

TOWN OF SENECA

Wood County, Wisconsin

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN 2003

Prepared by:
Town of Seneca Plan Commission
With assistance from
Wood County Planning & Zoning Office

Adopted by Plan Commission
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INTRODUCTION

Chapter 66.1001, Wisconsin Statutes, requires comprehensive planning in each county, city, village and town that engages in land use regulatory activities, such as zoning or subdivision ordinances. The comprehensive plan must contain nine elements, including 1) an issues and opportunities element, 2) a housing element, 3) a transportation element, 4) a utilities and community facilities element, 5) a natural and cultural resources element, 6) an economic development element, 7) an inter-governmental cooperation element, 8) a land use element and 9) an implementation element. In addition, by January 1, 2010, all local governments' land use-related actions regarding any ordinance, plan or regulation will be required to be consistent with its adopted comprehensive plan.

The Town of Seneca first enacted a local zoning ordinance in the 1960's, last updating it in 1993. The Town is considering making substantial amendments to the ordinance and, prior to making those changes, has determined that they should first develop a comprehensive plan pursuant to Wisconsin Statutes. This plan was developed under the guidelines and requirements of Chapter 66.1001, Wis. Stats., with further guidance from a community-wide survey that was conducted early in the year 2000.

1. ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Goals, Objectives, Policies and Programs

Future Development

Goal: Recognize that the City of Wisconsin Rapids will influence development pressure in the eastern parts of the Seneca, particularly, along the State Highway 13/73 corridor and in the eastern tier of sections between Highway 13/73 and Seneca Road. Growth in this area should be managed to maintain the uncongested, rural lifestyle desired by residents in a recent community survey.

Objective: Construct zoning standards to encourage shared access points on the State highways, thus reducing traffic conflicts.

Objective: Meet with Wisconsin Rapids officials to update their area official street map to coordinate street alignments and time of street extensions.

Goal: Promote commercial development that is harmonious with existing land uses.

Objective: Develop flexible zoning codes to protect the health, safety, and welfare of residents near proposed commercial developments.

Objective: Encourage new commercial development to locate along the Highway 13/73 corridor, thus promoting the clustering of development and increasing access to the public.

Protecting the 'Rural Character' of the Town of Seneca

Goal: Maintain the "rural character" of the Town of Seneca by preserving its natural amenities. Future growth should be concentrated along existing road corridors, using existing town roads as collectors to new residential development. Population density should be maintained at a low to moderate level with the possibility of cluster development at appropriate locations.

Demographic Trends

Introduction

At the time background data for this plan was being gathered, only limited data from the 2000 Census was available. Consequently, some of the background data in this document is dated and should be used with caution. Where comparisons to other communities or the State are made, however, data from the same timeframe is used.

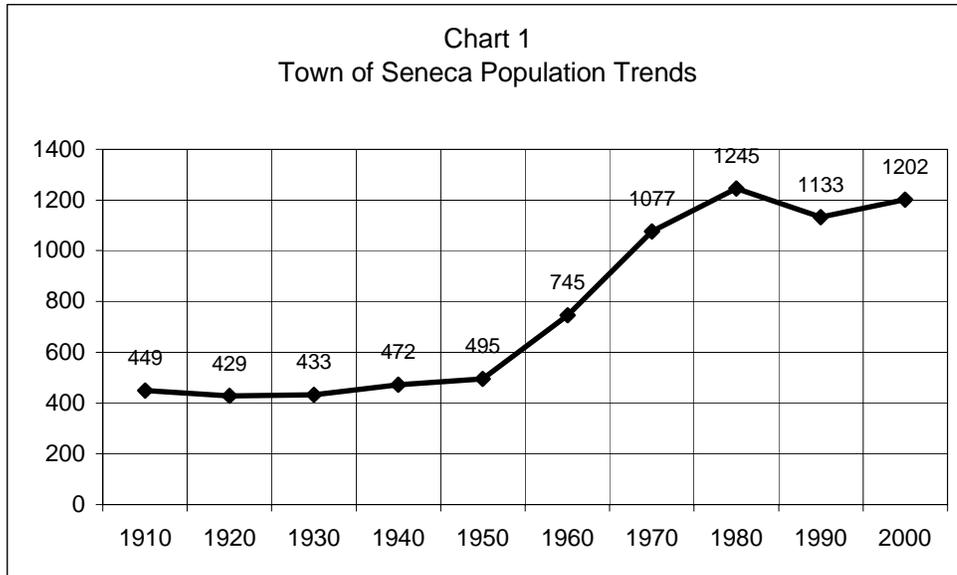
When new Census 2000 data became available during the planning process, that data was incorporated into this plan. Also, whenever new demographic estimates were available during the planning process, that information is incorporated and noted as being

estimated. For these two reasons – new data not available or only estimates available – the Town of Seneca will update this document at or before the five-year interval after adoption.

Population Growth and Distribution

Official census counts for the Town of Seneca, from 1910 to 2000, are listed in Table 1. During the first half of the 1900's, Seneca's population figures show a slow growth, reaching 495 in 1950. Beginning in 1950, Seneca experienced the same suburban growth that occurred in rural communities across the nation. As evidenced in Chart 1, the Town's population rose sharply between 1950 and 1980, as the automobile made it possible for people to live further from their employers and the desire to live away from the city resulted in suburban development. During that period, the population in Seneca grew by over 150%, rising from 495 in 1950 to its highest number, 1,245, in 1980. Between 1980 and 1990, there was a slight decline in numbers, which rebounded between 1990 and 2000. The current population is 1,202.

| Table 1 TOWN OF SENECA CENSUS COUNTS 1910 - 2000 | | | |
|---|-------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| YEAR | POPULATION | NUMBER CHANGE | PERCENT CHANGE |
| 1910 | 449 | | NA |
| 1920 | 429 | -20 | -4.5 |
| 1930 | 433 | 4 | 1.0 |
| 1940 | 472 | 39 | 9.0 |
| 1950 | 495 | 23 | 4.9 |
| 1960 | 745 | 250 | 50.5 |
| 1970 | 1,077 | 332 | 44.6 |
| 1980 | 1,245 | 168 | 15.6 |
| 1990 | 1,133 | -112 | -9.0 |
| 2000 | 1,202 | 69 | 6.1 |
| Source: U.S. Census of Population. | | | |



How does Seneca’s population change compare to the rest of the Wisconsin Rapids urban area? Table 2 lists area communities and their population numbers for 1980, 1990 and 2000. The average change during the past 10-years was 4.6%. Seneca’s population grew by just over six percent. The communities with the largest percentage growth include the towns of Grand Rapids and Saratoga, both lying east of the Wisconsin River in private on-site waste treatment system-friendly

| COMMUNITY | 1980 POPULATION | 1990 POPULATION | 2000 POPULATION | PERCENT CHANGE 1990 - 2000 | MEDIAN AGE YEAR 2000 |
|-------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|----------------------------|----------------------|
| Grand Rapids | 7,319 | 7,071 | 7,801 | 10.3 | 38.4 |
| Port Edwards (town) | 1,387 | 1,351 | 1,446 | 7.0 | 36.2 |
| Rudolph (town) | 1,385 | 1,180 | 1,161 | -1.6 | 38.9 |
| Saratoga | 4,363 | 4,775 | 5,383 | 12.7 | 38.5 |
| Seneca | 1,245 | 1,133 | 1,202 | 6.1 | 36.9 |
| Sigel | 1,332 | 1,192 | 1,130 | -5.2 | 40.1 |
| Biron (village) | 698 | 794 | 915 | 15.2 | 43.3 |
| Port Edwards (village) | 2,077 | 1,848 | 1,944 | 5.2 | 40.1 |
| Nekoosa (city) | 2,519 | 2,557 | 2,590 | 1.3 | 36.6 |
| Wisconsin Rapids (city) | 17,995 | 18,245 | 18,435 | 1.0 | 37.6 |
| AREA TOTAL | 40,320 | 40,146 | 42,007 | 4.6 | 38.7 |

sandy soil areas. West of the Wisconsin River, Seneca was second only to the town of Port Edwards where the population increased by only 26 people more than Seneca's increase. Two neighboring towns, Sigel and Rudolph, lost population during the past census decade.

Population Forecasts

To properly plan for future community services, the Town Board must be aware of the changing age structure of the population and of the numbers that are expected to live in the Town in the future. State agencies study future population expectations for anticipated funding levels of their programs and the town must do the same. Population projections are speculative and no person can forecast a community's future perfectly because of such things as changing economics, physical demands on the environment and changing political climate at all levels. However, using historic data from the community, one can foresee, with some accuracy, what the near future holds for the community as far as expected populations.

Two state agencies, the Wisconsin Department of Administration's Demographic Services Center and the University of Wisconsin - Extension's Applied Population Laboratory, spend considerable time developing population projections for counties and municipalities for purposes of estimating future state program and budget needs. Projections by those agencies are often required when a municipality is applying for various State-funded programs.

Prior to the 2000 census, the Demographic Services Center projected a growth in Seneca's population to 1,155 for the year 2000 and 1,154 for 2010¹. The Applied Population Laboratory, in their 1993 projections, was more optimistic than the Demographic Services Center. The Applied Population Laboratory projected a year 2000 population of 1,294, increasing to 1,437 in 2010². The 2000 census count for Seneca was 1,202. The census figures, along with State agency projections are shown graphically on Chart 2. It should be noted that the two State agencies will recalculate population projections following release of the 2000 census.

