



ST. CROIX COUNTY DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT PLAN



March, 2000

**ST. CROIX COUNTY
DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT PLAN
2000-2020**

**Adopted by
St. Croix County Board of Supervisors
March 21, 2000**

**Prepared by:
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**VOLUME ONE
DEVELOPMENT GUIDE**

**Section 1
Introduction**

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ST. CROIX COUNTY GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS

St. Croix County is located in west central Wisconsin and is separated from Minnesota by the St. Croix River. The county is bordered on the north by Polk County, the east by Dunn County and the south by Pierce County. St. Croix County has a combined land and water area of approximately 469,760 acres. This amounts to roughly 736 square miles, of which 17 percent is in forest cover and 70 percent is used for agriculture. The county is rectangular in shape and is about 33 miles east to west and 24 miles north to south.

The topography of St. Croix County ranges from gently rolling, to hilly and rough. A large portion of the central part of the county is a rolling plain. This plain is broken by mesas of resistant rock formations in southwestern St. Croix County. The northwestern areas and eastern fringe of the county contain the most rugged topography.

Continental glaciation covered the entire county, which contributed greatly to its physical characteristics. While glacial deposition has occurred across the county, the most prominent glacial features are the rough and scenic landscapes of the Towns of St. Joseph and Somerset, and the St. Croix River valley which was a major drainageway as the glaciers of the Pleistocene Epoch receded. Rugged, hilly areas that resisted the scouring action of the glaciers are in the eastern part of the county and are noted for local relief averaging 200 feet.

