

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION



Elm Street—Looking West in Future.

The City of River Falls and the surrounding region face many pressing planning challenges—from protecting a rich cultural heritage and a magnificent physical setting to meeting the demands for growth, providing services and facilities, and protecting and enhancing natural and built resources. This Plan attempts to embrace all segments of the community and guide the City toward its future. This Plan replaces the 1995 Comprehensive Plan as amended and serves as the City’s statement of direction for physical development and conservation.

1.1 SCOPE AND PURPOSE

This is a comprehensive, long-term Plan for the physical development and conservation of the City of River Falls and lies at the heart of the community’s decision making. This Plan reflects the community’s needs and a vision that is people-oriented, enduring, vibrant, and sensitive to the environment.

This Comprehensive Plan:

- Outlines a vision through the Plan themes and reflects the aspirations of the community;
- Establishes a base for judging whether development proposals and public projects are consistent with the Plan themes;
- Provides for projects that will enhance the character of the community, minimize hazards and preserve critical environmental resources such as the bluffs, Kinnickinnic River and its tributaries;
- Provides the basis for establishing and setting priorities for implementing programs and regulations;
- Provides the base for nurturing a vital community and reaching out to all segments of the population; and
- Meets the requirements of the “smart growth” provisions of the Wisconsin Statutes.

This Plan represents the goals and desires of the community as a whole and should be recognized as the City’s foremost public statement about the future of the City of River Falls. In order to ensure that a variety of City actions are consistent with this Plan, regular on-going use is essential. Because this Plan is both general and long-term, there will be circumstances and instances when detailed studies are necessary to implement it.

1.2 STUDY AREA BOUNDARY

Figure 1-1 depicts the regional location of the study area, and Figure 1-2 depicts the study area and existing boundaries that include:

- City of River Falls
- Extraterritorial Zone (ETZ) boundary
- Land within St. Croix County
- Land within Pierce County
- School District boundary
- The study area, which is land up to 1.5 miles from the City limits, including:
 - Town of Troy, to the north
 - Town of Kinnickinnic, to the east
 - Town of River Falls, to the south
 - Town of Clifton, to the west

1.3 PLAN ORGANIZATION

Themes. The policies within this Plan reflect 13 overall themes that closely track public comments. The themes are representative of citywide concerns and lay the foundation for the guiding and implementing policies.

Guiding Policies. Guiding policies state the City’s goals and philosophy and are at the end of each chapter. The guiding policies describe ways or methods that the themes and implementing policies may be achieved.

Implementing Policies. Implementing policies help guide and determine present and future decisions and are at the end of each chapter. They refer to existing programs or call for establishment of new ones.

Standards. Standards are set out in certain chapters and represent policies that can be mapped or measured.

Together, themes, guiding and implementing policies, and standards articulate the vision for the City of River Falls.

Policy Numbering Systems. Policies in this Plan are organized using a numbering system tied to sections, with a letter designation to distinguish guiding policies from implementing policies. For example, the first guiding policy in Section 2-1 is numbered 2-G-1, and the first implementing policy is 2-I-1. Thus, each policy in the Plan has a discrete number.

Explanatory Material or Commentary. Explanatory material provides background information and is set in *italics*.

1.4 PLANNING PROCESS

The City’s planning process includes monitoring and updating this Plan and preparing more detailed plans and programs, such as implementation program, resource management plans, neighborhood plans, and other special plans. An annual Plan report will provide an overview of the status of this Plan and its implementation programs.

Implementation Program. An Implementation Program will be developed using the policies from this Plan. This program document will describe, in general, terms of the timing and responsibilities for implementation. This document can be used as a basis for the Annual Report.

Resource Management Planning. This Plan encourages preparation of resource management plans for a subdivision or development that would affect sensitive resources areas. To help protect sensitive environmental resources the location of these resources is mapped in Chapter 8.

Neighborhood Planning. This document envisions a new process for both community and neighborhood level planning. It proposes development of a program to allow a neighborhood plan within district neighborhood boundaries.

The intent is to allow groups to be formed to discuss the common issues and ideas that concern people living alongside each other.

Figure 1-1 Regional Location.

Figure 1-2 Planning Boundaries.