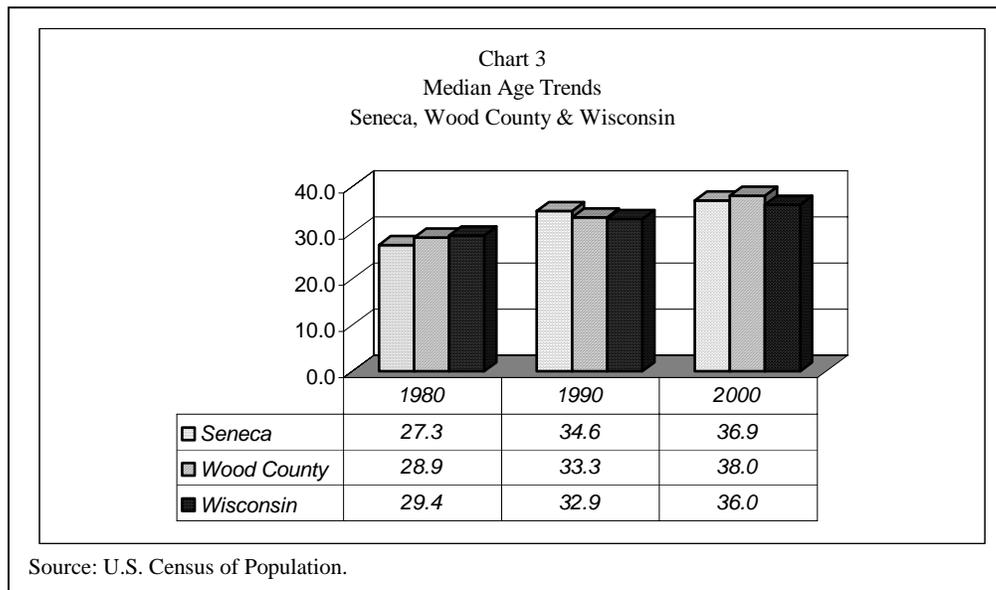
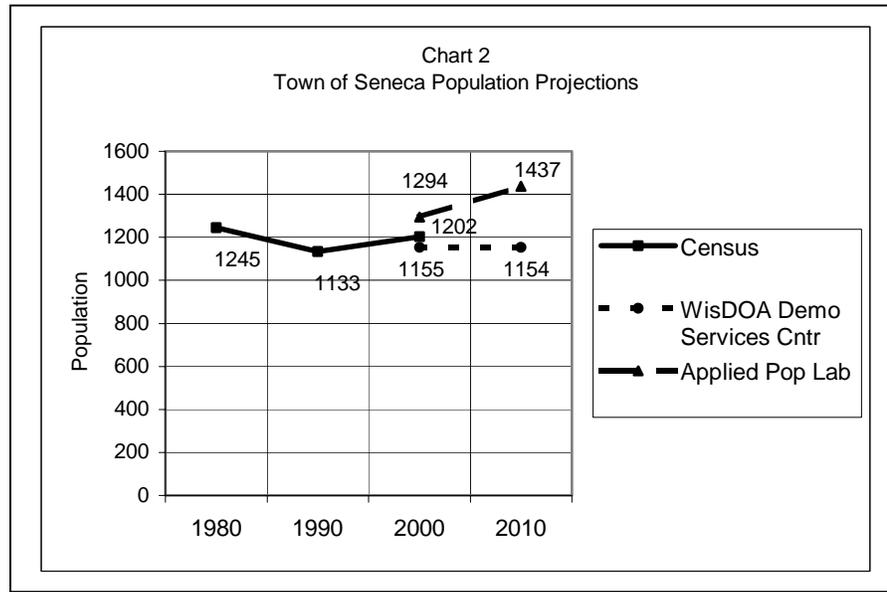
Age Distribution

Chart 3 illustrates the rising median age of Seneca's population since 1980, along with that of Wood County and Wisconsin. The median age in the Town of Seneca was 36.9 in 2000. In 1990, the median age was 34.6 and, in 1980, it was 27.3. This trend is typical not only for the area, but for the State and nation, as well. Families have gotten smaller and the baby-boomers are entering their 50s and 60s. Thus, the median age has gone up.

The median age of both Seneca and Wood County is increasing faster than that of the State. In 1980, the median age for the State was higher than Seneca and Wisconsin Rapids but in 1990, the two local median age numbers caught up with and slightly surpassed the State's median age. The most recent numbers show a narrower gap between the Town and the State and a considerably larger gap between the median age of Wood County and the State.

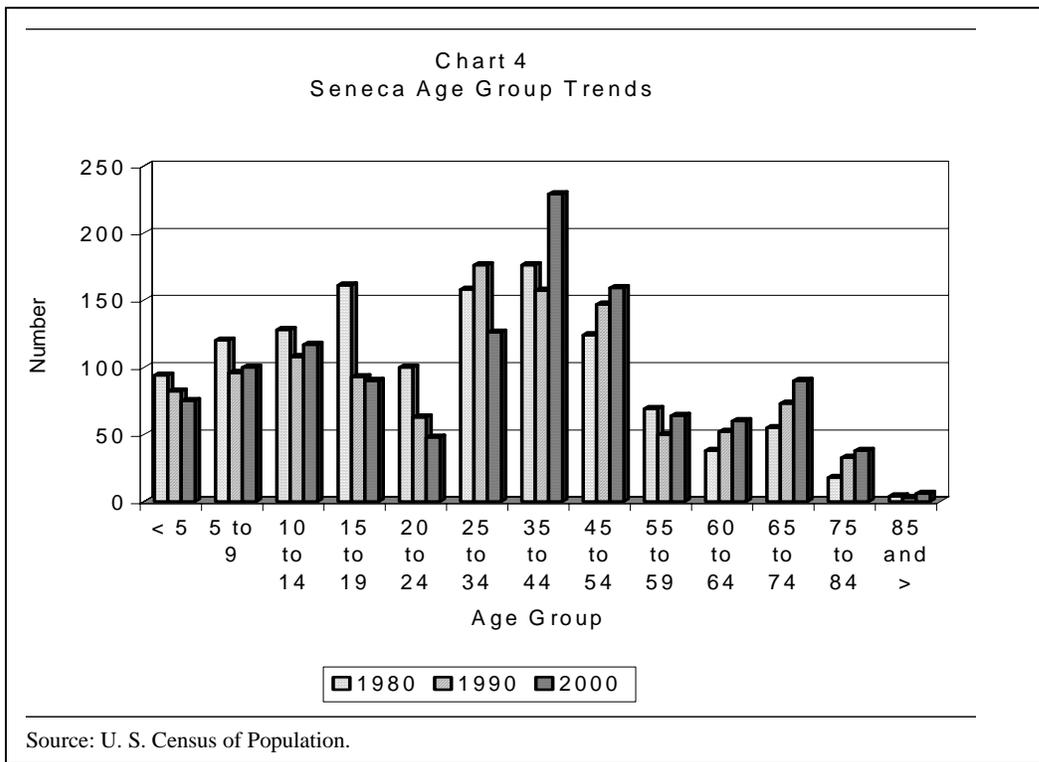
¹ Wisconsin Dept. of Administration, Demographic Services Center, Nov. 6, 2000 Internet search.

² "Interim Wisconsin Small-Area Baseline Population Projections, Applied Population Laboratory, Dept. of Rural Sociology, U.W.-Madison-Extension, March, 1993.



The median age for the Wisconsin Rapids area communities is listed in Table 2 is 38.7. Of those communities listed, only two have a lower median age than Seneca; the Town of Port Edwards and the City of Nekoosa. Typically, villages and cities will have “older” populations than towns because, as people age, they often want to locate closer to shopping, churches and community activities. Also, assisted living centers and nursing homes are located in incorporated communities, necessitating relocation from towns for those who require such services.

There are a number of factors that have affected the change in Seneca’s median age. Chart 4 provides graphic details about the Town’s population age groups from the 1980, 1990 and 2000 census figures. The first trend of significance is the steady, continuous decline in the number of persons under age 5 - the preschoolers. Although the youngest of the Town’s residents is declining, there has been an increase in both age



groups 5 to 9 and 10 to 14, the elementary and middle school age kids. Parents of these age groups are in their mid-30s to early 40s. Note the large increase in Town residents that fall in the 35 to 44 age category. There has also been a steady increase in the next older age group, persons age 45 to 54. The increases noted in the adult and school age population indicates that Seneca is becoming more of a commuter community, with families locating in the Town. The 15-to-19 age group has remained relatively consistent during the past 10 years, but, after high school, it seems that people are leaving the area, evidenced by the steady decline in the number of residents between the ages of 20 and 34. Then, from age 35, every age category has shown an increase during the past 10 years and most of those increases are continuations from the previous 10-year census period. The increase in the older age groups, coupled with the decline in three of the five youngest age groups helps explain the rise in median age.

Dependency Ratio

The dependency ratio of a community is defined as the working-age population to the non-working-age population. The non-working age population is considered to be persons under the age of 18 – still in high school – and those over age 65 – retired persons. The non-working-age population is considered to be “dependent” on the working age groups to provide services and facilities to the community. This is not to say that others, especially those 65 years old and older, do not contribute through equal property taxes and community service. In fact, they do carry their fair share and, in the case of many elected officials, they carry more than their share.

In the year 2000, 11 percent of Seneca’s population was 65 years of age and older. Looking back at Chart 4, it is evident that the three age groups that include persons age 65

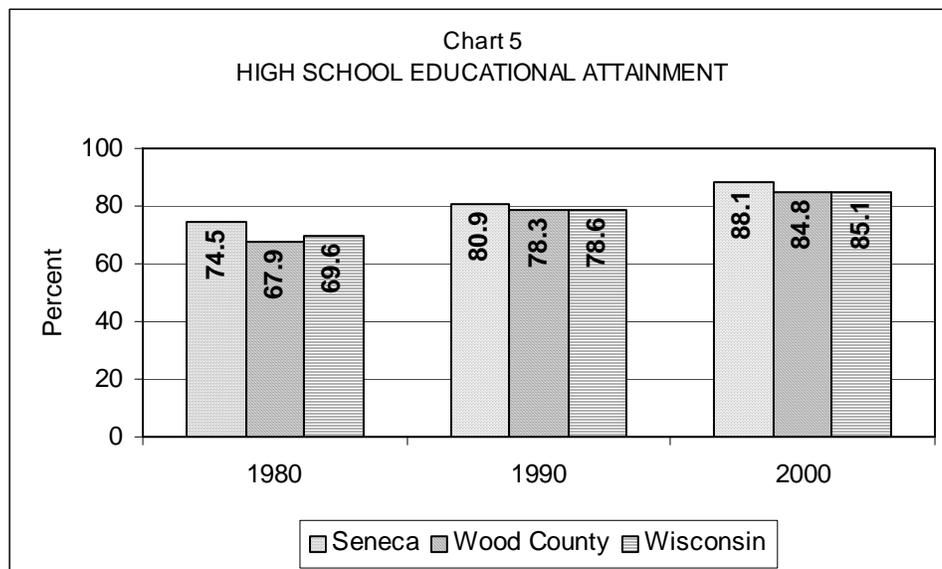
and older has shown steady growth. In 1990, for instance, 9.6 percent of the Town’s population was 65 or older and, in 1980, the figure was 6.2 percent. This trend will probably continue. The large increase in the 35 to 59 year olds will continue to move forward, barring unforeseen circumstances.

The Town population under the age of 18 has been declining since 1980, when 36 percent of the Town’s residents fell into this group. By 1990, the 36 percent declined to 30.8 percent and, by 2000, 28.8 percent were under the age of 18. Between 1990 and 2000, the actual number of people under the age 18 stayed about the same, being 349 and 346, respectively. However, the proportion of younger persons has dropped because the actual numbers of those over age 18 has increased so much.

As stated, the dependency ratio combines the two population groups considered to be outside the working age groups to those of “working age.” In 1980, for every non-working age person (dependent) in Seneca, there were 1.37 working-age people. The dependency ratio, then, was 1.37:1. In 1990, the dependency ratio was 1.47:1 and in the year 2000, it was 1.50:1. The trend that is revealed by these numbers is that, during the past 20-years, the proportion of working age people to non-working age people has grown somewhat. Again, that was shown graphically in Chart 4, with the increase in population from age 35 to age 59. For comparison purposes, the dependency ratio for Wood County in 2000 was 1.44:1.

