

# Town of Roxbury

## Comprehensive Plan Summary

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### A Snapshot of Roxbury

The Town of Roxbury, located in northwestern Dane County, is a small but growing community, anchored by its farming heritage. Farming provides a living for many residents of the Town; it also provides the basis for its rural character. The Town has a wide variety of landscapes. Most of the Town is characterized by agricultural and wooded rolling terrain, interspersed with scenic valleys and ridges.

Residents enjoy the rural atmosphere of the Town; it is also proving attractive to a growing number of new residents. Given the Town's proximity to the Madison urban area and planned improvements to Highway 12, unplanned growth over the next 20 years could gradually erode the Town's rural character. Planning for development in a timely, orderly, and predictable manner is essential to preserving the Town's farmland, protecting its woodlands and other natural features, avoiding land use conflicts, providing appropriate housing and employment opportunities, and protecting the Town's rural heritage.

### Comprehensive Plan Purpose

The *Town of Roxbury Comprehensive Plan* is intended to update and replace the Town's Land Use Plan, last amended in 1993. The *Plan* will allow the Town to guide growth, development, and preservation by identifying appropriate development and preservation areas, recommending land uses for specific areas, and providing detailed strategies to implement the *Plan*.

The *Plan* covers the nine elements specified by Wisconsin "Smart Growth" legislation, including land use, transportation, agricultural, natural, and cultural resources, utilities and community facilities, housing, economic development, intergovernmental cooperation, and plan implementation.



## Key Recommendations

Through the planning process, residents expressed their desires for the future of the Town, prioritized the resources that they wish to preserve, identified areas where future development was acceptable or desirable and ways to arrange new growth on the landscape, and chose implementation tools to make their vision for the future a reality. The following paragraphs summarize the key recommendations of the *Plan*.

### **Agricultural Preservation**

The *Comprehensive Plan* emphasizes the importance of agriculture to the community. Agriculture is the Town's primary economic activity (based on the percentage of businesses that are farms), and is also the most prominent land use.

To preserve agricultural land and character, the *Plan* promotes limiting new development to an overall density of one house per 35 acres, the clustering of new homesites on small residential home sites, the use of development design guidelines, and the use of transfer of development rights to provide more flexibility in the location of new development without increasing overall housing density in agricultural areas.

To implement these recommendations, the Town developed a Land Evaluation and Site Assessment System (LESA) to evaluate proposed developments in farming areas in the future. The system rates the suitability of a certain site for agricultural use, and will help the Town to direct placement of new development away from the most productive soils.

### **Natural Resource Protection**

Residents generally agree that protecting natural resources should be a key element of the *Comprehensive Plan*. The *Plan* seeks to preserve streams, drainageways, floodplains, wetlands, wildlife habitat, steep slopes, and areas of contiguous woodlands.

The *Plan* includes policies that protect resources by prohibiting new buildings in wetlands, stream banks, floodplains, shoreland setback areas, eagle feeding, perching, and roosting areas, and slopes greater than 20 percent. Development on slopes between 12 and 20 percent is discouraged.

### **Key Community Goals**

- ◆ Preservation of agricultural land
- ◆ Continuation of agriculture as a viable way of life
- ◆ Preservation of natural resources
- ◆ Accommodation and respect for wildlife
- ◆ Preservation of areas of cultural and historic importance
- ◆ Careful siting and design of new development to ensure a future land use pattern consistent with the Town's existing character



### **Natural Resource Concerns:**

- ◆ Woodlands
- ◆ Wetlands
- ◆ Shoreland areas
- ◆ Crystal, Fish and Mud Lakes
- ◆ Roxbury Creek
- ◆ Numerous small streams
- ◆ Wisconsin River
- ◆ Steep slopes
- ◆ Hilltops and Ridgetops
- ◆ Rare species/Wildlife habitat, including eagle habitat near the Wisconsin River

### **Rural Character Preservation**

Historic resources in the Town include residences, farm buildings, such as barns and silos, commercial properties, and St Norbert's Church. Archeological resources include cabins and homesteads, cemeteries (burial mounds and unmarked graves), and Native American community sites. The site of the Battle of Wisconsin Heights is located in the northwest corner of the Town. The "Village" of Roxbury, located near the geographical center of the Town, is an example of a typical older crossroads hamlet, and is itself historic.

These resources provide an important social and cultural continuity, and are a source of pride for Town residents. Policies to protect and enhance them are a component of the *Comprehensive Plan*. These include preservation of historic buildings and landscapes, careful design and placement of new development to respect historic styles and archeological sites, and support of local festivals or other activities that celebrate the Town's farming heritage and rural way of life.

### **Future Development Guidance**

Balancing the preservation of agricultural, natural, historical, and cultural resources with new growth is the focus of the *Comprehensive Plan*. The *Plan* includes policies and standards for development siting that minimize physical and visual impacts. Grouping of development is encouraged, to preserve agricultural land, protect natural resources, and reduce development visibility. Transfer of development rights within the Town will be allowed and promoted, to try to direct development away from agricultural and natural areas, while preserving the landowner's ability to exercise their land divisions, if they choose.

The Planned Land Use map included in the *Comprehensive Plan* identifies types of land uses envisioned for different areas of the Town. Most of the Town is identified as Agricultural Preservation Area, with a maximum development density of one home per 35 acres. Other areas, particularly within the triangle formed by Highways 12, 78, and Y, are identified for Rural Development, where larger subdivisions would be allowed. The "Village" of Roxbury is also identified for more concentrated development. Residents see the "Village" as a key focal point, and are beginning to prepare a detailed



neighborhood plan for the area to guide future development in a way that preserves the area's character.

### **Transportation Planning**

Roxbury is well connected through an extensive roadway network. The expansion of Highway 12 from two to four lanes is a major concern for the Town. The *Comprehensive Plan* contains a number of policies dealing with transportation issues. It suggests focusing any new commercial development at only a couple crossroads where such development already exists.

### **Implementation**

The *Comprehensive Plan* contains a set of recommended implementation steps, to help convert the goals and policies of the *Plan* to reality.

One of the key recommendations is implementation of the Town's LESA system, which will help to guide development away from the Town's most productive agricultural areas. Amending the Town's subdivision ordinance to reflect the updated *Comprehensive Plan* is another key recommendation. Preparation of an accurate map showing the number of dwelling units built and the number still available on parcels within the Agricultural Preservation Area is recommended for 2002.

Development of a detailed transfer of development rights program is also recommended. This program would allow the Rural Development Areas and perhaps the "Village" of Roxbury to serve as receiving areas for some development that might otherwise occur in the Agricultural Preservation Area, helping to ensure preservation of agricultural land and rural character.

### **Transportation Policies:**

- ◆ Discourage through traffic on Town roads
- ◆ Resolve traffic, parking, and safety concerns around Crystal Lake
- ◆ Discourage "side of the road" development on main roadways
- ◆ For planned development areas, require interconnected new roads, and consider impact fees
- ◆ Work to preserve a "scenic image corridor" along U.S. Highway 12

### **Transfer of Development Rights Program:**

- ◆ Local government allows development rights to be transferred from "sending areas" where preservation is desired (such as farmland and open space), to "receiving areas" where development is planned
- ◆ Developers controlling land in receiving areas must acquire development rights from sending area landowners in order to build
- ◆ Use of transferred development rights allows developers in receiving areas to develop at greater densities than would otherwise be allowed
- ◆ Developer must demonstrate that sufficient development rights had been purchased (and a conservation easement placed on the sending area property) before approvals of rezonings, plats, or conditional use permits is granted