

7 INTERGOVERNMENTAL COOPERATION

The joint planning effort between the City of Onalaska and the Village of Holmen, and joined by the Town of Onalaska, was conceived as a fully coordinated planning process that considered the larger regional context and involved thorough communication with neighboring governmental jurisdictions, planning organizations, agencies, stakeholders and strong cross-boundary public participation.

Intergovernmental cooperation is a critical component of this planning effort and the future wellbeing of the City of Onalaska. Local services and planning strategies can be strengthened by cooperative relationships throughout the County. This chapter contains an overview of Onalaska's intergovernmental relationships. This chapter also identifies known existing or potential conflicts between the City's Comprehensive Plan and the plans of adjacent cities and towns, La Crosse County, Onalaska School District and the State of Wisconsin. The plan also identifies potential strategies to resolve these conflicts. The accompanying plan document contains related future goals, objectives, and policies, pursuant to the Wisconsin Comprehensive Planning Law.

7.1 Onalaska's Intergovernmental Relationships

As **Map X**, Regional Context, depicts, the City of Onalaska, located in La Crosse County, borders the Towns of Onalaska and Medary and shares common boundaries with the City of La Crosse. The Village of Holmen is located immediately north of the City and the Village of West Salem is located east of the City. Lake Onalaska, the Black River and the Mississippi River create natural boundaries to the west.

In addition, two School Districts serve residents of the City of Onalaska and the Onalaska Sewer Service Area maintains service to all areas within the municipal boundaries. The City has a contract with the City of La Crosse to treat and dispose of its wastewater.

Overall, the City is responsible for providing most of its own services and maintains excellent relationships with surrounding municipalities. Table 7.1 identifies all intergovernmental agreements the City participated in between the years 1994 and 2004.

Table 7.1 City of Onalaska Intergovernmental Agreements, 1994-2004

Agreement Number	Parties	Title
N/A	Village of Holmen	Comprehensive Planning Grant
N/A	La Crosse County	Regional Economic Development Committee
394-03	Holmen, West Salem, Bangor, Rockland, Town of Campbell, Town of Shelby	Joint Municipal Court
396-03	City of La Crosse	Recycling Efficiency Grant
398-03	Village of Holmen	Swimming Pool Agreement 2003-2004
399-03	Wisconsin D.O.C.	Gundersen Lutheran Parking Ramp-CDBG/PFED
400-03	Wisconsin D.O.T.	12 th Avenue Repairs –STP Urban Program
368-02	Metropolitan Planning Org	Intermunicipal Agreement
355-01	Town of Onalaska	Fire Protection and First Responder Services
358-01	La Crosse County Aging Unit	Community Center Lease
359-01	Village of Holmen	Shared Ride Transit Agreement
360-01	Onalaska School District	Rowe Park Maintenance Contract
340-01	Wisconsin Historical Society	Certified Local Government Program
345-01	Winona and Houston Counties	Mutual Aid Agreement
322-00	La Crosse County	Emergency Management Documentation Guidelines
337-01	City of La Crosse	Mutual Aid Agreement-Fire Protection-2years
306-99	Metropolitan Transit Utility	MTU Bus Service Agreement
315-99	City of La Crosse	CTH S Agreement
316-99	La Crosse County	CTH OS and SS Jurisdiction Transfer
320-2000	City of La Crosse La Crosse County	CDBG-La Crosse International Business Park
264-97	City of La Crosse	Water Line Transfer
235-95	Onalaska School District	Police Liason Officer
223-94	La Crosse County Land Conservation	Cooperative Agreement-Erosion Control

Source: Jason Gilman, City of Onalaska Land Use and Development Director, 2004

7.1.1 La Crosse County

The City of Onalaska is the second largest community in La Crosse County and is included in many county plans, such as the La Crosse County Development Plan 2020 and the La Crosse Area Transportation Plan, 1994.

All fire departments in La Crosse County, including the Onalaska Fire Department, have a mutual aid agreement.

La Crosse County has started the process of updating their comprehensive plan to be completed in late 2005. In addition, the La Crosse Area Planning Committee is in the process of updating their Long Range Transportation Plan, to be completed in September, 2005.

