

FARMLAND PRESERVATION PLAN

CITY OF RIVER FALLS

BACKGROUND

The importance of preserving good farmland has received national attention in recent years. Productive agricultural soils have been recognized as a limited, irreplaceable natural resource, though the soils are being consumed at a rapid rate by urban development and soil loss. The agricultural community, especially the family farm, has also encountered severe economic difficulties, caused partially by the heavy burden of property taxes.

The State of Wisconsin recognized these problems and responded by enacting the Farmland Preservation Act. The legislation established a program which promotes long term commitment to agricultural activities and protection of productive soils. Incentives, in the form of tax relief, are offered to landowners who enter the program. Soil conservation measures and local government control and administration are also key features of the Act.

The benefits of preserving agricultural lands have also been recognized by local governments. It strengthens the local economy which is supported in large part by agricultural activities. Farmland preservation also enables better control of development and more cost efficient services by concentrating growth where municipal services and facilities are located.

Otherwise. sewer, water. and other urban facilities and services must be extended over long distances at high cost to scattered, isolated, and small pockets of development.

Locally, farmers have expressed concerns about the threat of urban development. The Pierce County Farmland Preservation Plan states that "for the period 1954-1979 there has been a net loss of farmland greater than 22,000 acres". Development leads to increased valuation and taxes, special assessments for roads and utilities, conflicting land uses, and a higher degree of regulation. Farmers are also aware of soil erosion problems. The Pierce County Plan states that, though tolerable soil loss limits for most soils in Pierce County is 3-5 tons/acre/year, the average soil loss in the County is 8.6 tons/acre/year.

In response, Pierce and St. Croix Counties have both prepared and adopted Farmland Preservation Plans. Their zoning ordinances have also been amended by establishing exclusive agricultural zoning districts, Agricultural lands have subsequently been rezoned to this new zoning classification. These actions have made numerous landowners fully eligible for the Wisconsin Farmland Preservation Program.

Since county plans have limited authority in the Extraterritorial area, the River Falls Joint Extraterritorial Zoning Committee has recently been taking actions to preserve farmland, through its zoning powers. It has devoted several meetings to the topic and has discussed the need for a preservation plan, the

State Farmland Preservation Act, criteria for delineating agricultural areas, and the impact of such a plan on local farmers. These considerations have resulted in the preparation of this plan. After its adoption, the committee would recommend the preparation and adoption of an amendment to the extraterritorial zoning ordinance which would establish an exclusive agricultural zoning district. Properties would subsequently be rezoned to this new zoning district, and the plan and ordinance submitted to the state for certification. Thus, individual owners would be able to take full advantage of the benefits of the Wisconsin Farmland Preservation Program.

It is the recommendation of the Extraterritorial Zoning Committee that this report serve as the City of River Falls Farmland Preservation Plan, as required by Wisconsin Statutes, Chapter 91.55. That legislation requires "1) statements of policy regarding preservation of agricultural lands, urban growth, the provision of public facilities and the protection of significant natural resource, open space, scenic, historic, or architectural areas, and 2) maps identifying agricultural areas to be preserved, areas of special environmental, natural resource, or open space significance."

GOALS AND POLICIES

The goals and policies outlined below are intended to provide elected and appointed officials, staff, and the general public with direction in subsequent implementation activities. Those

activities relate to the development of long range plans,, regulations, and programs. The goal and policies are divided into two categories: Farmland Preservation Area, and Urban Area.

FARMLAND PRESERVATION AREA

Goals:

- Preserve farmlands and agricultural as a viable, permanent land use and economic activity.
- Preserve and encourage the rural lifestyle and continuation of the family farm.

Policies:

- Permitted uses will be limited to those normally associated with agricultural activities.
- Land uses which conflict with agricultural activities will be prohibited.
- Residences will be limited to those for individuals working farms, including owners, family members, and employees.
- Regulations restricting noise, odors, animals, hours of operation, and other practices normally associated with farming activities will not apply to farmland preservation areas.
- Conservation measures and erosion control through approved farming practices and methods will be encouraged.
- Land uses and activities which have detrimental effects on areas of environmental, natural resource, or open space significance will be prohibited.

URBAN AREA

Goal:

- Control untimely and uneconomical expansion of urban facilities and services.

Policies:

- Development will be allowed only in those areas which are currently served by urban facilities and services or which are contiguous to such areas and can be provide such facilities and services in an economical, logical, and orderly manner.
- Permitted users will include residential, commercial, industrial, institutional, and recreational activities, as directed by the master plan and regulated by the zoning code
- Increased levels of facilities and services will be provided, including sanitary sewer and storm sewer, municipal water, curb and gutter paved streets, and parks
- Land uses and activities which have a detrimental effect on areas of environmental, natural resource, or open space significance will be prohibited.

INVENTORY

The West Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (WCWRPC), after entering into a contract with the City of River Falls Planning Office, prepared a base map and four overlays. The base map and overlays were used to delineate the farmland preservation area. The following overlays and information were prepared, as directed by the Extraterritorial Zoning Committee:

Parcels Overlay

- Parcels as of 1981 showing lot sizes, as per the River Falls Planning Office.

Soils-Suitability for Agriculture Overlay

- Class I and II soils, Class III soils, and other soils, as per the St. Croix County Farmland Preservation Plan and the Pierce County Farmland Preservation Plan.