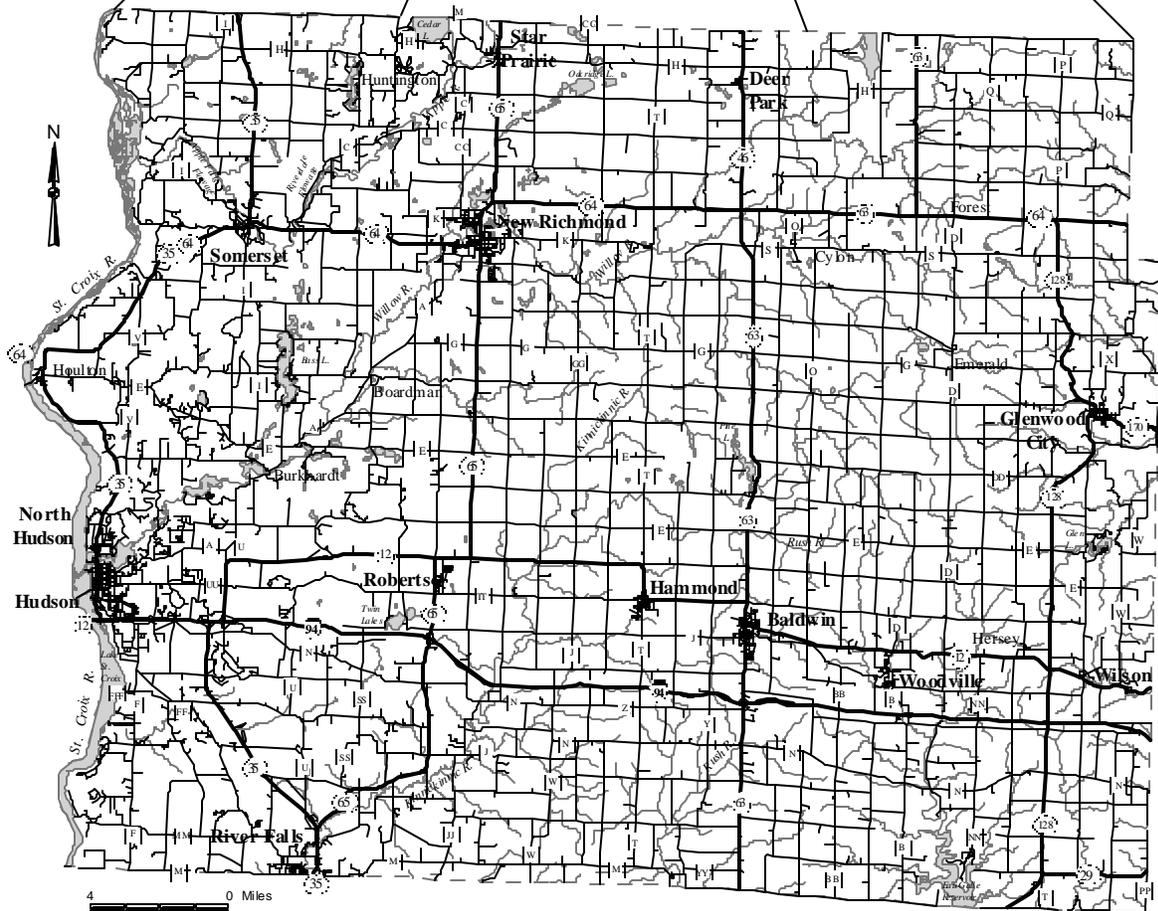
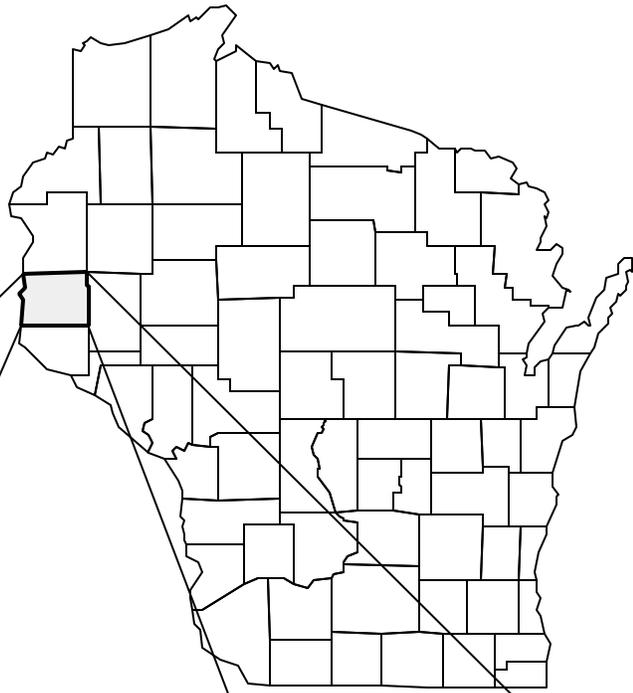
Within St. Croix County there are 21 unincorporated townships, 11 villages,

and 4 cities. The villages and cities include the Village of Spring Valley and City of River Falls, which lie mostly in Pierce County. The City of Hudson is located on the western edge of the county along the St. Croix River and is the county seat.

The communities of St. Croix County are diverse not only because of their physical setting differences, but also because of the effects of differing human activity. The western area contains the urban areas of the county. All territory, population and housing in urbanized areas and incorporated communities over 2,500 population outside of urbanized areas are considered urban by the Bureau of the Census.

The Cities of New Richmond and Hudson, and Village of North Hudson fit the urban classification. However, it is evident that the towns in the western area are also urbanizing with rapid residential and commercial development. The Towns of Hudson, St. Joseph and Troy add about 10,000 people to the same amount of people in the City of Hudson and Village of North Hudson, which they surround. This constitutes an urbanizing area containing over 20,000 people. The nearness to the Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area and the rural lifestyle amenities of western Wisconsin can account for this urbanization. Even the smaller villages in the central agricultural area and eastern wooded hills have felt some impact from the eastern migrations from Minnesota and the growth of the western portion of the county.

