

## Chapter 1

# History & Existing Land Use



### History of Winnebago County

Winnebago County was established in January 1836. The County was named after the Winnebago/Ho-Chunk Tribe of Native Americans that once occupied large parts of what is now Illinois, Wisconsin and Iowa, stretching from Green Bay, Wisconsin south through the Rock River Valley, along a tributary of the Mississippi River.

After the Black Hawk War of 1832, the area was settled on the banks of the Rock River in what is now the City of Rockford. Located halfway between Chicago and Galena, this early settlement was known as "Midway Village" but was soon changed to Rockford, after the ford that existed across the Rock River. The river played a major role in the development of the region, serving as a major source of power while the rich soils of the area helped the area grow rapidly.

Transportation was the main catalyst for the growth of Winnebago County. In 1836, the state granted a charter to the Galena and Chicago Union Railroad for construction of a railroad from Chicago west to Galena. It was not until 1852 that the line finally reached the Rock River. During this period, large numbers of Irish and Swedish immigrants flooded into Chicago and found work on the railroad. Chicago was in the midst of a cholera epidemic, and immigrants were encouraged to leave the city by taking the railroad to the end of the line at Rockford. When the bridge across the Rock River was finished the following year, many immigrants and their families nonetheless remained in the area.

The railroad continued to encourage economic growth over the next several decades, including manufacturing and agriculture. By 1900, the area had over 80 furniture factories and Swedish immigrants had established 72 companies and owned numerous banks. By the 1920s development was well underway in the County, and increased further in the postwar boom of the late 1940s and early 1950s.

Today, Winnebago County covers a total of 519 square miles, and is located just south of the Illinois-Wisconsin state line. The City of Rockford is the County Seat, and other cities include Loves Park and South Beloit. There are eight villages in Winnebago County: Cherry Valley, Durand, Machesney Park, New Milford, Pecatonica, Roscoe, Rockton and Winnebago. There are fourteen townships: Burritt, Cherry Valley, Durand, Harlem, Harrison, Laona, Owen, Pecatonica, Rockford, Rockton, Roscoe, Seward, Shirland and Winnebago. There are approximately 275,000 people living in Winnebago County today.



There are three cities and eight villages within Winnebago County. The largest is the City of Rockford, pictured above, which is also the County Seat.

### Land Use Inventory of Winnebago County

**Figure 2: Existing Land Use Map** illustrates the different land uses within Winnebago County today. Urban development is concentrated along the eastern boundary, which includes the municipalities of Rockford, Roscoe, Rockton, Loves Park and Machesney Park, with rural development (agriculture and natural areas) to the west. Approximately 22% of all land within the County is incorporated. The Existing Land Use Map categories shown in **Figure 2** can be described as follows:

- **Agriculture.** This category refers to the use of land for agricultural purposes including, but not limited to, farming, farmsteads, dairying, pasturage, agriculture, horticulture, floriculture, viticulture, and animal and poultry husbandry, as well as the accessory uses that are typically part of these activities. Single-family homes on 40 acre, quarter-quarter section lots are also part of this land use category.
- **Agriculture - Rural Residential.** This land use is indicated on the Existing Land Use Map only. It refers to very low density single-family developments, either as a single lot development or within small clusters, generally located far from municipal boundaries. These lots are more agricultural in nature than a typical single-family residence. Often, they are referred to as "hobby farms." They are shown on the Existing Land Use Map to illustrate how residential development has spread throughout the rural areas of the County and the potential impact on agricultural uses. In the Future Land Use Map, the agriculture - rural residential category is absorbed into either agricultural land use, especially within the more remote areas of the County, or into a non-

