queen Anne style house was pictured in the 1874 Atlas of Fond du Lac County. T
- **G.N. Shoemaker Farmstead.** Located at W4182 Highway 23 this two story, Italianate Style home built prior to 1874 has a hipped roof, red brick foundation and brackets under the eaves.
- **Rosenbaum Farmstead.** This farmstead is located at N6601 Tower Road. The two-story farmhouse is characterized by its gable roof, fieldstone foundation and segmental arch windows. This house is of unusual design and, if historically intact, may be eligible for National Historic Property listing.

In addition to the buildings profiled in the AHI, cemeteries are also important historical resources in a community. The cemeteries located in Empire are profiled in the Utilities and Community Facilities Chapter.

Cultural Resources

Other cultural resources lie in the nearby City of Fond du Lac (i.e. theaters, museums, clubs, churches, etc.). In addition, easy access via area highways to the Fox Cities, Milwaukee and Madison further expands cultural offerings available to Town residents. Within the Town of Empire, area churches and a newer distillery are the primary cultural resources for residents.



7.5 Current Policies & Programs

Table 7-1 highlights the primary local, county, state, and federal policies and programs available to protect the Town's agricultural, natural, and cultural resources.

Table 7-1: Current Policies & Programs

Entity / Jurisdiction	Program / Regulation Name	Program / Regulation Purpose	General Description
Town of Empire	Land Division Ordinance	Regulate the division of private land parcels and required infrastructure for new development including roads and stormwater management.	Calls for the preservation of existing features which would add both aesthetic and economic value to residential development or to the town as a whole, such as trees, watercourses and wetlands, beaches, rock outcroppings and similar irreplaceable assets. Requires 20% open space set aside in new subdivision developments (in addition to undevelopable areas).
Town of Empire	Zoning Ordinance (Chapter 13)	Regulates the use of land through the creation of specific districts and land use criteria and standards.	Section 13-1-36 CAO Critical Areas Overlay District created to protect the public health and safety and promote the general welfare by preserving unique and valuable geologic and other natural resource features of the Town of Empire. The Town also administers the Floodplain Zoning district
Local/Regional	Purchase of Development Rights (PDR)	A program created and implemented by a community or, more commonly, a Land Trust, for farmland and/or environmental land protection.	Landowners receive payment equal to the difference between the fair market value of the land a developer would pay if it could be developed and the price the land would command for agricultural use. In return a conservation easement is recorded on the deed to the property which stays with the land.
Fond du Lac County (WDNR)	Shoreland/Wetland Zoning Ordinance (Ch. 59.97 Wis. Stats. and Wisconsin Admin. Codes NR115, 116, and 117)	Protect water quality and wildlife, prevent flooding.	Development in shoreland areas is generally permitted, with specific design techniques. Development in floodplain areas is strictly regulated and in some instances, not permitted. Applies to all unincorporated areas.
Fond du Lac County (DATCP)	Farmland Preservation Program (Farmland Preservation Plan / Farmland Preservation Zoning)	Maintaining productive land for agricultural uses.	Provides monetary incentives to eligible landowners to keep their land in a productive state. The program offers tax credits to participation landowners whose eligible land must be identified in the Fond du Lac County Farmland Preserve Plan and be zoned as Certified Farmland Preservation District.
Fond du Lac County (WDNR)	Non-Metallic Mining Reclamation Program (Admin. Code NR-135)	Requires the development and approval of reclamation plans for active mine sites.	Permit issuance is dependent on meeting criteria and standards to achieve a specified 'end land use' as outlined in the ordinance. Annual reporting and financial assurances are required to ensure reclamation occurs.



Table 7-1: Current Policies & Programs, continued

Entity / Jurisdiction	Program / Regulation Name	Program / Regulation Purpose	General Description
State of Wisconsin	Right to Farm Law (Wis. Stats. 823.08, passed in 1982 and revised in 1995)	Protects farmers from nuisance lawsuits related to typical farm noise and odors.	Provides criteria that define whether or not an agricultural activity is considered a nuisance by meeting two conditions: (1) the activity is being done on land that was used for agricultural purposes “without substantial interruption” prior to the plaintiff coming to the property being affected by the activity; and (2) the activity does not present a substantial safety or health threat.
State of Wisconsin (DATCP)	Livestock Siting Rules (Wis. Stat. § 93.90 & ATP 51)	Establishes standards for the siting of confined animal feeding operations (CAFO's) of 1,000+ animal units.	<p>Either through a conditional use permit or a licensing arrangement, applicants must address standards for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Property line and road setbacks • Management and training plans • Odor management • Nutrient management • Manure storage facilities • Runoff management <p>The State's Livestock Siting Review Board hears appeals of local decisions from applicants or neighboring landowners.</p>
State of Wisconsin (WDNR)	Wisconsin Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (WPDES)	Protection of water quality from municipal and industrial discharges.	Individual (i.e., site-specific) WPDES permits are issued to municipal and industrial facilities, including CAFOs, discharging to surface water and/or groundwater.
State of Wisconsin (WDNR)	Managed Forest Law Program (MFL)	Protection of woodland areas 10 or more acres in size.	Landowners agree to manage the property for hunting, fishing, wildlife, and recreation purposes and not permit development in exchange for tax credits.
U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)	Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)	Voluntary program that encourages farmers and landowners to convert highly erodible and other environmentally sensitive acreage to vegetative cover, such as native grasses, trees, and riparian buffers.	By enrolling in CRP, participants receive annual rental payments and cost-share assistance to establish long-term, resource-conserving covers.



7.6 Agriculture, Natural, and Cultural Resources Vision

In 2040, the agrarian character of the Town has been preserved. Farming remains an important and economically viable component of the Town's landscape. Woodlands, panoramic views, the Ledge and other natural and cultural resources continue to enhance the Town's rural environment and economy.

7.7 Agricultural, Natural, and Cultural Resources Goals & Strategies

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. Strategies are more specific than goals and provide a more measurable direction for future actions and implementation of the plan. Strategies can be viewed partially as 'objectives', as well as perhaps containing some 'policy' statements or thoughts. Moving along the path of the indicated strategies contributes to fulfillment of the goal.

Goal 7.1: Preserve the rural character and support country living by maintaining open space, natural areas and farmland.

Strategy 7.1.1: Using the Future Land Use Map as a guide, seek to direct residential and commercial development to areas least suited for farming with soils that support foundations and septic systems.

Strategy 7.1.2: Direct individual lot development on farmland to the edges of farm fields to preserve contiguous blocks of productive farmland.

Strategy 7.1.3: Establish an Agriculture Committee to:

- Provide education to local landowners regarding conservation subdivisions, land trusts, development right options, alternative farming practices and markets, etc.
- Coordinate with local farmers to consider consolidated strategies for efficient farming (i.e. local farmers market, specialty farming, equipment sharing, education seminars, insurance/benefit consolidation programs, value added businesses, etc.).
- Initiate a local education and marketing campaign on the Town web site and media releases to generate local interest for new agricultural endeavors (i.e. organic foods, stables, orchards, etc.).

Goal 7.2: Protect the Niagara Escarpment in the Town of Empire.

Strategy 7.2.1: Develop local land trusts to protect the escarpment. Provide information (on the Town web site) encouraging local landowners to pursue opportunities to protect their land by working with land trusts.

Strategy 7.2.2: Consider revisions the Town of Empire Zoning Ordinance to better protect and preserve the Niagara Escarpment by clarifying what will be allowed within those areas.

Strategy 7.2.3: Create a plan to develop a funding source to purchase PDR (Property Development Rights) and for TDR (Transfer of Development Rights) from property owners who own land in the "Critical Overlay District" to prevent the land from being developed.

Strategy 7.2.4: Maintain DATCP certification of the Town's Farmland Preservation Zoning Ordinance.

Goal 7.3: Preserve and enhance wildlife habitat.

Strategy 7.3.1: Develop local land trusts to protect wildlife habitat area in Empire. Educate local landowners to pursue opportunities to protect their land by working with land trusts.

Strategy 7.3.2: Coordinate with local WDNR staff to obtain better identification data about local wildlife habitats, particularly those unique to the community.

Strategy 7.3.3: Discourage habitat fragmentation through the use of conservation subdivision techniques and by limiting any new traditional residential subdivision developments to officially designated Town Growth Areas (as opposed to outlying areas).

Strategy 7.3.4: Establish a network of green corridors throughout the community to act as wildlife corridors. This effort should begin with areas protected through shoreland and wetland zoning, as well as open areas preserved in conservation-based subdivisions.

Goal 7.4: Preserve and protect Empire's groundwater to ensure a long-term, viable source of potable water for residents of the Town.

Strategy 7.4.1: Evaluate the establishment of a requirement in the Empire Land Division Ordinance for the installation of passive monitoring wells, or piezometer, within future subdivision development projects. Identify other potential methods to monitor the water supply and quality.

Strategy 7.4.2: Identify those areas within the Town where susceptibility to groundwater contamination is highest and develop plans to ensure that land use within these areas occurs in a manner consistent with protecting groundwater.

Strategy 7.4.3: Develop an information & education strategy aimed at providing Town residents with the tools to protect and conserve their potable water supply.

Goal 7.5: Preserve and protect the historic resources of the Town to promote the educational, cultural, and general welfare of residents of Empire and provide for a more interesting, attractive and vital community.

Strategy 7.5.1: Encourage residents and other groups to inventory historic properties and locations in the Town of Empire. Share this information with the State of Wisconsin Architecture and History Inventory.

Strategy 7.5.2: Maintain the historic resources of the community by encouraging landowners to apply for grants and official historic site designation through the State of Wisconsin.

8. Land Use

8.1 Introduction

To appreciate Empire's rural character, one only needs to look at the landscape. From Lake de Neveu, to the Niagara Escarpment and across the rolling farmfields hills, Empire is a beautiful community with wonderful views and expanding development potential. These attributes are echoed in the value statements presented in Chapter 1 and the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats listed in Chapter 2.

Land use is the central element of a comprehensive plan. Previous chapters have discussed:

- Projected population growth;
- The quality housing available in the Town and potential future housing needs;
- Transportation network challenges with increasing population growth;
- Available utilities and community facilities;
- Local business choices and economic growth opportunities; and,
- Empire's abundant natural resources.
- Farmland preservation efforts.

Of the 14 local planning goals provided in the Comprehensive Planning Law, Empire believes that the goals listed below specifically relate to planning for land use within our community:

1. Promotion of the redevelopment of lands with current infrastructure and public services and the maintenance and rehabilitation of existing residential, commercial and industrial structures.
2. Encouragement of neighborhood designs that support a range of transportation choices.
3. Protection of natural areas, including wetlands, wildlife habitats, lakes, woodlands, open space and ground water resources.
4. Protection of economically productive areas, including farmland and forests.
5. Encouragement of land uses, densities and regulations that promote efficient development patterns and relatively low municipal, state governmental and utility costs.
6. Preservation of cultural, historical and archaeological sites.
7. Providing adequate infrastructure and public services and an adequate supply of developable land to meet existing and future market demand for residential, commercial and industrial uses.
8. Balancing individual property rights with community interests and goals.
9. Planning and development of land uses that create or preserve varied and unique urban and rural communities.

8.2 Planning From the Outside-In

Planners have long taken the approach to land use planning that future development would grow out of the established core of developed incorporated communities (cities and villages). Land within the path of development would be consumed for more intensive-type land uses (residential, commercial, industrial). This approach is certainly valid for growing communities as they plan their infrastructure and service systems, but it does little to preserve the value of natural resource type land uses which Empire residents' value.

The traditional approach also assumes that land used for undeveloped purposes doesn't hold the same economic value as developed land. In addition, many future land use plan maps for cities and villages grossly overestimate the actual land required to accommodate future growth. Often, the intent is to hold back the encroachment of incompatible agricultural use and make it ready for accommodating development.

Land use planning for rural counties and towns is very different. Towns like Empire have some ability to accommodate more intensive types of land uses due to the availability of public sewer.. Non-agricultural related residential developments are often located beyond these serviced areas on larger lots that can accommodate individual wells and on-site wastewater treatment systems. In addition, scattered non-agricultural related development can create barriers to agricultural expansion and profitability.

A better approach to land use planning for rural counties and towns is to “Plan from the Outside-In”. Basically, this approach gives all land equal value and establishes future use based on the strengths of the features of the land. Current or existing land use plays a big part in determining future use. The reason for this is current land use has weathered economic challenges (such as the 2008 recession) and stands a greater chance of carrying that use forward into the future. Changes from the existing land use pattern are considered in certain locations but are driven by how the local town interprets pressure (or market) for that change and what services it may require. Should unique land use opportunities arise, they will most likely be addressed on a case-by-case basis and be weighed against compatibility with existing uses around them. A recent example is the influx of renewable energy systems in rural areas.

The Town of Empire embraces the “Planning from the Outside-In” approach. The town is rural by nature and heavily influenced by farming and natural resources. Under this approach, defining the value of “Working Lands” in the town becomes critically important. The intent being these are not just “holding areas” until a better use comes along. The town is vested in their value for the long term.

The result of this planning approach will create a Future Land Use Plan Map that:

- Represents a better reality for attaining the projected future land uses for the town.
- Uses established criterion for the value of agriculture and other working lands within the town
- Elevates agriculture and natural resource features as a future land use type (not just a holding area for future development).
- Accommodates agricultural related business as an economic opportunity.

More discussion occurs later in this chapter regarding the designation of agricultural lands as “Working Lands” on the 2040 Future Land Use Map.

8.2 Current Land Use Inventory

As show on Map 8-1, Table 8-1, and Figure 8-1, a majority of the town (85.8%) is in agricultural and woodland uses accounting for more than 15,800 acres of land. Residential uses, both within existing subdivisions, as well as scattered rural development, account for nearly 8%, or 1,465 acres, of land within the town. The net density (total number of dwelling units divided by all residential acres) in the Town is .79 dwelling units/acre (1,160 housing units/1,495 acres).



