



Village of McFarland Comprehensive Plan Summary - Stakeholder Meetings Spring/Summer 2016

In Spring and Summer 2016, the consultant completed a series of meetings with the following Village committees and McFarland-area stakeholder groups:

- Plan Commission - March 31
- Landmarks Commission - April 28
- Community Development Authority - May 4
- Public Works Committee - May 10
- Public Utilities Committee - May 17
- McFarland High School Students - May 18
- Senior Outreach Committee – May 18
- Chamber of Commerce - June 14
- Parks, Recreation, and Natural Resources Committee - June 16
- Public Safety Committee - July 13

These stakeholder meetings provided one way for the consultant to gain an understanding of these groups and their members' vision and priorities for the Village. This information was then combined with other public input and analysis to contribute to the vision and initiatives within the Comprehensive Plan's Volume 2: Vision and Directions.

The results from each of these stakeholder meetings are available, for a limited time, on the Village's Web page, or upon request to the Community Development Department. While individual groups and members raised unique issues, the themes and subject matter that make up the rest of this summary intersected many, if not all, of the discussions.

Reputation, perception, and intergovernmental cooperation cross multiple themes and ideas presented below. While the comments suggested many areas of potential improvement, group members expressed a general satisfaction with McFarland in its current state. There were several comments and expressed desires to not change the essence of McFarland as a smaller community, even though most recognized that some change would be inevitable.

Enhance Community Identity

Several group discussions and individual comments relayed an interest in defining or expanding upon a unique identity, image, or “brand” for the Village. This may perhaps be built around the water/lakes, schools, improvements on and near Highway 51, and/or the downtown or historic buildings. The following specific comments emphasized the importance of identity, and provided some ideas:

- Ideas for branding sometime come before the ability to fund a related marketing initiative. The Village should be ready with an idea so it can “strike” when funding is available.
- Good staff, nice schools, and updated school buildings are key assets; the school system should be a defining characteristic of McFarland.
- Quality, small school system should be actively promoted as a community asset.
- Does McFarland have an identity, aside from the school system? “City of the Second Lake” used to be slogan—bring back and update?
- Identify McFarland as a community of waterways.
- Better define ourselves as a waterfront community.
- To enhance McFarland as a lake community, address challenges in improving lake quality, improve access to the lakes, and expand opportunities for paddling.
- There should be a distinct appearance change when motorists cross into McFarland, perhaps characterized by green space and/or by careful planning.
- Currently, the tank farms separate the Village from the City near Highway 51, but also form the image of McFarland to a significant degree. Need to address.
- Establish wayfinding signage along Highway 51 to help with branding and get people to key destinations in the community.
- Need greater identity built around an enhanced downtown.
- Enhance the historic qualities of the Village. There is something unique that exists here that isn’t promoted in a way that has endeared it to the community.

Enhance Economic Diversity and Non-residential Tax Base Growth

Many group participants expressed an interest in growing McFarland beyond its “bedroom community” image, though there were countervailing opinions. There was also significant interest in growing job opportunities, retail, commercial, and health services in McFarland. The following specific comments elaborate:

- McFarland will have overcome its stereotype of a bedroom community, and more business growth will result.

- The bedroom/small town image may be a hindrance for economic development.
- Focus on economic sustainability; better match local jobs with local residents.
- Expand and diversify tax base to bring relief to residential taxpayers.
- Position McFarland as a community that accommodates different housing types.
- Village needs housing, but also business generation to lower the residential tax burden.
- Advance economic development, which means both direct recruitment of new and expanded businesses (growing the non-residential tax base) and enhancements to quality of life to make the Village a more attractive location for investment.
- Enhance a business-friendly government and community.
- Unify, define, and link the current collection of business areas—historic downtown, Farwell, Highway 51, Siggelkow.
- Establish a retailing niche, recognizing that general retailing in McFarland will be challenging, particularly with the growth of on-line retailing and “big box” stores nearby.
- Need to grow businesses, including technology-based light industrial uses, office users, and mixed use infill development and redevelopment
- Establish a new industrial park with larger sites near Interstate 39/90.

Secure Avenues for McFarland’s Future Growth

Several groups discussed opportunities, challenges, and limitations for future horizontal expansion of the Village of McFarland. Most members advised that the Village pursue well-planned easterly expansion. Many also promoted infill and redevelopment, as a hedge if east side expansion provides unattainable or is truncated. The following were specific comments:

- Ideal annual enrollment growth rate increase for the school district seems to be 2-5%.
- Amount of vacant land that the Village may have for future growth is quickly becoming an issue; the plan needs to address this.
- Village should plan for and pursue continued expansion to the east.
- Explore all options to expand to the east.
- Take advantage of a narrow growth window, both geographically and in time, especially for growth to the east.
- Convince Blooming Grove property owners to east of Village that they will have a better future in the Village. Consider including Dunn property owners.
- Enable agricultural land as a permitted use following annexation, and don’t require a development plan to annex.

