

Chapter Seven

Land Use

Land use is a crucial component of livability and provides a basis for the formulation of policy to coordinate a sustainable pattern of development. The existing natural landscape and land use patterns influence future land use and development. Balancing the needs of the community with land use issues requires that each situation be considered individually and that the community seeks the solution which fits the unique challenges it faces.

Previous Plans and Studies

[Village of Marathon City Comprehensive Plan, 2017](#)

The Village of Marathon City Comprehensive Plan is a policy plan that describes existing and future land uses, and regulatory tools for land use. The overall goal of the Comprehensive Plan is to provide consistency between official mapping, zoning and subdivision ordinances, local plans, and other implementation tools.

[Marathon County Comprehensive Plan, 2026](#)

The Marathon County Comprehensive Plan chapter on land use analyzes pattern of development, existing land use, and future land use. The plan's land use goal is as follows: *Marathon County makes sound land use decisions which balance the needs of agriculture, recreation, economic development, and growth to wisely maximize the land's potential.* Objectives to achieve this goal include:

- Promote the preservation of agricultural land.
- Promote practices that preserve soil health and land productivity.
- Encourage revitalization of former residential properties in rural areas.
- Provide tools for managing and coordinating growth.

[Regional Comprehensive Plan, 2025](#)

The RCP's Land Use chapter looks in detail at the land uses through the ten-county region and identifies the following issues and trends related to land use:

- **Dispersed Land Use Patterns.** As the Region continues to age, a dispersed population will impact the ability of residents to access services. There are also concerns about continuing to fund infrastructure as a result.

- **Contamination and Blight.** Older neighborhoods in the Region may have sites contaminated by former industry and structures that have fallen into disrepair. There is an opportunity to rehabilitate these properties to save infrastructure costs compared to new construction.
- **Environmental Features.** Development pressures can fragment woodlands and other wildlife habitat, increase runoff into waterways, impact aesthetics, and contribute to erosion if not designed properly.
- **Land Use Demand.** Work-from-home may increase the number of people living in certain areas, and decrease demand for commercial space, influencing land use patterns and infrastructure needs.
- **Renewable Energy.** While renewable energy provides environmental and economic opportunities, large scale solar and wind power is approved at the State level, with few tools for municipal and county government to manage its location, screening, and other impacts.
- **Comprehensive Plans.** While many communities and counties have adopted comprehensive plans, they are frequently not being updated as required by Wis. Stats. 66.1001. See Map 7 for Comprehensive Plan status.

Existing Land Use

The Village of Marathon City is bordered by four towns: Stettin to the northeast, Marathon to the southeast, Cassel to the southwest, and Rib Falls to the northwest. The northern part of the Village is crossed by STH 29 running east-west.

The Big Rib River is a dominant land feature in the Village, bisecting the Village east-west. The originally platted section of the Village is to the south of the River and is made up primarily of small lots, including most of the single-family residences and small-scale commercial uses. These small-scale commercial areas are located between the River and 4th Street. Most Village public services are also located south of the Big Rib River, including the Village Hall, the library, and the different facilities of the Marathon School District.

North of the River, many larger lots are found, with both commercial and residential properties. This area includes a significant amount of wetlands which limit development. Commercial development is congregated near the STH 29 interchange, providing ease of access to Village residents as well as people coming from other communities. The Business and Industrial Park has several large employers as well as space to expand and develop.

Most of the existing agricultural land within the Village is found along the Village boundary. This includes the land to the far south of the Village along STH 107 and CTH B, to the east along CTH NN, and in the newly annexed lands north of STH 29. Several quarries or gravel pits are located on the northeast side of the Village, on both sides of STH 29 west of STH 107.

Knowledge of the existing land use patterns within a community is necessary to develop a desired “future” land use pattern. The **Existing Land Use Map** was developed using air photos from a countywide flight in 2025. Eleven basic categories were used to classify the various existing land uses. The categories include Agriculture, Commercial, Governmental, Industrial, Open Lands, Outdoor Recreation, Residential, Transportation, Utility, Water, and Woodlands.

Land use classifications are groups of land uses that are compatible, and that separate conflicting uses. The classifications are not zoning districts and do not have the authority of zoning but are intended for use as a guide when making land use and zoning decisions.