Table 8-1: Existing Land Use

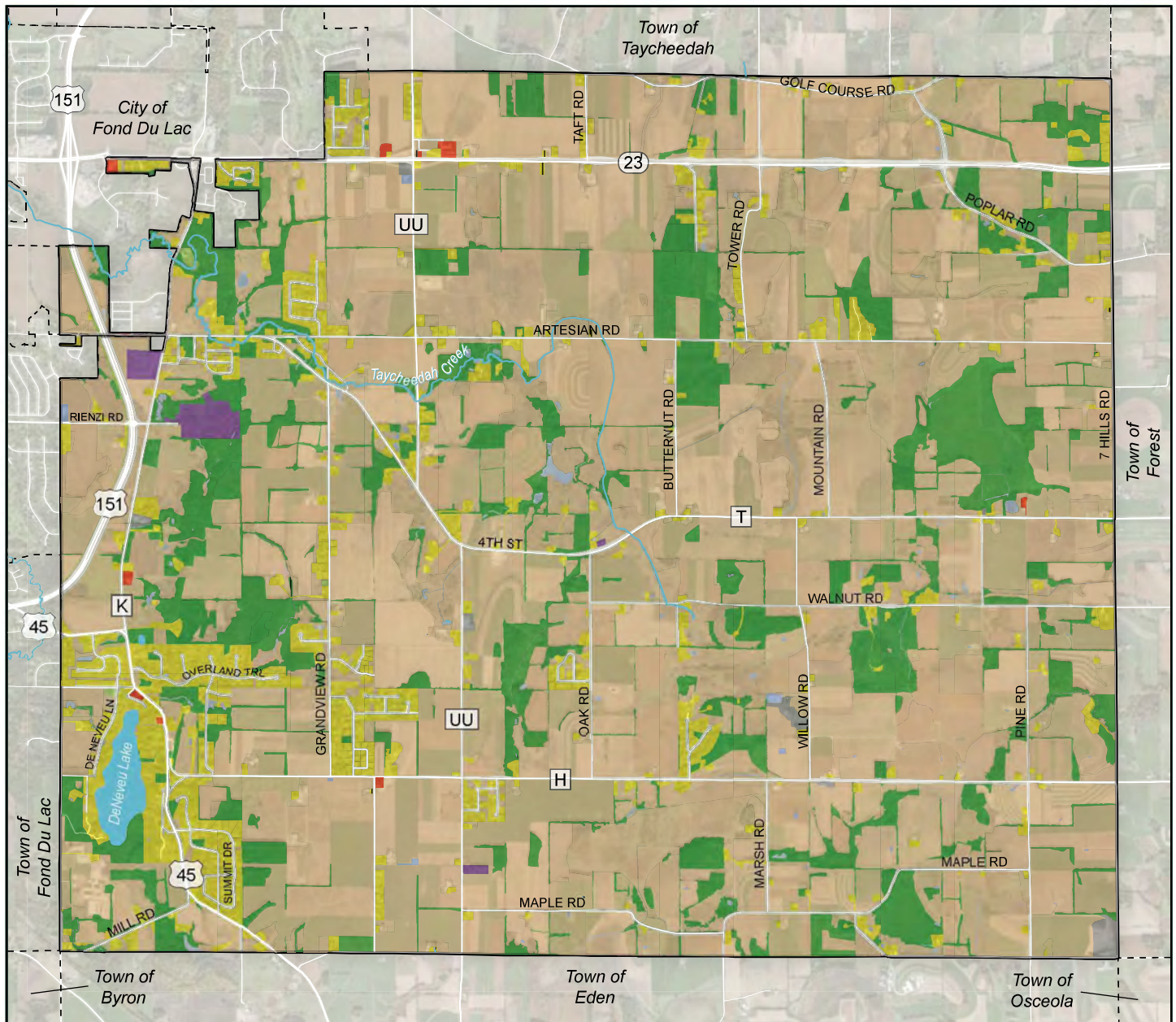
Category	Acres	Percentage		Acreage	Percentage
Residential	1,465.08	7.94%	Intensive	2,415.12	13.09%
Commercial	20.74	0.11%			
Industrial/Quarries	44.46	0.24%			
Communication/Utilities	14.28	0.08%			
Institutional/Governmental	71.80	0.39%			
Transportation/ROW	798.76	4.33%			
Agriculture & Other Open Land	13,230.61	71.70%	Passive	16,037.17	86.91%
Parks and Recreation	16.40	0.09%			
Water Features	190.36	1.03%			
Woodlands	2,599.80	14.09%			
Total	18,452.29	100.00%		18,452.29	100.00%

Source: Town of Empire and Cedar Corporation.

Figure 8-1: Existing Land Use



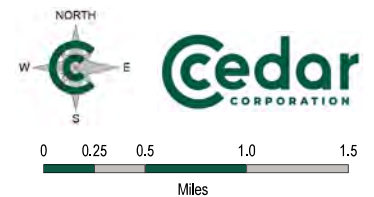
Map 8-1: Existing Land Use



Existing Land Use

Town of Empire Fond du Lac County, WI

- | | |
|---|--|
| ■ Residential | ■ Institutional/Governmental |
| ■ Commercial | ■ Agricultural/Other Open Land |
| ■ Industrial/Quarries | ■ Parks and Recreation |
| ■ Transportation | ■ Woodlands |
| ■ Communication/Utilities | ■ Water |



This base map was created with data from Fond du Lac County who assumes no liability for the accuracy of this data and any use or misuse of its content is the responsibility of the user. Changes were made by Cedar Corporation under the direction of the Town of Empire. Map Date: April 1, 2024.



8.3. Land Use & Development Regulations

Zoning Regulations

The Town of Empire has adopted and enforces its own local zoning ordinance. The zoning ordinance organizes the community into different districts. Within each district, specific uses are permitted subject to certain requirements. Six basic zoning districts exist, ranging from two types of Agricultural Districts (which conform to the County's Farmland Preservation Plan and DATCP standards (see Map 8-2), and one District each for Residential (R-1), Business (BD), and Industrial (ID). Dimensional standards exist for each District and lots sizes can vary for residential uses based on the availability of sanitary sewer. For additional information refer to the Town of Empire Zoning Ordinance.

Subdivision Regulations

The Town of Empire Land Division Ordinance outlines procedures for land division, technical requirements, design standards for plats and certified survey maps, and outlines required improvements (i.e. stormwater detention, public and private sewage, land dedication). The ordinance also includes provisions for open spaces in subdivisions but provides limited guidance for such development design and objectives.

Extraterritorial Zoning

Currently, extraterritorial zoning is not in effect in the Town of Empire. There are no plans to establish extraterritorial zoning at this time. The process for adopting an extraterritorial zoning ordinance is as follows:

There are many potential benefits to approving an extraterritorial zoning ordinance, including:

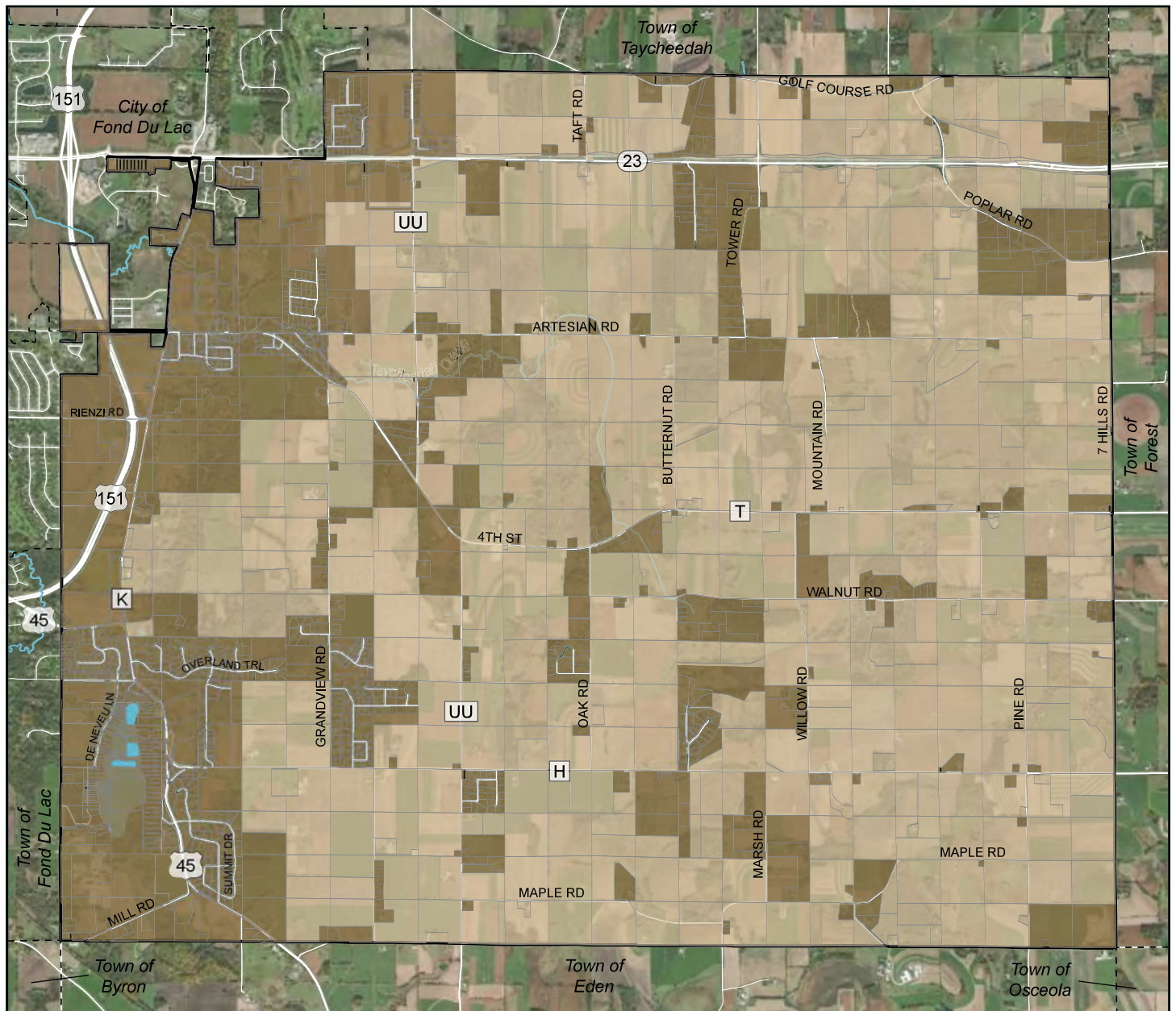
- Can provide for smoother transitions between rural and urban land uses.
- Can reduce conflicting land uses, which can reduce citizen complaints and protect property values.
- Can help to promote intergovernmental cooperation and communication.
- Can help to avoid multiple communications towers and similar duplications.
- Can make planning for roads, utilities, recreation facilities, etc. easier.
- Allows for coordination related to protection of sensitive areas and valued natural resources.

Extraterritorial Plat Review

The City of Fond du Lac does exercise extraterritorial plat review authority at this time, but Empire and Fond du Lac have mapped planning/growth areas. The City of Fond du Lac has the ability to adopt extraterritorial plat review authority without forming a joint committee or requiring any Town approval. The town will continue to work with the City to ensure growth patterns are consistent with this and future plans.








Map 8-2: Farmland Preservation Areas



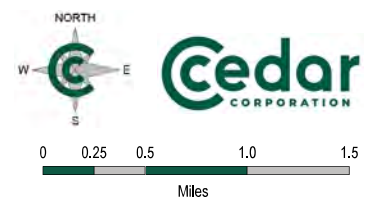
Farmland Preservation

Town of Empire
Fond du Lac County, WI

Farmland Preservation Areas*

- | | |
|---|--|
|  Areas of Agricultural Use and Agriculture Related Use |  Parcel Boundary |
|  Areas of Nonagricultural Development |  Town of Empire |
| |  Municipal Boundary |

*Farmland Preservation Plan, Fond du Lac County, 2021.



This base map was created with data from Fond du Lac County who assumes no liability for the accuracy of this data and any use or misuse of its content is the responsibility of the user. Changes were made by Cedar Corporation under the direction of the Town of Empire. Map Date: April 4, 2024.



8.4 Trends in Supply, Demand, and Price of Land

Agriculture

Residents have continued to expressed a strong desire to retain farmland in the town. Simultaneously, the local farming economy has continued to see the number of area farms decrease. This can be attributed to diminished farm product returns, aging farmers seeking retirement through land sales, and demands for rural housing. Currently, agricultural lands are in high demand for agricultural use, particularly with the need for lands to spread manure, and to support agricultural infrastructure. There are not any large tracts of farmland for sale within the town currently, but within eastern Fond du Lac County, several larger properties are for sale with per acre costs running between \$10,000 and \$16,500, or about \$400,000-\$650,000 for a 40-acre parcel. Long-term agricultural uses are most likely to continue in the easternmost reaches of the township, where development pressures have not been as substantial. The continuation of farmland in the westernmost areas of the Town will require dedicated farmers committed to farming and not selling property for residential development. Transitions of farmland to other uses may occur, but will require amendments to the existing Farmland Preservation Plan map and associated zoning.