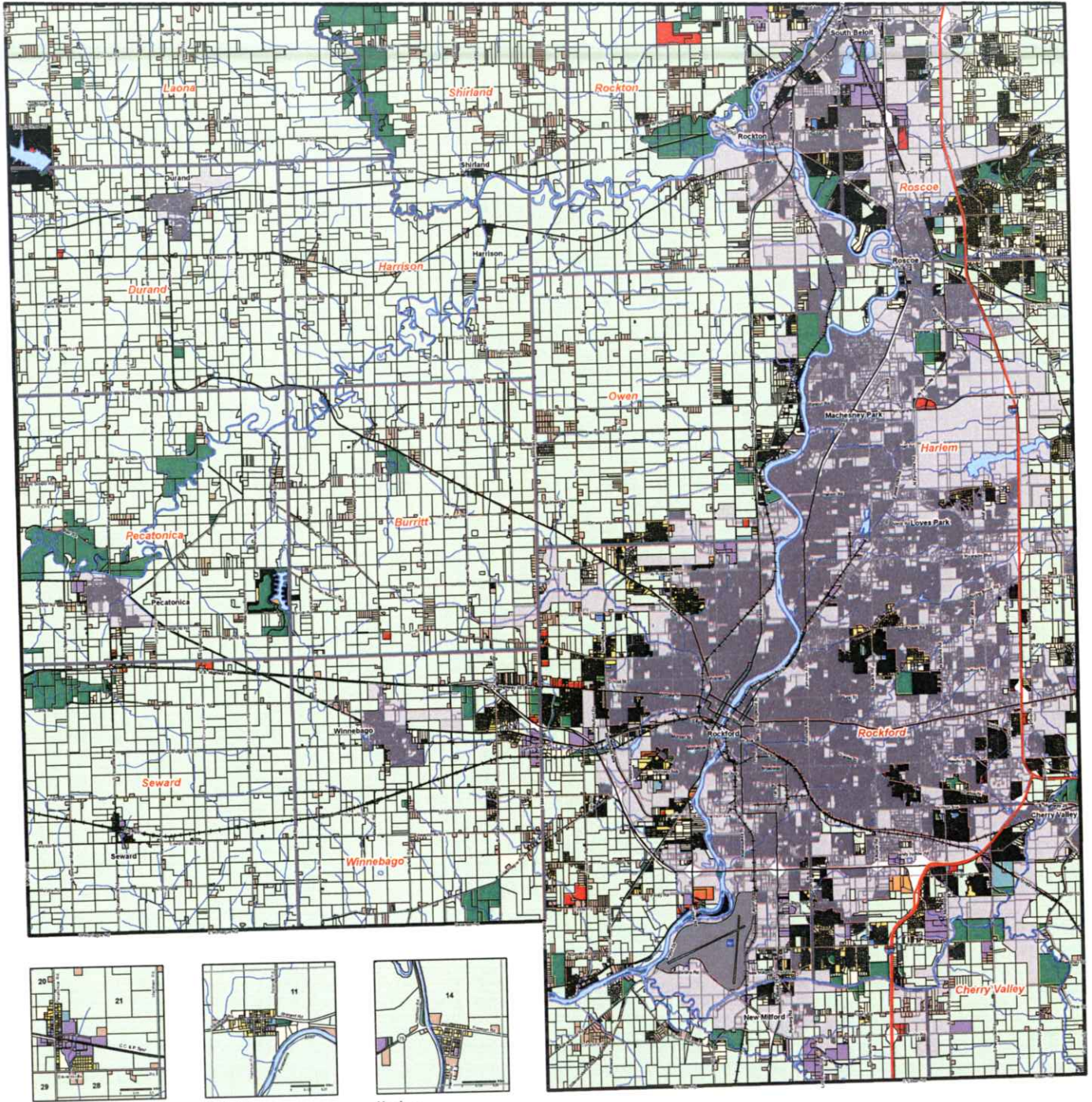
agricultural land use, such as low or medium density residential, within planned growth areas.

- **Residential - Low Density.** The low density residential land use consists of single-family residential developments of a density of 1.5 dwelling units per acre or less.
- **Residential - Medium Density.** The medium density residential land use consists of single-family residential developments of a density of more than 1.5 dwelling units per acre. The distinction between medium density and low density residential uses was based upon an analysis of the predominant size of residential subdivision lots.
- **Residential - High Density.** High density residential land uses are multi-family developments.
- **Residential - Mobile Home Park.** Mobile home parks are those parcels of land improved for the placement of mobile homes or similar (i.e. park models) for residential use on single or multiple lots, either privately-owned or leased.
- **Commercial.** Commercial uses are those businesses that provide goods and/or services directly to the consumer, where those goods are available for immediate purchase. This category includes a variety of commercial uses of various intensities, from retail stores and restaurants, to home improvement centers and motor vehicle dealerships, and commercial recreational uses, such as bowling alleys and go-kart tracks.
- **Industrial.** On the Existing Land Use Map, this category includes all types of industrial users, including light, medium and heavy industrial land uses. This includes wholesale, distribution, storage, and research and development facilities, as well as users engaged in the processing and manufacturing of materials or products, predominately from extracted or raw materials, and storage or manufacturing processes that potentially involve hazardous conditions.
- **Open Space & Forest Preserves.** This category includes areas that are used for active and passive recreation as well as natural resource conservation land. It includes a significant amount of forest preserve-owned land within the County.

