

# 1. Issues and Opportunities

## 1.1 Introduction

Clark County, Wisconsin is located in West Central Wisconsin. Geographically, Clark County is very large (1,215 square miles) and is host to 45 local units of government that include seven cities, five villages and 33 towns. With a 2000 census population of 33,557 and a total land area of 1,215 square miles, population density in Clark County is low with an average density of 28 persons per square mile. Clark County is predominantly a rural county with an economy that revolves around the agriculture, manufacturing, and recreation industries.

The foundation of Clark County is based in agriculture, particularly the dairy industry. Dairy processing and agri-business are very important to county residents as employment opportunities and as a way of life. Colby cheese, first produced in the City of Colby, is one of the county's claims to fame. Clark County maintains a strong manufacturing base as well.

State Highway 29, one of Wisconsin's most important east/west transportation routes, traverses northern Clark County. The incorporated Cities and Villages of Abbotsford, Colby, Curtiss, Owen, Withee, and Thorp all benefit from interchange access to this 4-lane highway that connects Green Bay to Minneapolis/St. Paul.

The cornerstone to Clark County's recreation industry is the 133,000 acre Clark County Forest. The county-owned forest provides residents and visitors a variety of recreational opportunities including hunting, camping, ATV riding, snowmobiling, hiking, biking, skiing, and horseback riding. The Clark County Forest is managed as a sustainable resource and generates opportunities for the forest products industry as well. Considerable private holdings of forest land exist throughout the county. Private forest land generates additional recreational and economic opportunities for land owners and provides valuable wildlife habitat. The county's major water feature is the scenic Black River, which flows north to south through the entire length of the county before it empties into Lake Arbutus.

Clark County is also home to a sizable and growing Amish and Mennonite population which adds to the County's unique rural character and agricultural image. The Amish and Mennonite communities maintain traditional methods of farming, craftsmanship, and living. It is not uncommon to encounter a carriage or horse-drawn buckboard wagon when traveling along Clark County roads.

Given Clark County's social, economic, and significant natural features, land use planning is important and will be utilized as the formal process to discuss and develop local and county plans designed to guide growth over the next 20 years and beyond. Map 1-1 identifies Clark County's geographical location in the State of Wisconsin.

## **1.2 Regional Perspective**

Clark County is bordered by Taylor, Chippewa, Eau Claire, Jackson, Wood, and Marathon Counties. Within those counties, 22 townships and six (6) incorporated communities share borders with Clark County (See Map 1-1). While the region is generally known for its agricultural base and small rural communities, there are several significant urban centers located within the region including the Cities of Marshfield, Eau Claire, and Wausau. State Highway 29, which runs through the northern portion of Clark County, is a significant travel route from the Minneapolis and St. Paul region in Minnesota to eastern portions of Wisconsin.

Clark County is located within the West Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission's jurisdiction along with Barron, Chippewa, Dunn, Eau Claire, Polk, and St. Croix Counties.

## **1.3 Planning Efforts**

Development of the *Clark County Comprehensive Plan* was in response to the passage of Wisconsin's comprehensive planning legislation (Statute 66.1001). This law requires all municipalities (counties, cities, towns, and villages) to adopt a comprehensive plan by the year 2010 if they wish to make any local land use decisions. After the year 2010, any municipality that regulates land use must make its decisions in accordance with that community's comprehensive plan. Clark County falls under this requirement because it administers programs such as state-mandated shoreland zoning and the non-metallic mining ordinance. Therefore, according to the legislation, Clark County is required to develop a countywide plan to meet the conditions of the legislation.

Municipal comprehensive plans are not chapters in the Clark County Comprehensive Plan but their own plans adopted separately. The Clark County planning process will attempt to reconcile conflicts among plans to the extent that it is politically and practically feasible and, failing reconciliation, will identify processes that can be used for future conflict resolution.

Comprehensive plans are implemented and administered through a variety of incentive based, non-regulatory, and regulatory policies and programs. The authority to utilize these policies and programs is defined in various statutory provisions and is not directly connected to the comprehensive planning law. Each governmental unit's land use decisions must be consistent with its own comprehensive plan as adopted or amended by them.