Existing Land Use Classifications

The **Existing Land Use Map** outlines the existing land use pattern throughout the Village. The intent of an existing land use map is to illustrate the location of existing land use categories within the Village for planning purposes. Land use classifications are grouped by the use most central to each parcel. For example, lands classified as residential may also have a barn or home-based business on site.

Existing land use classifications and acreage totals are presented in **Table 21**. Industrial uses account for the largest share of the Village’s land area at about 18 percent. The next largest land use category is Agriculture at about 17.5 percent, followed by Woodlands and Residential. Uses such as Commercial, Governmental, Industrial, Open Lands, Outdoor Recreation, Transportation, and Utilities occupy the rest of the Village.

Table 21: Existing Land Use, 2025		
Land Use	Acres	Percent of Total
Agriculture	366	17.5%
Commercial	71	3.4%
Governmental	102	4.9%
Industrial	372	17.9%
Open Lands	57	2.7%
Outdoor Recreation	62	3.0%
Residential	319	15.3%
Transportation	226	10.9%
Utility	3	0.1%
Water	159	7.6%
Woodlands	348	16.7%
Total	2,085	100.0%

Source: NCVRPC

Land Values

Table 22 displays the assessed land values in the Village of Marathon City. It is important to note that tax exempt lands are not included in values for Table 22. Overall, land value per acre in the Village is valued at about \$172,851 per acre based on assessed land values from tax information submitted to the Department of Revenue. Residential properties have the highest value per acre, followed by those properties designated as Manufacturing and Commercial.

Table 22: Assessed Land Value (per acre), 2025		
Land Classification	Total Value of Land and Improvements	Average Value per Acre
Residential	\$144,033,500	\$809,177
Commercial	\$37,474,200	\$123,677
Manufacturing	\$73,565,400	\$275,526
Agriculture	\$95,800	\$297
Undeveloped	\$195,600	\$776
Forest	\$405,700	\$3,559
Agricultural Forest	\$74,600	\$1,913
Other	\$838,700	\$93,189
Total	\$256,683,500	\$172,851

Source: WI Department of Revenue

Development Trends

Land Supply

The Village has great potential to expand in the future if adjacent land owners wish to annex their properties into the Village. Unlike most municipalities in the nearby Wausau metropolitan area, Marathon City is not bounded by any other incorporated municipalities. The towns adjacent to the Village each have their own unique identity, but the amenities of the Village may draw other nearby landowners to join.

There are also opportunities for new development within the Village itself. Recently annexed lands, mostly along the north side of Marathon City, present great opportunities for new development and growth. The Future Land Use map presents a rough ideal of how the Village should develop these lands. Additionally, several commercial and residential buildings within the Village are vacant or in need of revitalization, and could be ideal locations for redevelopment.

Land Demand

An estimate of land needed for future residential development was based on projected new dwelling units between 2020 and 2050 derived from NCWRPC household projections and the average density of dwelling units per acre in the community. The average density was calculated using the total acres of residential land on the 2025 land use/cover map divided by the number of households according to the 2024 American Community Survey. For the purposes of this analysis, it was assumed that the density would remain constant between 2020 and 2050. Future acres needed for residential development were then estimated by multiplying the projected number of households in 2050 by the average density.

According to these projections, approximately XXX acres of land will be needed to accommodate new residential development through 2050 according to the DOA projections. It is important to note that the Future Land Use map accounts for XXX new acres of residential land. [section subject to change based on new Truth in Planning Law requirements]

Managed Forest Law & Public Lands

The Managed Forest Law (MFL) was established in Wisconsin to encourage better forest management and provide tax relief to the woodland owners. Currently, there are no lands within the Village enrolled in the MFL program. According to the most recent statement of assessment submitted to the DOR there are over 226 acres of public lands within the Village.

Future Land Use Map

The Village of Marathon City **Future Land Use Map** represents the anticipated future pattern of land uses. The map includes distinct land use categories to guide where new residential and non-residential development should be encouraged to be located or where development should be discouraged. See the Land Use Descriptions for a general overview of each land use category on the map.

