

Executive Summary

WHY PLAN? 2010 PLAN ACCOMPLISHMENTS PROVE PLANNING WORKS

Plans are developed to help communities prepare for the future; and while doing so, they also need to look to the past for an understanding of where they have come from and what is possible. Between 1979 and 1989, West Allis lost 8,500 manufacturing jobs, 10,000 in population, the average wage dropped by 25%, and there was a huge shift of the property tax burden from industrial to residential properties. Rather than accept the role of victim, in 1991, the City prepared the 2010 Comprehensive Land Use Plan with a long-range look ahead for how it could develop, grow and prosper.

In West Allis, planning has served as the catalyst to a renaissance and made the City a regional leader in redevelopment practices. Some of the successful projects include: the conversion of the former home of the manufacturing giant Allis Chalmers into the Summit Place Office Complex, which is now home to over 150 varied businesses, employs over 4,000 people and is the City's single largest taxable property; and Quad/ Graphics, whose current facility was formerly nothing

more than a dormant manufacturing space, but is now home to the City's largest private employer. These projects illustrate the positive outcomes of proactive public involvement as a means of converting blighted properties into some of the highest valued properties in the City.

Other accomplishments of the 2010 Comprehensive Land Use Plan include: creation of a unified zoning ordinance and design guidelines for development; implementation of numerous redevelopment plans; and improvements to the Central Business District's visual image with new streetscaping, construction, and façade renovations.

In 2007, then-Mayor Jeannette Bell conducted a series of Strategic Planning Sessions, which engaged the public to think about current events and consider the future. In 2008, with the support of the Plan Commission, the Common Council, and Mayor Dan Devine, the City utilized a Department of Administration planning grant to hire Graef to assist in the creation of a Comprehensive Plan for the next 20 years.



THE PLANNING LEGACY CONTINUES

To build on the success of that 2010 Comprehensive Land Use Plan, the City of West Allis has prepared a Comprehensive Plan projecting through the year 2030. One way to think about the Comprehensive Plan is to imagine a time even further in the future, say 2050, and think about what will be needed to keep our City and our region livable and vibrant. Many of us may not be here to see that time, but we all have ideas about the opportunities we want our children and grandchildren to have in their living environment.

The recommendations within this 2030 Comprehensive Plan strive to continue the trend of success. These recommendations emphasize public strategies and private partnerships that address future growth, improve transportation systems, target redevelopment opportunities, preserve the City's open spaces and cultural resources, and enhance the community's character. This plan identifies special areas of interest, redevelopment opportunities, and specific neighborhood recommendations that are uniquely West Allis.

This plan includes opportunities to create over 5,000 new jobs, construct unique residential developments and update aging commercial corridors. As a built-out city, West Allis must grow from within, and this will require continued, attentive and proactive redevelopment. Implementation of the 2030 Comprehensive Plan will provide opportunities to continually engage residents and property owners to ensure best practices for redevelopment are followed and ensure the City's long-term viability.

The City of West Allis maintains a great diversity of neighborhood options, and supporting these options has been a driving force of this plan. The preservation and enhancement of these options will require continued innovation. Do we wish our next generations

to be saddled with past burdens and our current perceptions, ranging from respect for the environment and housing options to transportation choice, or do we wish for them to have the choice to determine their own destiny? Successful cities contain a healthy and sustainable mixture of quality living, working and recreation options that are accessible to everyone. The City's Comprehensive Plan provides us with the steps needed along the way, in the next 10 to 20 years, to allow us to be where we want farther in the future.

Twenty years ago, it was visionary to think of a computer in every home, let alone cellular phones or the Internet, yet that is today's reality. As we plan for the future, it is pertinent to be wary of innovation and reality as we make decisions that have long-term effects. In the future: how will we move from place to place, what will a typical home require, where will we work, and what will we be doing? This plan seeks to define answers for these questions.