- **Public Facilities.** Public facility land uses provide services to the County, such as a police, fire, schools, etc.
- **Place of Worship.** Existing places of worship are designated in this category. These are indicated in the Existing Land Use Map only. On the Future Land Use Map, these parcels are specifically identified as another land use compatible with the surrounding land uses in the event that they were to redevelop. It is not the intent of this *Plan* to encourage the redevelopment of places of worship or to determine specific locations for places of worship in the future. The location of a place of worship is controlled by zoning and other land use controls, not this *Plan*.
- **Incorporated Area.** The incorporated area includes the following municipalities: Cherry Valley, Durand, Loves Park, Machesney Park, New Milford, Pecatonica, Rockford, Roscoe, Rockton, South Beloit, and Winnebago.

The single largest land use in the County is agriculture. 63% of the entire County is in agricultural use. Land uses surrounding the incorporated municipalities, especially those on the eastern half of the County, are predominantly single-family residential, with limited commercial and industrial development. It is assumed that, over time, many of these areas will be annexed into the various municipalities, which would extend the municipal boundaries further into the central portion of the County and increase the percentage of incorporated land. Currently, single-family residential development constitutes approximately 13% of all unincorporated land area. With population growth, it is expected that residential development will continue in the unincorporated County. Commercial and industrial uses make up 0.4% and 1.0%, respectively, of all unincorporated land area.

Table 1: Existing Land Use Analysis by Township describes existing land use patterns by township. Figures 3A and 3B: Existing Land Use Breakdown provide a breakdown of the different land uses in the County by percentage, both for the entire County, both including and excluding incorporated and unincorporated land.



**Legend**

- Winnebago County
- Townships
- Incorporated Boundary
- Lakes & Waterways
- Airport Property

- Agriculture
- Agriculture - Rural Residential
- Low Density Residential
- Medium Density Residential

- High Density Residential
- Mobile Home Residential
- Commercial
- Industrial

- Open Space or Forest Preserve
- Public Facility
- Places of Worship

\* Townships labeled in red  
Hamlets, Villages & Municipalities labeled in black