Residential Development

Residential development accounts for only about 8% of the land in the Town. From a tax base standpoint, however, it accounts for a far greater percentage of the local tax revenue. During the past 10 years, new housing development has been limited, and the effects of the nation-wide housing shortage have created market conditions whereby very few homes have become available for sale within the town. A review of properties currently for sale on Realtor.com and Zillow.com show about four homes ranging from \$435,000 to \$1.1 million depending on the amount of acreage that comes with it. Most for sale homes within subdivided areas (approx. 1/2 acre lots) appear to average about \$450,000. There are very few platted subdivision lots available within the town currently. Several existing lots are for sale in the \$25,000 (.35 acre) to \$42,500 (.4-.5 acre) range. This means that a rural, one-acre lot could generally be about \$100,000. There is a growing realization that residents living in the Town must be able to live and maintain a single family home on a sizeable lot. If they are not able to handle this responsibility, or if they desire some other type of living (i.e. townhomes, condos, etc.) they have to move. This situation particularly challenges the elderly. Presently, the town permits multi-family dwellings in most zoning districts as a conditional use. It is possible, if market conditions are right, that a developer make seek to create market-rate apartments and/or othersenior housing development to capitalize on the quiet, rural setting within a close proximity to services.

Commercial & Industrial Development & Redevelopment

As has been demonstrated throughout this plan, commercial and industrial development represents a very small portion of the community. Local resident sentiment would like to see this continue in the future, although agricultural related businesses would be welcomed. Though still only a small fraction of land in the Town, commercial and industrial activities are becoming more common, especially along WIS 23. With the recent expansion of WIS 151 and WIS STH 23, commercial and industrial development demands will likely increase near these corridors. Currently, only one commercial property is listed for sale along WIS 23 for \$499,000 (2.55 acres). There are very limited, if any opportunities for redevelopment given the primarily rural nature of the town.



8.5 Future Land Use & 2040 Future Land Use Map

This section describes the strategy used in the development of the Town of Empire's Year 2040 Future Land Use Plan Map (Map 8-3). The land use development strategy included analysis of historic information, knowledge and analysis of current issues, identification of trends and conditions, and vision for the future acquired through public engagement. The 2040 Future Land Use Map graphically represents the desired arrangement of preferred use of land on Empire's landscape 20 years into the future. It should be utilized to support future rezonings and land divisions (WI Stats 66.1001).

The 2040 Future Land Use Plan Map must not only react to desired land use patterns, but it must also evaluate the ability to accommodate future development pressures which will most likely take the form of new single-family residential development. The 2040 Future Land Use Map illustrates the anticipated amount, location, and intensity of new development, as well as areas which are intended to be protected from significant development in order to preserve and protect agricultural and environmentally significant lands. Table 8.2 illustrates the allocations and projections of acreages for future land uses based on broad categories shown on Map 8-3. The Future Land Use Map includes the following categories of land use as described below.

Agricultural Uses & Working Lands Overlay

Town of Empire residents have expressed an interest in maintaining the rural atmosphere (character) within their town. Often, a big part of that appeal aligns with production agriculture at its base. Open fields, crop land, forestry all comprise portions of the rural character most enjoyed within the town. But those areas have an economic responsibility back to the landowners who own it. Owning significant acreage is expensive so much of that acreage is "put to work" in agricultural activities, mostly crop land. If these areas are to remain in the town, they will require some protections as well and be allowed to continue without threats from neighboring "nonfarm" use owners. The 2040 Future Land Use Map identifies about 10,796 acres (58.5% of the Town) as being agricultural in nature. This categorical designation includes all active and passive farmlands, as well as some farmlands that are associated with existing rural residential uses.

In addition to the base level categorization of these lands, two additional components related to agricultural lands have been incorporated into the map: a land use overlay depicting active farmlands which are referred to as "Working Lands" as a method to provide a transparent landscape for all farm and non-farm land use owners, and the location of Intensive Farm Operations (IFOs).

Working Lands Overlay

"Working Lands" is a concept that addresses agricultural lands as being more than just "holding areas" until a better use comes along. The town is vested in the value of these lands for the long term. The result of this planning approach will create a Future Land Use Plan Map which:

1. Represents a better reality for attaining the projected future land uses for the town.
2. Uses established criterion for the value of agriculture and other working lands within the town.
3. Elevates agriculture and natural resource features as a future land use type (not just a holding area for future development).
4. Accommodates agricultural related business as an economic opportunity.

The Working Lands Overlay is generally defined actively farmed lands which have long-term opportunities for preservation and the continuation of agricultural, or agriculturally-related uses. For the Town of Empire, Working Lands consist of all agriculturally used lands on parcels of more than five acres which are identified as Farmland Preservation Areas in the Fond du Lac County Farmland Preservation Plan. The Working Lands Overlay concept can be administered by the Town via a number of different review procedures including:

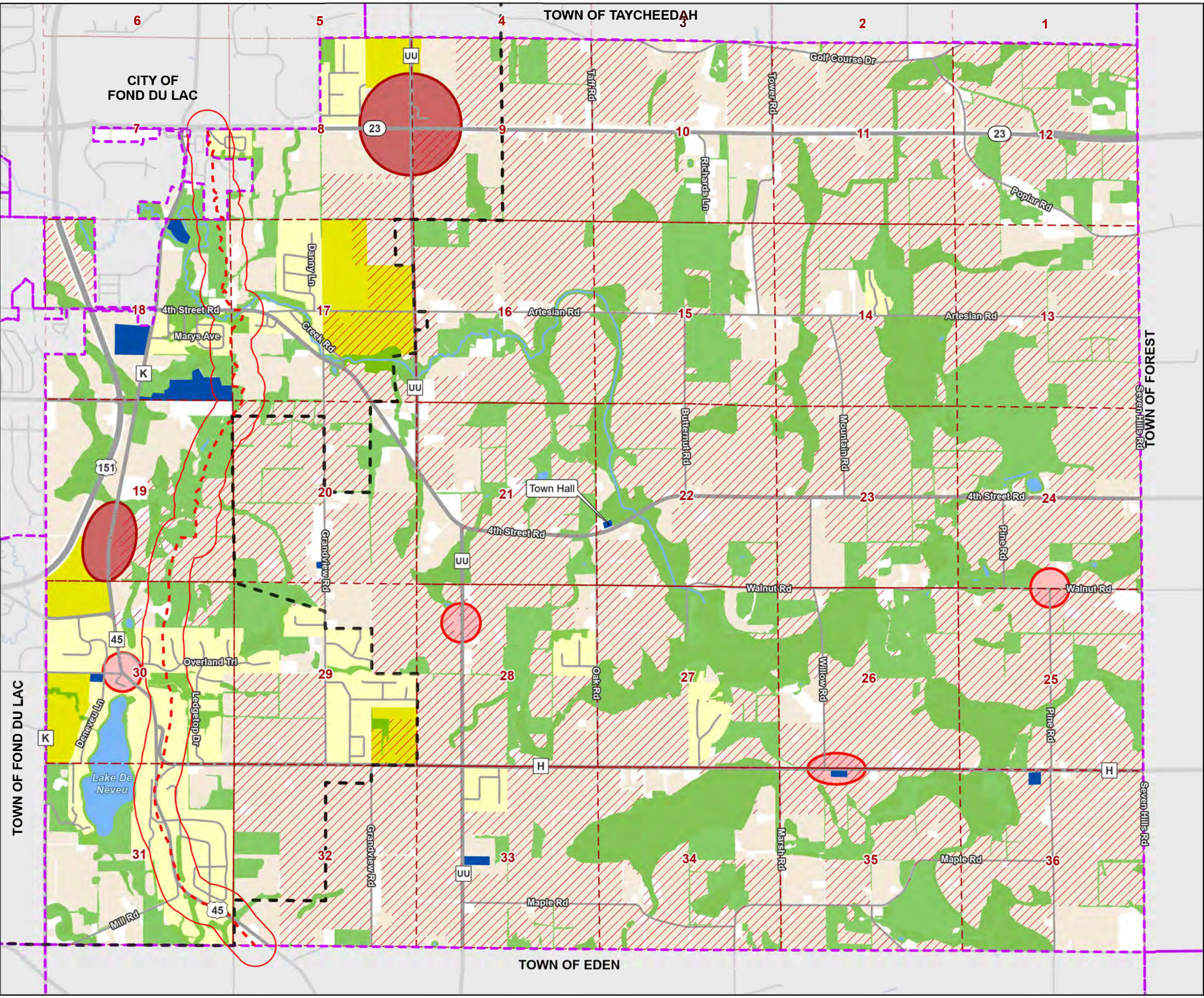


Town of Empire

Fond du Lac County

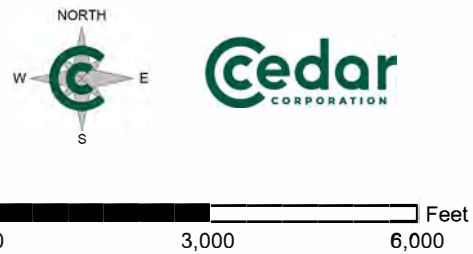
Map 8-3

2040 Future Land Use



- Agriculture/Other Open Land
 - Working Lands
 - Highway Business/Industrial
 - Rural Commercial/Industrial
 - Existing Single Family Residential
 - Future Single Family Residential
 - Public/Institutional/Utility
 - Future Urban Area
 - Niagara Escarpment Brow
 - 600-Foot Niagara Escarpment Brow Buffer
 - Environmental Corridors*
- *Consists of Wetlands, 100-Year Floodplain, Woodlands (=>5 acres), and Surface Water with a 75-foot buffer.*

- Base Features**
- Municipal Boundaries
 - PLSS Sections
 - Waterbody



This base map was created with data from Fond du Lac County Planning Department who assumes no liability for the accuracy of this data and any use or misuse of its content is the responsibility of the user. Changes were made by Cedar Corporation under the direction of the Town of Empire.

Map Updated: February 25, 2025

BACK OF MAP 8-3 - 2040 FLU



Land Use Projections in 5-Year Increments

Approximately 84 new housing units are projected to be built over the next 17 years. The Future Land Use Map illustrates approximately 445 total acres to accommodate this use which includes factors for infrastructure and market competition. In terms of other land uses, the projected demands for commercial, industrial, institutional, and recreational land use assumes that the ratio of the Town's 2024 population or housing units as compared to current land areas in each use will remain the same in the future. In other words, each new person or home will require the same amount of land for each particular land use as it does today. Based on these assumptions, a total of 319 additional acres of land will be converted to accommodate these non-residential uses, bringing the total potential land use consumption to 764 acres over the 17-year planning period. Table 8-2 illustrates these acreage consumption figures, with an estimate of how much land might be consumed or converted in five year increments.

Table 8-2: Future Land Use & 5-Year Projection Increments

Category	2025 Acres	% of Town	Projected Land Use Change (Acreage Consumption)		
			2030 Acres	2035 Acres	2040 Acres
Agriculture/Other Open Land	10,796.4	58.51%	10,616.4	10,166.4	9,402.4
Highway Business/Industrial	221.8	1.20%	40.0	100.0	221.8
Rural Commercial/Industrial	97.2	0.53%	20.0	50.0	97.2
Existing Single Family Residential	1,419.1	7.69%	1,419.1	1,419.1	1,419.1
Future Single Family Residential	445.0	2.41%	120.0	300.0	445.0
Public/Institutional/Utility	87.7	0.48%	87.7	87.7	87.7
Environmental Features	4,494.9	24.36%	4,994.9	4,994.9	4,994.9
Transportation	798.8	4.33%	798.8	798.8	798.8
Water Body	91.6	0.50%	91.6	91.6	91.6
Totals	18,452.3		180.0	450.0	764.0



1. Processes for both opting-in, and opting-out of the Working Lands designation as part of the Comprehensive Plan and the County's Farmland Preservation Plan;
2. The types of agricultural-related businesses which could co-exist with lands designated as Working Lands, and;
3. The term's relationship to the Town's Zoning and Land Division Ordinances and the future use of Working Lands properties.

Intensive Farming Operations

The active intensive farm operations (IFOs) and farm-related infrastructure have been identified within the Town and are shown on the 2040 Future Land Use Map. The IFO definition can include typical farm facilities such as barns, large machine type sheds, feedlots, grain storage, and the like. It should be noted that a farmhouse or residence is not required to meet the definition of an IFO if it has already transitioned to non-farm use. It also can be noted that an IFO does not need to be an "active" farming operation but holds opportunities for active farming practices such as the raising of livestock and other farm animals as defined by DATCP, the storing and/or drying of grain, the storage and operation of farm equipment or other farm related activities. This happens commonly when active farming operations lease or rent these facilities. The location of existing IFOs was not a primary factor in determining the "working lands," but is useful to know in terms of their relationship. Also, while not illustrated on the map, the town may wish to consider the creation of buffer zones around these IFO locations as part of its zoning regulations to further protect them from being surrounded by incompatible uses.

Glossary of Terms

The administration of the town's Working Lands Initiative requires some understanding of terminology. The following terms are clarified:

- Agricultural Use: Any of the following activities conducted for the purpose of producing an income or livelihood, or if operated as a hobby-farm:
 1. Crop or forage production.
 2. Keeping livestock.
 3. Beekeeping.
 4. Nursery, sod, or Christmas tree production.
 5. Floriculture.
 6. Aquaculture.
 7. Fur farming.
 8. Forest management (Includes tree farms).
 9. Enrolling land in a federal agricultural commodity payment program or a federal or state agricultural land conservation payment program.
 10. Any other use that the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection, by rule, identifies as an agricultural use.
 11. Equestrian boarding, training, and riding facilities (Definition is not recognized by DATCP as an Agricultural Use), including supporting pasture and crop land.
 12. Any other use that the town approves of as an agricultural use (but likely not recognized by DATCP as an Agricultural Use).