Developing quality infrastructure that supports future flexibility in our built-environment and social fabric can have far reaching effects in maturing neighborhoods of choice. Building a community where people are willing to make long-term investments does not merely happen



by circumstance. Individual actions must be supported by public and societal confidence. Guiding future decisions with local input, through Comprehensive Planning, serves to establish this confidence and creates communities where opportunity invites commitment.

As a counter to sprawl, the City will continue to utilize Comprehensive Planning as a tool for successfully guiding urban redevelopment projects, public investment decisions, and public/private partnerships. Good planning will help ensure measurable outcomes for increased quality-of-life, sustainability and prosperity. Recommendations offered within this plan will serve as a long-range guidance tool that links city planning, capital improvements and redevelopment efforts. This linkage will support the City's strategic vision of being one of the most livable communities in Southeastern Wisconsin.

KEY FINDINGS

West Allis is a fully built-out community with little undeveloped land. Over the next 20 years, areas of West Allis will need to be aggressively redeveloped, in order to meet the needs of a changing demographic and economy. The keys to a successful future will include embracing change and increasing development density, while not sacrificing the quality, safety, and affordability that property owners have grown to expect.

Looking into the future, even beyond 2030, one is likely to see a demographically transformed West Allis. Projections by the US Census Bureau note that by 2050, minorities will be the majority in America, and the number of residents older than 65 will more than double. Additionally, life expectancy may likely continue to rise, and living beyond 100 may become more commonplace. On a localized level, these shifts will need to be acknowledged.

Planning for demographic shifts in West Allis are based on existing and predicted trends that highlight the following needs:

- Retention of existing families and employees
- Attraction of young families to grow and stabilize the population
- Development of a professional workforce
- Attention to the continued diversification and aging of the population

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations throughout this plan respond to and challenge existing trends. They also realistically plan for future growth and improvements through pro-active policies and programs.

Neighborhoods, Districts, and Corridors

Although not required by the State Legislation, in this plan, the City calls special attention to its varied neighborhoods, districts and corridors. Each area is briefly described for its unique character, and recommendations are provided to sustain and increase value into the future. Within this plan, 26 neighborhoods, 8 business districts, and 11 commercial corridors are discussed in detail.

Key recommendations for value-driven growth include:

- Support for the continuation or development of complete neighborhoods that address the employment, transportation, retail and service needs of different parts of the City
- Development of increased neighborhood awareness through improved visual cues and aesthetic features (signage, gateways, landscaping)

- Advancement of the recent coalescence of neighborhoods through continued participation and outreach

Economic Development

In order to remain competitive and usher in future prosperity, the City of West Allis will continue to proactively pursue economic development initiatives through well-planned redevelopment projects and funding mechanisms.

Key recommendations include:

- Build on the City's prime location within the region
- Attract private sector investment that aligns with local industrial sector trends and driver industries
- Continue value-driven redevelopment to alleviate tax burden and increase employment opportunities
- Foster workforce development initiatives to train and prepare for a 21st century economy
- Support quality-of-life improvements that increase the value of the community, such as transportation choice and open space amenities
- Participate in the development of a stronger regional economy

Initiatives to expand economic development opportunities in the City will include:

- **Industrial Land Development** - The City will be implementing a number of economic development initiatives to provide building sites for the creation of new private-sector jobs by transitioning underutilized and

vacant properties into viable light industrial developments.

- **Workforce and Education** - The City will continue to facilitate discussions on how to attract and keep the level of talent necessary for our businesses to gain and maintain a competitive edge. Local companies continue to express the need for adding new employees to respond to product demand, even during slow economic times.
- **Small Business** - The City will continue to assist local businesses with finding untapped financial public resources, including the creation of additional business and neighborhood improvement districts.

Housing

West Allis is fortunate to have a diverse housing stock, ranging from single-family residential homes to multi-family residential developments. Residential uses comprise the majority of land in the City, making housing an integral component of the comprehensive planning process.