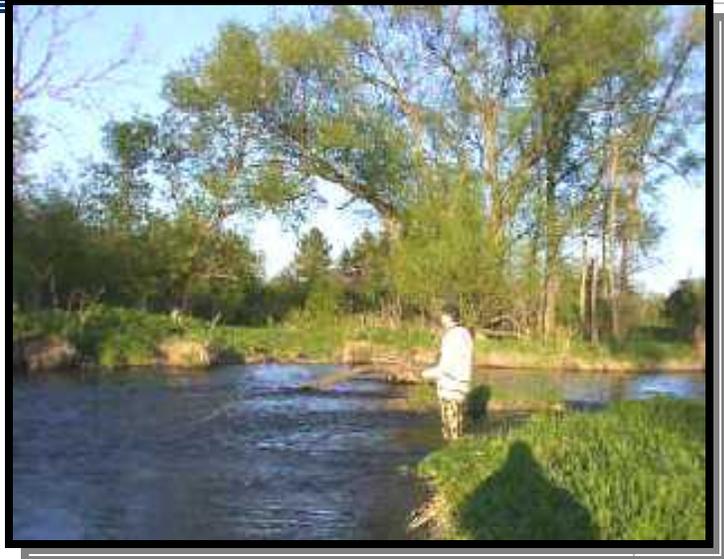
Neighborhood plan districts would be tailored to individual areas and needs. All community plans will have authority only through adoption by the City Council and will be required to be consistent with this Plan. A neighborhood plan district requires considerable community consensus and planning effort but has limited regulatory power.

Transportation Planning. As part of preparation for updating this Plan, a more detailed study was done for transportation. The study reviewed the following: street network classifications, standards, scale, design, origin destination, transportation-system analysis, future traffic estimates, and future transportation system needs. Chapter 6 will also address bicycle and pedestrian circulation and outline future bicycle routes and trail systems.

Fees. If special plans are prepared as part of a specific City plan, the City Council may establish fees to recoup plan preparation costs.

Amendments to the Comprehensive Plan. This Plan is flexible enough to respond to changed conditions and can be amended over time to keep it current. It should not be amended so frequently as to diminish its authority. Amendments to the Plan should be limited, although each amendment may include more than one change.

This Plan is intended to be a living document and, as such, will be subject to more site-specific and comprehensive amendments over time. Amendments also may be needed from time to time to conform to state and federal laws passed since the adoption to eliminate or modify policies that may have become obsolete or unrealistic because of changed conditions (such as completion of a task or project, development on a site, or adoption of an ordinance or plan). This Plan may also incorporate by reference, other detailed studies and plans that may be prepared.



Trout Fishing on the Kinnickinnic River.

Annual Report. An annual progress report focusing on implementation of the Plan will be prepared by the Planning Department and submitted to the Planning Commission and City Council. The annual report will include a summary of all Comprehensive Plan amendments adopted during the preceding year, an outline of the upcoming projects, and comprehensive planning issues to be addressed in the coming year. The Planning Commission and City Council can hear public review and comment on the annual report at regularly scheduled public meetings.

Five-Year Review. The City will undertake a comprehensive review of the Plan every five years after adoption. The five-year review will include:

- Comprehensive evaluation of Plan's policies;
- Analysis of the effectiveness of the implementation programs and strategies initiated to carry out the Plan;
- Review of five-year growth trends and reassessment of future urban land needs in light of the urban area's carrying capacity and available land inventory;

- Systematic assessment of the resource based threshold such as storm water management practices, shoreland standards and other environmental standards, and resource management plans that may be in place; and
- Analysis of the coordination and cooperation among the four adjacent towns, two counties, and state and federal units of government.

The focus of the five-year review will be to determine how well the Comprehensive Plan has performed—whether policies related to development and environmental conservation have been effective. A report summarizing City staff findings and recommendations will be circulated for public comment and then presented to the Planning Commission. The Planning Commission will review the five-year report and make a recommendation to the City Council. Public review and comments on the five-year review can be heard at the Planning Commission and City Council regularly scheduled public meetings.

1.5 BACKGROUND STUDIES

A Working Paper was drafted and titled “Existing Conditions and Planning Issues” - *Urban Area and Extraterritorial Area* (August 2003). Also a comprehensive analysis of the existing conditions and major planning options for the counties, City, towns, and the ETZ was performed prior to the preparation of this Plan. Major documents that have been reviewed are included in **Appendix A**.

1.6 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Throughout the preparation of this Plan, the City was committed to active public outreach and participation. The Plan policies were shaped by comments made in public surveys, meetings, and adopted Plans. A document was drafted and titled “Public Outreach and Issues and Identifications” – *Summary of Public meetings and Survey Responses*. The

document includes the following public participation:

The City of River Falls Council and City Planning Commission. Through an extensive public involvement process, the City Planning Commission identified issues and concerns and was the policy-making body responsible for overseeing the development of the Comprehensive Plan. As elected representatives, the Mayor and City Council are responsible for reviewing and making decisions about the Plan.

Community Meetings. Meetings were held in different neighborhood settings, one at each public elementary school and high school along with the public library, university, towns and city hall. In addition, meetings were held on the planning process and the elements of a Comprehensive Plan with the City and towns. The comments made at these meetings were recorded, published, and forwarded to the City, towns, counties, state, and public.