Furthermore, the state comprehensive planning law does not change the basic authorities or relationships between counties and towns in adoption and administration of zoning. While the law encourages coordinated planning between jurisdictions, it does not require consistency between plans. Accordingly, it is possible that a city or village's preferred land use map may conflict with the plan of a neighboring town and that each respective plan will portray this difference.

To discuss participation at the local level, the Clark County Planning and Zoning staff held a series of 10 regional meetings in 2000 with all Clark County municipalities to assess their interest in being a formal partner with the county in the planning process. Originally 23 municipalities expressed interest in the process. The Clark County Board of Supervisors

initiated the planning process by submitting applications to fund the efforts through the Wisconsin Department of Administration (WDOA) comprehensive plan grant program. The County was awarded two grants totaling \$326,000 to assist in funding the efforts. The grant contract with the state required a \$110,300 county cost share match. Participating communities were not required to contribute any local dollars toward the planning process. Over the course of the planning process, other communities passed resolutions to join the process while others withdrew. Reasons communities (all towns) left the county planning process included:

- ◆ Concern over the county amending the local plan.
- ◆ Communities wanted to wait and see if the planning law would go away or be delayed.
- ◆ Communities felt that planning could accelerate the loss of property rights and personal freedom.
- ◆ Communities preferred to develop a plan independently from the county process.
- ◆ Others simply had fear of the unknown.

Reasons communities joined the county planning process included:

- ◆ The planning process was cost effective.
- ◆ The process provided an opportunity to improve intergovernmental cooperation with adjacent communities and the county.
- ◆ The process provided an opportunity to meet the requirements of the comprehensive planning law by 2010.
- ◆ There was a local perceived need to plan (i.e., loss of farmland and fragmentation of woodland).
- ◆ Having a plan could improve chances to receive future funding for economic development, transportation, or other programs.

As of the writing of this Inventory and Trends Report, 19 local units of government are active participants with the county in developing local comprehensive plans. The communities are:

Cities

Abbotsford  
Colby  
Greenwood  
Loyal  
Neillsville  
Owen

Villages

Curtiss  
Dorchester  
Withee

Towns

Colby  
Dewhurst  
Hixon  
Longwood  
Mayville  
Mead  
Mentor  
Reseburg  
Thorp  
Weston

The county planning process realigned the participating municipalities into planning regions. These regions have met seven (7) times in workshop settings to develop individual community plans which will be used to develop the *Clark County Year 2025 Comprehensive Plan*.

Municipalities that have declined participation in the county planning process will either develop their own plans, hire a consultant to develop their plans or choose not to plan at all.

The *Clark County Comprehensive Plan Inventory and Trends Report* will serve three basic functions:

1. The report provides all the necessary support data for the 19 local communities developing individual comprehensive plans. This report will assist them in meeting the requirement of the comprehensive planning law.
2. The report will provide all the necessary data for those local communities wishing to pursue planning activities at a later date. Utilization of this report should provide a significant cost savings to any local future planning effort.
3. This report will provide all local and county public officials, agencies, and citizens with increased knowledge of the governmental assets and programs that are managed to promote the health, safety, and welfare of the county.

## **1.4 Public Participation Process**

The Wisconsin comprehensive planning legislation (s. 66.1001) specifies that the governing body for a unit of government must prepare and adopt written procedures to foster public participation in the comprehensive planning process. The procedures must include open discussion, communication programs, information services, and public meetings for which advance notice has been provided, in every stage of the preparation of a comprehensive plan. In addition, the participation procedures must provide for wide distribution of proposed drafts, alternatives, and amendments of the comprehensive plan. The public participation procedures should address how members of the public can send written comments on the plan to the governing body, and how the governing body will respond.

### **Public Participation Plan**

To address the public participation directive as identified under Section 66.1001(4)(a) of the Wisconsin Statutes, Clark County developed a Public Participation Plan for the development of a comprehensive plan for Clark County.