Key recommendations include:

- Preserve the quality of existing neighborhoods and housing stock
- Support the development of quality, life-cycle housing options that align with demographic trends and consumer preferences
- Encourage energy-efficient and environmentally sustainable housing initiatives
- Increase the percentage of owner-occupied units throughout the City

Transportation

Local and regional transportation systems play a critical role in land use decisions, and influence growth and economic development opportunities within the City. For decades, the transportation network has been a major factor in promoting residential and commercial growth in West Allis, and as the City plans for the future, transportation infrastructure will remain a critical component in creating demand for new high quality development.

Key recommendations include:

- Support the maturation of a multi-modal transportation network to support movement within the City and region
- Develop transportation infrastructure that recognizes the safety of all users
- Acknowledge the role that transportation infrastructure has on our land use, neighborhoods and environment
- Coordinate with other transportation agencies to carry out a comprehensive vision

Initiatives to enhance the City's transportation system include:

- **Zoo Interchange** - The Zoo Interchange is one of Wisconsin's oldest interstate interchanges and is currently the busiest in the State. The City is concerned about the effect the relocated freeway ramps, such as S. 76 Street and S. 84 Street, may have on the City street system, businesses and neighborhoods. One proposed option would eliminate direct access to S. 84 Street with a Texas U-turn routing the public to a roundabout and then through local neighborhoods. The best alternative would maintain the exit ramps to S. 84 Street and avoid pushing traffic to the narrower and more residential S. 76 Street.
- **Mass Transit** - West Allis proudly maintains various transportation options that connect its residents, businesses and customers to all parts of the metro region. In the future, a potential Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system with real-time arrival information and improved shelters may operate with new buses featuring an improved fare collection system and the ability to control traffic lights, allowing for a faster commute.

The City is also situated along a potential future mass transit route that could operate along the rail line between downtown Milwaukee and Elm Grove, providing additional regional linkages to and from the City.

- **Toward Complete Streets** – “If you always do what you've always done, you'll always get what you always got, and you'll always feel what you always felt.” Maximizing the efficiency of the existing right of way toward full use for all users is critical for the long-term

success of redevelopment projects throughout the City. The plan recommends adopting complete streets as a design model for the future lifestyles of our community.

- **Cross-Town Connector Bike Trail** - The Cross Town Connector Bike Trail is the missing link to connecting existing state trails between the Lakefront and Madison. Through a coordinated effort with the Bicycle Federation of Wisconsin, the 2030 Comprehensive Plan is taking steps toward not only the implementation of the Cross Town Connector Trail, but recommending adoption of a Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan for West Allis.

Parks, Open Space, Natural and Cultural Resources

West Allis' parks, open spaces, historic buildings, and cultural features contribute to the City's overall quality of life, and create a sense of place and identity for the City. These resources should be protected and enhanced for future generations to enjoy.



Key recommendations include:

- Maintain and upgrade a system of parks and open spaces that are safe, functional and designed for optimal utilization
- Integrate public space and environmental features into developments and rights-of-way that increase the quality of life in West Allis
- Protect and improve ground water quality and natural features within the city
- Increase awareness of the benefits of sustainability to the city's residents and business community
- Preserve and invest in culturally significant landmarks and places that contribute to West Allis' unique identity

Utilities and Public Facilities

Providing the City's residents with quality services, infrastructure, and amenities is important for continued long-term value.

Key recommendations include:

- Provide safe, efficient and cost-effective services that keep West Allis a desirable place to live
- Support energy efficiency and environmental responsibility through the creation and implementation of policies that encourage quality growth and limit wasteful sprawl

Redevelopment Opportunities

The planning process identified numerous areas in the City that are ripe for change. Redevelopment options are presented for 27 identified areas, all with potential for increasing long-term value for the area. The redevelopment strategies can increase the value of surrounding properties, represent a significant and visible investment in the neighborhood, support the overall plan goals, and have the potential to attract additional investment to nearby properties.