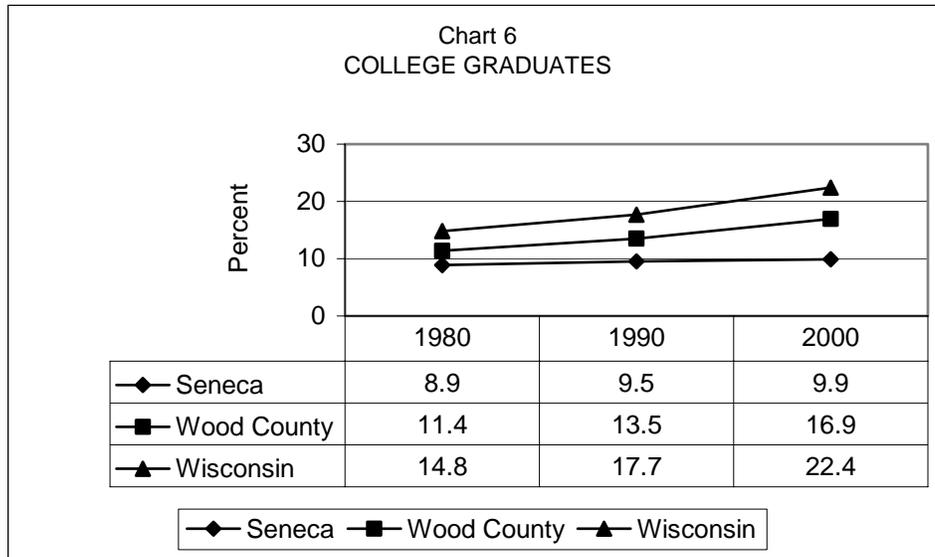
Educational Levels

Educational attainment levels of Seneca residents have risen steadily with respect to high school graduates. The proportion of high school graduates in the Town has consistently been higher than the County or the State (Chart 5). Although the gap has closed over the past 30 years, Seneca’s population with a high school-level education remains higher.



The opposite seems to be the norm for the proportion of college graduates. The proportion of college graduates living in the Town has consistently been lower than both the

County and the State. Chart 6 shows that the gap between Town numbers and numbers for the County and the State has widened over the past 30-years. In fact, although the proportion of town residents with a college degree has increased, the change has been very slow, with the line being almost flat.



Income

Table 3 lists the median income levels in Seneca and Wood County. It is encouraging to the Town to note that their household and family income levels are significantly higher than the County and State income levels. The Town’s per capita income level is greater than that of the County and State, although the gap is less than that of the median household and family income levels.

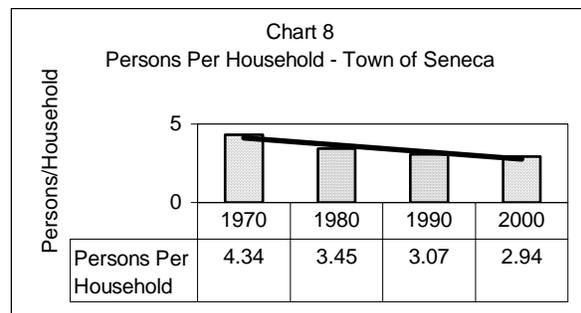
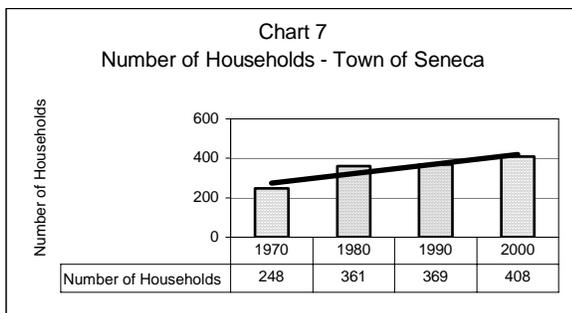
Poverty figures are also provided by the U.S. Census reports. Of the 1,202 persons in the Town in 2000, 70 had incomes below the poverty level. That calculates to 6.0% of the Town's population. This is less than the 6.5% figure for Wood County individuals, probably due to employment of a high proportion of residents in good industrial jobs. It may also be related to the high proportion of Town residents with higher than average high school educational levels. In Wisconsin, 8.7 percent of the population was classified as being in poverty. Only 3.0% of the Town’s families had poverty-level incomes compared to 4.4% in Wood County and 5.6% in Wisconsin.

| Table 3 MEDIAN INCOME – 1999 | | | |
|--|----------|-------------|-----------|
| 1999 INCOME | SENECA | WOOD COUNTY | WISCONSIN |
| Household | \$54,118 | \$41,595 | \$43,791 |
| Family | \$58,750 | \$50,798 | \$52,911 |
| Per Capita | \$21,833 | \$20,203 | \$21,271 |
| SOURCE: U.S. CENSUS OF POPULATION, 2000, Table DP-3. | | | |

Households³

Households and Household Size

Charts 7 and 8 illustrate two trends in the Town of Seneca that are typical of trends in most communities. First, the number of households in Seneca continues to increase, having gone from 248 in 1970, growing steadily to its present 408. The second trend, shown in Chart 8, is a continuous decline in the average number of persons per household during the same time period. In 1970, the average household in Seneca had 4.34 persons. Compare that to the 2.94 average population per household today. Larger families were still the norm 30-years ago. Family size has decreased, however, for many factors. The number of farms has decreased. Along with fewer numbers, advances in farm technology have resulted in fewer people being able to operate family farms. The move to the suburbs has resulted in commuters migrating to the Town for more space. Double-income families have resulted in fewer children as both adult partners work to support their lifestyle. There are a multitude of other factors leading to smaller family size. The trend for more households and fewer people per household is likely to continue throughout the planning period, although at a slower rate than in past years, as children of the “baby boomers” leave home to start households of their own. Referring back to Chart 4, we saw an increase in elementary and middle school-age children and a decline in the 15 to 19 year olds and early adults to the age 34. Children have been leaving the town as they finish high school, according to these numbers. Couple this with the decline in children younger than 5, and one can surmise that there will be fewer persons in each Seneca household when the next census is taken.



Household Forecasts

The number of households is a function of population and population per household. Population projections show that Seneca’s population will remain stable or increase slightly. Household size is expected to continue to decline. Between 1990 and 2000, an additional 30 housing units, or houses, were added to the Town’s inventory, bringing the total number of housing units to 422. Four hundred eight households occupied the housing units, a 97 percent occupancy rating. The population per household figure has continued to decline, although at a smaller rate between each census period. Chart 4 showed two population projections. The projection by the Demographic Services Center to 2000 was lower than the actual census and the UW Applied Population Laboratory’s projection to 2000 was

³ A household and a housing unit are different. A housing unit is a structure, i.e., single-family home, duplex, four-plex, etc. A housing unit may house more than one household, i.e., two households in a duplex, etc.

somewhat high. For the purpose of this plan, it will be assumed that the 2010 population will fall somewhere about the midpoint between the Applied Population Laboratory's projection and the actual 2000 census; say 1,320 persons. Assuming that the population per household will drop at a rate of -0.10 percent from 2.94 to 2.84 persons per household, the number of households in the year 2010 will be 465. That is an increase of 43 households over the next 10 years.

Household trends and projections are summarized in Table 4.

| Table 4 HOUSEHOLD TRENDS AND PROJECTIONS TOWN OF SENECA 1970 – 2010 | | | |
|--|------------|------------|----------------------|
| Year | Population | Households | Population/Household |
| 1970 | 1,077 | 248 | 4.34 |
| 1980 | 1,245 | 361 | 3.45 |
| 1990 | 1,133 | 369 | 3.07 |
| 2000 | 1,202 | 408 | 2.94 |
| 2010 | 1,320 | 465 | 2.84 |

Source: U. S. Census of Population and Wood County Planning & Zoning Office.

Employment Characteristics

The Town of Seneca is becoming more of a commuter community than in the past. According to the 2000 census, the civilian labor force (persons age 16 and over) in the Town totaled 634, 604 of whom were employed. The types of occupations of Seneca residents in 2000 are listed in Table 5. The mean travel time to work is about 19.5 minutes, which would suggest that the workers are traveling to jobs outside of Seneca. A review of the occupation types, coupled with the mean travel time to work, could mean that as much as 95% or more of the jobs held by Seneca residents are located outside of the Town.

| Table 5 TOWN OF SENECA OCCUPATION TYPES – 2000 | | |
|---|--------|---------|
| OCCUPATION TYPE | NUMBER | PERCENT |
| Management, professional & related | 138 | 23 |
| Service occupations | 75 | 12 |
| Sales & office occupations | 126 | 21 |
| Farming, forestry & fishing | 13 | 2 |
| Construction, extraction & maintenance | 88 | 15 |
| Production, transportation & material moving | 164 | 27 |
| Total | 604 | 100 |

Source: U.S. Census of Population, 2000, Table DP-3.

2. HOUSING

Goals and Objectives

The overall housing goal for the Town of Seneca is to encourage development of an adequate housing supply that meets existing and forecasted housing demand. The housing supply is to consist of housing units, both owner- and renter-occupied, that meet the needs of Seneca residents for both large and small families of all economic levels.

In the community survey that was distributed to every town property owner prior to beginning work on the comprehensive plan, 73 percent of the respondents indicated that they thought the overall appearance and quality of housing in the Town of Seneca is “about average” and 26 percent said appearance and quality of housing is “very good.” Only one percent of survey respondents thought housing quality and appearance is “poor.” ***It is an overall objective of the Town of Seneca to encourage home improvements and development standards that will enhance the overall appearance of the Town’s housing, while increasing the structural quality of homes.***

While respondents to the community survey indicated that all types of housing should be allowed in the Town, 66 percent feel the largest need in Seneca is for single-family residential homes on large, scattered lots. Another 22 percent prefer single-family residential homes in clustered subdivisions. Ninety percent of survey respondents said that maintaining Seneca’s current rural landscape is important. ***It is an overall objective of the Town to encourage development of affordable housing through appropriate zoning districts and standards. Further, the Town will provide areas for residential development on both larger lots and in clustered subdivisions, both where appropriate and while encouraging the maintenance of the Town’s rural landscape.***

There was a mix of responses regarding the relationship of housing and agricultural uses in the Town. On one end of the spectrum, 26 percent of survey respondents said remaining farmland should be preserved “at all costs”, while, on the other end of the spectrum, 33 percent of respondents prefer to not protect the remaining farmland, but to let landowners develop as they see fit. Between these two ends, 16 percent prefer to protect only prime, productive farmland and 12 percent indicated that the Town should protect farmland, but allow for residential growth in areas unsuitable for agriculture. Twenty-six percent of survey respondents recognize that agriculture in Seneca is declining, as it is in many areas. Finally, 52 percent of all respondents enjoy living in the Town because of its rural atmosphere and low population density. ***It is an objective of the Town of Seneca to develop zoning standards to allow residential development where it will not encroach on prime agricultural lands, but may mix into the agricultural community in appropriate locations, such as areas that are not tillable.***

Housing Assessment

Age of Housing Stock

Table 6 shows the age of housing in the Seneca. According to the 2000 census, there are 422 total housing units in the Town.