The City will submit this Plan to the County for review and inclusion into its Comprehensive Plan when it is completed, and provide feedback on the County's Comprehensive Plan when it is circulated for review.

7.1.2 Regional Planning Commission

The City of Onalaska is located within the Mississippi River Regional Planning Commission's (MRRPC) jurisdiction. The MRRPC prepares and adopts regional or county-wide plans.

The MRRPC represents Pierce, Pepin, Buffalo, Trempealeau, La Crosse, Vernon and Crawford counties. The RPC was established to:

- carry out comprehensive and intergovernmental planning;
- have jurisdiction throughout the seven-county area, including incorporated and unincorporated areas;
- meet area-wide requirements so local jurisdictions can receive federal grants;
- provide an organization to receive federal grants.

Services provided by the RPC include:

- comprehensive planning
- open space, recreational and environmental planning
- economic development
- demographic information and projects
- technical assistance to local governments
- geographic information services
- aerial photography distribution

The City of Onalaska is included in many of the MRRPC planning documents and profiles, such as the MRRPC Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy, 2001; the MRRPC Economic Development Program, 2000; and the MRRPC Industry Cluster and Regional Trade Report, 2001.

7.1.3 Surrounding Municipalities

a. Town of Onalaska

The Town of Onalaska surrounds most of the City of Onalaska. The City of Onalaska currently provides fire service to the Town of Onalaska and includes parts of the Town in its school district. The entire City and parts of the Town of Onalaska are served by the La Crosse Sewer Service Area. The Town is currently drafting its Comprehensive Plan and is investigating possible development of a Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) program to preserve agricultural land and open space.

b. Town of Medary

The Town of Medary abuts the southeastern portion of the City. The Onalaska School District includes portions of the Town of Medary and the City also provides fire service to the Town. The City of Onalaska and areas within the Town of Medary are served by the La Crosse Sewer Service Area.

c. Town of Hamilton

The Town of Hamilton is located immediately to the west of the City of Onalaska but does not share a boundary with the City because Lake Onalaska separates the two. The Town of Hamilton is partially served by the Onalaska School District. The City of Onalaska and areas within the Town of Hamilton are served by the La Crosse Sewer Service Area.

d. Village of Holmen

The Village of Holmen and the City of Onalaska have a historically productive and cooperative relationship and have recently cooperated on a number of land use regulations in addition to this joint comprehensive planning process. Areas of cooperation include: a joint technology zone application through the State's new tax incentive program; the Wisconsin Department of Transportation Feasibility Study for STH 35 Onalaska-Holmen; and discussion of common land use concerns and solutions. In addition, the Village and the City jointly provide "Shared Ride Transit Service," that provides transit service between the two communities.

The Village and the City will establish a regular means of communication for all land use decisions, including informing each other of impending plan commission hearings and land use decisions, coordinating on land use ordinance amendments and continuing to exchange ideas on issues confronting each community.

The Village of Holmen and the City of Onalaska have identified potential future areas for cooperative agreements, including: boundary agreements; bluff-land development regulation; emergency management planning; transportation planning; grant writing; economic development; and shared service agreements.

e. Village of West Salem

The Village of West Salem is located 5 miles east of the City of Onalaska and was identified by the City as a neighboring jurisdiction to be consulted as part of this comprehensive planning process and in the future on related land use decisions and planning efforts.

f. City of La Crosse

The City of La Crosse borders the City of Onalaska to the south. Together these two cities account for over half of the total population of La Crosse County, and represent a major regional economic hub.

The entire City of Onalaska lies within the La Crosse Sewer Service Area and the City contracts with the City of La Crosse for all of its sewer treatment needs. In the past, the City of Onalaska has partnered with the City of La Crosse to provide transit service within the greater metropolitan area through the La Crosse Metropolitan Transit Utility (MTU).

The City of Onalaska also partnered with the City of La Crosse to provide transit service to the STH 16 business area, including Crossing Meadows Shopping Area, Pralle Center, Elmwood Business Center, Marketplace and Gundersen Clinic and provides connections to the City of La Crosse.

The City of Onalaska and the Village of Holmen jointly provide “Shared Ride Transit Service” that will connect passengers to the nearest MTU stop in La Crosse if the final destination is in that City.

