List of Commissioners:

**Adams County**
Rocky Gilner, C (6/24)
Pending, G (6/22)
Pending, J (6/26)

**Marathon County**
Catherine Wineman, C (6/21)
Daniel Guild, G (6/23)
Craig McEwen, J (6/25)

**Forest County**
Bill Chaney, C (1/26)
Paul Millan, G (1/24)
Cindy Gretzinger, J (1/22)

**Oneida County**
Thomas Rudolph, C (1/20)
Ted Cushing, G (1/22)
Harland Lee, J (1/24)

**Juneau County**
Edmund Wafle, C (6/19)
Kenneth Winters, G (6/23)
Jerry Niles, J (6/21)

**Portage County**
None Participating

**Langlade County**
Ronald Nye, C (1/20)
Angela Close, G (1/22)
Reinhardt Balcerzak, J (1/24)

**Vilas County**
Robert Hanson, C (6/25)
Jay Verhulst, G (1/23)
Pending (1/21)

**Lincoln County**
Paul Gilk, C (6/25)
Loretta Baughan, G (6/21)
Pending, J (6/23)

**Wood County**
Gerald Nelson, C (6/23)
Doug Machon, G (6/21)
Dave LaFontaine, J (6/25)

In addition, per Wisconsin Statute, the Secretary of the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC) - Missy Hughes - is an ex-officio officer of the NCWRPC.
The RLP was adopted in 2015 and this document is the five-year status report.
I. Background

Introduction

The North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (NCWRPC) adopted the Regional Livability Plan (RLP) in 2015. The plan serves as the regional comprehensive plan for the ten county area. Several key issues impacting the region were identified and analyzed, eleven overall goals were established, and a detailed strategy was developed based around economic development, housing, land use, and transportation. Overall, this document provides a framework for the communities within the region and introduces goals, objectives, and recommendations to promote livability, sustainability and quality of life. In addition, the RLP provides the foundation for local plans prepared by the NCWRPC.

It was recommended that a periodic “Plan Status” report be prepared to summarize the progress toward implementation. This Plan Status Report is not an amendment or update, but rather a review and evaluation report of implementation of the RLP over the last five years. The focus is on implementation of the RLP through local planning efforts and issues that might be included in the 2020 update.

Regional Plans

Under Wisconsin law ss. 66.0309(9), “The regional planning commission shall have the function and duty of making and adopting a master plan for the physical development of the region.” As such, the NCWRPC adopted the 1981 Framework for Regional Development. The statute was later revised to add that the master plan must incorporate the elements described in ss. 66.1001 – the State’s comprehensive planning law. To comply with that requirement, the NCWRPC developed and adopted the 2003 Regional Comprehensive Plan, which incorporates the elements described in 66.1001. In 2015 the Regional Livability Plan (RLP) was adopted, which builds upon and updates those previous efforts.

The cumulative choices of ten counties, 21 cities, 38 villages, 198 towns, and four tribal nations help determine the quality of life and economic prosperity across the region. These municipalities have local control and the decisions they make impact both neighboring communities and the region. Implementation is completed by preparing county, city, village, and town plans, as well as tribal plans incorporating the goals, objectives, and policies from the RLP.

Regional Approach

Working as a region, all communities can be made more livable when residents are able to live near their place of employment, which reduces travel costs, transportation maintenance, pollution, and congestion. In addition, the ability to live, work and recreate in one location...
connects citizens to their communities and helps ensure economic, equitable, and environmental sustainability for the region. Efficient use of land and support for walking, biking, and access to transit reduces energy consumption saving money for individuals, communities, and the region.

To help communities make informed choices about the future—that is, to create and maintain places where people want to live, work, and recreate a regional approach was utilized. Beyond, state statute, the regional approach was necessary for four basic reasons:

1. Many issues are regional in nature, and as such, they cannot be dealt with effectively by any one unit of local government. Over the years, NCWRPC has identified issues of regional significance, including housing, land use, transportation, and economic development. These issues were addressed in the Regional Livability Plan.

2. Planning coordination is essential for plan consistency and implementation. Throughout the region, for example, some single towns are planning without their surrounding communities, some counties are planning for only the unincorporated areas, and many areas have no planning at all. Many State plans and programs have an impact on all communities in the region. The RLP provided the background information for local plan efforts.