Data Source Courtesy of WinGIS



**Figure 2: Existing Land Use Map**

**TABLE 1: EXISTING LAND USE ANALYSIS BY TOWNSHIP**  
(SEE FIGURE 1 FOR TOWNSHIP LOCATIONS)

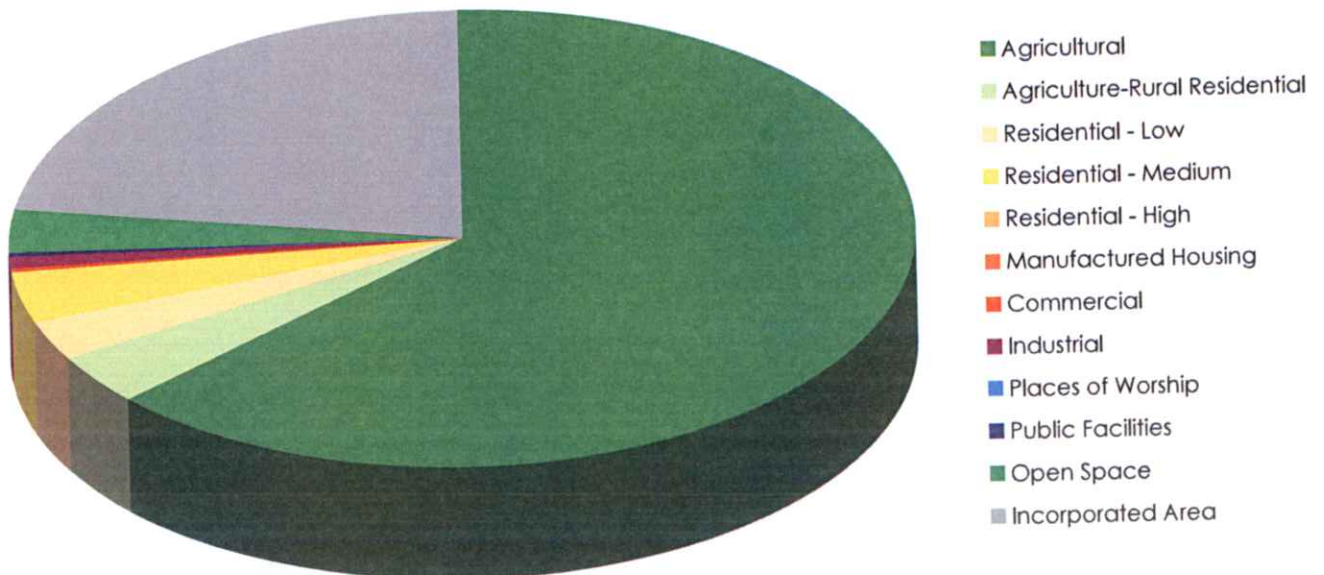
| <i>Township</i>   | <i>Existing Land Use</i>  |
|-------------------|---|
| <b>Laona</b>      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Primarily rural with scattered agriculture-rural residential development and existing forest preserves</li> <li>→ There is also a large residential subdivision - Lake Summerset - that extends into Stephenson County and Durand Township (Winnebago County), in the southwest corner (Lake Summerset has its own wastewater treatment facility and water system)</li> <li>→ There are no incorporated areas within the township</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Durand</b>     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Durand Township includes the incorporated municipality of Durand (population 1,081)</li> <li>→ Outside the incorporated area, primarily rural with scattered agriculture-rural residential development and existing parkland</li> <li>→ The Lake Summerset subdivision located in Laona Township also extends partially into Durand Township</li> <li>→ There are small commercial developments both within the Lake Summerset development and at the intersection of IL Rte. 75 and Best Road</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Pecatonica</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Pecatonica Township includes the Village of Pecatonica (population 1,997)</li> <li>→ There is some residential development, and commercial and industrial development adjacent to Pecatonica's boundaries</li> <li>→ Outside the incorporated area, primarily rural with scattered agriculture-rural residential development and existing forest preserve</li> <li>→ Westlake Village, a medium density residential subdivision is located in Pecatonica Township (Westlake Village has its own wastewater treatment facility and water system)</li> </ul> |
| <b>Seward</b>     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Primarily rural with scattered agriculture-rural residential</li> <li>→ Significant forest preserve land is located in the northwest corner of the township</li> <li>→ Residential development, public facilities, a manufactured housing park and some retail and heavy commercial are located along Highway 20</li> <li>→ The unincorporated Town of Seward is located within the township, which contains medium density residential development and significant industrial land uses along the Canadian National railroad spur</li> </ul>              |
| <b>Shirland</b>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Primarily rural with a significant amount of scattered agriculture-rural residential</li> <li>→ Significant forest preserve land is located along the Sugar River that forms the western boundary of the township</li> <li>→ The unincorporated Town of Shirland is located within the township, which contains medium and low density residential development, as well as some light industrial along Shirland Road</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Harrison</b>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Primarily rural with scattered agriculture-rural residential</li> <li>→ The unincorporated Town of Harrison is located within the township along the Sugar River</li> <li>→ The Town of Harrison contains primarily medium density residential development with some commercial and light industrial</li> <li>→ There is a small medium industrial development along IL Rte. 75</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Burrill</b>    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Primarily rural with scattered agriculture-rural residential</li> <li>→ A portion of the City of Rockford is located within the township</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Winnebago</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Winnebago Township includes the incorporated municipality of Winnebago (population 2,958)</li> <li>→ Outside the incorporated area, the western portion of the township is primarily rural and the eastern portion of the township has significant development, both residential and non-residential, as it approaches Rockford</li> <li>→ Currently, open space and agricultural uses separate the Village of Winnebago from Rockford</li> </ul>  |