In 1999, the Clark County Board of Supervisors directed the Clark County Planning and Zoning Committee to lead and coordinate the development of a comprehensive plan for Clark County. Significant effort was set forth by the Planning & Zoning Committee to obtain input from all municipalities and the public with regard to the development of the county's comprehensive plan. The municipalities were grouped into 10 planning regions. During February and March 2000, meetings were held with the local officials and administrators within each region to gain input and understanding of the issues facing both the local region and the county overall. Numerous issues were identified on both the local and county level, and were ranked in order of priority by each of the 10 regional planning districts.

Most importantly, the regional meetings brought neighboring town, city, and village officials together to discuss and resolve issues. The communities strongly endorsed the use of a regional review (workshop) format to assist in the development of the county's comprehensive plan. The workshops were preceded by a public outreach effort to announce the workshop and encourage community participation.

Among the many opportunities that were used to foster public participation, the following core and additional efforts were implemented. The core efforts include adherence to the statutory requirements relative to public participation meetings, the corresponding notification procedures, and the directives of the open meeting law. Core public outreach efforts include the following:

- ◆ All meetings are open to the public.
- ◆ Informational meeting announcements to be posted in the *Clark County Press* (Neillsville, Wisconsin), *The O-W Enterprise* (Withee, Wisconsin), *The Thorp Courier* (Thorp, Wisconsin), *The Tribune Phonograph* (Abbotsford, Wisconsin), *The Tribune Record Gleaner* (Loyal, Wisconsin)
- ◆ Public service announcements by WCCN radio and a WCCN call-in radio show.
- ◆ Meeting notices mailed directly to the elected officials, planning commission members, and County Board Supervisors within each region.
- ◆ Notices for each regional review workshop posted at each community's regular posting locations and at the Clark County Courthouse, Neillsville, Wisconsin.
- ◆ Announcements made on the Clark County Planning & Zoning Department web site ([www.co.clark.wi.us](http://www.co.clark.wi.us)).
- ◆ Distribution and placement of the *Clark County Inventory and Trends Report* and the *Clark County Comprehensive Plan* documents for public review to occur at several locations as identified in the Public Participation Plan.
- ◆ Public comment forms available at all locations containing a document. In addition, the Clark County web site will allow for E-mail comments and correspondence throughout the planning process.
- ◆ Quarterly progress reports to be developed by the Clark County Planning and Zoning Department staff.

Efforts made to conduct special interviews with Amish and Mennonite Leaders to discuss cultural issues and directives.

In addition to the above core efforts, periodic press releases are developed to report key project findings. In addition, Clark County Planning and Zoning Department staff are available for presentations to civic groups and/or other organizations.

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**Map 1-1, Clark County Regional Perspective**

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## Public Informational (Tier) Meetings

Three rounds of public informational (tier) meetings were held to facilitate the planning process. The first round of tier meetings was held in the evening at the following locations:

- ◆ Tuesday, April 23, 2002: Clark County Health Care Center, Owen
- ◆ Wednesday, April 24, 2002: Greenwood High School Cafetorium
- ◆ Thursday, April 25, 2002: Clark County Fairgrounds, Neillsville



*Public informational tier meeting-  
Greenwood High School Cafetorium*

In total, 193 individuals attended the three tier meetings. Specifically, 63 individuals attended the April 23rd, Owen meeting, 55 individuals attended the April 24th, Greenwood meeting, and 75 individuals attended the April 25th, Neillsville meeting. It must be noted that not all attendees participated in the workshop-voting portion of the programs.

The tier meetings included a one-hour presentation on the comprehensive plan's progress to date, specifically covering Smart Growth requirements, level of community participation, public outreach efforts, inventory, and anticipated trend data. After the presentation, the general public participated in a workshop session wherein participants were asked for their general level of support for 15 proposed land use management area designations. Participants were encouraged to vote for both urban and rural designations.