In the “Population Growth and Distribution” section, Chart 1 (page 4) showed a sharp increase in Seneca’s population between 1950 and 1980. Table 6, below, shows the large increase in housing units that occurred to accommodate the new population. Fifty-eight percent of Seneca’s housing units were constructed between 1940 and 1979. Between 1980 and 1990, the number of new housing units dropped by more than 50 percent from the previous decade, which corresponds to the drop in population during the ‘70s, but rebounded during the 1990s, when 90 new housing structures were added to Seneca’s housing inventory. According to community survey results, most Town residents would like to see the growth rate continue as it has during recent years⁴.

| Table 6 AGE OF HOUSING STRUCTURES TOWN OF SENECA | | |
|--|--------------------------|-----------------------------|
| YEAR BUILT | HOUSING UNITS | PERCENT OF TOTAL |
| 1990 – March 2000 | 90 | 21 |
| 1980 – 1989 | 46 | 11 |
| 1970 – 1979 | 93 | 22 |
| 1960 – 1969 | 71 | 17 |
| 1940 – 1959 | 79 | 19 |
| 1939 or earlier | 41 | 10 |
| TOTAL HOUSING UNITS | 420 | 100 |
| <i>NOTE: Data in this table is from census sample data and, therefore, does not agree with 100% count. The actual 100% count determined that there were 422 total housing units. Source: U.S Census of Population, 2000, Table DP-4.</i> | | |

Structural Value

The structural value of specified owner-occupied housing in the Town of Seneca is listed on the following page for the year 2000. Only five percent of all housing units were valued at \$50,000 or less. Most homes (81%) in Seneca are in a “middle-income” range - \$50,000 to \$149,999. Ten percent of Seneca’s homes are valued between \$150,000 and \$199,999, and four percent are valued between \$200,000 and \$299,999. None are valued higher than that.

There is a nice range in the value of housing units in the Town. One housing objective, presented at the outset of this chapter, is to provide affordable housing and a wide range of housing types. The value of homes in the Seneca shows that there are low-income housing opportunities and considerable lower-middle to upper-middle income housing opportunities. While upper-income housing is not widely present, the Town has many areas that would be compatible for this housing type as well.

⁴ Fifty-two percent of survey respondents would like the Town to “maintain the present growth rate” and another 41 percent would like the population to “remain the same”; Spring, 2001.

| Table 7 STRUCTURAL VALUE OWNER-OCCUPIED HOUSING UNITS TOWN OF SENECA – 2000 | | |
|--|-----------------|------------------|
| VALUE | NUMBER OF UNITS | PERCENT OF TOTAL |
| Less than \$50,000 - | 13 | 5 |
| \$50,000 - \$99,999 | 120 | 45 |
| \$100,000 - \$149,999 | 95 | 36 |
| \$150,000 - \$199,999 | 27 | 10 |
| \$200,000 – \$299,999 | 11 | 4 |
| \$300,000 or more | 0 | 0 |
| Median – Seneca | \$100,000 | |
| Median – Wood Co. | \$81,400 | |
| Median-Wisconsin | \$112,200 | |
| Source: U.S. Census of Population, 2000, Table DP-4. | | |

Occupancy Characteristics

According to census figures, the occupancy status of housing units in the Town of Seneca has remained relatively stable at between 96 and 99 percent since 1980 (Table 8). In 1980, 332 of the 366 housing units, or 91% of the total units, were owner-occupied and 31 housing units were renter-occupied. In 1990, the number and percent of renter-occupied units reported increased to 54 units. There may have been a transition of some units to rental units during this rapid growth period, or the number of renter-occupied units may have been misreported. In 2000, the number and proportion of renter-occupied units settled back to the 1980 level, with 33 units, or eight percent of the Town's housing stock. This is a fair share of housing that is available to renters, supporting the affordable housing objective of the Town. During the past 10 – 12-years, three to four percent of the total housing units have been vacant. This makes for a good turnover selection.

| Table 8 OCCUPANCY CHARACTERISTICS TOWN OF SENECA HOUSING STOCK 1980 – 2000 | | | | |
|---|----------------|-----------------|--------|---------------------|
| | Owner Occupied | Renter Occupied | Vacant | Total Housing Units |
| 2000 | 375; 89% | 33; 8% | 14; 3% | 422 |
| 1990 | 322; 82% | 54; 14% | 16; 4% | 392 |
| 1980 | 332; 91% | 31; 8% | 4; 1% | 366 |
| Source: U.S. Census of Population (Table DP-1 for Year 2000 data). | | | | |

It is interesting to analyze the tenure of householders, or how long they have lived in their homes (Table 9). Of the owner-occupied housing units, 31 percent have lived in their home for five or fewer years and 48 percent for 10 or fewer years. This fact supports the theory that Seneca is becoming more of a commuter community. These numbers compare to 40 percent and 57 percent for Wood County for the same time frames. Nearly one-third (32.4%) of Seneca's residents have lived in their homes for at least 20 years – they were there prior to 1980. This compares to slightly over 25 percent for Wood County. County numbers show more movement than do Town numbers, but the numbers for Wood County include a very large number of rental units, group homes, nursing homes, etc., that are not present in the Seneca.

| Table 9 TENURE BY YEAR HOUSEHOLDER MOVED INTO UNIT TOWN OF SENECA | | |
|--|------------------|-------------|
| YEARS | PERCENT OF TOTAL | |
| | TOWN OF SENECA | WOOD COUNTY |
| 1995 – March 2000 | 31.2 | 40.3 |
| 1990 – 1994 | 16.7 | 16.5 |
| 1980 – 1989 | 19.7 | 17.6 |
| 1970 – 1979 | 15.0 | 11.9 |
| 1969 or earlier | 17.4 | 13.8 |
| Source: U.S. Census of Population, 2000, Table DP-4. | | |

As a comparison, and to provide perspective to the source of planning goals, objectives and programs, 31 percent of the community survey respondents for this plan have lived in Seneca for 10 years or less and 62 percent have lived in the Town for more than 10 years. The remaining respondents own land, but do not reside in Seneca.

Housing Policies and Programs

The following policies and programs will be used to promote the development of housing for residents of Seneca.

- Establish residential zoning in areas where higher densities can be served by public sewer and water in the future in case problems arise with regard to groundwater quality or quantity.
- Be an active participant in the planning process when the Wisconsin Rapids Area Water Quality Management Plan is updated and work with the City of Wisconsin Rapids to promote planned development in the service area of the Wisconsin Rapids Urban Area Sewer Service Area Plan.
- Work with the Village of Port Edwards to promote planned development near that community in a manner that may be serviced by public sanitary sewer if needed in the future.
- Allow higher-density cluster-type residential development as a means to maintaining the Town's rural character, pursuant to town residents' preferences, while allowing new housing units to be constructed.
- Provide some large lot residential areas to accommodate those with desires for more remote or more private development sites.

The following policies and programs are meant to provide a range of housing choices that meet the needs of persons of all income levels, all age groups and special needs.

- Develop zoning standards that encourage development at a density that is considered much lower than many suburban communities, yet allow for lot sizes that make the land affordable for lower-income homeowners.
- Encourage developers of rental units to build those units in areas of the Town where, in the case of duplexes and other multi-family units, the housing type will be compatible with neighboring land uses.

To promote the availability of land for development or redevelopment of low- & moderate-income housing the following policies and programs will be used.

- Allow various lot sizes that are conducive to different housing types.

The following policies and programs are established as a means of maintaining or rehabilitating the existing housing stock.

- Encourage homeowners to participate in paint-up/fix-up events.
- Encourage volunteers or civic organizations to help those who are physically unable to maintain their property.
- Educate property owners about the Town zoning ordinance and other ordinances that may affect them, including activities that may require permits. The Town will work with Wood County to help make information available to town residents.

3. TRANSPORTATION

General

The purpose of this section is to describe the Town's transportation system, assess current and future changes and additions to that system, describe how the transportation system relates to other segments of the comprehensive plan, develop goals and objectives for the transportation system and establish local programs that will seek to achieve those goals and objectives.

Overall Goal

It is the overall goal of the Town of Seneca to provide residents with safe, efficient, cost-effective access between their homes and places of work, school, parks, shopping and other destination points and to provide a means for travelers to traverse the town with minimal conflict with local land uses, while enjoying the natural beauty of the Town.

Objectives, Policies & Programs

Goal: To provide choices of transportation for town residents.

Objective: Work with the Wisconsin Department of Transportation, Wood County, the City of Wisconsin Rapids, the Village of Port Edwards and neighboring towns to encourage and coordinate development of bicycle and pedestrian trails and routes.

Objective: Maintain contact with County and State highway departments to encourage continued improvements to the highways as necessary in the interest of the safety of highway users and efficiency in coordinating local road improvements with those of County and State highways.

Goal: To provide interconnection of transportation systems between municipalities.

Objective: Develop and maintain an Official Street Map of the Town of Seneca, with input from the City of Wisconsin Rapids, Village of Port Edwards, adjacent towns, Wood County and the Wisconsin Department of Transportation to coordinate street alignments and trail development.

Objective: Provide for development of future through-streets and street extensions from Wisconsin Rapids and Port Edwards where connections and extensions are logical for interconnections or may be possible to improve traffic movement.

Goal: To provide safe transportation throughout the Town.

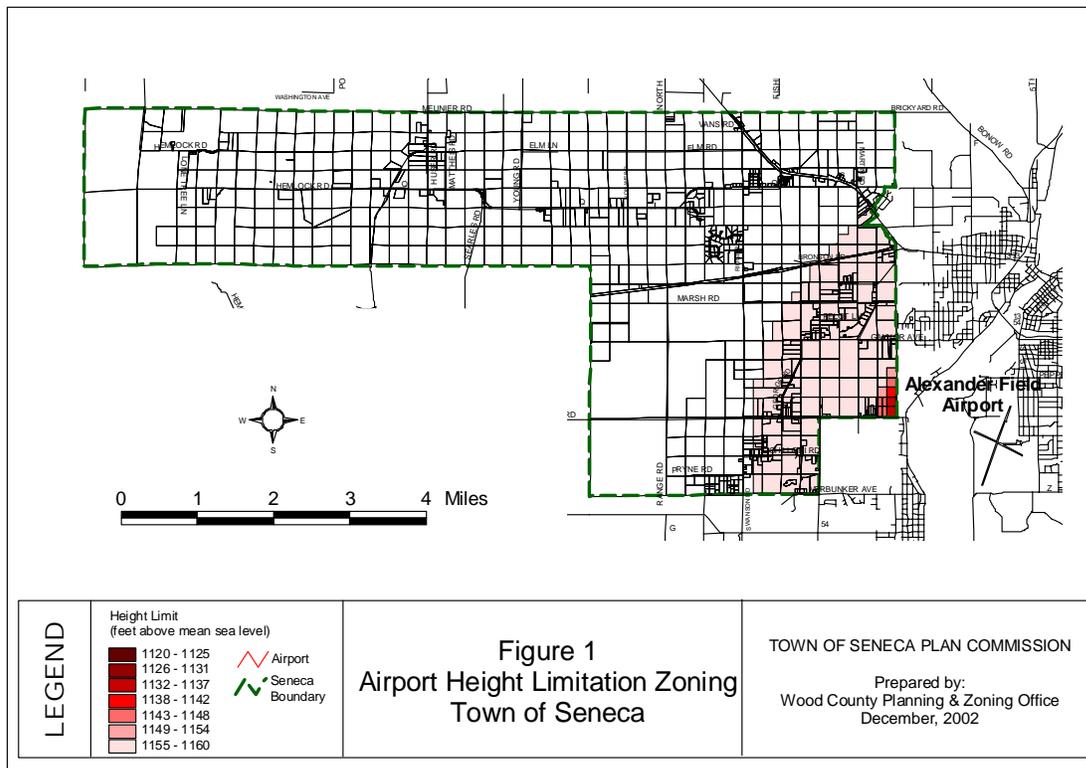
Objective: Coordinate local street improvements with work on County and State/Federal highways.