The City of La Crosse and the City of Onalaska entered into a municipal boundary agreement in 1997 to resolve a boundary dispute in the South Kinney Coulee Area. The South Kinney Coulee Area is bounded on the north by I-90, the east edge of Section 12 of the Town of Medary on the east and the La Crosse River on the south. The agreed upon municipal boundaries are represented on **Map X**, Regional Context.

7.1.4 School Districts

The Onalaska School District comprises most of the City of Onalaska as well as parts of the Towns of Onalaska, Hamilton and Medary. Parts of the City lie within the Holmen School District, which primarily serves the Village of Holmen and the Town of Onalaska.

7.1.5 Onalaska Water Service

Onalaska's water system is owned and operated by the City of Onalaska and currently serves all developed areas in the City. The City's water supply is obtained from four wells that are drilled into the Mt. Simon Sandstone Formation. The City also has five (5) underground water storage reservoirs with a total combined capacity of 3,275,000 gallons. The system has 519,460 feet of publicly owned and 24,600 feet of privately owned water mains and 5,620 service connections.

7.1.6 Onalaska Sewer Service

Onalaska contracts with the City of La Crosse for sewage treatment. Under contract, Onalaska is allowed to send 8.48 cubic feet per second of waste to La Crosse; the City currently only sends about three (3) cubic feet per second. The City does not anticipate needing to re-negotiate this contract during the life of this plan. The City of Onalaska's sewer utility is responsible for construction and maintenance of the interceptor network within the municipal boundaries.

7.2 Existing or Potential Conflicts

Two intergovernmental cooperation meetings were conducted on May 26, 2004 at the Village of Holmen and August 5, 2004 at the City of Onalaska for the cooperative City and Town of Onalaska and Village of Holmen comprehensive planning processes. In addition, all surrounding neighboring jurisdictions, the state, county, and school districts were invited to participate in these meetings, and most did participate, including the following:

- Town of Medary
- Town of Hamilton
- Town of Holland
- City of La Crosse
- La Crosse County
- Holmen School District
- Onalaska School District
- West Salem School District

However, the input by the officials and general public at these meetings cannot be considered to be all inclusive because only one or a few people from each community or jurisdiction attended. Nevertheless, the input provided is a tremendous starting point for gaining an understanding of the existing or potential conflicts with the City of Onalaska.

The following lists include the combined responses by meeting attendees from both the May and August 2004 meetings for the existing or potential conflicts that relate to the City of Onalaska include:

- Discrepancies between the land use classifications employed by the City and those employed by the Village of Holmen.
- Cost sharing for City amenities and services (e.g. police, pool, parks, etc.) with neighboring communities.
- Differences between the City's environmental, agricultural and bluff land policies and those of neighboring communities.
- School district planning and boundaries, and involving the school districts in making land use decisions.
- Impacts of the Village of Holmen's industrial development moving south toward CTH XX.
- The City of Onalaska's eastward expansion into the Town of Hamilton and toward the Village of West Salem is a potential conflict with the Town, Village and West Salem School District. Meeting participants explained that the Village of West Salem and the City of Onalaska had an informal understanding that the City would not extend over the hill toward the Village and vice versa. A concern was raised regarding commercial on STH 16, east of Nathan Hill.
- Limited land and developable land in particular throughout the region might cause conflicts over jurisdiction boundaries.
- Development on Brice Prairie is significant issue for people in both the Town of Onalaska and City of Onalaska because it will impact both communities' in a variety of ways. One person said the City should not determine how Brice Prairie is developed.
- It is the responsibility of the City of Onalaska to consider regional issues related to: affordable housing; aging districts; and concentrations of poverty/crime when planning for future developments, especially with regard to tax base and service provision.
- Some communities are concerned about bluff land preservation in the City and would like to see the City reduce the ability to develop on 30 percent slopes. There should be a uniform slope percent that can be built on.

- Onalaska’s needs to assess what its regional share of affordable housing would be and share this burden with other jurisdictions.
- There is room for improvement in communications between the City and some neighboring towns, and some issues with road connections to neighboring towns.
- Trying to involve the school districts in planning efforts is a potential conflict.