As a means to increase public participation at round two of the tier meetings, the Clark County Planning and Zoning Committee authorized a postcard mailing to all Clark County property owners outlining the focus, location, date, and time of each tier meeting. The Clark County Planning and Zoning Department mailed over 14,000 postcards to Clark County property owners in early February.

Round 2 of the public informational tier meetings was held in the evening at the following locations:

- ◆ Monday, February 24, 2003, Clark County Health Care Center, Owen
- ◆ Tuesday, February 25, 2003, Greenwood High School Cafetorium, Greenwood
- ◆ Thursday, February 27, 2003, Clark County Fairgrounds, Neillsville

In total, 292 individuals attended the three tier meetings. The specific number of attendees breakdown as follows: Owen meeting had 92 including eight county supervisors, Greenwood meeting had 87 including six county supervisors, and the Neillsville meeting had 113 including nine county supervisors.

The meeting included a one-hour presentation by Ken Jaworski, Planning Consultant, Foth & Van Dyke and Associates. The presentation covered the following topics:

- ◆ A refresher on the local and county plan building process
- ◆ The level of local municipality participation
- ◆ Accomplishments to date
- ◆ Opportunities and challenges
- ◆ Timeline for project completion
- ◆ Frequently asked questions
- ◆ Public comment and questions

In addition, reports on local plan accomplishments were presented at the February 24 meeting by Tom Rohland, Hixon Town Chairman and President Kay Miller, Village of Withee, by Francis Herr, Town of Warner Plan Commission Chairman, and City of Greenwood Plan Commission member John Binder at the February 25 meeting; and by Tony Suda, Town of Washburn Chairman and Mayor Diane Murphy, City of Neillsville, at the February 27 meeting.

Also included were summaries of the *All-Season Road Construction Cost Analysis Report*, the *Model Public Road Access Ordinance*, and the *Amish and Mennonite Transportation Report* (developed as part of the Clark County comprehensive planning process). During the Opportunities and Challenges portion of the program, Richard Heath, Executive Director of the Clark County Economic Development Corporation, presented information on nurturing, developing, and attracting business to Clark County. An extensive public comment period followed the presentation at all locations. Clark County Planning and Zoning staff recorded summaries of all public comments.

The final round of public informational tier meetings was held in the evening as follows:

- ◆ Monday, October 20, 2003, Clark County Health Care Center, Owen
- ◆ Tuesday, October 21, 2003, Loyal American Legion Hall, Loyal
- ◆ Wednesday, October 22, 2003, Clark County Fairgrounds, Neillsville

In total, 77 individuals attended the three tier meetings. The Owen tier meeting included 36 participants, while the Loyal tier meeting had 19 participants. The Neillsville tier meeting included 22 participants.

Round 3 tier meeting attendance was significantly down from Round 2. The primary reason for a lower attendance was that individual post card mailings were not sent out to each county resident. Meeting announcements for Round 3 included block ad postings in all local papers, notices sent to individual community officials for posting, and a web site announcement.

The meeting included a 45-minute presentation by Ken Jaworski, Planning Consultant, Foth & Van Dyke and Associates and a one-hour question and answer session. The presentation covered the following topics:

- ◆ A refresher on the local and county plan building process.

- ◆ Content of Local Comprehensive Plans.
- ◆ Content of County Comprehensive Plan.
- ◆ Plan adoption timetable.

### Focus Group Meetings

As part of the Clark County planning process, a series of six (6) focus group meetings was held to further explore ideas and solutions regarding land use topics. The topics selected were based on input received from governmental officials and their respective planning committee/commission members who attended a series of 10 regional workshops held throughout Clark County in February and March 2000. The six main topics generated from the regional meetings were as follows:

1. Environment and Water Quality
2. Farming and Farmland
3. Residential Development and Housing
4. Outdoor Recreation
5. Transportation and Roads
6. Economic Development