Key recommendations include:

- Continue the pro-active redevelopment practices that have created renewed opportunity within the City
- Make the most of opportunities for redevelopment by maintaining a watchful eye on areas susceptible to change
- Initiate conversations regarding conceptual ideas for revitalization with the public and development community

Initiatives for redevelopment include the following strategies:

What Part of Highway 100 Could We Place on a Postcard?

A broad new vision for Hwy 100 will reshape this corridor into a new and increasingly vital mixture of retail and commercial uses. Through planning and urban design efforts, older retail centers, vacant car lots and aged industrial uses will be transformed architecturally into vital retail and commercial uses. New developments will be optimized not simply for a big-box and parking lot, but for multiple layouts featuring varied facades and shared parking areas that emphasize safe pedestrian movement with

planters, tree-lined boulevards, public art, benches, and changing pavement types. As part of this initiative, the City will continue to work with property owners to develop a modified "frontage road" system to ease traffic and create a safer transportation corridor.

An Alternative Vision for the Milwaukee Mile

The Milwaukee Mile has been a West Allis historic icon for over 100 years. The continuance of the Milwaukee Mile as one of America's premier, tradition-laden auto racing venues is certainly of foremost importance. Recent successes in re-acquiring a major racing event suggest hope for the long-term future of racing at the Milwaukee Mile.

The City of West Allis encourages the State Fair Park Board to do everything within its powers to preserve and enhance the Milwaukee Mile as a major racing venue. If the Milwaukee Mile were to evolve into uses other than racing, it would be a cultural loss to West Allis.



However, recognizing that the racing schedule over the last several years has had mixed results in terms of obtaining premier racing events, there does exist a remote chance that the Milwaukee Mile could evolve into uses other than racing. As part of the City's 2030 Comprehensive Planning effort, West Allis is looking at all land masses that may present an opportunity to evolve, and if so, to offer redevelopment options to help guide and promote compatible future reuses.

As an exercise in long-range planning, what other future uses would most benefit the State Fair Park, the State of Wisconsin and the abutting neighborhoods?

Any discussion of land reuse options would obviously first explore the potential of expanding and broadening the State Fair Park experience. After the long-term needs of the State Fair Park have been accommodated, what is the highest and best use of any remaining parcels?

Concept Area Five, within Chapter 9 of this Plan, details the landmass on the eastern portion of State Fair Park of about 127.5 acres (Milwaukee Mile Corridor). Of this amount, 42.5 acres is north of the Milwaukee Mile area, the Milwaukee Mile area itself is about 76 acres, and the land area south of the Milwaukee Mile is about 9 acres.

This landmass lies in the shadow of the Milwaukee County Medical Complex, which will soon be completely developed. The reuse of the Milwaukee Mile Corridor may provide for the next generation of medical, educational, business development and residential uses.

In the past, the State Fair Park Board has explored the potential of selling a portion of the 42.5 acres north of the Milwaukee Mile for private development, via the board-appointed I-94 Development Corridor Feasibility Committee. The Board also approved the sale of the

9+ acres immediately south of the Milwaukee Mile to one of the previous racetrack promoters for private reuse. Should the State Fair Park continue to explore the redevelopment of these two landmasses, what should the City of West Allis recommend for reuse considerations?

If any or all of the 127.5 acres, which includes the Milwaukee Mile, were to evolve during the next 20-year planning horizon into uses other than racing, what new land uses might best complement and be integrated into potential reuse of the northern and southern parcels?

As a conceptual idea, the City of West Allis' 2030 Comprehensive Plan offers a bold new alternative vision for complete redevelopment and reuse of the Milwaukee Mile Corridor. This long-term vision includes the potential for more than \$1.2 billion in new development with varying uses, providing \$24 million in annual property tax relief, and allows for the creation of 8,000 new jobs and vibrant public spaces. A central feature of this new vision is re-creating a natural waterway with the opening – daylighting – of Honey Creek, which is currently channeled underground. Discussion of this plan represents the first step in the process of planning for the future.