Objective: Minimize conflicts with local land uses by monitoring the number access points from subdivisions and higher density residential areas to higher function County and State/Federal highways.

Objective: Through local zoning and the plat review process, monitor the location of access points to assure clear visibility for motorists and bicyclists and to allow sufficient maneuvering space for speed changes and turning.

Transportation System

The Town of Seneca’s internal transportation system consists, primarily, of town roads, county highways and State Highway 13/73. Local streets of adjoining communities link to Seneca’s roads to form a network of transportation corridors. Alexander Field (the South Wood County airport) also impacts the town with limitations on the height of structures within the flight path of the runways. Figure 1 shows the airport height limitations as required by the Federal Aviation Agency for the safety of airport users. Although Seneca is not impacted greatly, the height limitations could affect such things as additional communications towers or tall agricultural buildings.

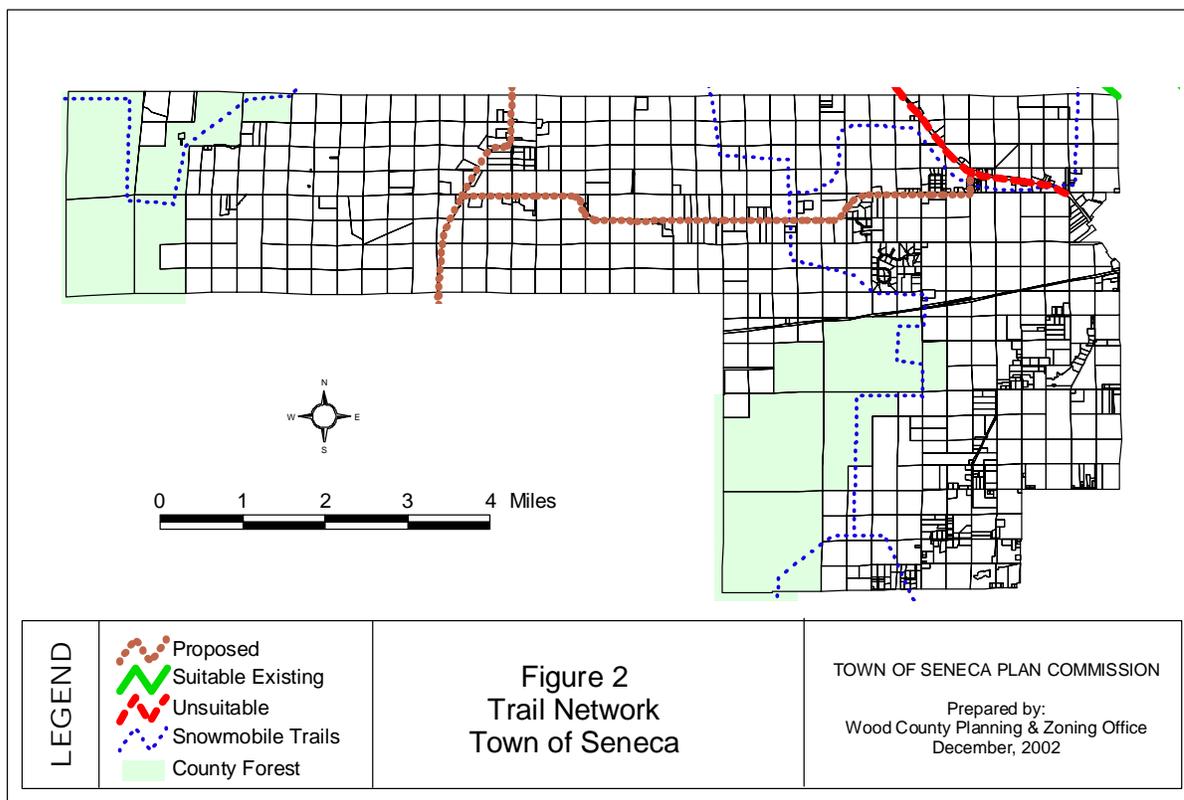


Bicycle trails have become very popular in Wood County. The *Wisconsin Bicycle Map*⁵ has identified a number of routes along state and county highways in the town of Seneca, mostly on county and state highways. These trails are part of a statewide system and are rated according to safety factors available at the time that map was published in 1992. On that map, only State Highway 13/73 are included in the Town of Seneca and that route is rated as “unsuitable” for safety purposes. The rating may change in the next printing of the map, due to the recent shoulder improvements to the highway, but riding on shoulders where the speed limit is 55 mph is still dangerous, especially to novice riders and children.

⁵ Wisconsin Department of Transportation, May, 1992.

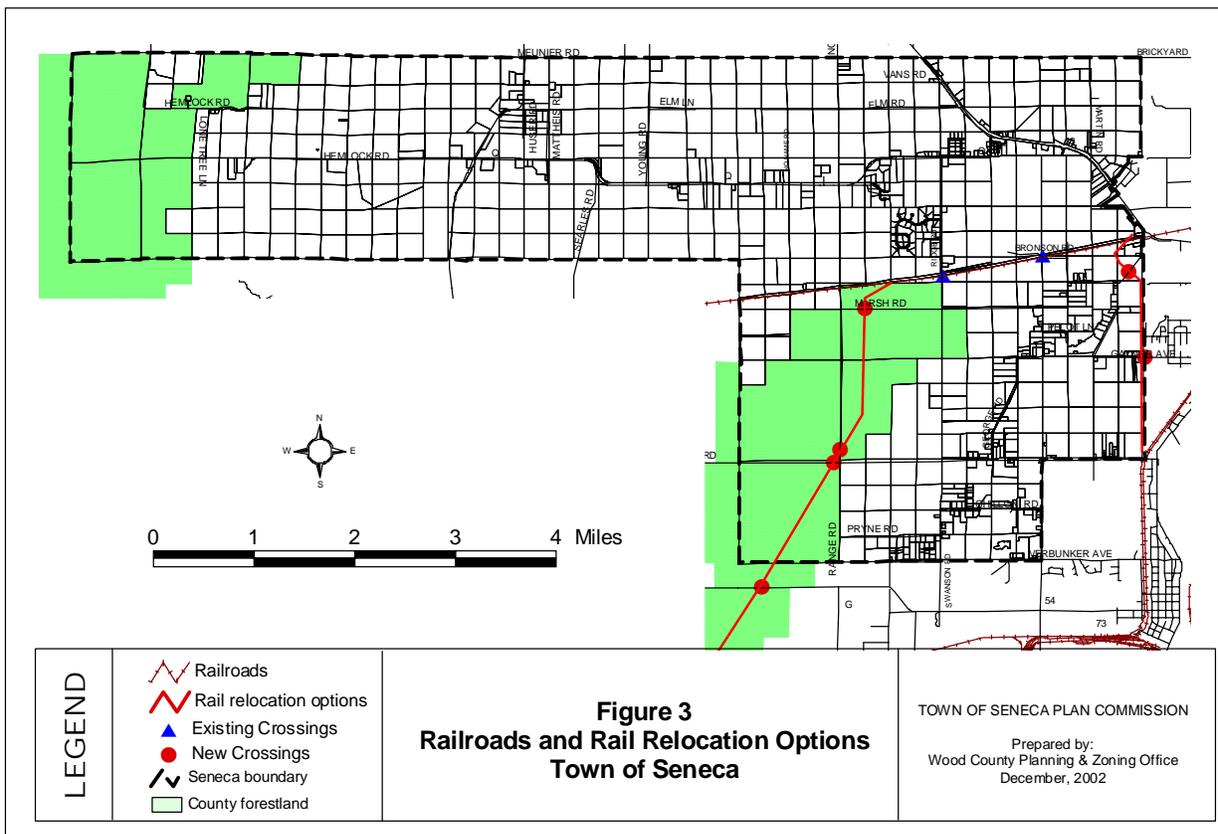
The County Board adopted a bicycle and pedestrian plan in 1995 and is updating it at the same time as this plan is being developed. The original Wood County bicycle and pedestrian plan proposed bicycle routes to be established along county roads and state highways because that was the limit of their jurisdiction. In the town of Seneca, the Wood County Plan only included County Roads Q, as a “proposed shared roadway” and D, as a “proposed alternate or future bikeway”. Highways 13/73, in Seneca, were rated as “unsuitable”, the same as the *Wisconsin Bicycle Map* rating. Since 1995, more interest has been shown for off-road trails in rural areas because of the safety bicycle trails and improved routes provide users. In the towns, widened shoulders on county roads may be the principal improvement, although off-road trails may be possible and desirable in some areas. Several respondents to the Town of Seneca community survey suggested that bicycle trails be provided for safety reasons. The town should join the county planning effort and suggest, or recommend, trails and routes in Seneca that could tied into the county wide bicycle system. The benefits will include safer commuter routes to work and school, fewer vehicles on the roads, and a healthier population.

Finally, the Wisconsin Rapids urban area has seen the development of several miles of trails and have more approved or planned for in the near future. These trails are being used for commuting and recreation purposes alike. Planned routes, as proposed in the Wood County Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan, 1995, and existing bicycle routes in the Seneca area are shown in Figure 2.



Also shown in Figure 2 are the snowmobile trails that travel through Seneca. Approximately 18 miles of trails connect to a county-wide system that, in turn, is part of a regional and statewide system of improved trails.

The Fox Valley & Western Railroad bisects Seneca from east to west, traveling through sections 11, 15, 16 and 17 in the eastern half of the town (Range 5 East). The most important at-grade crossing is at Ridge Road. This road is a main collector, moving traffic from nearby residential areas to and from Wisconsin Rapids and the village of Port Edwards. The Canadian National Railroad just touches the southeast corner of section 23 at the juncture of Seneca with Wisconsin Rapids and the village of Port Edwards. Prior to Canadian National's acquisition of this railroad from Wisconsin Central, Ltd. in 2001, there were discussions of relocating the tracks from downtown Wisconsin Rapids, where major intersections were blocked for several minutes several times each day, to the Seneca-Wisconsin Rapids line or further west through Wood County forestland. Canadian National has indicated that they are not interested in the relocation because of their need to serve a downtown Wisconsin Rapids customer. The existing railroads and relocation options are shown in Figure 3.