The Future Land Use Map is not a zoning map. The Future Land Use Map is general in nature and was developed as a general guide for future development in the Village. Although general, the future land use plan map indicated appropriate future land uses, and as a result shows where rezoning may occur. In many areas the existing zoning districts already reflect the desired future land uses; while in other areas, zoning map or text changes may be required to meet some of the desired future land uses.

The identification of desired future land use types through the map does not imply that an area is immediately appropriate for rezoning. Given service demands and a desire for controlled growth, careful consideration to the timing of zoning decisions is essential. In some places, it may be desirable to rezone land to reflect the planned land use designations as soon as possible. In other cases, it may be appropriate to wait to rezone the area until an actual development proposal is brought forward.

Future land use planning assists local governments with balancing individual property rights and community goals, minimizing conflict between different land uses, and maximizing use of public expenditures. It is essential that future land use planning is ongoing and flexible. Periodic plan updates ensure that the plan continues to reflect future community preferences.

Village Plan Commission members participated in a mapping exercise with NCWRPC staff to identify the desired future land uses by using eleven common Land Use Map Classifications, as described below. Village Plan Commission members used their broad knowledge of the Village to draw shapes on a map representing the different land uses. The goal was to produce a generalized land use plan map (future land use) to guide the Village's growth.

The map includes eleven land use categories to guide where new residential and non-residential development should be encouraged to locate or where development should be discouraged. Descriptions of each land use category are provided below.

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Future Land Use Map Classifications

Agricultural Areas

Areas recommended to be preserved for the purpose of general crop farming or the raising of livestock.

Commercial

Areas recommended for commercial and retail developments.

Governmental/Public/Institutional

Areas recommended for government buildings, libraries, school, churches, etc.

Industrial

Areas recommended for industrial developments.

Residential

Areas recommended for residential development, typically consisting of smaller lot sizes and primarily single-family houses. [might need to add specific densities due to Truth in Planning Law requirements]

Multi-Family

Areas recommended for multi-family residential developments, including townhouses, multi-family apartments, and condominiums. [might need to add specific densities due to Truth in Planning Law requirements]

Outdoor Recreation

Areas recommended for parks, sport fields, and other outdoor recreation spaces.

Transportation

Areas for highways, road right-of-ways, railroads, and other transportation corridors.

Water

Areas with surface water features that preclude development

Woodlands

Areas of large wooded land that is expected to not be developed.

Land Use Programs and Tools

The principal land use program in Wisconsin is the comprehensive planning program, while the primary land use tools are zoning, subdivision ordinance, and official mapping.

Comprehensive Planning Programming

Wisconsin's comprehensive planning law was established in state statutes in 1999. The comprehensive plan is intended to be a local government's guide to community physical, social, and economic development. Comprehensive plans are not meant to serve as land use regulations in themselves; instead, they provide a rational basis for local land use decisions with a twenty-year vision for future planning and community decisions.

The Wisconsin Comprehensive Planning Law does not mandate how a local community should grow, but it requires public participation at the local level in deciding a vision for the community's future. The uniqueness of individual comprehensive plans reflects community-specific and locally driven planning processes.

While a local government may choose to include additional elements, a comprehensive plan must include at least all of the nine elements below as defined by the Comprehensive Planning Law (s. 66.1001).

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

Zoning

Zoning is the major implementation tool to achieve proposed land uses. The Village of Marathon City enforces its own zoning ordinance. Under the ordinance, zoning regulations are applied to zoning districts to regulate land use and development. The Village has five residential, two commercial, two industrial, and four special districts under the current zoning code. The zoning map identifies the locations where each district is sited.

Basically, zoning is a set of regulations used to minimize land use conflicts and promote development that supports a community's values. It regulates how property is used and how development occurs as well as the physical placement of buildings on land. Under Wisconsin Statutes, counties and local units of government are authorized to adopt zoning ordinances.

A zoning ordinance consists of a written text and a map. The text of a zoning ordinance specifies the permitted land uses, the size of buildings, yard/lot dimensions, and other prerequisites in obtaining permission to develop, while the zoning map arranges the community into districts or zones, such as agriculture, residential, commercial, or industrial. Each of these districts has different regulations. The goal of the zoning ordinance is to establish a reasonable development pattern by keeping similar and related uses together and separating dissimilar, unrelated, incompatible uses, particularly in relationship to transportation facilities, utilities and public services and facilities.