Existing Land Use - 1983 Overlay

- Residential, commercial, agricultural, vacant, and parks and open space land uses outside city limits and within the Extraterritorial Zoning Area, as per the St. Croix County Farmland Preservation Plan, Pierce County Farmland Plan, and the River Falls Planning Office.

Selected Environmental Resources Overlay

- Wetlands, floodplains, and open water, as per the St. Croix County Farmland Preservation Plan, the Pierce County Farmland Preservation Plan, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources Wetlands Inventory, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, U.S. Geological Survey 7 1/2 Minute Series topographic quadrangles (River Falls East, River Falls West, Northline and Roberts), and Wisconsin Department of Transportation aerial photos (1978 Flight).

DESIGNATION OF FARMLAND PRESERVATION AND URBAN AREAS

The following sets of criteria were used as guidelines to designate the Farmland Preservation and Urban areas. The criteria assures that similar lands are treated equally.

FARMLAND PRESERVATION AREA

Lands will be designated Farmland Preservation if the following criteria are met:

- parcel size - they are at least 100 acres in size or lie adjacent to other lands designated Farmland Preservation which together consists of at least 100 acres, as required by Statutes, Chapter 91.55(1)(b).
- contiguity - they lie adjacent to other lands designated Farmland Preservation and do not constitute "islands" which are physically separated from other such lands.
- Soil - they contain primarily Class I, II, and III soils, and
- Development - they do not contain areas designated for potential urban development

Lands may also be designated Farmland Preservation if the following criteria is also met:

- Existing land use - they have a history of economic agricultural production

URBAN AREA

Lands will be designated Urban if the following criteria is met:

- Urban services and facilities - they lie adjacent to an area currently served by urban services and facilities or which can be served by the economical, logical, and orderly extension of those services and facilities.

Lands may also be designated Urban if the following criteria is met:

- Surrounding land uses - the nature, location, or present use of surrounding land uses is or may become incompatible with agricultural activities.

Areas of environmental, natural resource or open space significance in the Farmland Preservation and Urban Areas will be encouraged to be preserved and protected.

IMPLEMENTATION

The worth of a plan is judged in large part by the means used to translate the goals and policies into action and to incorporate them into the decision making processes. Though the City's authority is limited in the extraterritorial area, there are several actions which can be taken to make this plan effective. Generally, these actions fall into three categories: long range planning, ordinance development and administration, and the state farmland program.

The City is considering the preparation of a Master Plan. The scope of the Plan would include the Extraterritorial Area and would project twenty years ahead. It would analyze and plan for a variety of issues, including land use, housing, sanitary and storm sewers, water, parks and recreation, airports and transportation. The Farmland Preservation Plan would be incorporated

into the Master Plan and would be coordinated with other land uses and various public facilities and services. The Master Plan would refine the Preservation Plan by addressing in more detail the location, timing, use, capacity, and financing of facilities and services for existing and proposed uses. It would also provide further implementation devices regarding ordinances, programs, budgets, and capital expenditures.

The zoning and subdivision ordinances are the most appropriate regulations for promoting farmland preservation. The Extraterritorial zoning ordinance should be amended to create an exclusive agricultural zoning district. The purpose of the new district would be similar to the goals and policies outlined in this plan. Minimum lot requirements, permitted and special uses, and limitations on residences would have to be incorporated, as required by statutes. Those areas designated as Farmland Preservation should then be zoned. The subdivision ordinance should also be modified to include specific procedures and regulations for the small subdivisions and large acreage lots typical of the agricultural areas.

The authority of the City and Extraterritorial Zoning Committee is limited to the zoning and subdivision ordinances. However, it should be noted that, within corporate limits, floodplain and erosion control ordinances are administered and enforced. The Master Plan would also provide an inventory and analysis of environmental features, natural resources, and open space and a plan for their protection and preservation.

Finally, state certification of this plan and zoning ordinance should be obtained. This would allow for local administration of the Farmland Preservation Program. Most important, the program would provide individual farmers with tax relief and preserve agriculture as a viable, permanent land use and economic activity.

RESOLUTION NO. 673

RESOLUTION ADOPTING
FARMLAND PRESERVATION PLAN AND MAP

WHEREAS, the River Falls, Clifton, and Troy Extraterritorial Zoning Committees have prepared and recommended adoption of the "Farmland Preservation Plan, City of River Falls" and the map of "Farmland Preservation Areas"; and

WHEREAS, the Farmland Preservation Plan and Map comply with the statutory requirements for farmland preservation plans, as per section 91.55; and

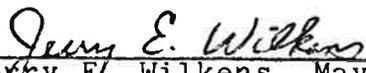
WHEREAS, the River Falls, Clifton, and Troy Extraterritorial Zoning Committees have also prepared and recommended approval of an amendment of the Extraterritorial Zoning Ordinance which creates an exclusive agricultural zoning district and rezones properties to that zoning district; and

WHEREAS, Wisconsin statutes, section 91.75 requires that exclusive agricultural zoning be based upon an adopted farmland preservation plan; and

WHEREAS, the Common Council of the City of River Falls has considered the recommendations of the Extraterritorial Zoning Committees and reviewed the Farmland Preservation Plan and Map;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Common Council of the City of River Falls hereby adopts the "Farmland Preservation Plan, City of River Falls" and the map of "Farmland Preservation Areas".

Dated this 8th day of October, 1985.



Jerry E. Wilkens, Mayor

ATTEST:



Loyd E. Ostness, City Clerk