Initially, six separate sub-committees were to be formed to address the topics but due to poor public interest to serve on committees, the Clark County Planning and Zoning Committee approved the utilization of a focus group format to obtain further input. In an effort to recruit focus group participants, sign-up sheets were announced and made available at the regional review workshops held in early September 2001. Those expressing interest in attending a focus group meeting were sent a personal invitation to attend. The focus group meetings were held at the American Legion Post 175 Hall, 302 North Union Street, Loyal, Wisconsin per the following schedule:

**Table 1-1: Focus Group Meeting Participation, Clark County**

Topic	Date	No. of Voting Participants
Environment and Water Quality	Tuesday, November 27, 2001	9
Residential Development and Housing	Wednesday, November 28, 2001	7
Farming and Farmland	Tuesday, November 29, 2001	20
Outdoor Recreation	Tuesday, December 4, 2001	9
Transportation and Roads	Wednesday, December 5, 2001	10
Economic Development	Wednesday, April 3, 2002	8

At each of the meetings, participants were asked to list their answers to a minimum of eight questions. Each question was presented and discussed individually with participant responses recorded and numbered on flip charts. In an effort to help prioritize the responses, participants were asked to vote for their top three responses per question. The results of the focus group meetings were utilized to assist in the development of individual community and county goals, objectives, and policies.

## 1.5 Regional Review Workshops

As a means to facilitate intergovernmental cooperation, the Clark County planning process utilized a regional workshop approach to develop local plans and provide public participation in the development of the *Clark County Comprehensive Plan*. Seven (7) rounds of regional review workshops (62 meetings total) were held as part of the planning process. Invitations were sent to all municipal officials, planning commission/committee members, County Board Supervisors, and Public Advisory Committee (PAC) members. Rounds 1 and 2 of the workshops included participation from all 45 units of government within Clark County while all following rounds only involved those communities formally participating in the process. An outline of topics covered at each round of regional workshops follows:

- ◆ Workshop #1 (April 17-30, 2001)
  - Discussed demographic trends
  - Conducted community facilities and services inventory
- ◆ Workshop #2 (August 28-September 12, 2001)
  - Reviewed existing community facilities services map and existing land use maps
- ◆ Workshop #3 (January 22-February 5, 2002)
  - Discussed local community goals and objectives
- ◆ Workshop #4 (March 18-April 4, 2002)
  - Discussed proposed land use management area definitions
  - Discussed potential plan implementation tools
- ◆ Workshop #5 (July 15-July 25, 2002)
  - Finalized land use management area descriptions
  - Built first draft of community preferred land use maps
  - Discussed survey mailing to collect additional public input on draft preferred land use maps
- ◆ Workshop #6 (April 21-29, 2003)
  - Reviewed local survey results
  - Finalized preferred land use management area descriptions and densities
  - Discussed public facility and service needs
  - Distributed and discussed policy statements and programs
- ◆ Workshop #7 (July 28-August 19, 2003)
  - Finalized policies
  - Discussed plan implementation tools
  - Discussed efforts to finalize local land use plans
  - Discussed efforts to finalize local plans

## Local Efforts

Through the course of the planning process, individual communities also sponsored some community specific public outreach efforts. These efforts included holding special town hall meetings and developing and tallying local surveys.

### 1.6 Planning Framework and Reporting Process

The Clark County planning process follows the State of Wisconsin's Comprehensive Planning legislation, adopted in 1999 and contained in Wisconsin Statutes 66.1001.

Clark County's planning process consists of three main document components:

- ♦ *Clark County Inventory and Trends Report.* This document component contains inventory, background, and trend data for eight of the nine required smart growth elements. Subjects include: population, housing, transportation, utilities and community facilities, economic development, intergovernmental relations, land use, and related programs. Issues relating to the included element which are more qualitative and related to implementation are included within the other two portions of the planning framework. This document is used to build the next two documents and is referenced continually within them.
- ♦ The second component of the Clark County planning process will be the development of 19 individual Clark County community comprehensive plans. These plans will reference the *Clark County Inventory and Trends Report*, but will also include necessary information and recommendations to make each community's plan compliant with Wisconsin's Comprehensive Planning Legislation.
- ♦ The final product of the planning process is the *Clark County Comprehensive Plan*. This document will reference the *Clark County Inventory and Trends Report* as well as provide goals, objectives, policies, recommendations, and future programs. The document will also discuss proposed facilities and services, identify preferred land uses, include an implementation element, and further develop the other elements of the plan. This document, in coordination with the *Clark County Inventory and Trends Report*, will meet the requirements of Wisconsin's Comprehensive Planning Legislation.