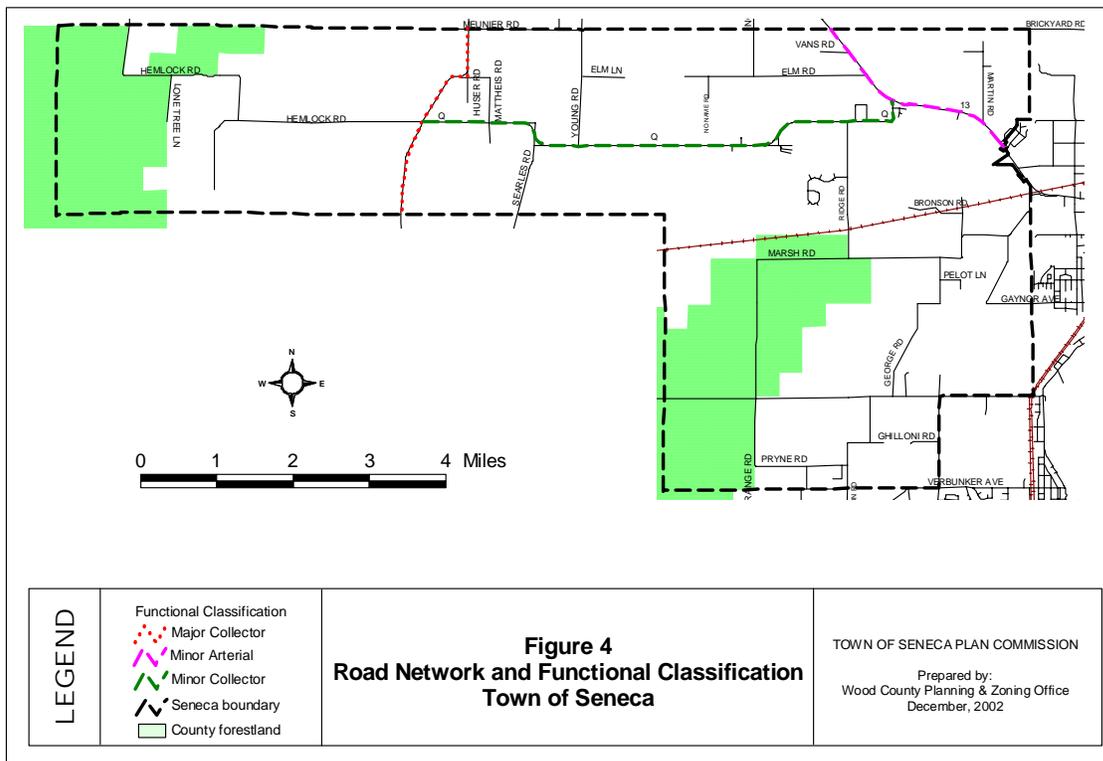
Another part of the Town's transportation system is public transportation. Providing for the needs of those who are not able to transport themselves has been provided through programs of the County, with the assistance of State and Federal grants. The Town's interest should be in maintaining communications with the appropriate agencies to ensure that what ever programs are available through those agencies be made available to Seneca residents.

Highway Functional Classifications

Different roads are meant to serve specific functions. For example, a subdivision street is meant to provide access to individual lots. These streets sometimes include tight curves, are narrower than higher function roads and have lower speed limits (i.e., 25 mph) for the safety of

users and because of the numerous driveways. The subdivision street may connect to a local road that collects traffic from many subdivisions. This collector street may be wider, straighter, have fewer access points and have a higher speed limit (i.e., 35 or 45 mph). Its function is to move larger volumes of traffic. The collector street may, then, connect with a county road. The collector street can be classified as a minor or major collector, depending on its location, traffic counts and other factors. The function of the county road may be to serve as an artery from the town to employment centers in the adjoining city. These arterials may be even larger than the collector because they carry traffic from several collector streets. Arterials should have fewer access points than collectors and may be multi-lane with higher speed limits (i.e., 55 mph). In large urban areas, arterials may channel traffic to larger, or principal, arterial highways, such as an interstate highway that has divided lanes and speeds of up to 65 mph or more.

The map in Figure 4 shows the road network in the Town of Seneca. Rural functional classifications are shown and include State Highways 13/73 as a minor arterial, County Road D as a major collector and County Road Q as a minor collector.



Current & Future Changes to the Transportation System

There are not likely to be any major changes in Seneca's transportations during the planning period. Relocation of the Canadian Northern railroad is not likely to occur during the planning period. Minor changes to Seneca's transportation system would likely include additional subdivision roads and possible improvements to the county roads. Typical maintenance of County and local roads is also anticipated when necessary.

County roads may be widened, where possible, to accommodate bicycles if off-road trails cannot be developed. Because of the wetlands and lack of right-of-way width on many

roads, it will be difficult to expand road shoulders in many parts of the town. Where possible, new developments will be planned with street systems that include links to other local streets or provisions will be made to plan for future extension of those streets, using temporary cul de sacs until the connections or extensions are constructed.

Relationship of Transportation System to Other Comprehensive Plan Segments

Much of the residential development in the town of Seneca belongs to residents who commute to work in nearby urban area communities. Lifestyle choices of those working in the city, but living in the town, affect the future of surrounding suburban areas. As the town grows, one of the first impacts is on streets. When a new development is proposed in a commuter town like Seneca, provisions have to be made to move the intended population to and from that development to work, school, shopping, parks and other activities. Eventually, existing local streets may become so busy that the street will have to be widened to accommodate peak traffic, or speed limits may have to be lowered for safety reasons. In the recent community survey, several respondents commented on the need to control the speed of traffic on those roads that serve residential developments, specifically Ridge Road, George Road and Seneca Road. In some cases, the town may have to appeal to the county to take over jurisdiction of certain roads because of high traffic. More recently, residents ask that facilities be added to provide a safe area for walkers or bikers.

Land uses that exist or develop in the town also impact streets. Commercial and industrial uses that generate a lot of truck traffic will impact the community's road maintenance dollars. Those uses may also have an impact on how surrounding land uses develop. The need for a buffer between incompatible land uses, the desire of Seneca residents to maintain the Town's quiet, peaceful nature and the desire of many people to live on streets that do not have truck traffic will pressure certain areas to develop in residential uses and may pressure town officials to place more restrictions on the types of land uses that are allowed or the routes that trucks can use.

Transportation system changes also impact certain community facilities. As more streets are built, the demand increases for more road maintenance equipment. In addition, as a town grows and as more roads are constructed, there comes a time that the town will have to consider hiring a police officer to patrol those streets. Depending on the linking of new to existing streets, or the lack of linking them, costs to provide street maintenance, school bussing and other services that use the streets, could increase. It is less expensive to continue driving through a subdivision, for example, than it is to maneuver a snowplow through a development with cul de sacs.

New streets impact the natural resources and agricultural lands. Seneca has areas of wetlands and floodplains that need to be protected from encroachment of construction of residences and other buildings.

Intergovernmental cooperation is essential to the development and maintenance of a transportation system. For example, Seneca does not have an airport, yet has a small portion of the town – that portion that is experiencing commercial and residential development – impacted with height restrictions because of the location of Alexander Field. Expansion of that airport could impact land uses in Seneca because of the potential of aircraft noise and lower height restrictions.

Street improvements should be coordinated between neighboring communities. If, for example, an increase in daily traffic on certain streets results in the need to widen the street, the Town should coordinate that project with adjacent communities to make the best use of taxpayer dollars. Finally, because bicycle and pedestrian facilities are getting so popular in the Wisconsin Rapids urban area and, because several respondents to the Seneca community survey requested such facilities, the town should be sure to coordinate any planning with neighboring communities. Several planned routes or trails, shown in Figure 2, are incomplete as they come west into Seneca. The County is updating the bicycle plan and has solicited Seneca's input for that update.

Relation of Highways to Other Transportation Plans

Except for County Roads D and Q and State Highways 13/73, roads in the Town of Seneca are local streets. Highway 13/73 was improved in 2000, with wider shoulders and a new mat. No further improvements are included in the six-year plan.⁶ The County roads are well maintained and some have been improved in recent years. As the County roads are improved, the County Highway Department is to consider the Bicycle/Pedestrian Plan, adding shoulders where indicated, if costs can be justified. Seneca officials should maintain contact with the Wood County Highway Department and the District 4 office of the Wisconsin Department of Transportation to encourage widening of shoulders for safer bicycle and pedestrian use. It was already mentioned earlier that *The Wisconsin Bicycle Map* does not include Seneca, except for rating State Highways 13/73 as unsuitable for bicycle traffic. The "Wisconsin Bicycle Transportation Plan 2020"⁷ also does not include Seneca on its "Priority Corridors and Key Linkages" map. This fact makes it more important that the Town determine its own future with regard to bicycle trails and routes.

A transportation plan for the Wisconsin Rapids urban area is near completion. The Wisconsin Department of Transportation-sponsored project is a comprehensive analysis of traffic movement into and out of the entire urban area, including the Town of Seneca. The final plan will recommend road improvements, which could impact the Town in terms of road needs and could affect development pressures if new routes (eg. bypasses) are established to move traffic around the urban areas. Upon completion of the urban area plan, the Town plan should be reviewed to determine if changes need to be incorporated.

⁶ Wisconsin Department of Transportation, District 4, "2001-2006 Highway Improvement Program-Wood County".

⁷ Wisconsin Department of Transportation, Division of Investment management, Bureau of Planning, December, 1998.

4. UTILITIES & COMMUNITY FACILITIES

Goals, objectives, policies and programs

Unincorporated towns, like Seneca, typically do not provide urban-type utilities and community facilities, such as sanitary and storm sewers, public water supply, police and fire protection, parks in some instances, and similar facilities. Towns simply do not have the financial means to provide public utilities because of lower population and lower density developments. Seneca will, however, provide those utilities and community facilities that are needed, or desired, by town residents, either through individual town efforts or as a partner with other communities, within good financial reason.

Sewage Disposal/Sanitary Sewer

The Town of Seneca does not have municipal sanitary sewer service. Any development that occurs in the Town must install a private on-site waste treatment system (POWTS). All such systems must be approved by the State Department of Commerce under the provisions of applicable statutes and the Wisconsin Administrative Code for both installation and maintenance. Because of the poor soil drainage and relatively high groundwater in Seneca, most POWTS in the Town are holding tanks. Although not technically a “treatment system”, because waste is held and not treated, holding tanks have been and continue to be allowed as a “system of last resort”. This means that, if a “treatment system” of some type cannot be installed, the property owner can use holding tanks.