7.3 Processes to Resolve Conflicts

The two meetings discussed in 7.2 above also addressed the question about potential conflict resolution processes. Meeting attendees provided following conflict resolution ideas:

- Maintain an ongoing dialogue between the City and surrounding communities via Joint Committees, Joint Plan Commission Meetings.
- Draft and adopt a boundary agreement with appropriate neighboring communities.
- Utilize the comprehensive planning process to identify and resolve incompatible goals, objectives and policies regarding development in the region.
- Identify a formal method for conflict resolution. Consider contracting with a private firm for mediation/dispute resolution services.
- Improve the exchange of information related to municipal issues and promote regular coordination between municipal staff and government representatives.
- Work with the La Crosse Area Planning Committee, the Mississippi River Planning Commission, La Crosse County and other communities in the Coulee Region to establish Annual Leaders’ Meetings as described in the *City of La Crosse Confluence Plan*.
- Participate in quarterly planners’ meetings proposed by La Crosse County to include planning and zoning administrators from area cities, villages and towns to discuss a predetermined subject.
- Address revenue sharing.

In addition to identifying general conflict resolution processes, meeting attendees on August 5, 2004, were asked the following questions:

1. What do you think should be the mechanism for determining where heavy industrial, high density housing, landfills, etc. are located in the County?
2. What changes in services or additional services should be included in service agreements – and between/among which communities?
3. Environmental issues were discussed at the past meeting such as preserving farmland, bluffs, and open spaces. How should these issues be addressed on a regional level – regional regulatory plans, purchase or transfer development rights programs, etc.?
4. Saving money was identified as a regional goal at the past meeting. What specific efforts should be made to save money? For example, are communities willing to participate in revenue sharing agreements?

The following is a summary of the responses to the above questions.

1. What do you think should be the mechanism for determining where heavy industrial, high density housing, landfills, etc. are located in the County?

- Industry should be close to major transportation facilities, the interstate rail.
- Regional planning should occur to address this issue with impacted municipalities involved. Perhaps the LAPC should have oversight of this issue.
- Make sure areas are compatible with one another – this should be a high priority.
- Environmental issues must be taken into consideration.
- Industrial - should be determined by market - where is it most desirable for them to locate (land use patterns, rails, etc.).
- High density housing should not all be located in one area. It needs to be mixed with other uses and densities. It should not be segregated. Development guidelines should be used to determine quality.

2. What changes in services or additional services should be included in service agreements – and between/among which communities?

- Library
- Police/fire/EMT
- Social services
- Public improvements (capital)
- Shared service discussions in snow plowing, trash removal, road repairs, parks
- Public transportation between communities
- Parks and recreation – shared pool, hockey rink parks, soccer, ball diamonds

- Shared equipment agreements
 - Snowplowing Green Coulee - City should do this because it makes more sense - may Town could help City with something else
 - Geographic constraints/topography - e.g. school buses in Green's Coulee, which community snowplows in Green's Coulee
 - Agreement regarding more education needed about services available in rural areas
 - Urbanized towns should hire staff
3. **Environmental issues were discussed at the past meeting such as preserving farmland, bluffs, and open spaces. How should these issues be addressed on a regional level – regional regulatory plans, purchase or transfer development rights programs, etc.?**
- Regional adoption of PDR/TDR. Tools to coordinate activities.
 - Provide alternatives to development to land owners.
 - Regional shared quality of life areas should be targeted for shared development of such facilities as golf, trails, campgrounds, and lake access.
 - Roads in area limited by topography - must be considered.
 - Storm water management is currently be retained on site but this may not be the best plan – there may be consequences. Should explore other solutions such as rain gardens, bioswales, etc. Also depends on soils.
 - Landfills will need to be based on environmental features first.
4. **Saving money was identified as a regional goal at the past meeting. What specific efforts should be made to save money? For example, are communities willing to participate in revenue sharing agreements?**
- Saving money or efficient use of money? Just saving money could ultimately be a poor choice.
 - Cooperative agreements to sharing equipment and services such as snow plowing, a chipper, and street sweeper
 - Transportation of school kids.
 - School district and municipality – common planning and budgets.
 - Move to a single county-wide assessor system.
 - Common jurisdiction for fire and public protection.
 - Bill coordination of water/sewerage services.
 - Revenue sharing could help to prevent/reduce competition between municipalities. Make it a win-win situation for everyone and should help entire region work together.