All three documents will achieve compliance with Wisconsin's Comprehensive Planning Statutes. The documents will provide the planning framework upon which decisions can be based, allow for local control, and provide planning and implementation strategies that can direct the entire county in a desirable direction for the next 20 years.

### 1.7 Issues and Opportunities

There are a number of major issues, opportunities, and trends that Clark County leaders will deal with over the 20-year planning period. Pro-active planning may help resolve these issues and facilitate the realization of opportunities. Several primary topics are discussed below:

## Growth and Cultural Changes

Population growth in Clark County has historically been somewhat moderate. However, the 2000 population count of 33,557 is the highest population the county has experienced since at least 1950. However, when compared to all neighboring counties and the State of Wisconsin, Clark County experienced the least amount of population growth from 1970 to 2000.

The overall population within Clark County is slowly shifting to older age groups indicating the need to plan for accommodating older individuals in the future. These shifts have effects on housing, health care, and transportation needs as well as effects on the labor force and recreational demands.

It is not anticipated that Clark County will experience any major population increases or decreases within the planning period. Most of the population and demographic changes that will occur will be a shift to older age categories and a greater diversity of race and cultural background. Clark County has experienced an increasing number of Amish and Mennonite populations within the county as well as increasing numbers of Hispanic residents. Cultural shifts within the county may require planning and accommodating different types of demands as well as a basic acceptance of other cultures and backgrounds.

## Farming and Agriculture

The importance of agriculture and farming to Clark County cannot be overstated. Therefore, the current state of agriculture and farming and anticipated future trends are of great importance to residents, farmers, and general citizens of the county. One primary issue is the current and future use of land within the county. It is anticipated that there will be increasing pressure to convert farmland to other uses especially given the current poor agricultural economy. This will affect farm numbers in the county and also increase issues

regarding compatible land uses. It is also anticipated that the number of large “commercial” type farms will increase over the planning period as farmers strive to maximize efficiencies.



*Grassland Dairy Butter Plant-Town of Eaton*

On the other hand, Clark County has been an attractive destination for Amish and Mennonite families. This immigration has reduced the occurrence of farm abandonment throughout the county. Small red barns that may have been abandoned, continue to be utilized for small dairy, horses, and beef. Clark County can expect a wide variation of farming operations over the next several decades. Specialized farming such as game farms, tree farms, and vegetable cropping have grown in popularity in the county.

Overall, farming and agriculture trends in the county are linked to many of the demands, needs, and services required by residents. Local officials will find it difficult to find common ground on how to preserve farmland. A local farmer said the most productive farm crop today is housing. A poor farm economy over the last several decades has led to a “we’ll farm until something better comes along” attitude. The independent disposition of most farmers makes it challenging to implement any type of local farm preservation policy or program. Recent state changes to a use value assessment system (market value for development to actual use of land) has aided local farmers in lowering taxes as a means to stay in farming. Communication between farmers, landowners, and local and county officials will become increasingly important to ensure that needs can be met and that farming can continue to be the backbone of the county. (Better farm prices would help, too.)



*Small farming operations are still popular throughout rural Clark County*

## Transportation and Roads

The transportation system in Clark County can be categorized as very diverse. From the high speed truck traffic found on STH 29 to horse drawn buggies plodding their way down a gravel town road, motorists could encounter just about any transportation device in Clark County. Although the diversity of transportation methods is very interesting, it does present some compatibility issues. For example, the conflict between vehicles moving at 65 miles per hour in the face of a horse and buggy trying to cross STH 29 is a situation that occurs daily. These types of compatibility issues spawned the development of a special report titled: *Amish and Mennonite Transportation Report, Clark County Wisconsin*. The report was developed as part of the county comprehensive planning effort and details the issues and solutions available to reduce future conflict.