St. Croix County



Prepared By: West Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission

**Minneapolis-St. Paul
Metropolitan Statistical Area**



REGIONAL SETTING

Physically, St. Croix County is part of the Western Upland region of Wisconsin that extends east from and parallel to the St. Croix River, and is higher in elevation than the Central Plain to the east. The surface topography of the region varies from rolling plain to rugged hills and escarpments. The glaciers pushed through this area only leaving a portion of southwest Wisconsin, southeast Minnesota, northern Illinois and northwest Iowa untouched on their southward march. This accounts for the southern two-thirds of the Western Upland having rugged topography while the northern third is smoother. The St. Croix River, which borders the county's western side, is a significant tributary of the Mississippi River. The St. Croix River enters the Mississippi River some seven and a half miles south of the St. Croix County border at Prescott, Wisconsin.

St. Croix County is the easternmost county in the Minneapolis-St. Paul Metropolitan area. The influence of economic opportunities and residential migration from the metropolitan area was recognized by the U.S. Census Bureau in 1980 when St. Croix County was added to the Minneapolis-St. Paul Metropolitan Statistical Area. A Metropolitan Statistical Area is a county or counties with a central city of at least 50,000 people, a total population over 100,000, and significant social and economic ties which exist between the central city and any outlying counties that are included. As a result of the 1990 Census, Pierce County to the south of St. Croix County was included in the Minneapolis-St. Paul Metropolitan Statistical Area by the Census Bureau. Hence, it is apparent that the influence of the metro area is spreading.

Polk County to the north of St. Croix County is also feeling the influence of the metro area.

Continued expansion of the Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area has contributed to the dramatic growth and development of St. Croix County over the past several decades. A significant migration of people and businesses into the county results in many development issues never before

experienced by local governments. This rapid growth has caused local officials to assess their capacity to deal with these issues from a planning and regulatory viewpoint. Consequently, St. Croix County has created a Development Management Plan intended to provide local and county government with the tools to effectively and efficiently manage development throughout St. Croix County.

NEED FOR A DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT PLAN

The last major planning effort to occur countywide in St. Croix County was the St. Croix County Farmland Preservation Plan completed in 1980. In addition, the St. Croix County Zoning Ordinance was written in 1978 and has never had a major revision since. Considering the age of these documents and the change that has occurred since they were developed, it is unlikely that the information base upon which development decisions are being made in the County and the implementation tools to used guide development are adequate to meet the challenges the future holds.

The proximity to, and after 1980 the inclusion in, the Minneapolis-St. Paul Metropolitan Statistical Area (metro area) has had a profound impact on St. Croix County. Population growth alone indicates the magnitude of that impact on the County. From 1970 to 1990, St. Croix County has increased in population over 46 percent. It appears that significant population growth is continuing in the 1990s. In 1995, the Wisconsin Department of Administration estimated the population of St. Croix

County had increased by more than 3,100 people since 1990.

This growth has been even more dramatic at the municipal level. The towns, cities and villages on the western edge of the county have experienced the greatest growth from 1970 to 1990. The Town of Hudson, for example, has doubled its population in the last 20 years. The towns of Somerset, St. Joseph, Warren and Troy have increased in population between 50 and 100 percent. Only the towns in the county's extreme eastern tier have lost population. All St. Croix County cities and villages grew in population from 1970 to 1990. At the same time, the Village of Roberts doubled its population, and the Villages of North Hudson, Star Prairie and Baldwin increased their population between 50 and 100 percent.

Housing units have increased dramatically in St. Croix County from 1970 to 1995. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, housing units increased more than 45 percent between 1970 and 1980, and another 24 percent

between 1980 and 1990. This trend continued between 1990 and 1995 with an increase in housing units of 20 percent, returning to a pace similar to that of the 1970's. Each of these increases was much greater than the approximately 8 percent increase on a statewide basis occurring at the same time.