- Examine community space availability for growth and development; look at spaces within McFarland (infill/redevelopment) as well as expansion to the east.
- Establish or grow a secondary retail and commercial service district, not just relying on Highway 51. Perhaps located in the Village's eastern growth area.
- As the community grows east, identify and preserve natural and recreational areas.
- Acquire a larger piece of land (20+ acres) on the east side for larger scale athletic facilities and open field space (e.g., ultimate Frisbee, disc golf).
- Pursue a final decision on whether WisDOT or the Federal Highway Administration will support a new Interstate interchange ASAP, so land use can be driven by whatever improvement is possible or likely.
- Investigate WisDOT's plans for CTH AB/USH 12 improvements; this may be reasonable alternative access for east side employment growth.
- If the Village wants to expand east, it will need to make significant infrastructure investments: sewer, water, transportation. Will need to increase sizes of sewage lift pumps, and consider major sewer interceptor projects.
- May need to work backward under the assumption that McFarland may become a landlocked community. How can we do the best with what we have and keep McFarland vibrant though revitalization?
- May need to plan for a Village where infill and redevelopment is more common or possible than is edge development.
- One opinion: when the Dunn intergovernmental agreement expires, there may be an opportunity for the Village to grow beyond its current agreed limits. Another opinion: this agreement may have benefits to the broader community and Village, and retains a sense of small town and natural character.

Improve Connectivity within McFarland and to Other Destinations

McFarland has developed in different stages, each with more or less attention to road, bike, and pedestrian connections. Also, McFarland's geographic position has created challenges for bike, bus, and auto connections to Madison and beyond. Group members had a number of ideas to improve connectivity:

- By 2035, there should be a better way to get people around the area. The Village should be supportive of new transportation methods.
- The Village's 2006 vision statement missed the importance of link the Village with the greater Dane County area. This should include a fully connected transportation system, including bike/ped connections.
- Provide multiple transportation options, including bus, rail, small electric vehicles, biking.

- Improve transportation connectivity within the Village and back and forth into Madison. The pending trail is a good addition, but not everyone can walk/bike that far.
- Extend the Capital City Trail link through the Village south towards Stoughton.
- Capitalize on the greater trend of walking and biking to shops.
- Make McFarland bike-able to connect residents to different places: expand bike parking at businesses; enable commute to downtown Madison by bike.
- Make McFarland walkable, including an old world feel with modern infrastructure.
- Establish McFarland as a bike destination or hub, via more facilities.
- Increase interconnectivity between residential neighborhoods.
- Ensure connectivity of bike and pedestrian facilities in McFarland, and encourage Dane County to do the same for facilities it controls.
- Improve the Burma and Farwell intersections with Highway 51; they are hazardous and impeding safe pedestrian movement.
- Build an elevated crosswalk over Highway 51 (or an underpass or refuge medians) to make the corridor safer and break down the division between the two parts of the Village.

Grow Recreational and Leisure Activities in McFarland

Several groups and members discussed expanding water-based recreation and trails, and providing more shopping and hospitality businesses in the community. Specific comments included the following:

- Create usable waterfronts for swimming, fishing opportunities (pier at Lewis Park?), and business development related to the water. Build on momentum at McDaniel Park.
- Pull in business owners to ask them what they think the Village should focus on for parks and recreation to help them enhance their businesses.
- Consider parks that are open longer to provide locations for youth activities.
- Use the park system to enhance the economy: concessions like Wingra Boat House, event spaces; seize Lewis Park development plan as an opportunity for enhancement.
- Develop/enhance identities of different parks: distinguish certain parks for different functions; don't be tied to the historic functions/improvements of existing parks, assuming that the needs of 20-30 years ago are the same as needs of today
- Take advantage of natural resources—recreation/tourism may be a way to grow.
- Get much stronger collaboration between the schools and Village, including facilities (for regular and emergency use), safety improvements (sidewalks), equipment, etc.

- Respond to the needs and interests of the future labor market, which is rapidly evolving (e.g., home based businesses). For example, the Village may want to promote “third places”—more places to eat and work and relax.

Address the Needs of an Aging and Increasingly Diverse Population

Meeting participants identified several ideas for McFarland to help address the needs of the aging Baby Boom population over the planning period. Several also expressed interest in advancing a multi-generational community center. The following member comments elaborate:

- Be more responsive to seniors, so that isolation can be broken down.
- Maintain connections to and for older residents.
- Be prepared for evolving demographics, including potential increases in poverty.
- Address EMS call volume increases associated with aging Baby Boomer demographics.
- Enhance downtown, including as a place of seniors.
- Increase health/medical services for an aging population; attract medical clinics into McFarland.
- Many current residents will want to downsize, so smaller homes/condos and senior living options should be expanded.
- Transportation options will be important for an aging and Millennial population that may not want to drive as much: Do walkers have the time to cross the road, given the timer on the beg lights? Consider allowing/promoting golf carts on local streets.
- Consider more modes of transportation as community ages and changes (bus, bike).
- Build a community center that is big enough for seniors, other adults, and youths.
- Need a community center, including a place for the youth center that will be displaced and designated spots for seniors; Municipal Building is spread too thin.
- Lack of community space hinders what the Village can do to bring people together. More meeting rooms are needed. The curling club and ice center are also used as community places, but each has its limitations.