*Multiple forms of transportation utilize Clark County roads*

The design of existing county trunk highways and local roads has also been tested due to the increased size of farm equipment, tanker trucks, and logging vehicles. The increase in vehicle size has challenged road conditions, especially in spring, because most county and local roads have not been constructed to all-season road standards. This had led to road weight limits and closures. This issue prompted the development of the *All-Season Road Construction Cost Analysis Report, Clark County, Wisconsin*. This report was also developed as part of the county comprehensive planning process. The report analyzes the economic realities of constructing future roads to all-season road standards.

Finally, the issue of providing safe ingress to and egress from existing and new developments has surfaced primarily due to the increased size of emergency rescue vehicles, increased traffic speeds, and the location of new development. Adequate driveway widths and clearance are essential for emergency vehicle access. In addition, the placement of driveways in connection with poor visibility, steep grades, and other factors presents safety issues. To address these issues, the comprehensive planning process included the development of the *Model Public Road Access Ordinance, Clark County, Wisconsin*. The ordinance was developed to provide consistent standards between local Clark County communities and the Clark County Highway Department.

## **Economic Development**

Clark County has historically been, and will continue to be, an agriculturally based county. The rural nature, transportation system, agricultural resources, and overall culture within the county accommodate this type of economic development very well. The manufacturing industry will also continue to be very strong within the county. However, there are several obstacles and issues Clark County will deal with regarding economic development over the planning period.

One issue is a shift in the population to older age groups. Another issue is that a large number of workers commute out of the county to work. This issue will affect the number and types of jobs available and created within the county over the planning period. The current workforce within the county is not as technically skilled as some other areas, which also affects wage rates and the types of jobs created in the county. Over dependence on the agriculture industry can also be viewed as a vulnerability to the overall economy. A large number of individuals within the county depend on this industry for their livelihood, however many of the economic and pricing trends that affect it are based more on state-wide and national trends than on local ones. Another recent economic setback has been the announcement to close the Fleetgaurd Nelson Muffler plant in the City of Neillsville. This facility is planning to close at the end of June 2004, resulting in a loss of employment for 280 people. The plant has been located in the Neillsville Industrial Park since the early 1950s. Fleetgaurd Nelson is one of Clark County's largest private employers and has been a leader in employee wages and benefits. A decision was made to move the facility to Waynesboro, GA. One of the reasons for the move is to be closer to customers who are primarily located in the southeastern US. In addition to Fleetgaurd, several other closures have occurred which include Saputo Cheese in the City of Thorp and IGA Grocery in the City of Loyal. Many of these challenges are already recognized within the county as obstacles to a strong economic future but several opportunities have presented themselves in recent years and are being pursued in order to overcome them.



*Highway commercial development-City of Abbotsford*

One such opportunity which exists is the economic development potential associated with the STH 29 corridor in the northern part of the county. With STH 29 now providing continuous four lane service from Green Bay to Interstate 94, the infrastructure is in place to spawn new

economic development opportunities along the corridor. Signs of economic resurgence can be seen already in the Clark County communities of Abbotsford, Colby, Thorp and Curtiss. A recent economic victory includes a \$750,000 Community Development Block Grant award to the Village of Curtiss. The village will use the grant to upgrade its wastewater treatment facility to assist in the expansion of Abbyland Pork Park, Inc. This award helps Abbyland expand its facility in Curtiss, create 105 full-time positions, retain 190 existing positions, and leverage up to \$1.1 million in additional investment.



*Curtiss Travel Center-STH 29*

Business and industry in adjacent communities, such as the City of Stanley in Chippewa County, have also benefited from the STH 29 corridor investment, specifically an ethanol plant and state prison, which may have spin-off opportunities for Clark County. Clark County also may benefit from the availability of an active rail line, an economic asset that can be used to attract future businesses and industry.