This residential growth has led to a change in the rural character of the county. The residential growth in the unincorporated areas has begun to transform the previously rural farm areas into rural residential areas. There has been a steady decrease in rural farm population over the past 20 years. Yet, there has been an increase in total rural population, indicating an increase in rural non-farm residents. Between 1970 and 1990, St. Croix County's farm population dropped from 7,823 to 4,259, a decline of over 45 percent. During the same time, non-farm population grew from 9,755 to 22,647, or by 132 percent.

Another indicator of development is the increased economic growth as indicated by employment increases. St. Croix County has a significant presence in the region's economy. Between 1983 and 1993 there was a 52.2 percent increase in employment at the same time there was about a 16 percent increase in population. This difference can be attributed to the large increase in the population available in the workforce. By comparison the West Central Wisconsin Region of Wisconsin had an employment increase during the same time of about 10 percent.

Commuting patterns indicate that the majority of people living in western St. Croix County are driving to the

Minneapolis/St. Paul area to work. Thirty-five percent of all workers in the county commute to Minnesota and in some western communities over seven out of 10 workers do so. However, even though significant numbers of workers take advantage of Minnesota employment opportunities, St. Croix County has experienced strong employment growth.

The largest gains in employment within St. Croix County between 1983 and 1993 came from Transportation and Utilities (490 jobs, 111percent increase), Construction (300, 88percent), Manufacturing (2,200, 71percent), Wholesale/Retail (2,010, 68percent) and Services (1500, 63percent). So, even though many people are commuting to Minnesota to work, employment increases within the county also contribute to the robust development occurring in the residential, industrial, commercial and retail sectors of the St. Croix County economy. Employment increases are certainly welcomed, but the development that accompanies them is having a profound impact on land use and the provision of services and public facilities by the local and county governments.

An analysis of equalized valuation of properties between 1980 and 1990 reveals the magnitude of investments in the residential, commercial and manufacturing sectors. It also reveals a loss in valuation in the agricultural sector. St. Croix County saw significant increases in valuation in all but the agricultural sector between 1980 and 1990. St. Croix County lost 20.9 percent in agricultural valuation. This contrasts with the increase in residential, commercial and manufacturing property

valuations. Commercial valuation increased dramatically, 127.4 percent between 1980 and 1990. Residential valuation increased 91.1 percent. A similar trend was found in the manufacturing sector, with a valuation increase of 58.9 percent.

The substantial residential and economic development in St. Croix County in the last two decades has required significant investment in public facilities and services, caused encroachment on prime agricultural land and natural areas, raised environmental concerns and created serious land-use problems.

One obvious and highly visible effect growth and development have had on public infrastructure is the transportation system improvements required to accommodate the additional population. To accommodate commuters and business, and recreation travel, the Interstate Highway 94 bridge at Hudson was reconstructed with lanes added, and a new bridge at Stillwater and Houlton is proposed to be built. Numerous highway projects are under construction or programmed for construction. These projects include: upgrading State Highways 35 and 64 from Houlton to New Richmond; a River Falls bypass; upgrading State Highway 35 from River Falls to Interstate 94; and reconstruction of the State Highway 35-Interstate 94 interchange. It is important that measures be taken to protect the public's investment and ensure the longevity of these improvements. Current and future transportation improvements are requiring local and county governments to deliberate on issues seldom discussed before, such as access control, land use and corridor alignments.

There are many factors influencing development issues in the county. Unfortunately, the local units of government affected by these issues have a limited capacity to deal effectively with them, due to a lack of experience, and non-existent or outdated planning information and enforcement tools. Consequently, this major study was needed to more thoroughly identify the

extent of development, (how much, what type, where, and why); the multi-faceted impact of development on the environment, land use, services, infrastructure and the economy; the options for managing future development; and what measures are reasonable (politically, technically, and financially) to attain a development framework that will work for the county.