Consistency between Land Use and Zoning

Land use and zoning designations are related, but not necessarily identical. Land use categories tend to be fairly general whereas zoning districts regulate specific land uses and development requirements. Because the land use categories are general it is common for more than one zoning district to correspond to each land use category. It is also possible that some zoning districts might be consistent with more than one land use designation.

Achieving consistency between land use and zoning is required by State Statutes. This generally occurs when a community is considering a proposed zoning change. The decision to approve a zoning change must be based on the adopted comprehensive plan, and specifically, the future land use map. Generally, if the requested zoning is consistent with the land use designation on the property it should be approved, unless unique circumstances indicated the rezoning would negatively impact surrounding properties or the community. If a rezoning request is not consistent with the land use designation, the community should consider denying the rezoning request.

In situations where a rezoning request is not consistent with the land use designation - but the community believes the requested zoning is appropriate in the specific location and would benefit the community - the zoning change can be approved, however, the land use map should be amended accordingly to establish land use and zoning consistency. The process for amending the land use map is discussed in greater detail in the Implementation Chapter.

Shoreland Zoning

All counties, including Marathon County, are mandated by Wisconsin law to adopt and administer a zoning ordinance that regulates development in shoreland and floodplain areas for the entire county outside of villages and cities in accordance with state shoreland zoning standards. Municipalities may apply their own zoning in shoreland areas as long as it does not impose requirements regulated by a county.

Land Division

The Village of Marathon City has their own Subdivision Ordinance. Subdivision regulation relates to the way in which land is divided and made ready for development. A community can control the subdivision of land by requiring a developer to meet certain conditions in exchange for the privilege of recording a plat. While imposing conditions restricting the use of private property, the cumulative effect of land

subdivision on the health, safety, and welfare of a community is so great as to justify public control of the process.

There is some overlap between zoning and subdivision codes in terms of standards. Both ordinances, for example, can set lot sizes. Both can deal with the suitability of land for development. Implementing important plan techniques such as rural cluster development often requires use of the zoning ordinance and the subdivision ordinance.

A local land division code can provide the Village the means to review and regulate new divisions of land to ensure consistency with the vision, goals, objectives, land protection criteria, and other recommendations of an adopted plan. The ordinance would require administration and enforcement by the Village. Therefore, local control of divisions of land would require Village oversight. It also adds a layer of government involved in regulating proposals for land divisions.

Official Mapping

An Official Map is a map adopted by a municipality that specifies locations of future roads and other utilities or public facilities, along with right-of-way widths and other specifications. When a land division is approved, it must accommodate dimensions for future facilities according to the Official Map. Currently, the Village of Marathon City **does not** have an official map.

Other Tools

Additional tools and approaches can be utilized by the Village to achieve the goals of the plan. These include but are certainly not limited to the following: fee simple land acquisition, easements (purchased or volunteered), deed restrictions, land dedication, and ordinances or programs regulating activities such as impact fees, land division, building permits, and erosion control.

Land Use Issues

- **Limited Land** – Limited land supply for new housing in the Village appears to be one factor in out-migration of residents to the countryside where larger lots are available for building.
- **Site Planning** – The development of a general site plan for recently annexed lands will assist the Village in maintaining a desired growth pattern and maximizing the available lands.

Goals, Objectives & Policies

Land Use Goal: The Village of Marathon City makes sound land use decisions to balance the diverse needs of the community and to wisely maximize the land's potential.

1. Provide tools for managing and coordinating growth and development.
 - a. Explore the creation and adoption of an official map to site the locations of future infrastructure.
 - b. Maintain clear and open communication with neighboring Towns to discuss potential annexations.

2. Preserve Marathon City's downtown as the center of the community.
 - a. Develop a long-term downtown development plan.
 - b. Enhance the streetscape of the downtown to identify it as a unique shopping location.
 - c. Concentrate manufacturing businesses in the Business and Industrial Park and encourage businesses aimed at the local community to locate downtown.

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