3. State-adopted objectives, standards, and policies should be given their first operational meaning within the context of multi-county regional plans. A multi-county approach to planning is the most technically sound, cost-effective way in which to collect, analyze, and disseminate essential planning data; to develop and apply sound planning techniques; and to prepare and adopt a set of framework plans relating to land use, transportation, housing and economic development. The RLP provided the needed framework for communities to plan.

4. The Regional Livability Plan, was prepared on a multi-county basis, will be readily adaptable for county, city,
town and village plans. One of the overall goals of this effort is to promote local comprehensive planning efforts across the region. Counties and municipalities will play a critical role in the regional planning effort by implementing portions of the RLP allowing communities to select the goals that best address their most pressing challenges, while at the same time accomplishing regional goals.

The successful implementation of this plan will save tax dollars, create more housing options, provide more transportation choices, increase economic development, accommodate an aging population, retain and attract a knowledgeable workforce, improve community health, protect the region’s rural character, and enhance the region’s scenic beauty. As such, the RLP identifies ways to address the region’s opportunities and weaknesses to become more livable for all residents.

Livability Principles

The Regional Livability Plan incorporated six livability principles. These are based on the livability goals identified by the federal U. S. Department of Transportation. These six principles are:

1. Enhance economic competitiveness. Improve economic competitiveness through reliable and timely access to employment centers, educational opportunities, services and other basic needs by workers, as well as expanded business access to markets.

2. Promote equitable, affordable housing. Expand location- and energy-efficient housing choices for people of all ages, incomes, races, and ethnicities to increase mobility and lower the combined cost of housing and transportation.

3. Provide more transportation choices. Develop safe, reliable, and economical transportation choices to decrease household transportation costs, reduce our nation’s dependence on foreign oil, improve air quality, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and promote public health.

4. Support existing communities. Target federal and state funding toward existing communities, through strategies like mixed-use development and land redevelopment, to increase community revitalization and the efficiency of public works investments.

5. Coordinate and leverage federal policies and investment. Align federal policies and funding to remove barriers to collaboration, leverage funding, and increase the accountability and effectiveness of all levels of government to plan for future growth, including making smart energy choices such as locally generated renewable energy.

6. Value communities and neighborhoods. Enhance the unique characteristics of all communities by investing in healthy, safe, and walkable neighborhoods - rural, urban, or suburban.
Regional Plan Goals

The eleven overall goals developed as part of the RLP are listed below. These goals provide the foundation for the regional strategy.

- Promote a variety of safe and affordable housing options that meet the needs of all community members.
- Ensure the availability of a skilled and flexible workforce.
- Support and develop a diverse economic base ensuring economic resiliency and growth.
- Support infrastructure needed for economic development.
- Develop tourism and knowledge based economy into leading economic sectors.
- Provide and improve access and transportation to people of all ages and abilities ensuring lifelong mobility and accessibility to the community.
- Fund the maintenance and expansion of the transportation system.
- Enhance the regional economy by reinforcing airports and freight rail.
- Preserve and protect the Region’s landscape, environmental resources, and sensitive lands while encouraging healthy communities.
- Promote the reuse of vacant and underutilized buildings and land.
- Monitor and update the Regional Livability Plan.

The goals and the strategy supported by them still appear relevant to the region. They should be reviewed again as part of the 2020 update.

II. Local Implementation Steps

Implementation of the Regional Livability Plan requires action by individual counties and local communities. Within the ten county region, there are 258 local units of government: 198 towns, 39 villages, and 21 cities. It is those local community level plans that pull data, goals, and strategies from the RLP to integrate into their local plans. Once adopted the plans foster livability and sustainability at the local level.

Comprehensive plans are the most direct way to implement the RLP, however, there are other related plans that also play a critical role. Here we examine plans at the county level, except for the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) which is a regional plan. The county level plans identified below are the usual plans provided to member communities by the NCWRPC. Not all counties utilize the NCWRPC for all of them, based on the needs and capacity of each individual county. Membership has changed over the years as well. Marathon County joined in 2013, as our eighth county, and Wood County joined in 2020, as our ninth. Therefore, depending on when a plan was completed, the number of county members vary. Portage County is not a member county. Our role is not to duplicate, but to enhance, support, and expand local planning efforts. Through these many local efforts the RLP is implemented.
1. Comprehensive Plans

Comprehensive plans are designed to guide the future actions of a community. The plans present a 20-year vision for future planning and community decisions. A comprehensive plan is a local government’s guide to community physical, social, and economic development. Each plan is the unique result of the respective community’s locally driven public participation process. There are nine state mandated elements, including issues and opportunities, housing, transportation, utilities and community facilities, agricultural, natural, and cultural resources, economic development, intergovernmental cooperation, land use, and implementation. Additionally, a local entity may choose to include additional elements that are particularly relevant to that community. Comprehensive plans are required for most communities and should be updated every ten years.