BACKGROUND, AUTHORITY AND PURPOSE

Under Section 59.69 of the Wisconsin Statutes the stated purpose of planning and zoning is to promote the public health, safety, convenience and general welfare of the county. In addition, the reasons for planning and zoning are further stated as:

- to encourage planned and orderly land-use development;
- to protect property values and tax bases;
- to permit careful planning and efficient maintenance of highway systems;
- to ensure adequate highway, utility, health, educational, and recreational facilities;
- to recognize the needs of agriculture, forestry, industry, and business in future growth;
- to encourage appropriate land use and natural resource conservation;
- to provide adequate light and air, including access to sunlight for solar collectors and wind for wind energy systems;
- to encourage the protection of ground water resources;
- to preserve wetlands and conserve soil, water, and forest resources;
- to protect the beauty of the landscape and man-made developments;
- to provide healthy surroundings for family life; and,

- to promote the efficient and economical use of public funds.

To accomplish the above stated goals the St. Croix County Board of Supervisors may plan for the physical development and zoning of territory within the county as set forth by section 59.69(3) of the statutes regarding THE COUNTY DEVELOPMENT PLAN.

The county planning and zoning agency directs the preparation of a county development plan for the physical development of the unincorporated jurisdictions in the county and those incorporated jurisdictions who by resolution agree to having their areas included in the county's development plan. The plan must incorporate without change all master plans adopted under section 62.223(2) or (3), and the official map of any city or village in the county adopted under section 62.23(6). The county development plan presented here will be referred to as the Development Management Plan.

According to state statute the Development Management Plan may include, without limitation, comprehensive surveys, studies, and analyses of:

- county history;
- existing land-use;
- population and population density;
- economy;
- soil characteristics;
- forest cover;

- wetland and floodplain conditions; and,
- any other human or natural features of the county.

Authorized by state statute, this Development Management Plan incorporates the comprehensive surveys, studies and analyses that were used to identify goals and objectives for the future physical and economic development of the county with respect to public and private land-use, natural resources, highways, parks, public and private infrastructure, and other factors that improve the physical and economic conditions of the county.

The purpose of the Development Management Plan is to develop a comprehensive set of informational resources and a policy framework to assist the County and local units of

government in managing development. To address growth and development occurring in St. Croix County, the Development Management Plan explores the physical and economic conditions of the county, defines what the larger community of individuals, groups, organizations and institutions that is St. Croix County feel are the important development issues affecting the county, and articulates a county-wide development policy to assist local and county governments in building their capacity to deal with development issues. Adopted by the St. Croix County Board of Supervisors, the Development Management Plan is certified by designated state statutes to serve as a guide for public and private actions and decisions to assure the appropriate development of public and private property in St. Croix County.

STUDY OBJECTIVES

If conscientiously implemented, the Development Management Plan will act as a sound basis for the harmonious development of the county. The plan, along with the implementation tools, will provide local governments with the ability to effectively and efficiently make public investment decisions and work with developers to ensure private investments are compatible with the public interest.

The primary objective of the Development Management Plan is to minimize the impacts and maximize the opportunities that growth and development bring to the county. In the course of attaining that objective, there

are numerous physical development benefits that will be derived from the preparation of a locally developed and accepted plan and its implementation. Such as:

- The proper allocation of land uses that account for health, safety, and welfare concerns and maximize amenity and convenience in terms of accessibility to supporting land uses.
- The proper allocation of land uses which will maintain an ecological balance between the activities of people and the natural

environment which supports them.

- The establishment of a relationship of urban and rural land use development to soil type will avoid costly environmental and developmental problems, aid in the establishment of appropriate settlement patterns, and protect an irreplaceable resource.
- The protection of lakes, streams, woodlands and wetlands, and other natural habitats, which are essential to the ecological balance, provide certain recreational opportunities and in certain instances provide a desirable aesthetic setting for special types of land development.
- The protection of groundwater aquifers, which provide essential drinking water for county residents and clean water for commerce and industry, through local wellhead protection planning and the proper allocation of land uses.
- The establishment of areas and locations suitable for the

production of goods and services to expand the county's economic vitality.