With redevelopment of the Milwaukee Mile Corridor, West Allis and the region would have a unique opportunity to bolster economic growth within the urbanized metropolitan area. Direct access to the State's busiest freeway interchange, connections to an existing employment and residential base with established businesses and services, and the potential for increased public transit connections make this site a prime target for growth in the region. As opposed to urban sprawl (costly and inefficient new developments beyond the region's urbanized core), the Milwaukee Mile Corridor offers metropolitan Milwaukee an

invaluable, sustainable opportunity to strengthen development of its geographic center.

The private redevelopment of the Milwaukee Mile Corridor could benefit State Fair Park by generating significantly more net revenues. Further analysis would obviously be needed, but as an example, the sale of land could yield somewhere in the ballpark of well over \$25 million. Alternatively, the State Fair Park could retain ownership of the land and receive substantial annual revenues from long-term land leases.

A strong potential also exists to provide several million dollars of annual revenue to support the historic uses of State Fair Park. This could be done by structuring new state legislation that would allow State Fair Park to participate in the annual revenue streams resulting from the project. Possible revenue streams range from receiving a percentage of the total property taxes, to participating in other revenue streams, such as hotel/motel tax revenue, sales tax revenues, etc., to such other income producers including parking and advertising revenue streams.

Extending the City's Main Street

The Six Points area represents an extension of the City's downtown commercial district. Recent investment in the area with new housing and mixed-use development, builds upon the Summit Place success. Continued investment in the form of more housing, revitalized commercial uses, and improved streetscaping, will establish this area as the gateway to Downtown West Allis from the east.

Land Use

West Allis has a diverse mix of land uses that contribute to the overall identity of the City. Although mixed and varied, the variety helps to maintain a stable tax base, provides housing and employment options,

and offers opportunities for continued redevelopment. Land use recommendations can be successfully implemented when looking at the social, economic, and physical factors of growth. Diverse and healthy communities achieve a balance of these growth types to provide a quality environment for its residents. Together these factors influence current residents, business owners, and the community's marketability to new residents and businesses.

Key recommendations include:

- Encourage the development of compatible infill and renovation projects that complement the City's existing mix of uses and quality of life
- Capitalize upon West Allis' existing neighborhoods and urban infrastructure, and implement sustainable land use initiatives that increase their value
- Develop appropriate buffers and transitions between land uses that allow for the co-existence and retention of the City's assets

Intergovernmental Cooperation

The realities of today's lifestyle, in which people readily cross municipal borders in their daily routines, increases the importance for intergovernmental cooperation. As West Allis plans for the future, intergovernmental cooperation will likely be a vital component to its success, both within its borders and crossing its borders.

Key recommendations include:

- Continue partnerships with neighboring municipalities and overlapping districts to

strengthen the core of the metropolitan area with quality development and services

- Recognize the importance of planning for the future through updates and reviews of plan documents and policies that affect West Allis and the region

Comprehensive Plan Organization

The following chapters contain greater detail regarding the outlined vision for West Allis through the year 2030. Each chapter contains a broad goal or goals, with clarifying objectives and specific recommendations for achieving identified targets. Each chapter also contains an analysis of current conditions, statistical trends, and a compilation of existing policies and programs.

As a living document, periodic reviews and updates to this plan are scheduled to occur on a regular basis. As the community continues to evolve, the Comprehensive Planning process should prove to be a valuable asset for engaging in conversation to define the future vision of the community, identifying how that vision can be achieved, and compiling this vision into a common document that can be used for reference and guiding decisions.

The City of West Allis is always looking for citizens to serve on boards, commissions, committees, and task forces to assist in the operation of many of the functions of the City. Input by residents adds positive value, a broad perspective of ideas, talents and interests. Find out where the vacancies are and if they interest you, ask to serve.