The City of Neillsville, which serves as the county seat, has undertaken downtown improvements and is poised to market its unique historic heritage. The city has recently announced the siting of a major lodging chain on the city's south side to serve visitors taking advantage of the adjacent amenities such as the Clark County Forest, golf course, and other seasonal attractions. The city also just completed the development of a new one-half mile paved industrial park access road to better serve the park. To address the needs for a more technically skilled workforce, Chippewa Valley Technical College (CVTC) announced in early October 2003 its vision of a new Learning Center in Neillsville as the city transferred title to land in the industrial park for the future facility. Ground breaking for the new 3,000 square foot Learning Center is planned for spring 2004 with classes beginning in fall.



*City of Neillsville Industrial Park*

## **Recreation**

Clark County communities possess a strong commitment to youth recreation programs. Clark County School Districts, although facing very difficult economic times due to declining enrollments, continue to invest and take pride in their school athletic programs. In March 2003 Clark County enjoyed the benefits of their commitments as the county sent two girls basketball teams (Thorp and Owen/Withee) to the Wisconsin State Basketball Tournament. In addition, several pro athletes have called Clark County home as youths.

The challenge for the school districts of Clark County over the next several decades will be to creatively look for ways to maintain their education and athletic programs without sacrificing the level of success they have obtained.

The other form of recreation Clark County residents are very passionate about is outdoor sports, especially hunting, fishing, and trail riding. Clark County's hunting roots are tied to the logging era but have been maintained due to the extensive amount of county forest land still available to the public (approximately 133,000 acres). The Black River Corridor provides the perfect conduit for wildlife to travel between the southern Clark County Forest Unit and the central and northern farm belts of the county. In addition, the quilt work pattern of farmland mixed with forests and private woodlots has produced a haven for white-tailed deer. It has been stated in the course of the comprehensive planning process, that the whitetail has replaced the Holstein cow as the symbol animal of Clark County.



*Quality Deer Management property-Town of Pine Valley*



*Jim Rood, of Chippewa Falls, was successful in the west central Clark County "Hunt for Hunter's with Disabilities".*

Another recent event which is growing in popularity is the West-Central Clark County "Hunt for Hunters with Disabilities". This fifth annual event occurred most recently on the weekends of October 4 and 11, 2003. Forty-nine (49) Willard, Greenwood, and Neillsville landowners assisted 39 disabled hunters to harvest 43 deer from their properties. The "Special Deer Hunt for Hunters with Disabilities" was created in 1990 by the Wisconsin DNR, to allow individuals with certain disabilities the opportunity to gun/deer hunt in early October when the weather is more favorable. The hunter's disabilities ranged from high level paralysis to amputation to blindness. They traveled from all corners of Wisconsin to participate in the Clark County special hunt. With 49 landowners, 5,100 acres of land, and 39 participating hunters, this hunt has become the largest organized disabled hunt in Wisconsin.



*Clark County park system trail head-Town of Hewett*

An extensive trail system in the Clark County Forest has quickly gained a following of ATV and snowmobiling enthusiasts. Clark County is home to one of the largest ATV trail systems in the state. Further investments in trail head facilities such as loading ramps, parking areas, and signage will continue an effort to attract tourism as an economic stimulus. In addition, the Clark County park system is another recognized asset of the central Wisconsin region providing seven campgrounds with over 560 camping sites for visitors. Continued investment in the Clark County park system and County Forest areas will be

required to maintain the current level of service and quality facilities residents and visitors have come to enjoy.

The sale of private forestland has been an active and productive market throughout Clark County although it has recently slowed due to concern over Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD). Many private landowners have enrolled their land in local Quality Deer Management (QDM) Programs. The establishment of QDM programs further validates the hunting interest of rural property owners. Since the success of the QDM program relies heavily on the assembly of large tracts of land for deer management purposes, it remains to be seen if local land owners will endorse large minimum lot size requirements as a means to protect the fragmentation of hunting land.

### **Other Issues and Opportunities**

In addition to the above, other issues, opportunities, and trends have been identified in each element of this report. Please consult the appropriate element for more detailed information.