- **Agriculture-Related Business Use:** May include private business uses such as: an agricultural equipment dealership; facility providing agricultural supplies; facility for storing or processing agricultural products; or, a facility for processing agricultural wastes. In addition, any use that the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection identifies by rule as an agriculture-related use. An “agricultural related use” must be primary (not just incidentally) related to agriculture and must have a direct connection to agriculture uses.
- **Agritourism Use:** Any form of commercial enterprise that links agricultural production and/or processing with tourism to attract visitors onto a farm.
- **Nonfarm Residence or Use:** Any residence or use that has no association with agriculture use or agriculture related uses.
- **Farm and/or Agricultural Use or Agricultural Related Use Residence:** A single-family or two family residence that is the only residential structure on the farm or agricultural parcel that is occupied by any one of the following:
 1. An owner or operator of the farm or agricultural parcel owner.
 2. A parent or child of an owner or operator of the farm or agricultural parcel owner.
 3. An individual who produces agricultural products from the parcel for sale and/or personal sustenance.
- **Residential “Agrihood”:** Single-family, multifamily, or mixed-use communities built with a working farm or community garden as a focus, and which are directly connected to farming operations.
- **Working Lands:** Actively farmed lands which have long-term opportunities for preservation and the continuation of agricultural, or agriculturally-related, uses. The lands designated “Working Lands” are included as an overlay to certain areas of the Town as shown on the Town of Empire’s 2040 Future Land Use Map. The Working Lands overlay is comprised of land which was part of a detailed analysis which included specific criteria. The criteria were as follows:
 1. Exclusion of all parcels located west of the maximum extent of future urbanization based on a variety of boundaries including municipal agreements, sewer service areas, and sanitary districts.
 2. Exclusion of all parcels \leq 5 acres;
 3. Inclusion of all existing Farmland Preservation parcels as identified in the Fond du Lac County Farmland Preservation Plan.

Administration

The Working Lands Overlay is generally defined as actively farmed lands which have long-term opportunities for preservation and the continuation of agricultural, or agriculturally-related uses. The 2040 Future Land Use Map includes approximately 9,538 acres (51.7% of the Town) in the Working Lands Overlay. The Working Lands Overlay concept can be administered by the Town via a number of different review procedures including:



1. Processes for both opting-in, and opting-out of the Working Lands designation as part of the Comprehensive Plan;
2. The types of agricultural-related businesses which could co-exist with lands designated as Working Lands, and;
3. The term's relationship to town's Zoning and Land Division Ordinances and the future use of Working Lands properties.

What follows is more detailed guidance on the administration of the Comprehensive Plan's Working Lands Initiative.

- Requesting Land for Inclusion into the Working Lands Overlay
For lands to be added to the Working Lands designation, a comprehensive plan amendment shall be required. As with any comprehensive plan amendment, the basic process would include an application submittal, review by town staff, a public hearing, and approval by both the town's Plan Commission and Town Board.

Adding land into the Working Lands designation acknowledges the use of the land for long-term agriculture management and agriculture related business and activities. Designation as Working Lands also offers property owners the "Right to Farm" in the town when farming practices are challenged by non-farm residents. For land to be eligible for inclusion in the Working Lands designation, the parcels must generally meet criteria 1 and 2 listed in the previous definition.

- Requesting Land for Removal from the Working Lands Overlay
For lands to be removed from the Working Lands Overlay, a comprehensive plan amendment shall be required. As with any comprehensive plan amendment, the basic process would include an application submittal, review by town staff, a public hearing, and approval by both the town's Plan Commission and Town Board.

Reasons for removal could vary but it is assumed the primary reason would likely include an interest by the land owner to propose a use contrary to agriculture or agricultural-related use. The town may wish to consider drafting formal guidelines for assessing proposed removals from the Working Lands Overlay so that there is consistency in such decision-making over time. The criteria could include items such as:

1. The land is better suited for a use not allowed in Working Lands Overlay.
2. The removal of lands will not substantially impair or limit current or future agricultural use of surrounding parcels of land that are zoned for or legally restricted to agricultural use.
3. The removal is due to transfer of ownership of the property.
4. The removal is based on other economic considerations related to the farming economy.
5. Assessing the effect of future land divisions and requirements for designating remnant agricultural lands for permanent agricultural use through the CSM process.



Existing Single Family Residential

These areas reflect existing residential subdivision development in the Town of Empire in existence at the time this plan was completed. Individual homes in the rural portions of the Town were not included in this category. These uses account for approximately 1,419 acres, or 7.7% of the entire Town.

Future Single Family Residential

Future Single Family Residential areas are designated on the 2040 Future Land Use Map to accommodate projected population gains. These areas are primarily located within (west of) the Future Urban Extent boundary where existing sanitary sewer services are available. The Future Urban Extent boundary represents the long-term (beyond 20 years) growth that could be accommodated within the maximum extent of growth area agreements with the City of Fond du Lac, as well as the outer extent of the Fond du Lac Sewer Service Area Plan's Planning Area Boundary. Approximately 444 acres of land have been allocated on the 2040 Future Land Use Map and are, for the most part, adjacent to existing subdivision development. These areas can be generally described as follows:

- Lands to the west of CTH K and west of Deneveau Lane.
- Lands just north of CTH H, between Grandview Road and CTH UU.
- Lands west of CTH UU and north of 4th Street Road.
- Lands in the northwest quadrant of the CTH UU and STH 23 interchange.

The 444 acres are more than is “required” to ensure that there is adequate space for future residential use.

Highway Business/Industrial

Two generalized areas have been identified for future highway-oriented commercial and light industrial uses (as appropriate) which encompass approximately 222 acres. These areas are located adjacent to major highway corridors at the intersection of CTH UU and STH 23, as well as along CTH K to the east of USH 151.

Rural Commercial/Industrial

There are some small, local business uses and non-metallic mining uses scattered around the rural portions of the Town of Empire. This category includes approximately 97 acres and recognizes those land uses as well as the compatibility of allowing some low level increases of similar types of uses in these general areas. No additional non-metallic mining is contemplated for these areas and should such proposals for expansions or new sites would need to comply with the Town's Zoning Ordinance as well as the provisions of NR 135 for reclamation.



Public/Institutional/Utilities

This category accounts for approximately 88 acres and includes existing facilities such as the Empire Town Hall, local churches, cemetery, and utility uses. No major expansion of these types of uses is contemplated during the plan design period.

Environmental Features

This category includes approximately 4,495 acres and includes all WDNR designated wetlands, FEMA 100 year floodplains, woodlands 5-acres in size or more, and a 75-foot buffer of areas adjacent to navigable waterways (i.e. shoreline protection areas). These lands are critical to providing environmental functions (such as filtering stormwater and retaining floodwaters), as well as providing wildlife habitat and scenic beauty. The plan calls for these areas to be protected from the impacts of new development and are regulated through the Town's Critical Overlay District within its Zoning Code.

Niagara Escarpment Brow/Buffer

The Niagara Escarpment Brow/Buffer was reviewed during this Comprehensive Plan Update and, based on more accurate and detailed information (Fond du Lac County digital contours and LiDAR data) was adjusted to better represent the location of this feature on the landscape. The term "brow" generally refers to the uppermost portion, or top, of the cliff face. Since visible cliff faces are not present along the entire escarpment corridor within the town, the refined Niagara Escarpment Brow line leans heavily on the topographic contours and attempts to place its location on or near the highest point of the steepest slopes associated with the escarpment corridor. Where the brow is not conclusive, lines connecting the 'known' segments were generated based on topography.

In addition, a 600' buffer is provided on either side of the Niagara Escarpment Brow for the purposes of restricting and/or regulating certain types of development in order to protect this natural feature consistent with the provisions of the Critical Overlay District.

8.6 Land Use Vision

To preserve our rural character, protect our natural and historical resources, promote sustainable growth, and provide a legacy which will enrich the lives of future generations.

8.7 Land Use Goals & Strategies

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. Strategies are more specific than goals and provide a more measurable direction for future actions and implementation of the plan. Strategies can be viewed partially as 'objectives', as well as perhaps containing some 'policy' statements or thoughts. Moving along the path of the indicated strategies contributes to fulfillment of the goal.

Goal 8.1: Maintain the rural character of the Town of Empire.

Strategy 8.1: Utilize the Comprehensive Plan to guide future development within the community to ensure that the rural character of Empire is preserved for future generations.

Strategy 8.2: Direct residential and commercial development to those areas identified on the Future Land Use Map. Ninety percent of the Town's new development should be directed to the areas noted as being "urban" in the future, with the remaining ten percent being located in the rural portion of the town, avoiding Farmland Preservation Areas.

Strategy 8.3: Restrict development to locations which are not classified as prime agricultural soils, and are consistent with the Fond du Lac County Farmland Preservation Plan.

Strategy 8.4: Reduce fragmentation of environmental features and corridors that affect the migration patterns of animals and the overall rural and natural attributes of the community through use of the Critical Areas Overlay in the Empire Zoning Ordinance.

Strategy 8.5: Amend the Empire Zoning Ordinance to establish provisions related to exterior lighting (i.e. establish restrictions on outdoor lighting for homes and businesses to preserve dark skies and minimize impact on neighbors).

Strategy 8.6: Cooperate with Fond du Lac County on the implementation of the Farmland Preservation Plan in order to maintain DATCP Farmland Preservation Zoning certification.



Chapter 9 - Intergovernmental Cooperation

9.1 Introduction

Intergovernmental cooperation involves working with adjacent and overlapping governmental jurisdictions to understand how each other's future planning activities will impact the Town of Empire. At a minimum, this involves sharing information about the Town's plans with neighboring communities and agencies and vice versa. However, Empire believes intergovernmental cooperation should not end with the sharing of plans. Instead, this process should be the beginning for joint planning and decision-making, conflict resolution, and other strategies to promote regional coordination, all of which could assist in the implementation of said plans. Wisconsin's Comprehensive Planning Law includes 14 goals for local comprehensive planning. The goals listed below specifically relate to planning for intergovernmental cooperation:

- Encouragement of land uses, densities and regulations that promote efficient development patterns and relatively low municipal, state governmental and utility costs.
- Providing an integrated, efficient and economical transportation system that affords mobility, convenience and safety and that meets the needs of all citizens, including transit-dependent and disabled citizens.

The Comprehensive Planning Law requires the Town of Empire to coordinate with the:

- Towns of Taycheedah, Forest, Eden, and Fond du Lac
- City of Fond du Lac
- Fond du Lac County
- Campbellsport School District
- Fond du Lac School District
- East Central Wisconsin RPC
- State Agencies, including: WDOA, WDNR, and WisDOT

9.2 Existing Intergovernmental Activities

Many intergovernmental programs already in effect impact the Town of Empire. This section highlights programs that are currently in place.

Adjacent Units of Government

Empire's relationship with neighboring Towns can be characterized as one of mutual respect and compatibility from a land use and political standpoint. These Towns share a common character with Empire. Since Towns cannot annex land from one another, boundary disputes are non-existent. Public services such as road maintenance and construction are conducted individually by each community. However, as mutually beneficial opportunities for shared services arise, the Town of Empire is open to considering shared services options.



The Town of Empire shares a portion of its western boundary with the City of Fond du Lac. While Empire residents enjoy access to the city's nearby parks, library and business areas, Fond du Lac is the community with the greatest potential for future conflict over land use with the Town of Empire, particularly as it relates to possible annexation. Currently, the Town is part of an intergovernmental boundary and growth agreement between the City of Fond du Lac and Towns of Fond du Lac, Taycheedah and Friendship, as well as a separate Outlying Sewer Users Group (OSG) agreements between the City of Fond du Lac and various town sanitary districts. The agreements set forth the procedures, terms and conditions by which the parties wish to achieve the following mutual goals:

- Orderly, planned growth for the City and the Towns and the provision of appropriate, cost-effective shared municipal services for such development;
- Orderly boundaries between the City and the Towns, promoting cost-effective provision of services and more efficient operation of all units of government;
- Continual City growth to provide the City with an ever-renewing and expanding tax base and a pool of citizen leadership;
- Continual development for the Towns to replace tax base lost due to City growth, so that the Towns may also have an ever-renewing and expanding tax base and a pool of citizen leadership;
- Promotion of diversity and balanced development in the City and the Towns;
- Prevention of unplanned development leading to urban sprawl, and protection of the area's natural resources, including its lakes, streams, rivers, wetlands, and woodlands; and,
- Promotion of quality development in the City and the Towns.

School Districts

The Town's relationship with the Campbellsport and Fond du Lac School Districts can be characterized as cooperative. The Town appreciates the quality service provided by the school districts and the fact that the schools are a draw to the area for new residents. Regular and open communication is critical to ensure that this cooperative relationship will continue and be strengthened as growth continues.

Fond du Lac County

The Town of Empire is located in Fond du Lac County. The County provides many programs, services, and facilities (i.e., parks) that are available to Empire residents. Fond du Lac County programs that most directly impact Empire include:

- County highway maintenance and improvement programs.
- Sheriff and emergency management services
- Library funding support
- Social services
- Planning department
- Town road maintenance and rating assistance.

In areas where Fond du Lac County has jurisdiction, the County attempts to get input from the Town before making decisions affecting the Town. Future communication will also be especially important as it relates to items such as land divisions, shoreland zoning, stormwater management, farmland preservation, and public safety.



East Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission

The East Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission is an advisory regional government established by the state in cooperation with counties which exists to provide planning services, many of which cross governmental boundaries. The ECWRPC is responsible for a number of regional programs and is heavily involved in both the administration of the Fond du Lac Sewer Service Area Plan (SSA Plan) and providing support for the Fond du Lac Metropolitan Planning Organization (or MPO) which focuses on the regional transportation system. The Town of Empire is affected by, and included, as part of both regional planning efforts and the Town actively participates in meetings related to these efforts.

State Agencies

WDNR, DATCP, and WisDOT are the primary state agencies with who Empire must coordinate to achieve the goals and objectives of this plan. WDNR takes a lead role in wildlife protection and the sustainable management of woodlands, stormwater regulations, wetlands and other natural wildlife habitat areas. WisDOT is a key player in the planning and development of highways and pedestrian/cycling facilities in the Town and region. Empire has a good relationship with WisDOT, and will continue to communicate with the agency directly and through the MPO process about the land use and transportation decisions made locally. DATCP addresses many matters within a rural landscape, including playing a major role with respect to oversight on County and local farmland preservation planning and zoning activities.