As displayed in Map 1, NCWRPC has prepared county comprehensive plans for Adams, Forest, Langlade, Lincoln, Marathon, Oneida, and Vilas. Juneau County used a consultant, and that plan is overdue for an update. Wood County, a new member, prepared their own plan; however, the next update will be completed by the NCWRPC. Overall, 7 of 8 member counties or 88% utilized the NCWRPC and incorporated parts of the Regional Livability Plan.

2. Farmland Preservation Plans

Farmland preservation plans establish a local vision for agricultural preservation, agricultural development, and the development of agricultural enterprises at the county level. The plans function as the primary policy document setting forth directions for how municipalities intend to preserve agricultural production capacity, farmland, soil and water resources, and rural character. These documents also enable cities and towns to establish policies to protect farmland and make them eligible to participate in the Farmland Preservation Program through Agricultural Enterprise Area and Farmland Preservation Zoning. Farmland preservation plans are required for counties to maintain the tax credit to local farmers. These plans are reviewed by Wisconsin’s Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection (DATCP) and must be updated once every ten years.

As displayed in Map 2, NCWRPC has prepared farmland preservation plans for Adams, Forest, Langlade, Lincoln, Oneida, and Vilas. Juneau and Wood County both internally prepared their plans. Overall, 6 of 7 member counties or 85% utilized the NCWRPC and incorporated parts of the Regional Livability Plan.

3. All Hazard Mitigation Plans

All hazard mitigation plans enable state, tribal, and local governmental entities to identify risks and vulnerabilities with natural hazards (e.g., hurricanes, tornados, and floods). The plans develop long-term strategies for protecting people and property from future hazard events. All
hazard mitigation plans are developed with public input and assess potential risk and community capabilities within a geographic area. They then assign implementation strategies to address vulnerabilities. All hazard mitigation plans are required by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and should be updated every five years.

As displayed in Map 2, NCWRPC has prepared county all hazard mitigation plans for Adams, Forest, Juneau, Langlade, Lincoln, Marathon, Oneida, and Vilas. Wood County, a new member, prepared their own plan; however, the next update will be completed by the NCWRPC. Overall, 8 of 8 member counties or 100% utilized the NCWRPC and incorporated parts of the Regional Livability Plan.

4. Outdoor Recreation Plans

Outdoor recreation plans enable municipalities to assess existing outdoor recreation resources, anticipate future demand and identify recommendations. Plan submission is required by Wisconsin’s Department of Natural Resources (WisDNR) for outdoor recreation related grant funds. Outdoor recreation plans are reviewed by WisDNR and should be updated every five years.

As displayed in Map 4, NCWRPC has prepared county outdoor recreation plans for Adams, Forest, Juneau, Langlade, Lincoln, Oneida, and Vilas. Marathon County used a consultant. Wood County, a new member, prepared their own plan; however, the next update will be completed by the NCWRPC. Overall, 7 of 9 member counties or 78% utilized the NCWRPC and incorporated parts of the Regional Livability Plan.

5. Land & Water Resource Management Plans

Land and water resource plans serve as a long-term strategic plan for each county land and water resource district. These plans identify erosion conditions and problem areas, water quality objectives, priority sites including agricultural, conservation strategies, and implementation partners and strategies. The plan is formed through a public participation process that helps to identify issues and opportunities. Land and water resource plans are required by Wisconsin’s Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection (DATCP) and are required to be updated once every ten years.