- The dedication of agricultural land to maintain the vital agriculturally related economy of the area.
- The development of an integrated transportation system which connects the various land uses within the county, thereby providing the accessibility essential to support these land uses.
- The establishment of residential areas conveniently located proximate to commercial, educational, health, transportation and recreational facilities and employment opportunities.
- The savings of both public and private expenditures through wise investment decisions based on sound development policy.

The result of the St. Croix County Development Management Plan will be an enhanced ability of the county and local governments to promote the public interest and make wise investment decisions.

PLANNING PROCESS

Because of the comprehensive scope of this plan, a considerable number of financial, political, technical and legal resources were necessary to complete it. These resources included the respective county and local governments; the Wisconsin Departments of Transportation, Natural Resources,

Revenue, and Industry, Labor and Human Relations; West Central

Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission; UW-Extension; Soil Conservation Service; Minnesota-Wisconsin Boundary Area Commission; the Lower St. Croix Management Commission; the private sector (developers, engineers and lawyers); and the Wisconsin Legislature. Throughout the process the commitment of two groups, the Steering Committee and the

Technical Advisory Committee, were instrumental in achieving the outcomes desired as the plan was prepared.

The Steering Committee was created to be the guiding force behind the planning effort. This committee was primarily made up of elected officials or their representatives from County and municipal government in St. Croix County. It met monthly during the entire planning process to discuss issues, review data and make decisions. The Steering Committee formed the majority of the policy in the Plan in consultation with the St. Croix County Planning, Zoning and Parks Committee. The participants on the Steering Committee are listed in the Acknowledgements.

The Technical Advisory Committee provided technical expertise in the review and analysis of complex information, and recommendations to the Steering Committee. The committee was made up of staff professionals from federal and state agencies, county and local government and other organizations. It was an important part of the long and tedious process of analyzing large quantities of information. They worked steadfastly to assure the planning process was valid and its outcomes reasonable. The participants on the Technical Advisory Committee are listed in Acknowledgements.

The process also relied upon the participation of local governments, individual citizens, and the representatives of special interest groups. Without their involvement and support, the plan would not be an accurate reflection of what St. Croix County is, what it wants to be and how it wants to get there.

The St. Croix County Development Management Plan process consisted of four phases: The first phase was the development of the introduction and the physical features analysis. The trend and policy analyses were the second phase. The third phase included the development and selection of development management alternatives. Policies, ordinances, and program

proposals to implement the selected development management alternative were developed during the fourth phase. Throughout the project, the community participation process was used to obtain local government, public and interest group input, and provide information, education and training to citizens and officials.

PHASE ONE: INTRODUCTION AND PHYSICAL FEATURES ANALYSIS

This introduction explains the background and authority for the planning project. It also covers the need for and purpose of the Development Management Plan, county characteristics, the regional setting, study objectives and the planning process.

Reliable basic planning and engineering data, collected on a uniform, area-wide basis, is essential to the formulation of any workable plan. Consequently, collection of data is part of the first operational phase in any planning analysis. The crucial nature of

factual and current information is rather evident, since no intelligent forecasts can be made or alternative courses of action evaluated without knowledge of the current state of St. Croix County. An inventory and analysis with respect to development limitations of the physical resources of the county was conducted including soils, geology, topography, surface and ground water, land, transportation facilities, public services and facilities, historic sites and structures, recreation and open space, and air quality.

PHASE TWO: TREND AND POLICY ANALYSES

In the trend and policy analysis, the county's dynamic resources were evaluated to determine the amount, type and direction of development in the county. Projections present what can be expected and what development needs should to be addressed. The following areas were evaluated and trends projected: population, economy, land use, housing, transportation, recreation, agriculture, water quality, solid waste, public services and facilities and air quality.