Newsletters and Surveys. A postage-paid survey and newsletter were sent to all City residents and town residents within 1.5 miles of the City. The results of the survey are summarized within this Plan, and all responses collected are available at City Hall, and a summary is on the City website. Newsletters were prepared periodically and distributed to all interested parties

Open Houses. Open Houses provided information about the Plan and were held throughout the process. Each public meeting was preceded by an open house, which was held in a highly visible location, such as City Hall, an elementary school, River Falls Library, and community events.

Cable TV, Video, and Radio. Many of the public meetings were broadcast on local cable channel 16. Tapes of the meeting were made available at the library and City Hall, along with interviews on the local radio station and University radio station.

Meetings and Hearings. Public meetings were held to receive comments on the draft Plan in addition to public hearings by the Planning Commission and City Council. City staff, adjacent Towns, UWRP Planner, School District Superintendent, Kinnickinnic River Land Trust, Trout Unlimited and the general public provide comments on the plan.

Updates. The City, counties, towns, and state were updated periodically on the issues and progress of this Plan while it was being developed by memorandum or by presentations from their representatives.

Reports. Quarterly progress reports were provided to the City, counties, towns, state, and general public.

Draft Plans. The draft Plan was subject to public review and public hearings, copies were provided for review and comment to the general public, City, counties, towns, and state, and were made available at City Hall, the Library, and on the City website.

Postings. City staff worked with the towns on posting notices of the meetings; presented information updates; documented the meetings; provided quarterly reports; mailed out information; printed ads, color maps, and draft Plans. Notices were posted at City Hall and on the City website.

1.7 SURVEY SUMMARY FOR THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

Policies have been shaped by active public participation and reflect the ideas and concerns presented at the numerous public forums. Responses to the surveys sent to all addresses in the City (81%) and to town residents within 1.5 miles of the City (19%) expressed their concerns as follows:

Table 1.1 What do you like most about living and/or working in River Falls?

Trait	Percent of Responses
1. Character and Charm	83%
2. Environment	18%
3. Recreation	14%

Table 1.2 What do you like least about River Falls?

Trait	Percent of Responses
1. Cost of Living	62%
2. Development	25%
3. Economic Development	22%
4. Transportation/Streets	18%

Table 1.3 What trends concern you when you think about the future of River Falls?

Concerns	Percent of Responses
1. Development	70%
2. Economic Development	37%
3. Environmental	17%

Table 1.4 Top priorities for the Comprehensive Plan.

Priority	Percent of Responses
1. Charm and Character	83%
2. Managed Growth and Development	70%
3. Cost of Living	62%
4. Economic Development	37%
5. Transportation and Traffic	18%
6. Environment	18%
7. Parks and Recreation	14%



A Family Picnic in Glen Park.

1.8 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN THEMES

The policies of this Plan reflect 13 overall themes that track with both the results of the public participation and previously adopted plans. The themes in the Sewer Service Area Plan have been added to this Plan and noted with an asterisk (*). For this section, the themes are equally weighted. The themes may be prioritized and amended, either with specific cases, or as a matter of general policy.

1.8.1 Character*

Maintain and respect River Falls' unique personality, sense of place, and character.

1.8.2 Community-Oriented Development*

Maintain and foster an urban fabric that promotes vehicular/pedestrian circulation, parks, conservation/open space areas and neighborhood services.

1.8.3 Sustainable Growth*

Ensure that development is financially sustainable and that growth, conservation, redevelopment, and natural resource protection are balanced.

1.8.4 Urban Form*

Promote a compact urban form that encourages sensitive/compatible infill development.

1.8.5 Mixed Use

Provide a mix of land uses and housing densities and types throughout the City.

1.8.6 Community-Oriented Downtown

Enhance and maintain community activities in the downtown area.

1.8.7 Transportation Alternatives

Maintain and promote alternative modes of transportation.

1.8.8 Economic Diversity

Develop and implement a comprehensive strategy to increase job opportunities, maintain a diverse economy, and promote arts and small businesses.

1.8.9 Housing*

Actively participate in the creation of affordable housing.

1.8.10 Quality of Life*

Enhance the quality of life of the community and ensure the availability of community services.

1.8.11 Intergovernmental Cooperation

Maintain a cooperative intergovernmental perspective with the towns, counties, and state, and work with private and governmental entities towards that goal.

1.8.12 Review Process*

Streamline the planning and review processes.

1.8.13 Implementation*

Ensure consistency between this Plan, implementing ordinances (including zoning and impact fees), and the Capital Improvement Program (CIP).