**TABLE 1: EXISTING LAND USE ANALYSIS BY TOWNSHIP**  
(SEE FIGURE 1 FOR TOWNSHIP LOCATIONS)












| <i>Township</i>      | <i>Existing Land Use</i>   |
|----------------------|--|
| <b>Rockton</b>       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Rockton Township includes the incorporated City of Rockton (population 5,296) and the City of South Beloit (population 5,397)</li> <li>→ The western portion of the township is primarily rural with scattered agriculture-rural residential</li> <li>→ The eastern portion of the township contains the City of Rockton with significant development along the municipal boundaries</li> <li>→ Along the Rock River, there is significant open space and a number of low density residential developments</li> <li>→ Along the northern boundary of the township there is some industrial development near South Beloit and the large commercial development is the Blackhawk Racetrack</li> </ul> |
| <b>Owen</b>          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Owen Township includes portions of the incorporated municipalities of Machesney Park (population 19,990) and Loves Park (population 20,044) along its eastern and southern boundaries</li> <li>→ Low density residential development is concentrated along the municipal borders and the Rock River</li> <li>→ Outside the municipalities and the adjacent areas to their borders, the township is primarily rural with scattered agriculture-rural residential</li> <li>→ The township also contains open space uses, including Camp Winnebago YMCA, and some industrial uses along IL Rte. 2</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Rockford</b>      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Rockford Township includes the incorporated City of Rockford (population 150,115) and New Milford (population 541)</li> <li>→ The majority of the township is incorporated and the City of Rockford comprises the majority of incorporated land area</li> <li>→ There is significant development surrounding the City's boundaries, including low and medium density residential, commercial and industrial development</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Cherry Valley</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Cherry Valley Township includes the incorporated municipality of Cherry Valley (population 2,191) and portions of the City of Rockford</li> <li>→ Along the northern and western boundaries the majority of the township is incorporated</li> <li>→ The developed areas surrounding the municipal boundaries in the township are medium density residential development</li> <li>→ The township also contains significant forest preserve land along the Kishwaukee River</li> <li>→ The land area along the eastern and southern boundaries is primarily agricultural with scattered agriculture-rural residential</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Roscoe</b>        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Roscoe Township includes the incorporated Village of Roscoe (population 6,244) and a portion of Rockton and South Beloit</li> <li>→ A large portion of the township is incorporated</li> <li>→ Along the Union Pacific railroad spur, there is significant industrial land use</li> <li>→ In the southern portion of the township, there is significant unincorporated medium and low density residential development</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Harlem</b>        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Harlem Township includes the incorporated municipalities of Machesney Park (population 19,990), Loves Park (population 20,044) and the City of Roscoe</li> <li>→ The majority of the township is incorporated</li> <li>→ The eastern portion of the township contains scattered residential development</li> </ul>  |