The Town of Seneca was a participant in the Wisconsin Rapids Area Water Quality Management Plan in 1985. The purpose of that plan was to determine where municipal sanitary sewer may be needed over a 20-year planning period. There were no areas in Seneca that were included in future service boundary. In 2001, a residential subdivision that is adjacent to the northwest corner of Wisconsin Rapids and some commercial establishments, located on State Highways 13/73, were annexed to the City so they could gain access to sanitary sewer. The plan had to be amended to include those areas for sanitary sewer. In 2002, another 5.5-acre parcel was annexed and the plan was amended to include it in the sewer service area. A comprehensive revision of the plan will be undertaken within the next few years as the planning period was through 2005. When the plan is updated, Seneca should be an active participant to assure that areas of the Town that will need sanitary sewer will be eligible to receive it without unnecessary delays caused by the plan amendment process.

Unless it is determined that other parts of Seneca will need sanitary sewer, the Town’s development will continue to rely on private on-site waste treatment systems. If sanitary sewer services are needed, it will be most cost effective to utilize the Wisconsin Rapids wastewater collection and treatment system. A goal of the Town is to provide information about the advantages and disadvantages of building in various soils and groundwater conditions and refer potential developers to the appropriate County and State agencies who regulate POWTS and well locations. These areas are mapped in the natural resources section of this plan.

Solid Waste Disposal

Municipal solid waste is disposed at the Superior Cranberry Creek Landfill in Wisconsin Rapids. There is a collection container for both trash and recycling at the Town Hall, as well as curbside collection of residential solid waste.

During the first nine months of 2002, about 125 tons of trash was collected from the service locations in Seneca. This number includes a six-yard container at the town hall and approximately 90 residential hand stops as well as larger size dumpsters located at residences and small businesses in the town.

Superior has collected about 13 tons of recyclables from the drop off site during the first nine months of 2002. This figure does not include aluminum, which the town recycles themselves.

The Seneca Town Board recognizes the importance of having a location for disposing of solid waste and, as such, it is the policy of the Board to negotiate terms with the landfill owners for clean, safe collection and disposal of waste at the most cost-effective rates.

Police, Fire and Rescue Facilities

The Wood County Sheriff's Department provides police protection to the Town of Seneca. The Wisconsin State Patrol also has presence in the community with Highways 13 and 73 traveling through the northern portion of the Town. There are no plans to hire a local law enforcement officer at this time.

Seneca receives fire protection from either the Village of Vesper Volunteer Fire Department or the Village of Port Edwards Volunteer Fire Department, depending on the location in Seneca. Vesper provides service from the railroad tracks north to the town line. The Village of Port Edwards services that part of Seneca from the railroad tracks south.

The policy of the Town with regard to protective services is to provide the most efficient police, fire and ambulance services available to Town residents and the most cost-effective rates.

Parks, Open Spaces and Recreational Resources

Recreation resources include both indoor and outdoor facilities, both public and private. Outdoor recreation facilities can include anything to forestland that is available to the public for hiking, bird-watching or camping to more structured facilities like ball fields, soccer fields and golf courses. Public open space lands are important determinants of the quality of life within a community. Oftentimes, in rural areas that are adjacent to larger cities, residents of the smaller town will rely on city, county and state parks and open spaces for their recreation needs. There is a variety of outdoor recreation opportunities in Seneca, including Town-, county- and privately-owned facilities. The Town of Seneca owns the George Nielsen Memorial Park in the southwest corner of Section 3 on the north side of County Road Q where that road intersects with Ridge Drive. This facility is 3.7 acres in size and has a ball field, volleyball court and shelter building.

Wood County owns over 3,500 acres of forestland in Seneca, all of which is available for hunting, hiking and other outdoor use. A county-owned public shooting range is located in the

County forest at the intersection of Marsh Road and Range Road. The range has 14 shooting stands, with distances of 25-, 50- and 100-yards. There are also four pistol shooting points. Another county facility is the ATV trail in County forestland along Highway 54, approximately four miles west of the Village of Port Edwards. The Seneca ATV Trail includes about 12-miles of developed trails on 400-acres of County forestland. Except for gun deer season, the trail is open to the public year around. This facility includes more than just a trail. Also available are a parking lot, restrooms, loading ramp, well, 28' by 40' enclosed shelter, children's playground and a roofed charcoal grill. All are handicap accessible.

The Homestead Golf Course is a public golf course and restaurant located at the intersection of State Highways 13/73 and County Road Q. In addition to the nine-hole golf course, this facility includes a driving range and practice green.

County parks are also available to Seneca residents. The nearest county parks are South Wood County Park, located east of Wisconsin Rapids, Nepco Lake County Park, just south of Wisconsin Rapids, and Dexter County Park, located south of Pittsville. Finally, Seneca residents also make use of Wisconsin Rapids and Port Edwards parks and recreation opportunities, especially in organized youth and adult sports activities. Facilities include both outdoor and indoor opportunities. Examples are the YMCA, South Wood County Hockey Arena, Wisconsin Rapids Area Youth Sports Association (boys and girls baseball and softball), adult softball leagues, youth soccer leagues, flag football, youth and adult basketball, youth wrestling and more.

In the recent community survey, eight percent of the respondents suggested that more parks, including hiking and biking trails and more playgrounds, be a priority of the Town.

Libraries

Communities without libraries of their own pay for these services through a County assessment. That assessment is based on the Town's equalized valuation. It is calculated on the basis of the non-library municipalities paying 70 percent of the costs associated with circulation to non-library-community users. The Town of Seneca does not have its own library, but residents have access to the other libraries in the County, the closest being in Vesper and Wisconsin Rapids. The policy of the Town Board is to continue participating in the library program to provide Seneca residents with that important resource.

Schools

Seneca is included in three school districts: Wisconsin Rapids, Port Edwards and Pittsville. Only a small portion on the Town's far west side is in the Pittsville School District. The rest of the Town is fairly evenly split between the two larger school districts. Town officials must coordinate with each of the three school systems to keep them notified of new land splits, road extensions and other land development activities that may affect either the number of students or the routes that school busses can use. The map in Figure  shows how the Town is divided among the school districts.

Cemeteries

There are four small cemeteries in Seneca. Wood County owns a small, inactive cemetery on Seneca Road. The Wood County cemetery, active from 1891 through 1948, was

used for former residents of the County Poor Farm and Home for the Aged, as well as other Wood County residents who could not afford to pay for a funeral.

A second cemetery is located on County Road D, adjacent to the St. Joseph Catholic Church in the settlement known as Altdorf. The church and cemetery site is about 2-acres in size.

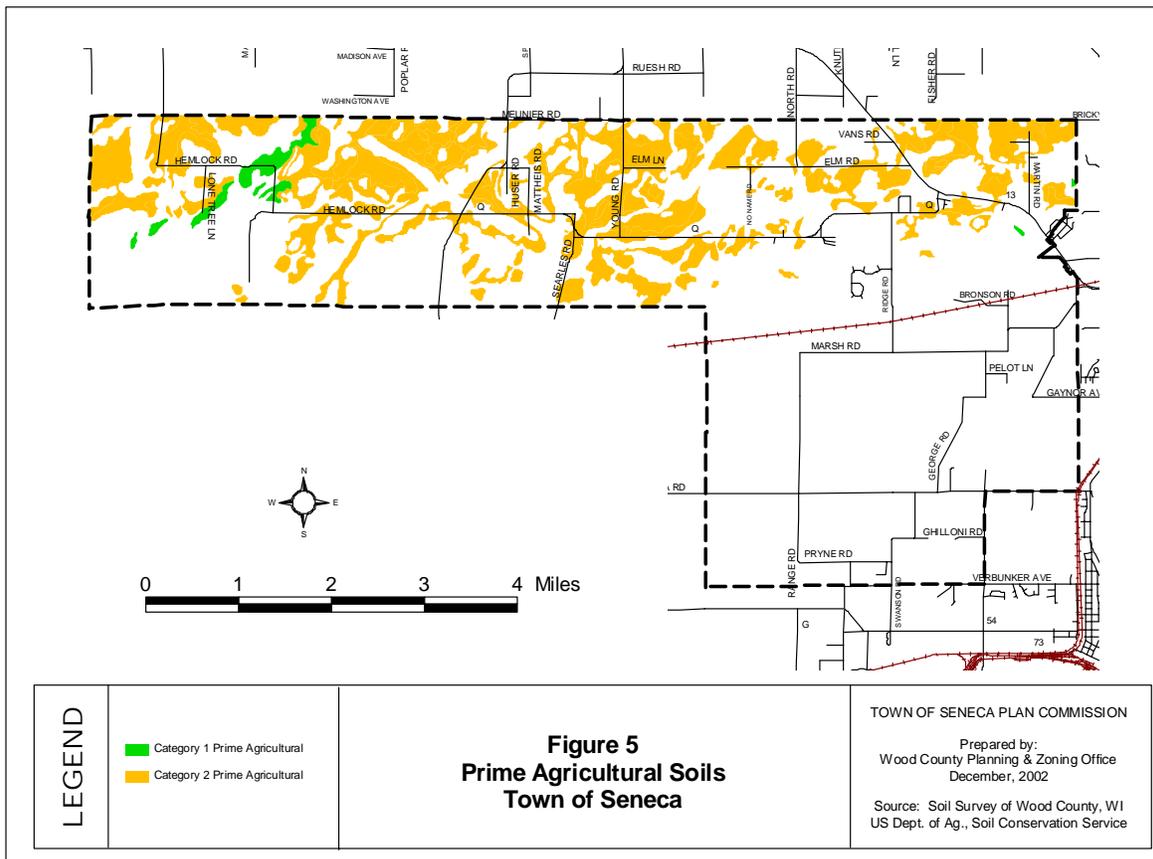
The other three Native American cemeteries in Seneca. Two are located along County Road Q in the western part of the Town. The White Cemetery is on the north side of County Road Q in Section 6, T. 22 N., R. 5 E. It is the largest of the three cemeteries. The Anawash Cemetery is in the same area on the south side of County Road Q and the Pigeon Cemetery is located in Section 9.

5. AGRICULTURAL, NATURAL & CULTURAL ELEMENTS

This section provides a good analysis of lands that have some constraints to development. They are primarily environmental constraints, such as floodplains, wetlands, soils with high groundwater conditions, or soils with characteristics that severely limit development because of inability to accommodate private on-site waste treatment systems. Prime agricultural soils may also be restricted from development to retain the best agricultural areas. This section will look at each of these characteristics and, through a series of analyses and map overlays, describe areas that cannot or should not be developed in the future. Conversely, the analyses and map overlays will also reveal the best areas in Seneca for future development to occur.

Productive Agricultural Areas

Figure 5 shows how the Natural Resource Conservation Service rates soils in Seneca for traditional agricultural purposes. Most of the Town, 80.5%, is rated as “not prime farmland”.



This is due, in part, to the very shallow groundwater that is present in much of Seneca. About 3,880 acres or 18.7%, is rated as “prime where drained” and only 0.8% is rated as “prime”. All soils with a “prime” or “prime where drained” rating are located in the northern part of the town, stretching from the far west border of the panhandle to the east border. The few acres of

“prime” farmland are located in the northwest part of the town, in Sections 4, 5 and 8 of Range 4 East.