As displayed in Map 5, NCWRPC has prepared county land & water resource management plans for Adams, Forest, Langlade, Lincoln, Oneida, and Vilas. Juneau and Marathon Counties prepared their own plans. Wood County, a new member, prepared their own plan; however, the next update will be completed by the NCWRPC. Overall, 6 of 7 member counties or 85% utilized the NCWRPC and incorporated parts of the Regional Livability Plan.
6. Specialized Transit Plans (County Transit Coordination Plans)

County transit coordination plans are created with stakeholder involvement in the assessment of elderly and disabled transportation. The plans provide strategies and goals to improve specialized transportation alternatives. Development of these plans includes gathering demographic information, identifying existing transportation alternatives, soliciting public input, and developing strategies for improving transportation options over the next five years. Plans may be developed on an individual county basis, multi-county basis, or regional basis. Plans are reviewed by Wisconsin’s Department of Transportation (WisDOT) every five years.

As displayed in Map 6, NCWRPC has prepared county transit plans for all ten counties. As part of our partnership with WisDOT we provide service to all counties for these plans, regardless of membership standing. Overall, 10 of 10 counties or 100% utilized the NCWRPC and incorporated parts of the Regional Livability Plan.

7. Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan

As a component of the Regional Livability Plan and as a designated partner with Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT) the NCWRPC prepared a regional bike plan. Walking and biking are important as part of a balanced transportation system. The Regional Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan is intended to enhance the viability of bicycling and walking as a form of transportation throughout the region. The plan also analyzes existing bicycling conditions and suggests routes or corridors on which to prioritize bicycling and walking improvements. This regional plan is intended to bridge the gap between the largely policy-based State plans and local community planning for bicycle and pedestrian networks and serves as a guide to help these communities and counties connect across their boundaries to form a complete regional network of safe walking and bicycling.

As displayed in Map 7, NCWRPC has prepared county bike and pedestrian plans for Adams, Juneau, Langlade, Oneida, and Vilas. Marathon County used a consultant and Wood County prepared their own plan. Overall, 5 member counties or 55% utilized the NCWRPC and incorporated parts of the Regional Livability Plan.

8. Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS)

As the designated regional Economic Development District (EDD) by the U.S. Department of Commerce - Economic Development Administration (EDA), the NCWRPC prepares the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy for the region. Like the RLP, the CEDS provides an overall framework for county and local economic planning efforts. To maintain EDD designation the CEDS must be updated every five years, and in the off years an annual performance report is prepared.
A map is shown for each of these various plans, except the CEDS, which covers the entire region. These maps reflect adopted county level plans prepared by the NCWRPC. Each year several plans are updated, but only the last adoption date is reflected in the maps. Portage County is blank in these maps since it is a non-member county.

Overall, based on the considerable development and adoption of county level plans implementation of the Regional Livability Plan has occurred. NCWRPC will continue to implement plans throughout the region that are influenced by the Regional Livability Plan. Each community should select the most applicable goals, objectives, and recommendations that best fit their community. In addition, federal, state, and regional government agencies and quasi-governmental organizations may be directly involved in project coordination, funding and execution based on the findings of the RLP.

III. Future Planning Considerations

The state’s planning law requires that plans, like the Regional Livability Plan, be updated at least once every ten years. An update results from revisiting the entire plan document including a substantial rewrite of the plan document and maps. An update of the Regional Livability Plan will occur about 2025.

A variety of issues were addressed in the RLP from population changes to housing options and economic development; however, during the review of the RLP, there are some additional topics that should be addressed. The inclusion of some additional topics will make the plan a stronger document for the region.

The issues that should be incorporated in the update process are:

- Public Health Needs/Pandemic Response
- Economic Recovery
- Resiliency - Weather & Climate Change
- Fiscal Conditions of the Region
- Widening Equity Gap

Why should these be considered in the plan update? There are a variety of reasons for each described below.

- Public Health Needs/Pandemic Response

Public health is the science of protecting and improving the health of people and their communities. Public health needs include promoting healthy lifestyles, researching disease and injury prevention, and detecting, preventing, and responding to infectious disease. The
overriding goal of public health is to protect the health of entire populations. Pandemic planning specifically involves the ability of a governmental entity to guide preparedness and response activities in a pandemic. The plans aim to stop, slow, or otherwise limit the spread of a pandemic including limiting domestic spread, mitigating disease, suffering, and death; and sustaining infrastructure and lessening the effects on the economy and society as a whole.

Public health needs within the region include promoting healthy lifestyles, researching disease and injury prevention, and detecting, preventing, and responding to infectious disease. Pandemic planning including preparedness and response activities are also a regional priority. Because of the rural nature of much of the region a medical infrastructural needs assessment is of particular importance.