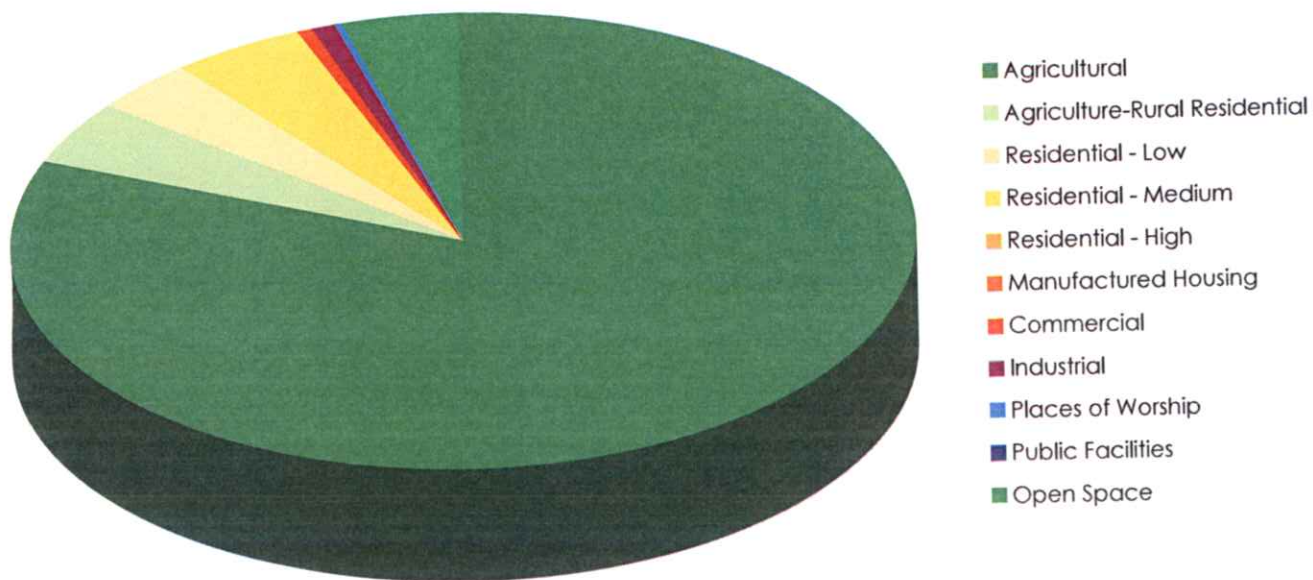
**FIGURE 3A: EXISTING LAND USE BREAKDOWN - COUNTY: ENTIRE LAND AREA**

|                                    |        |
|------------------------------------|--------|
| Agricultural                       | 63.33% |
| Agriculture - Rural Residential    | 3.54%  |
| Residential - Low Density          | 2.82%  |
| Residential - Medium Density       | 3.56%  |
| Residential - High Density         | 0.05%  |
| Residential - Manufactured Housing | 0.05%  |
| Commercial                         | 0.33%  |
| Industrial                         | 0.78%  |
| Open Space & Forest Preserves      | 3.23%  |
| Public Facilities                  | 0.12%  |
| Places of Worship                  | 0.05%  |
| Incorporated Area                  | 22.14% |



**FIGURE 3B: EXISTING LAND USE BREAKDOWN - COUNTY: UNINCORPORATED AREA ONLY**

|  |                                    |        |
|--|------------------------------------|--------|
|   | Agricultural                       | 81.35% |
|   | Agriculture - Rural Residential    | 4.54%  |
|   | Residential - Low Density          | 3.63%  |
|   | Residential - Medium Density       | 4.58%  |
|   | Residential - High Density         | 0.06%  |
|   | Residential - Manufactured Housing | 0.06%  |
|   | Commercial                         | 0.42%  |
|   | Industrial                         | 1.00%  |
|   | Open Space & Forest Preserves      | 4.15%  |
|   | Public Facilities                  | 0.15%  |
|  | Places of Worship                  | 0.07%  |



## Chapter 2

# Future Land Use



### Winnebago County's Vision

Winnebago County has adopted this 2030 *Land Resource Management Plan* to implement its vision for the future of the County. The land use decisions and growth management strategies found in this *Plan* will preserve Winnebago County's unique quality of life, which results from its ability to balance the rural and urban characters that make up the County.

*Over the next 20 years, Winnebago County will preserve its prime agricultural land and protect it from incompatible development, ensuring that it is both a key part of both the County's character and economy. New residential development will take advantage of areas where infrastructure and services are readily available, resulting in new development primarily adjacent to municipal boundaries as well as infill development within the municipalities. New residential development will be sustainable, walkable and of the highest quality design, utilizing state-of-the-art development tools like conservation design and traditional neighborhood development, while continuing to meet the housing needs of all County residents. Key transportation routes will be home to thriving new industry, supported by a highly qualified local workforce. The County will continue to plan for and take advantage of new economic development opportunities. All development will proceed in an organized manner to maintain the quality of the County's infrastructure, including schools, roads, sewer and water. The County will preserve its green infrastructure through conservation, restoration and proper management. Expansion of forest preserve land and other types of open space will protect sensitive areas, including river corridors, and create green corridors that connect across the County. All residents will benefit from the ability to interact with the County's rural character through both active and passive recreation opportunities.*

### Goals, Objectives and Policies

Goals, objectives and policies are a system of recommendations that are refined at each level. Goals are the broadest recommendation; each of the nine topic areas has one goal that guides the recommendations at the subsequent level. Objectives expand the goal into a series of broad statements that highlight distinct aspects of the overall goal. Policies are even more specific and intended to guide the County's decision-making policies and implementation strategies. Finally, implementation strategies are specific actions the County, or various players within the County, can take to implement the policies.

The goals and objectives of each topic area are summarized below. Each chapter contains detailed policies and implementation strategies that will realize these goals and objectives.

### **I. Agriculture**

*Preserve prime agricultural land.*

*Objectives:*

1. Firmly establish agriculture's role as a key part of the County's economy and identity.
2. Protect farmland from the encroachment of incompatible development.
3. Allow limited new development that would be a good neighbor to existing agricultural uses.
4. Continue to assess and, where feasible, implement farmland preservation and conservation techniques.



*Future residential growth has been planned primarily for areas surrounding municipalities, where infrastructure and access to services are available.*

### **II. Residential Land Use**

*Provide a variety of quality housing stock to meet the needs of county residents, while establishing an efficient land development pattern.*

*Objectives*

1. Locate new residential development where infrastructure and resources are already available.
2. Prevent conflicts between incompatible land uses, such as new residential development and agricultural or industrial uses, through site design standards on the micro-level and, on a macro-level, by following this Plan in land use