9.3 Existing and Proposed Plans

Adjacent Units of Government

Of the communities surrounding Empire, only the Town of Forest appears not to have a comprehensive plan adopted, per WDOA data. In addition to the efforts identified above, the Fond du Lac Metropolitan Planning Organization has completed the Long Range Transportation/Land Use plan for the communities within the MPO.

Empire should consider working with its neighbors to ensure plans are consistent with one another by reviewing draft plans and offering feedback. Communication between communities is important to the success of Comprehensive Planning efforts.

In order to improve communication with ECWRPC and to avoid inconsistency in plan development and implementation, a series of activities and programs are identified in the Intergovernmental Cooperation section of the Implementation Chapter.

To ensure compatibility with the goals and objectives of this plan, Empire should be willing to participate in the planning efforts of its neighboring communities, counties, and ECWRPC as opportunities arise.

.



Campbellsport and Fond du Lac School Districts

At this time, no school district has plans to construct new facilities within the Town of Empire. In order to facilitate future school district planning efforts, the Utilities and Community Facilities Chapter of this plan recommends the Town continue to work with the schools districts on future facilities and studies as needed.

The two school districts serving the Town have a long history of planning for improvements and expansion in response to population growth rates. The districts' facilities can accommodate a significant number of new students. Since school district boundaries extend well beyond the Town, it is likely that new schools, if constructed, will be located outside of Empire. To further facilitate school district planning, this plan has been made available to those districts as a tool to predict future school enrollments from the Town of Empire.

State Agencies

The WDNR is a major agency involved in the acquisition and development of recreational/pedestrian trails. Furthermore, the WDNR takes a lead role in wildlife protection and the protection and sustained management of woodlands, wetlands and other natural wildlife habitat areas. These priorities are reflected in the natural resource goals, objectives and policies outlined in the Implementation Chapter.

The WisDOT has completed a series of statewide planning documents for use in the development of local comprehensive plans. These documents include plans for the state highway corridors, bicycle corridors, rail corridors, and air transportation. The plans were used as a starting point when preparing the Transportation Chapter of this plan.

DATCP addresses many matters within a rural landscape, including playing a major role with respect to oversight on County and local farmland preservation planning and zoning activities. This role is further described in the Agricultural, Natural, and Cultural Resources Chapter.



9.4 Intergovernmental Cooperation Vision

By 2040, intergovernmental cooperation efforts have allowed Empire to establish partnerships with neighboring communities, state agencies, the County, and the School Districts to provide coordinated, cost-effective services.

9.5 Intergovernmental Cooperation Goals & Strategies

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. Strategies are more specific than goals and provide a more measured direction for future actions and implementation of the plan. Strategies can be viewed partially as 'objectives', as well as perhaps containing some 'policy' statements or thoughts. Moving along the path of the indicated strategies contributes to fulfillment of the goal.

Goal 9.1: Empire will maintain and seek additional opportunities to improve communication with neighboring communities, the school districts, the WDNR, WisDOT, DATCP, Fond du Lac County, ECWRPC and other intergovernmental partners.

Strategy 9.1.1: Continue attending the Fond du Lac County unit of the Wisconsin Town's Association quarterly meetings. The meetings will maintain open lines of communication (attendees include local State Legislators, Fond du Lac County Executive, County Planner, County Highway Commissioner, County Sheriff etc.) and keep Board members apprised of pertinent issues.

Strategy 9.1.2: Participate in the planning activities as needed by the school districts, particularly with respect to expansion and building of new facilities.

Strategy 9.1.3: Recommend consideration of an intergovernmental review process for proposed large commercial, industrial and residential developments (especially those near Town borders). Even though there are growth and boundary agreements in place, particular land uses may still have impacts beyond municipal borders.

Goal 9.2: Resolve annexation and boundary disputes in a mutually beneficial manner.

Strategy 9.2.1: Maintain boundary and service agreements with the City of Fond du Lac to establish expansion areas in the future.

Strategy 9.2.2: Consider additional opportunities for shared service agreements between the City of Fond du Lac and Town of Empire such as potentially extending water service to portions of the Town.

Goal 9.3: Seek new ways to coordinate and share community facilities and services with neighboring communities, the school districts and Fond du Lac County.

Strategy 9.3.1: Consider additional opportunities (similar to the joint negotiations for waste collection) when signing contracts with private companies to coordinate with neighboring communities and the school districts that need similar services (i.e. plowing, resurfacing, etc.) and then negotiate with the private company for a reduced cost based on the larger project volume.

Strategy 9.3.2: Pursue opportunities to purchase expensive road maintenance equipment jointly with neighboring communities that can share the equipment in exchange for paying a portion of the purchase and maintenance costs

Strategy 9.3.3: Consider opportunities to lease existing Town equipment to generate revenue for the Town and avoid situations where neighboring communities and the school district own similar equipment that is underutilized.

Strategy 9.3.4: Consider snowplowing schedules that efficiently meet the needs of area residents. This may involve using Town equipment to plow portions of City streets (and vice versa) to maximize efficiencies.

Strategy 9.3.5: Investigate opportunities to provide garbage collection and recycling more efficiently by cooperating with neighboring communities and the school districts to coordinate collection times and contract negotiations with private providers to secure costs savings.

Strategy 9.3.6: Encourage the school districts to collaborate in ways that will allow them to provide additional services to Town residents (i.e. expanded library hours, youth summer reading programs, opportunities for community use of classrooms as meeting spaces for seniors and community classes).

Strategy 9.3.7: The Town, school districts and other public and private entities should explore joint use agreements concerning the use of recreational facilities in order that the advantages of such an agreement can result in avoidance of facility duplication and a greater diversity of recreational opportunities.



10. Implementation

10.1 Introduction

In order for plans to be meaningful, they must be implemented, so the Town of Empire'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 a variety of recommendations have also been provided which, if implemented, can move the Town closer to achieving its overall land use vision.

10.2 Priority Plan Implementation Strategies

The updated plan contains dozens and dozens of strategies and recommendations which makes it somewhat difficult for communities to implement and achieve them all over time. For this plan update, the Plan Commission took the time to review and select the twelve most important strategies, in terms of overall positive impact on the community.

1. **Strategy 4.1.1:** Restrict non-farm residential development to a low density in accordance with local zoning requirements.
2. **Strategy 4.1.2:** Protect farming operations from nuisance issues (noise, odor, etc.) created by the development of incompatible adjacent land uses.
3. **Strategy 4.1.3:** Revise the Empire Subdivision Ordinance to require residential and other potentially sensitive developments to consider agricultural conflicts and the State's Right to Farm laws when permitting development adjacent to farm areas.
4. **Strategy 5.1.2:** In accordance with state law, utilize the PASER system to update road ratings, as required. Seek to increase local funds for road maintenance to support these PASER recommendations.
5. **Strategy 6.2.3:** Require developers to pay their "fair share" for improvements needed to support new development requests.
6. **Strategy 6.3.1:** Pursue shared service opportunities when mutually beneficial (i.e., cost savings) to improve the efficiency and quality of utilities and community facilities.
7. **Strategy 6.3.4:** Consider revisions to the Empire Zoning Ordinance related to wind turbine and solar energy system siting requirements.
8. **Strategy 7.1.1:** Using the Future Land Use Map as a guide, seek to direct residential and commercial development to areas least suited for farming with soils that support foundations and septic systems.
9. **Strategy 7.1.2:** Direct individual lot development on farmland to the edges of farm fields to preserve contiguous blocks of productive farmland.



10. Strategy 7.2.2: Consider revisions the Town of Empire Zoning Ordinance to integrate a more refined and consistent method for determining the location of the Critical Area Overlay's Niagara Escarpment Buffer

11. Strategy 8.2: Direct residential and commercial development to those areas identified on the Future Land Use Map. Ninety percent of the Town's new development should be directed to the areas noted as being "urban" in the future, with the remaining ten percent being located in the rural portion of the town, avoiding Farmland Preservation Areas.

12. Strategy 9.2.1: Maintain boundary and service agreements with the City of Fond du Lac to establish expansion areas in the future.

10.3 Comprehensive Plan Amendments & Updates

Plan Adoption & Amendments

The Town of Empire should regularly evaluate its progress toward achieving the goals, strategies, 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 should 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:

1. **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.
2. **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.
3. **Adopted Plan Distribution.** One copy of the comprehensive plan or amendment adopted by 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 town, village, town, county, and regional Plan Commission that is adjacent to the town;
 - (c) the Department of Administration;
 - (d) the Regional Plan Commission in which the town is located;
 - (e) the public library that serves the area in which the town is located; and
4. 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.
5. 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 (e) of the distribution list above.

Plan Monitoring & Updates

The Plan Commission should report periodically to the Town Board on progress in implementing the Plan. This could include identification of action items that have been initiated and the results of those actions. The Plan Commission report should also include a discussion of any barriers to implementation that have been encountered.



The Plan Commission should also take this opportunity to review and consider any requested changes to the plan, especially as they relate to the future land use map. As a growing community facing development pressure and growth issues, the town is likely to receive occasional requests for plan amendments. In order to efficiently review these requests, the town should set an annual deadline for people to submit requests for plan amendments. These amendments can then be reviewed collectively along with a detailed assessment of how these changes might affect the overall vision and goals of the plan.

Within five years following adoption of the Plan, the town should review and evaluate the success of implementing the plan. This evaluation will include not only tracking what actions have been initiated, but also assessing whether these actions have been effective in furthering the goals and objectives of the Plan. It is expected that this evaluation will result in some actions and/or policies being dropped, or others added, as necessary. This five-year review does not necessarily need to include extensive public participation.

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 inventory and tables, and 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.

10.4 Integration & Consistency of Planning Elements

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 strategies and recommendations of this plan were considered by the Town of Empire in the light of their relationship and impact on other applicable 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. Planning element integration is achieved by grouping associated strategies and recommendations from multiple elements into a series of priority actions as listed later in this chapter.



Planning Element Consistency

Wisconsin's Comprehensive Planning law requires that the Plan Implementation element describe how each of the nine elements of the comprehensive plan will be made consistent with the other elements of the plan.

While there are no known major inconsistencies amongst the elements, there may be ones which arise occasionally as this is the nature of goals and strategies. 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 to evaluate the selected goal and/or strategy in the context of potentially competing values. The town should look to all related strategies to provide decision making guidance.

Over time, the threat of inconsistency between the plan and existing conditions will increase, requiring amendments 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 Empire 2040 Comprehensive Plan.





APPENDIX A - PLAN ADOPTION DOCUMENTS



**RESOLUTION OF THE TOWN OF EMPIRE PLAN COMMISSION
RECOMMENDING APPROVAL OF THE *TOWN OF EMPIRE 2040*
COMPREHENSIVE PLAN**

WHEREAS, Wisconsin's comprehensive planning law, set forth in Section 66.1001 of the Wisconsin Statutes, requires County and local governments that enforce general zoning, shoreland zoning, subdivision, or official mapping ordinances to adopt a comprehensive plan by January 1, 2010, and;

WHEREAS, The Town of Empire has developed a comprehensive plan update that meets or exceeds the requirements set forth in Section 66.1001 of the Wisconsin Statutes, and;

WHEREAS, the *Town of Empire 2040 Comprehensive Plan* contains all nine elements required by State Statute and addresses all 14 of the State of Wisconsin Comprehensive Planning Goals, and;

WHEREAS, the Town of Empire Plan Commission has developed an updated Comprehensive Plan as shown on Exhibit A, and;

WHEREAS, throughout the development of the plan the Town of Empire Plan Commission has solicited public input consistent with its adopted Public Participation Plan to ensure the public had ample opportunity for involvement in the development of the comprehensive plan update and amendments, and;

WHEREAS, The Town of Empire will duly notice a public hearing on the *Town of Empire 2040 Comprehensive Plan* and the Town Board will have held said public hearing, in accordance with Section 66.1001 (4)(d) of the Statutes.

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that pursuant to section 66.1001 (4)(b) of the Wisconsin Statutes, the Town of Empire Plan Commission hereby recommends approval of the *2040 Town of Empire Comprehensive Plan* to the Town of Empire Town Board by Ordinance.

Adopted this the 9th day of April 2025.



Steve Abel,
Plan Commission Chair

TOWN OF EMPIRE
Ordinance No. 25-04-01

An Ordinance to Adopt the Town of Empire 2040 Comprehensive Plan

The Town Board of the Town of Empire, Wisconsin, does ordain as follows:

Section 1. Pursuant to Sec. 61.35 Wis. Stats. and Sec. 62.23(2) and (3), Wis. Stats., the Town of Empire is authorized to prepare and adopt a comprehensive plan as defined in Sec. 66.1001(1)(a) and Sec. 66.1001(2), Wis. Stats.

Section 2. The Town Board of the Town of Empire, Wisconsin has adopted written procedures designed to foster public participation in every stage of the preparation of a comprehensive plan as required by Sec. 66.1001(4)(a), Wis. Stats.

Section 3. The Plan Commission of the Town of Empire, by a majority vote on April 9, 2025, has recommended to the Town Board the adoption of the document entitled *Town of Empire 2040 Comprehensive Plan* containing all of the elements specified in Sec. 66.1001(2), Wis. Stats.

Section 4. The Town of Empire has held at least one public hearing on this ordinance in compliance with the requirements of Sec. 66.1001(4)(d), Wis. Stats.

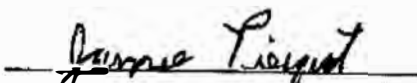
Section 5. The Town Board of the Town of Empire, Wisconsin, does, by enactment of this ordinance, formally adopt the document entitled, *Town of Empire 2040 Comprehensive Plan* pursuant to Sec. 66.1001(4)(c), Wis. Stats.