An inventory and evaluation of existing implementation tools was important in determining the existing development framework in the county. All county plans, ordinances, decisions, permits, violations and administration and enforcement decisions were

reviewed. Their effectiveness was evaluated and recommendations for improvements and changes were produced. State and federal policies, regulations and incentives as they apply to St. Croix County were also explored.

All town, village and city plans, ordinances, building codes, extraterritorial jurisdiction and annexation actions were evaluated to determine the present capacity of the local governments to deal with development issues. Within the broad objectives developed for the overall Development Management Plan, recommendations for the actions necessary to build the planning capacity of local units of government are presented.

PHASE THREE: SELECTION OF DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT ALTERNATIVES

This was a dynamic aspect of the process, which examined alternative approaches and policies for development in the county. The development management alternatives were approached from an area-wide perspective. They were developed to be broad enough to allow for local and county government plans to effectively mesh for the overall development of the county.

Existing development trends and the effect of maintaining the status quo are considered. Alternative development scenarios were developed by modifying the following development factors: quantity, quality, location, rate/timing, pattern, type/mix, density and costs/benefits. This allowed consideration of various levels of development activity and their impacts or characteristics. It was hoped that this process would identify or define areas of the county which require different development approaches based on the intensity of development or the desire to protect certain characteristics of an area. Using the development scenarios, community input and the trend and policy analyses, recommendations were

made for each defined area. The alternatives include maintaining the status quo for development of an area or modifying development trends with varying types and levels of intervention, depending on whether development is to be promoted, managed or restricted.

A set of goals, objectives and policies for each defined area was developed. Issues covered included: land use, transportation, recreation and open space, environmental resources, agricultural resources, community development, public facilities and services and financial resources. Planning areas and planning area boundaries were defined and mapped. The final plan includes: urban development areas, rural development areas, mixed use areas, agricultural preservation areas and conservancy areas.

The selected development management approaches will become the overall guide and basis from which local and county governments could decide whether or not existing implementation tools needed to be upgraded or new ones developed to assist them in influencing change in their jurisdictions.

PHASE FOUR: DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT ALTERNATIVE IMPLEMENTATION

The critical element of the St. Croix County Development Management Plan is carrying out the courses of action outlined in the plan. The recommendations include specific planning activities for the county, towns,

cities or villages; regional, state or federal planning activity; ordinance revisions for the county and municipalities; training and education programs for public officials and staff as well as public information and education

programs; changes in state and/or federal policies, regulations and/or financial incentives that affect local programs; coordination mechanisms among affected or related agencies or units of government; and finally, adjustments to the structure, procedures and standards for making local development decisions.

The Development Management Plan is intended to provide a foundation for a comprehensive revision of the county zoning ordinance and map. The need for this revision has been identified for several years. The county will consequently undertake this activity following this planning process.

PHASES ONE - FOUR: COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

The success of the plan and its implementation hinges on strong public, local government and interest group support. Throughout all four phases, public, local government and interest group input was sought. There was a concerted effort to inform and educate these clientele about findings and project development through the use of various techniques, such as, surveys, advisory committees, focus groups, open houses, visioning, hearings and issue sessions.

A significant prelude to any actual implementation activity is an extensive educational effort. It is essential that city, village, town and county officials understand the "state of the county" and the concept of planning for development management. Developers and interest groups also need to be comfortable with the vision the county chooses through the planning process and the standards and direction it takes to realize that

vision. Meetings were held throughout the county to reinforce the need, approach and benefits of growth management. Additionally, officials were introduced to implementation tools, which could be applied to their particular situations. Public and local government commitment to the process is essential and was nurtured throughout the process.

Every effort was made to truly make this St. Croix County's plan. This means giving all individuals, groups, institutions and organizations in the county an opportunity for the common exploration of the conditions and issues facing St. Croix County, creating a vision of what is good about the county and what it should be in the future, and agreeing upon the course of action that will best serve all of the residents and interests in the county.