- Economic Recovery

Economic recovery is the phase of the business cycle that follows a recession or downturn. It is a period when the economy regains and exceeds peak employment and output levels prior to a downturn. A recovery period is typically characterized by abnormally high levels of growth in real gross domestic product, employment, corporate profits, and other indicators. It is a turning point from contraction to expansion and often results in consumer confidence.

Economic recovery within the region is of particular importance. Employment rates, business growth and expansion, and levels of output are all important indicators of the state of the region. Economic vibrancy is vital to the health of the region.

- Resiliency – Severe Weather & Climate Change

Climate resilience is the capacity for a socio-ecological system to absorb stresses and maintain, function, adapt, reorganize, and evolve to improve sustainability. Understanding the climate change risks and their context enables effective planning for resilience. Risk can be managed through risk mitigation (stronger structures, lower vulnerability), risk transfer (insurance), or risk acceptance. Effective planning strategies can help to mitigate risk and improve sustainability.

Planning for resilience related to climate change is a priority throughout the region. Technology and research findings outside of the region can be applied within the region. Additionally, actions taken locally to adapt, reorganize, and evolve can benefit not only the local area, but the area as a whole.

- Fiscal Conditions of the Region

Fiscal conditions include liquidity, budgetary balance, reliance on debt to finance current and long-term expenditures, and the ability to pay for essential services. Fiscal sustainability is the
ability of a government to sustain its current spending, tax and other policies in the long term without threatening government solvency.

Assessing fiscal conditions within the region would include evaluating fiscal sustainability. It would also include assessing existing conditions for governmental entities, businesses, and individuals. For governmental entities this may include budgets and reliance on debt. For businesses this may involve liquidity, reliance on debt and the ability to make financial obligations. For individuals this may include liquidity, reliance upon debt, and the ability to make financial obligations.

- Widening Equity Gap

Although the economy has been doing well on many fronts including a low unemployment rate, rising incomes and a robust stock market, the income gap continues to widen. This disparity has continued to grow despite a surging national economy with low unemployment and more than ten years of consecutive GDP growth. The gap between high and low incomes continues to widen, despite the fact that in 2018, U.S. income had never been higher. There are several negative consequences as a result of this, including diminished economic opportunity and mobility, increased disparity within the public-school system, and higher rates of crime, health and social problems.

The widening equity gap is a concern regionally just as it is nationally. The equity gap should be evaluated along with suggestions to remove barriers. This is necessary to ensure that economic opportunity is available to all, education levels remain high, crime rates remain low, and public health levels remain acceptable.

IV. Conclusion

Overall, based on the completion and adoption of the local plans to date the RLP has been largely implemented throughout the region. Over the next five years additional plans will be prepared and adopted implementing the RLP even more. The NCWRPC’s annual work program appears to be achieving the goal of implementation.

Upon the review and evaluation of the Regional Livability Plan, no amendments are required at this time. The recommendation is to prepare an update in 2025, incorporating the planning considerations, which is the ten-year mark for the RLP. To accomplish that, resources need to be identified and an oversight committee should be established in early 2024 to provide oversight to the plan update process.
North Central Wisconsin
Regional Planning Commission
Adoption Year of Most Current Plan

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Legend:
- Green: Plan Prepared by NCWRPC
- Grey: * Plan Prepared by consultant
- Light Grey: ** Plan Prepared by Wood County Planning Department
### North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission

#### Adoption Year of Most Current Plan

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- **Green** indicates a plan prepared by NCWRPC.
- **Gray** indicates a plan prepared by the county.
North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission
Adoption Year of Most Current Plan

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North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission
Adoption Year of Most Current Plan

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Plan Prepared by NCWRPC
Plan Prepared by County
Regional Livability Plan: Five-Year Plan Status Report
Map 6 - Implementation of Transit Plans

North Central Wisconsin
Regional Planning Commission
Adoption Year of Most Current Plan

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Plan Prepared by NCWRPC
Regional Livability Plan: Five-Year Plan Status Report

Map 7 - Implementation of Bicycle & Pedestrian Plans

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Adoption Year of Most Current Plan

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- Plan Prepared by NCWRPC
- * Plan Prepared by consultant
- ** Plan Prepared by Wood County Planning Department

- Map showing various counties and their respective planning years.