Section 6. This ordinance shall take effect upon passage by a majority vote of the members-elect of the Town Board and publication as required by law.

Adopted by the Town Board of the Town of Empire this 9th day of April 2025.

Approved

Attest



James Pierquet, Town Chairman
Town of Empire



Scott Schnettler, Town Clerk
Town of Empire

APPENDIX B - PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT MEETING SUMMARIES





Town of Empire Comprehensive Plan Update

Public Information Meeting Summary
February 21, 2024



Overview

The Town of Empire is in the process of updating its Comprehensive Plan, a long-range planning document which addresses a variety of subjects including land use, farmland preservation, transportation, community facilities, economic development, housing, and more. As part of this public process, the Town held a Public Information Meeting (PIM) to gather up front citizen input regarding issues and opportunities associated with the Town of Empire and the creation of the future land use plan. Citizen engagement is a priority of the Town during this process and the opinions of its residents are important to evaluating the past and future trends that have, or will, shape the community.

Event Details

The Public Information Meeting was held at the Town Hall on Wednesday, February 21, 2024 beginning at 6:30 p.m. and ending around 8:30 p.m. In addition to Cedar Corporation staff, approximately 35 residents (including some members of the Plan Commission and Town Board) were present to listen and engage.



The event consisted of an approximate one-half hour presentation by Cedar Corporation about Comprehensive Planning, the state of the town's current (2007) Comprehensive Plan, and the process by which the plan will be updated and adopted. The presentation also touched on aspects of the need for consistency between the town's plan and its zoning ordinance, as well as consistency with the Fond du Lac County Comprehensive Plan and Farmland Preservation Plan. Lastly the presentation discussed recent and emerging trends in demographic changes, opportunities related to agriculture and land use, renewable energy generation, the economy, and transportation in order to place the Town of Empire and this planning effort in context with broader transformative societal changes.

Public Engagement and Summary of Results

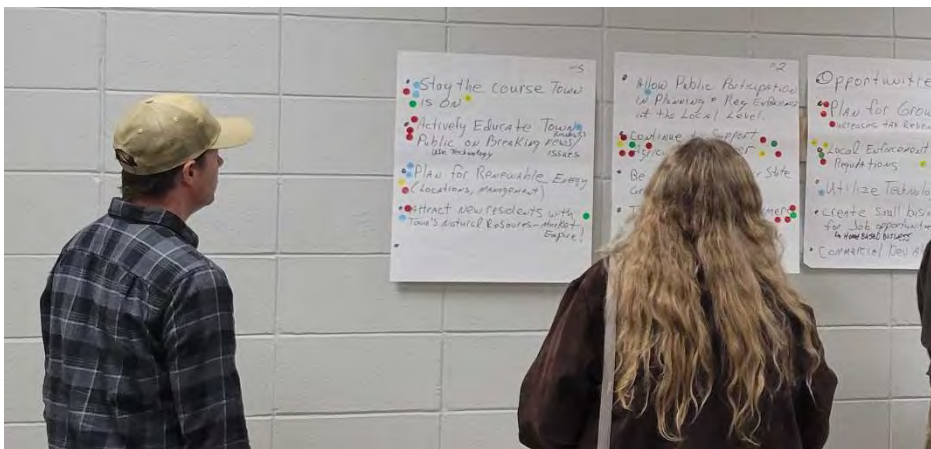
The last portion of the meeting was focused on two questions used to obtain direct input from attendees. The questions were designed to spur thoughts about current or future issues and opportunities within the town related to land use. The questions were also consistent with the 2007 comprehensive planning effort.

Question #1 – What do you consider the biggest issues facing the Town over the next ten (10) years?

Question #2 – What do you consider the greatest opportunities for the Town over the next ten (10) years?

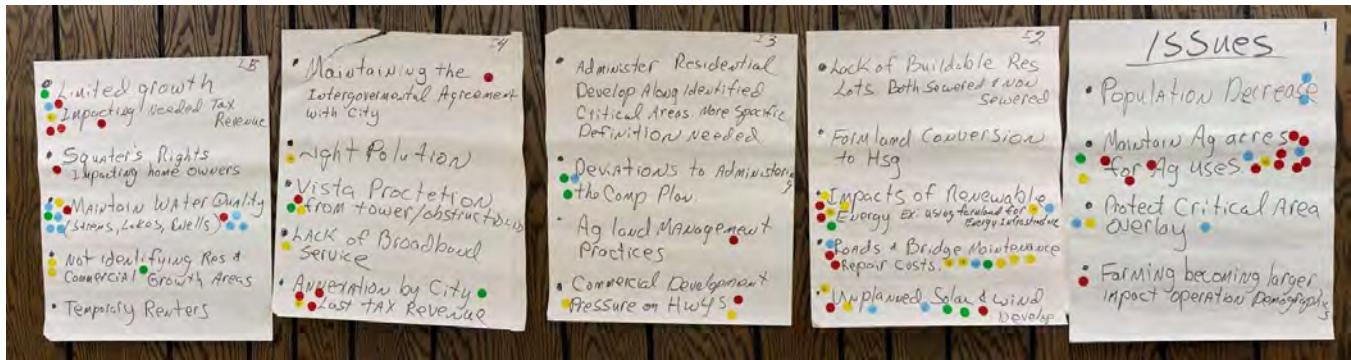
Each participant was provided a post-it note pad and a pen to write down their individual ideas and responses to the two questions. A round-robin process was then used to list and clarify all identified issues and opportunities on large post-it note sheets. Once the two lists were generated, the sheets were posted on the wall in two groups (issues/opportunities) for review and further consideration.

Each participant was then provided with six “dots” with instructions to ‘vote’ by placing their dots next to their top three priorities within both categories. Participants were asked to vote for six items in total and to not place multiple dots next to a single statement.



“A small group of thoughtful people could change the world. Indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.”

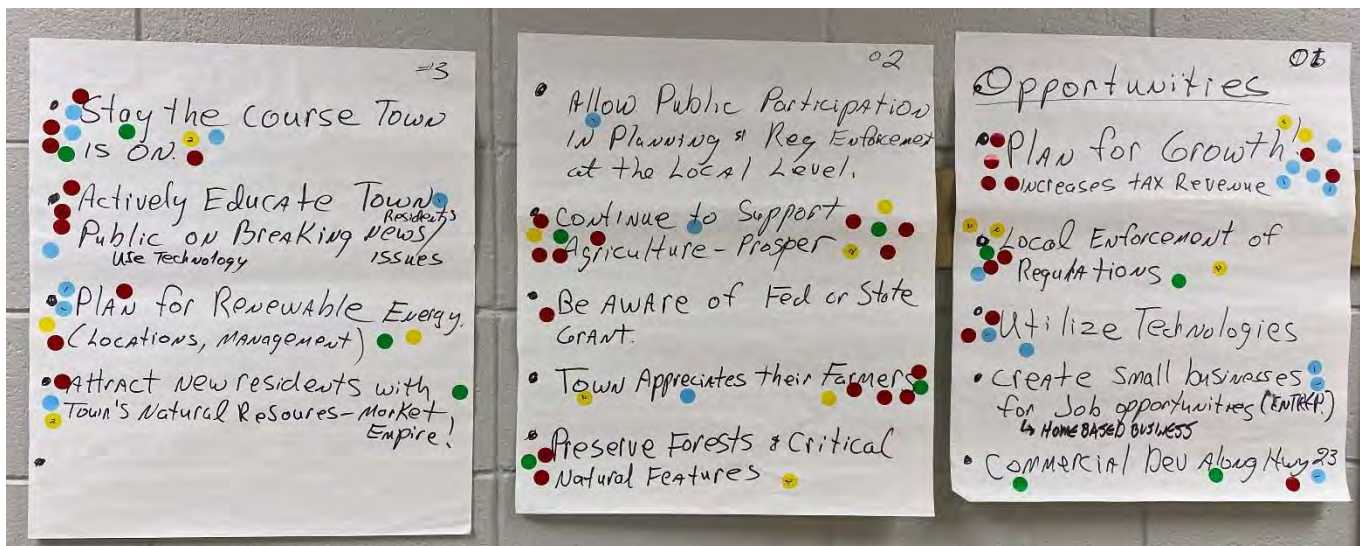
– Margaret Mead



Identified Issues (86 total votes)

- **Maintain agricultural acres for agricultural uses (15)**
- **Maintain water quality (streams, lakes, wells) (11)**
- **Road and bridge maintenance repairs and costs. (10)**
- **Impacts of renewable energy (i.e., using farmland for infrastructure) (8)**
- **Unplanned solar and wind development (8)**
- **Limited growth is impacting needed tax revenues (7)**
- **Annexation of lands by City of Fond du Lac / lost tax revenues (5)**
- **Rural vista protection from towers/obstructions (3)**
- **Deviations to administering the comprehensive plan (3)**
- **Commercial development pressure along highways (3)**
- **Protect Critical Area Overlay (3)**
- **Not identifying residential and commercial growth areas (3)**
- **Population decrease (2)**
- **Agricultural land management practices (1)**
- **Farming becoming larger and impacts of demographics on operations (1)**
- **Rural light pollution (1)**
- **Lack of broadband internet service (1)**
- **Squatter's rights impacting homeowners (1)**
- **Administration of residential development along identified Critical Areas – more specific definition needed.**
- **Farmland conversion to housing.**
- **Lack of buildable residential lots (both sewered and unsewered)**
- **Maintaining the intergovernmental growth agreement with the City of Fond du Lac.**
- **Temporary renters (i.e., Airbnb)**





Opportunities (84 total votes)

- Continue to support agriculture – prosper (13)
- Plan for growth as it increases tax revenues (13)
- Stay the course the Town is on (10)
- Town appreciates their farmers (8)
- Local enforcement of regulations (8)
- Plan for renewable energy (locations, management) (7)
- Actively educate town residents on breaking news and issues (use technology) (5)
- Utilization of technologies (4)
- Preserve forests, wetlands, and critical natural features (4)
- Commercial development along Highway 23 (4)
- Attract new residents with Town's natural resources – market Empire! (4)
- Create small businesses for job opportunities (entrepreneurship, home-based businesses) (2)
- Allow public participation in planning and regulation enforcement at local level (1)
- Be aware of federal or state grant opportunities (1)



Event Takeaways

This initial meeting provided a good overview of preferences and attitudes regarding land use issues within the community. The following are some of the important takeaways from the event and these items will likely be key focus areas for continued examination during the comprehensive plan preparation process:

- Based on the results of both questions, Town of Empire residents really appreciate living in their community and the quality of life it offers.
- There continues to be strong support for agriculture and the natural resource base, especially pertaining to wetlands, woodlands, and water quality.
- Residents appear to value the benefits of planning and want the Town to “stay the course” with respect to how it has managed past development and growth.
- On the other hand, town residents understand the town needs to continue its growth for numerous reasons, including tax revenue generation.
- Balancing future growth within the context of its agricultural base and significant natural features will be the key for this and future planning efforts.
- Accommodating future commercial development in controlled amounts and locations may offer opportunities for tax base generation. In addition, home-based businesses and resident entrepreneurial activities were generally supported.
- Renewable energy planning is not an exception, and establishing a solid foundation for its potential future growth will be of prime importance.



Comprehensive Plan Update – Public Informational Meeting #1

February 21, 2024
6:30 P.M.



PLEASE SIGN IN!

First & Last Name

Email Address (optional, for future notices)

Mary Jariello

Erica & Simon Floyd

Debbie Oosterwyk

Jim DALGIDEN

Gary Hefner

Nike Morgan

Scott Schroetter

Nikki Pierquet

Sam Z. Smith

Joe M. Smith

Richard Jullia

Comprehensive Plan Update – Public Informational Meeting #1

February 21, 2024
6:30 P.M.



PLEASE SIGN IN!

First & Last Name

Email Address (optional, for future notices)

Trish Schnettler

Bob Vandermolten

Jason Zeller

RON & JUDY BRATH

Dean Rentmeester

Grant Grinstead

TED HALBUR

PETER HOFFMAN

Telli Hoffman

Laurie Oling

Tom Oling

Pete Becker

JOAN PENNAH

KARL PENNAH



BUILDING TRUST

YOUR PROJECT • OUR PASSION

W61N497 Washington Avenue
Cedarburg, WI 53012
262-204-2360

2820 Walton Commons West
Suite 142
Madison, WI 53718
608-249-5046



1695 Bellevue Street
Green Bay, WI 54311
920-491-9081

604 Wilson Avenue
Menomonie, WI 54751
715-235-9081

www.cedarcorp.com

Town of Empire Comprehensive Plan Update

Public Involvement Meeting #2 Summary
March 4, 2025



Overview

The Town of Empire is in the process of updating its Comprehensive Plan, a long-range planning document which addresses a variety of subjects including land use, farmland preservation, transportation, community facilities, economic development, housing, and more. As part of the Town's citizen participation process, a second Public Involvement Meeting (PIM) was held to gather citizen input and reactions regarding the draft Comprehensive Plan goals and strategies, as well as the proposed changes to the 2040 Future Land Use Map.

Event Details

The Public Involvement Meeting was held at the Town Hall on Tuesday, March 4, 2025 beginning at 5:30 p.m. and ending around 7:15 p.m. In addition to Cedar Corporation staff, approximately 19 persons were present to listen and engage.



The event consisted of an open-house style display of six different boards (See Appendix B) containing data and information about key elements of the draft Comprehensive Plan that were positioned around the room. After signing in, participants were asked to take a stack of Post-It notes and a pen, and were encouraged to write down short comments, thoughts, and ideas regarding the information presented. Specific directional questions on the boards helped to prompt readers into leaving a response.

In addition, a short presentation was given at 6:00 p.m. to share more details about the Comprehensive Plan Update requirements, process, and major changes to the Future Land Use Map and associated goals and strategies.

Summary of Results

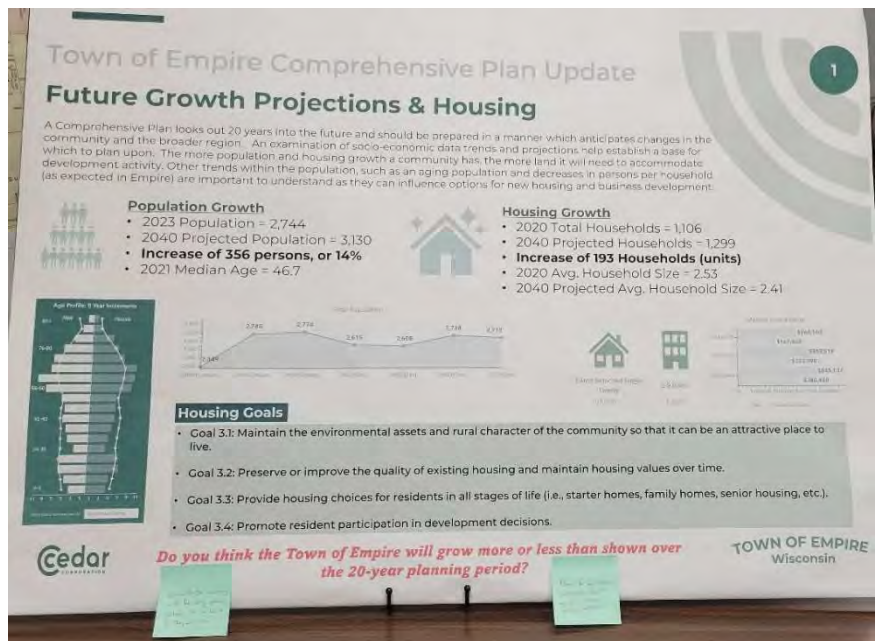
A total of four written comments were made on Post-It Notes during the event. While this may be a small number of documented comments, there was a fair amount of one-on-one engagement between participants and the Town/Cedar representatives who were in attendance. These conversations were generally supportive of the vision and land use strategies presented at the meeting. A summary of the feedback provided is summarized below.

Written Comments

Board #1: Future Growth Projections & Housing

Two comments were received as follows:

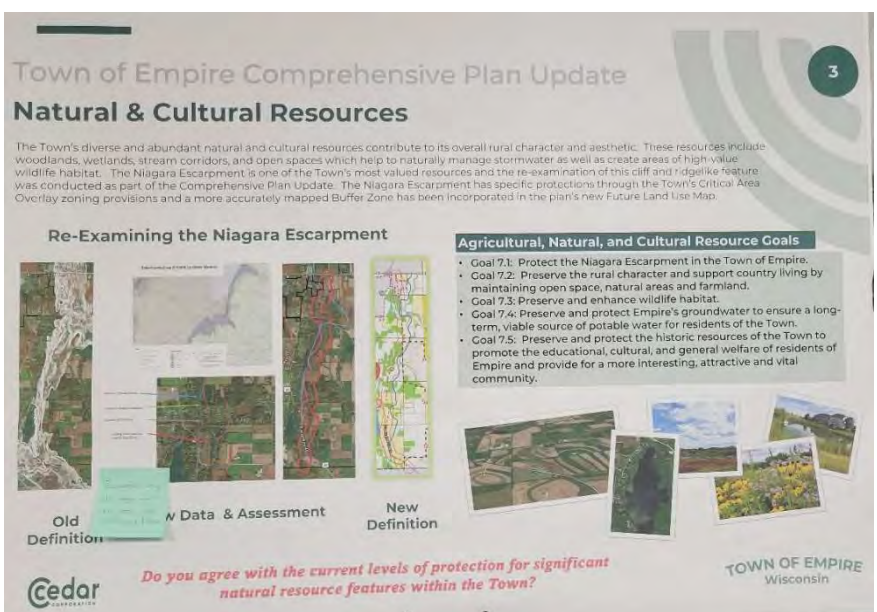
1. *Growth and housing will be very closely linked....if we build it they will come.*
2. *Need to be more deliberate about aging in place housing options.*



Board #3: Natural & Cultural Resources

One comment was received as follows:

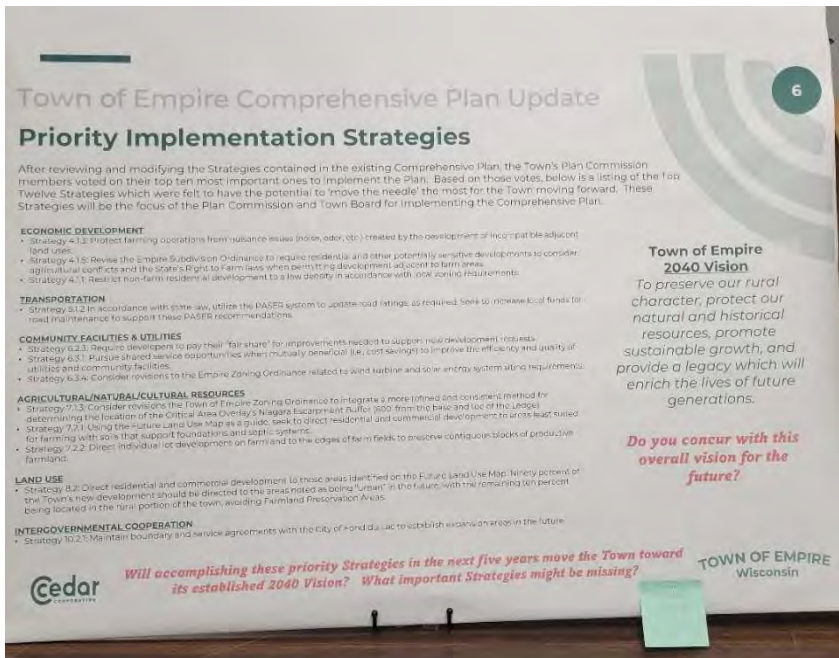
1. *Recreation along The Ledge would be cool....and would attract young families.*



Board #6: Priority Implementation Strategies

One comment was received as follows:

1. Define sustainable growth.



Verbal Comments

In addition to the Post-It Note input, several audience members asked questions or made comments after the presentation which can be summarized as follows:

- There was acknowledgement of the fact that there is unlikely to be a 'development boom' like in decades previous.
- It was also noted that the number of one and two-person households will increase demands for other styles of housing which is more affordable. This includes needs for senior housing.
- Questions regarding the number of rental units in the community were asked and some acknowledgement was given that the high costs of home-ownership will make rentals more popular. This was not mentioned as a concern, but was just noting recent patterns of whole-house rentals, as well as the use of homes for vacation rentals.

Page intentionally left blank.

APPENDIX A – EVENT SIGN IN SHEETS

Comprehensive Plan Update - Public Informational Meeting

March 4, 2025

TOWN OF EMPIRE
Wisconsin

PLEASE SIGN IN!

First & Last Name	Representing (resident, org., etc.)
Mike Morgan	Empire
Steve Abel	Res Empire
Richard Julka	Empire Res ^{Town} Board Member
PETE BECKER	N5353 DONDON DR.
CHRIS ANDERS	N6338 Reilly DR.
Brian Sarauer	W4486 Mary Hill Park Dr.
Robert S Vandermolen	W4014 4 th ST RD
Bob Ottery	N5814 Rancho Viejo Rd
COREY + JENELLE BRUNO	N5020 SUMMIT DR
HOWARD DHOANU	N5718 Grandview
DALE THEEL	RES PLAN COMMISSION
Diane Buschman	N6478 County Road UU F.D.L.
KEN BIRSCHBACH	N6478 County Road UU F.D.L.

Comprehensive Plan
Update – Public
Informational Meeting

March 4, 2025

TOWN OF EMPIRE
Wisconsin

PLEASE SIGN IN!

First & Last Name

Representing (resident, org., etc.)

Kent Klewicki Resident

Michael Bauer Resident

TED HALBUR Resident Town Supervisor

DON CATEN

"

Rodney Kern

Resident

Page intentionally left blank.

APPENDIX B – DISPLAY BOARD INFORMATION

Page intentionally left blank.



Town of Empire Comprehensive Plan Update

WELCOME TO THE OPEN HOUSE!

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Please take a Post-It Note pad and pen.
2. Review each display panel and jot down your thoughts, reactions, or suggestions on the provided Post-It Notes.
3. Place your Post-It Note(s) on the edges of the display panel.
4. **THANK YOU** in advance for your thoughts and participation!

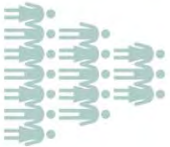
*Look for
questions in red
on each panel!*

Feel free to ask questions!

Town of Empire Comprehensive Plan Update

Future Growth Projections & Housing

A Comprehensive Plan looks out 20 years into the future and should be prepared in a manner which anticipates changes in the community and the broader region. An examination of socio-economic data trends and projections help establish a base for which to plan upon. The more population and housing growth a community has, the more land it will need to accommodate development activity. Other trends within the population, such as an aging population and decreases in persons per household (as expected in Empire) are important to understand as they can influence options for new housing and business development.



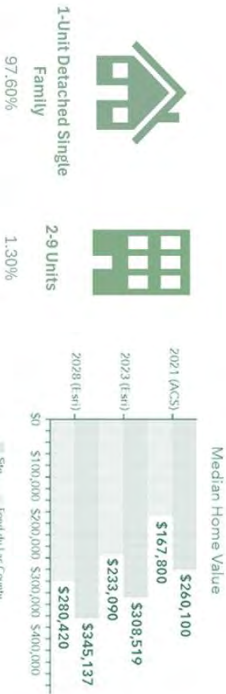
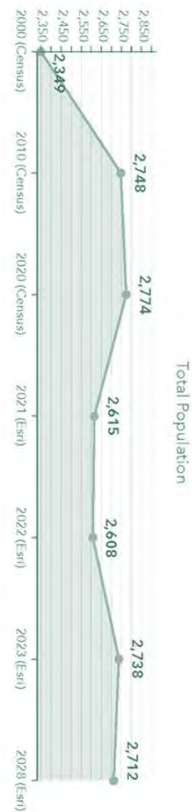
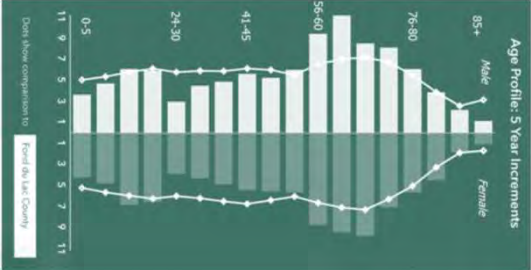
Population Growth

- 2023 Population = 2,744
- 2040 Projected Population = 3,130
- **Increase of 356 persons, or 14%**
- 2021 Median Age = 46.7



Housing Growth

- 2020 Total Households = 1,106
- 2040 Projected Households = 1,299
- **Increase of 193 Households (units)**
- 2020 Avg. Household Size = 2.53
- 2040 Projected Avg. Household Size = 2.41



Housing Goals

- Goal 3.1: Maintain the environmental assets and rural character of the community so that it can be an attractive place to live.
- Goal 3.2: Preserve or improve the quality of existing housing and maintain housing values over time.
- Goal 3.3: Provide housing choices for residents in all stages of life (i.e., starter homes, family homes, senior housing, etc.).
- Goal 3.4: Promote resident participation in development decisions.

Town of Empire Comprehensive Plan Update

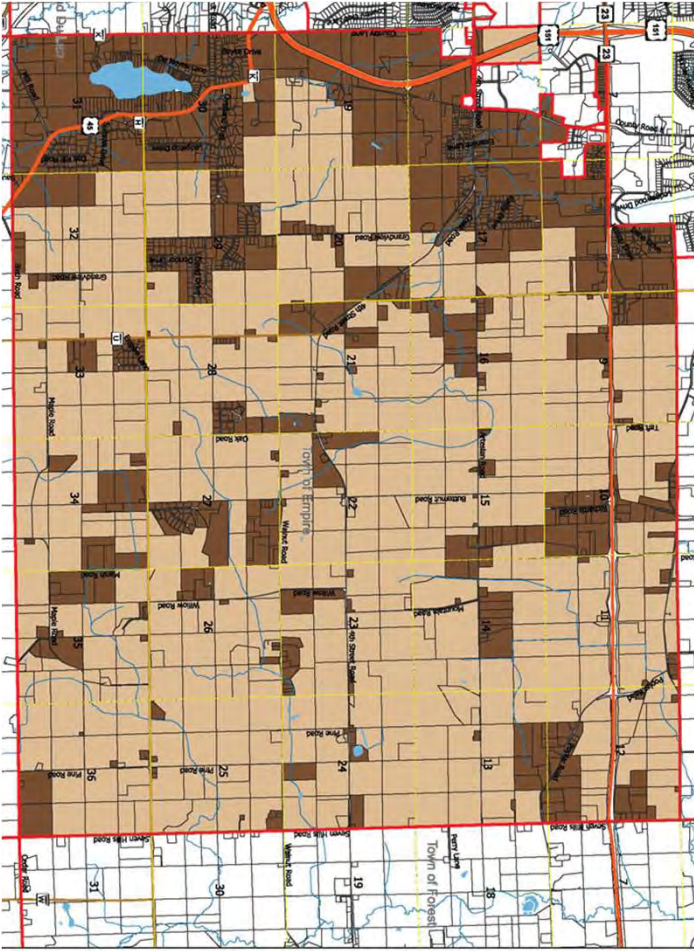
Agricultural Resources

Agriculture is the primary land use activity in the Town of Empire and generates a significant amount of economic activity. The importance of agriculture is not a coincidence as the Town, as well as much of Fond du Lac County, contains some of the most significant agriculturally productive soils within the entire nation. At the same time, increased development pressures continue to convert farmland to other uses and have also inflated the prices of agricultural land. The Town of Empire is a participant in the Fond du Lac County Farmland Preservation Plan which aims to protect these valued lands through good planning, local zoning, and ensuring farmer eligibility for tax incentive programs.

Nationally Significant Soils



Farmland Preservation Program



Farmland Preservation Plan



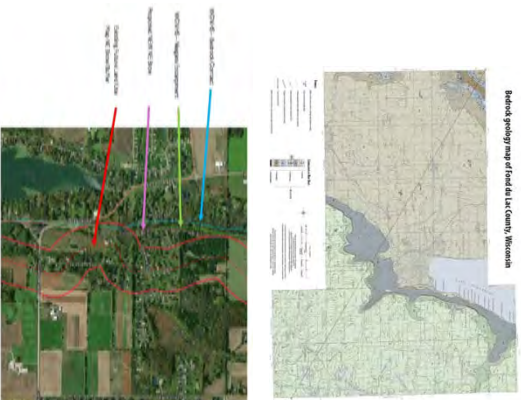
Do you agree with protecting farmland and agricultural uses within the Town?

Town of Empire Comprehensive Plan Update

Natural & Cultural Resources

The Town's diverse and abundant natural and cultural resources contribute to its overall rural character and aesthetic. These resources include woodlands, wetlands, stream corridors, and open spaces which help to naturally manage stormwater as well as create areas of high-value wildlife habitat. The Niagara Escarpment is one of the Town's most valued resources and the re-examination of this cliff and ridge-like feature was conducted as part of the Comprehensive Plan Update. The Niagara Escarpment has specific protections through the Town's Critical Area Overlay zoning provisions and a more accurately mapped Buffer Zone has been incorporated in the plan's new Future Land Use Map.

Re-Examining the Niagara Escarpment



**Old
Definition**

New Data & Assessment

**New
Definition**

Agricultural, Natural, and Cultural Resource Goals

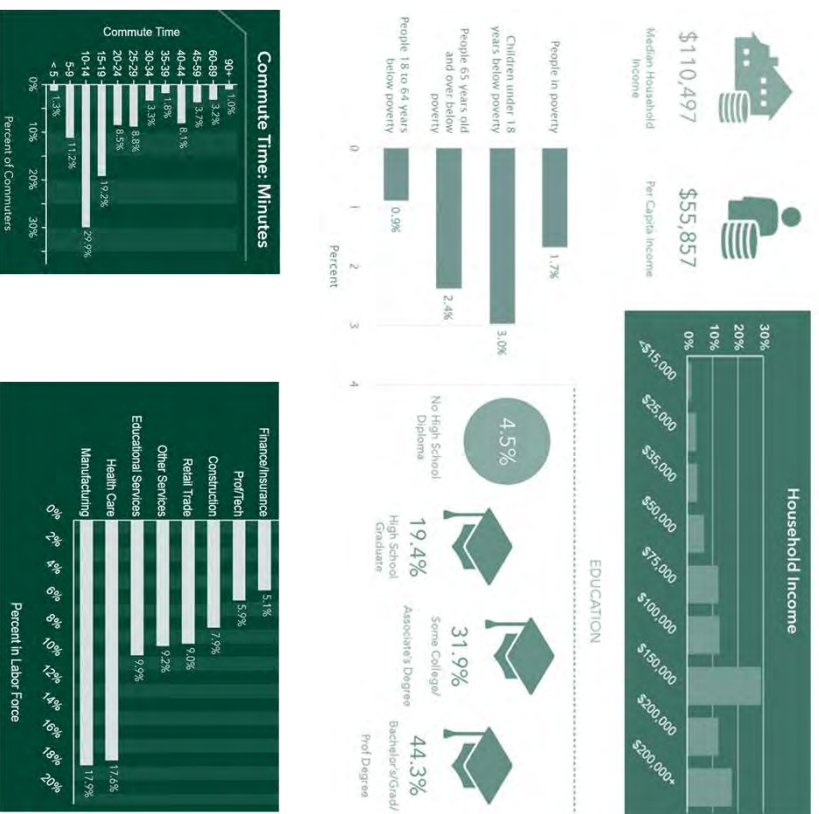
- Goal 7.1: Protect the Niagara Escarpment in the Town of Empire.
- Goal 7.2: Preserve the rural character and support country living by maintaining open space, natural areas and farmland.
- Goal 7.3: Preserve and enhance wildlife habitat.
- Goal 7.4: Preserve and protect Empire's groundwater to ensure a long-term, viable source of potable water for residents of the Town.
- Goal 7.5: Preserve and protect the historic resources of the Town to promote the educational, cultural, and general welfare of residents of Empire and provide for a more interesting, attractive and vital community.



Town of Empire Comprehensive Plan Update

Economic Development, Transportation & Community Facilities

Economic Development is defined as a community's ability to increase the well-being of its residents through increased economic activity. The Town's economic expansion opportunities lie mostly with the agricultural use of its lands, although some small-scale non-ag business development potential does exist along or near the USH 151 and WIS 23 highway corridors. Economic development can be influenced greatly by the level transportation facility and utility services available.



Economic Development Goals

- Goal 4.1: Preserve productive agricultural land for long-term farm uses.
- Goal 4.2: Maintain farming as the economic base of the community.
- Goal 4.3: Encourage local economic development opportunities to support the tax base within appropriate areas of the Town so that they exist in harmony with the rural atmosphere.

Transportation Goals

- Goal 5.1: Maintain and improve Town Roads in a timely and well-planned manner.
- Goal 5.2: Promote a multi-modal transportation system for efficient, safe, and convenient movement of people, goods, and services.
- Goal 5.3: Support the long-term viability of area roads.
- Goal 5.4: Continue to keep residents informed of pending transportation improvements.
- Goal 5.5: Partner with the County, ECWRPC, WISDOT and the WDNR to plan and coordinate transportation improvements.

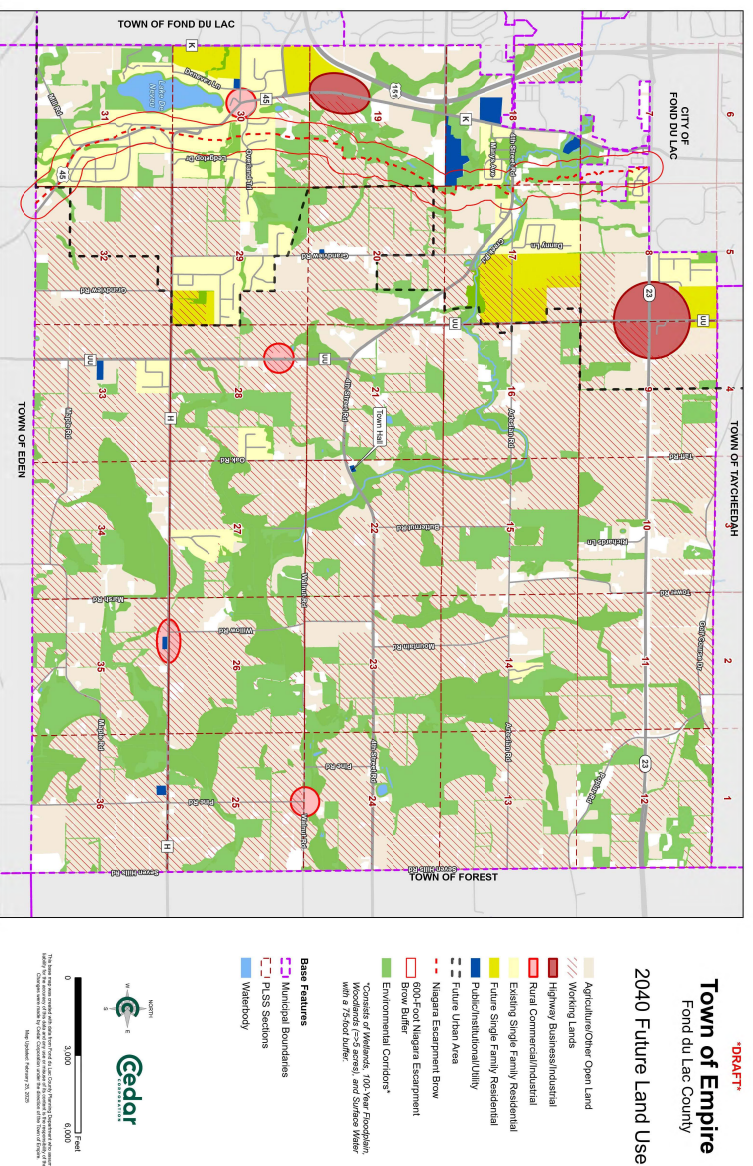
Community Facility & Utility Goals

- Goal 6.1: Provide efficient facilities to serve the needs of the Empire community.
- Goal 6.2: Ensure that all Town development is served by efficient, cost-effective services and infrastructure within the Town's capacity to provide services and facilities.
- Goal 6.3: Continue to ensure that Empire is a safe community by meeting or exceeding recognized standards for public safety.

Town of Empire Comprehensive Plan Update

Year 2040 PROPOSED Future Land Use Map

The updated Future Land Use Map emphasizes the protection of both natural resources and critical agricultural lands. This map was updated to include two major changes, and several more minor refinements, to the proposed land uses as indicated in the map's legend. The new Future Land Use Map was created with a "Working Lands" overlay to identify those properties associated with currently active farmsteads and crop production. See sidebar for more information on Working Lands. The map also incorporates revised mapping of the Niagara Escarpment' brow which serves as a measuring point for the 600 foot-wide Critical Area Overlay corridor. Other future land uses have been adjusted slightly based on projected levels of development and the location of available utilities.



Working Lands Concept

- "Working Lands" is a concept that addresses agricultural lands as being more than just "holding areas" until a better use comes along. The town is vested in the value of these lands for the long term. The result of this planning approach will create a Future Land Use Plan Map that:
- Represents a better reality for attaining the projected future land uses for the town.
 - Uses established criterion for the value of agriculture and other working lands within the town.
 - Elevates agriculture and natural resource features as a future land use type (not just a holding area for future development).
 - Accommodates agricultural related business as an economic opportunity.

The Working Lands Overlay is generally defined actively farmed lands which have long-term opportunities for preservation and the continuation of agricultural, or agriculturally-related uses. For the Town of Empire, Working Lands consist of all agriculturally used lands on parcels of more than five acres which are identified as Farmland Preservation Areas in the Fond du Lac County Farmland Preservation Plan. The Working Lands concept can be administered by the Town via a number of different review procedures including:

- Processes for both opting-in, and opting-out of the Working Lands designation as part of the Comprehensive Plan and the County's Farmland Preservation Plan.
- The types of agricultural-related businesses which could co-exist with lands designated as Working Lands; and,
- The term's relationship to the Town's Zoning and Land Division Ordinances and the future use of Working Lands properties.

Town of Empire Comprehensive Plan Update

Priority Implementation Strategies

After reviewing and modifying the Strategies contained in the existing Comprehensive Plan, the Town's Plan Commission members voted on their top ten most important ones to implement the Plan. Based on those votes, below is a listing of the Top Twelve Strategies which were felt to have the potential to 'move the needle' the most for the Town moving forward. These Strategies will be the focus of the Plan Commission and Town Board for implementing the Comprehensive Plan.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- Strategy 4.1.3: Protect farming operations from nuisance issues (noise, odor, etc.) created by the development of incompatible adjacent land uses.
- Strategy 4.1.5: Revise the Empire Subdivision Ordinance to require residential and other potentially sensitive developments to consider agricultural conflicts and the State's Right to Farm laws when permitting development adjacent to farm areas.
- Strategy 4.1.1: Restrict non-farm residential development to a low density in accordance with local zoning requirements.

TRANSPORTATION

- Strategy 5.1.2 in accordance with state law, utilize the PASER system to update road ratings, as required. Seek to increase local funds for road maintenance to support these PASER recommendations.

COMMUNITY FACILITIES & UTILITIES

- Strategy 6.2.3: Require developers to pay their "fair share" for improvements needed to support new development requests.
- Strategy 6.3.1: Pursue shared service opportunities when mutually beneficial (i.e., cost savings) to improve the efficiency and quality of utilities and community facilities.
- Strategy 6.3.4: Consider revisions to the Empire Zoning Ordinance related to wind turbine and solar energy system siting requirements.

AGRICULTURAL/NATURAL/CULTURAL RESOURCES

- Strategy 7.1.3: Consider revisions the Town of Empire Zoning Ordinance to integrate a more refined and consistent method for determining the location of the Critical Area Overlay's Niagara Escarpment Buffer (600' from the base and toe of the Ledge).
- Strategy 7.2.1: Using the Future Land Use Map as a guide, seek to direct residential and commercial development to areas least suited for farming with soils that support foundations and septic systems.
- Strategy 7.2.2: Direct individual lot development on farmland to the edges of farm fields to preserve contiguous blocks of productive farmland.

LAND USE

- Strategy 8.2: Direct residential and commercial development to those areas identified on the Future Land Use Map. Ninety percent of the Town's new development should be directed to the areas noted as being "urban" in the future, with the remaining ten percent being located in the rural portion of the town, avoiding Farmland Preservation Areas.

INTERGOVERNMENTAL COOPERATION

- Strategy 10.2.1: Maintain boundary and service agreements with the City of Fond du Lac to establish expansion areas in the future.

Town of Empire 2040 Vision

To preserve our rural character, protect our natural and historical resources, promote sustainable growth, and provide a legacy which will enrich the lives of future generations.

Do you concur with this overall vision for the future?



BUILDING TRUST

YOUR PROJECT • OUR PASSION

W61N497 Washington Avenue
Cedarburg, WI 53012
262-204-2360

2820 Walton Commons West
Suite 142

Madison, WI 53718

1695 Bellevue Street
Green Bay, WI 54311
920-491-9081

604 Wilson Avenue
Menomonie, WI 54751

715-235-9081