Although soils are not conducive to what might be considered to be traditional agricultural uses, things like dairying or cash crops, Seneca is still a strong agricultural community. Cranberry production has a strong presence in the Town and that industry has continued to grow. Presently, there are nearly 400 acres of cranberry beds in Seneca. Many more acres are dedicated to support residences and uses. Residents of the Town define agriculture in the town to be cranberry production (33% of those responding to the question), while many (22% of the respondents) consider agriculture in Seneca to be small farms and hobby farms.

It is the desire of community planning survey respondents to retain the agricultural character of the Town. Twenty-six percent of the survey respondents think the town should preserve remaining farmland at all costs, while 12% want to preserve agricultural lands, but allow for residential growth in areas that are unsuitable for agricultural purposes. A third of the respondents favor not protecting farmland at all, but allow owners to develop it as they see fit.

Water Resources

The State has significant responsibilities for protecting water resources under what is known as the “Public Trust Doctrine.” The Public Trust Doctrine embodies the notion that the waters in Wisconsin are held in trust by the State for the benefit of all. There can be no private interests in waterways that adversely affect this public interest. In fulfilling its responsibilities under the Public Trust Doctrine, the Wisconsin Legislature has enacted laws and charged the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources to protect water resources. The local plan, at a minimum, must be consistent with the state laws. This section of Seneca’s comprehensive plan provides an inventory of the water resources in the Town and establishes local policies and programs regarding those resources.

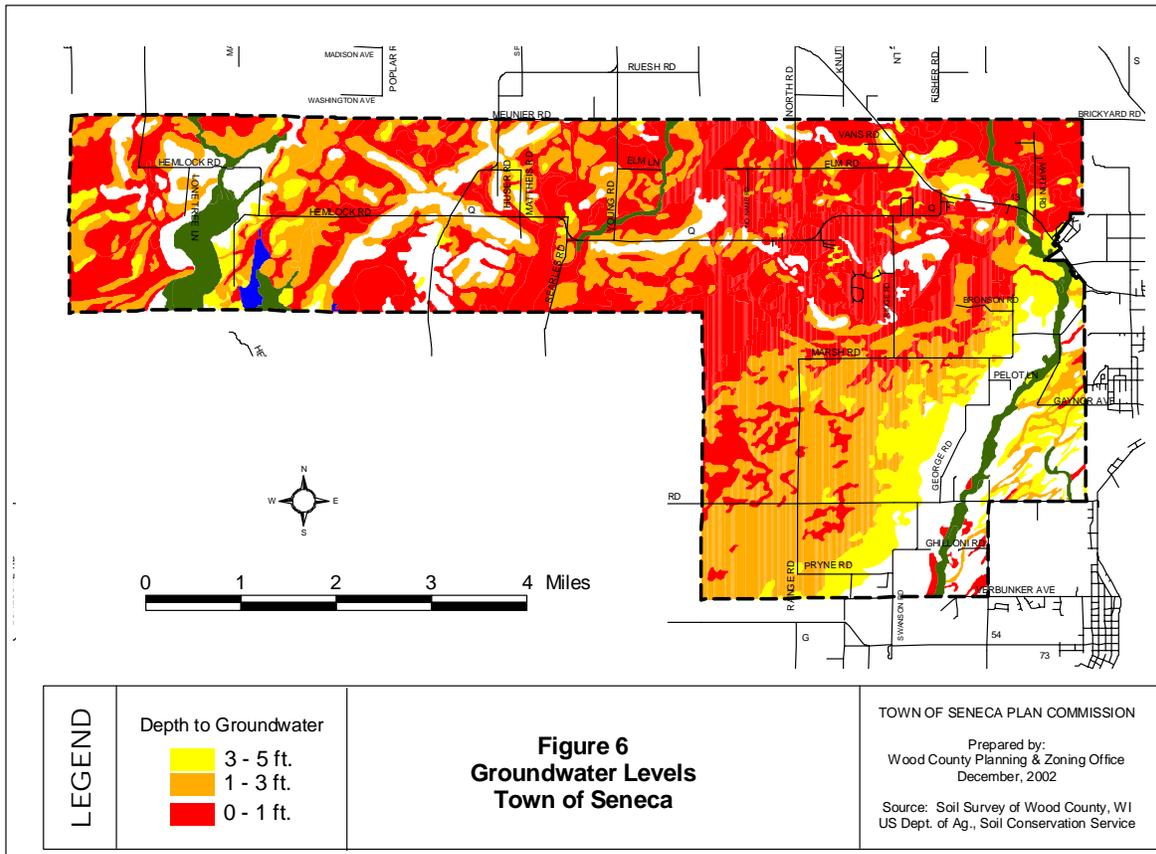
Groundwater

Fifteen to thirty percent of the precipitation we get in Wisconsin each year seeps into the ground and recharges our aquifers.⁸ It is estimated that there is enough water underground to cover Wisconsin to a depth of 30 feet.⁹ The Town of Seneca is in an area of Wood County where soils are characterized by shallow groundwater conditions (Figure 6). Nearly 45 percent of all land in Seneca has soils with seasonal high groundwater at 0’ – 1’ below the surface. Another 28% has seasonal high water at 1’ – 3’ below the surface. About 10 percent of the land area has seasonal high water levels of 3’ – 5’. Finally, about 15.8% of Seneca has groundwater levels of greater than five feet.

A comparison of Figures 5 and 6 reveals that nearly all of the Town’s most productive agricultural soils are also in areas that have problems with seasonal high groundwater. Protecting the high groundwater areas would also have the effect of protecting the prime agricultural areas.

⁸ “Planning for Natural Resources”, Dept. of Urban & Regional Planning, University of Wisconsin-Madison/Extension and Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, January, 2002, pg. 35.

⁹ Ibid.



The parts of Seneca with the deepest groundwater, hence the most conducive to structural development, are along the George Road – Swanson Road corridor, along County Road D, the Hemlock-Lone Tree-Brockman Road area, and segments of County Road Q. A community survey asked Seneca residents where they would prefer to see future development. The highest responses indicated the preferred areas to be along that George Road-Swanson Road corridor, along Marsh Road and along Ridge Road.

There are growing concerns statewide about both the quantity and quality of groundwater. Figure 7 is a diagram that illustrates how nature’s water system works and how land uses can impact groundwater quality. Groundwater quality may be impacted by a variety of activities, including leaking underground storage tanks, old dumps, septic systems, land spreading of septage and over-application of fertilizers and pesticides. The most common contaminants found in Wisconsin groundwater are nitrate-nitrogen, volatile organic compounds (VOCs) and pesticides.¹⁰ Nitrate comes from a number of sources, including nitrogen-based fertilizers, septic systems, animal waste storage, feedlots, municipal and industrial wastewater discharges and sludge disposal. Some examples of VOCs are gasoline, paints, paint thinners, stain removers and drain cleaners. Pesticides reach the groundwater from land application, spills, misuse or improper storage and disposal.

¹⁰ Ibid.

It is not only important to protect groundwater resources at the local level, it is the law. Private well supplies, agricultural uses, recreational use of surface waters, etc. depend on a clean water supply. Every drinking water supply in Seneca is a private well – untreated water from the groundwater supply. In 1974, the Wisconsin Supreme Court overturned existing law and created the current law – the doctrine of reasonable use. A property owner's use of groundwater is not absolute, but has to be reasonable, considering impacts on the water table and other uses. Groundwater is also protected as waters of the State.

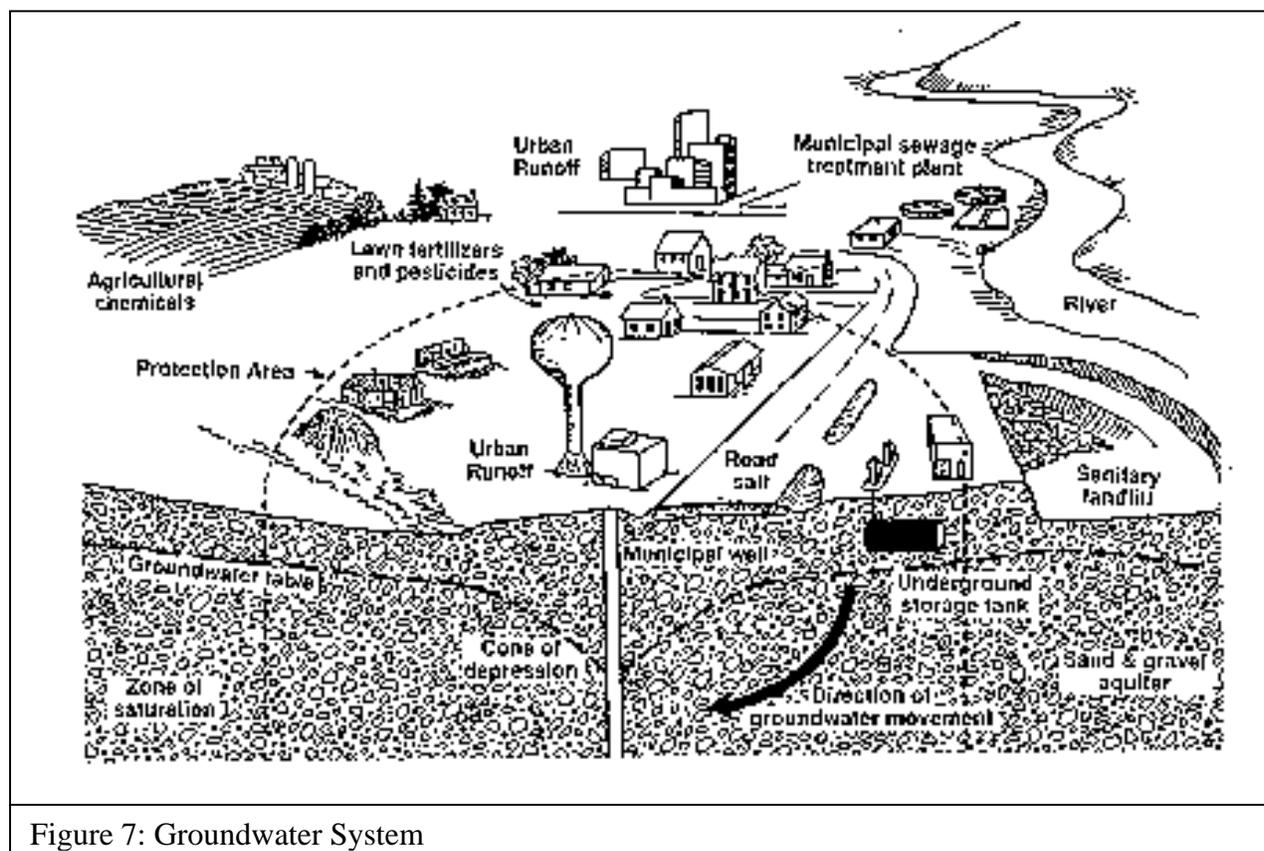


Figure 7: Groundwater System

Surface Water

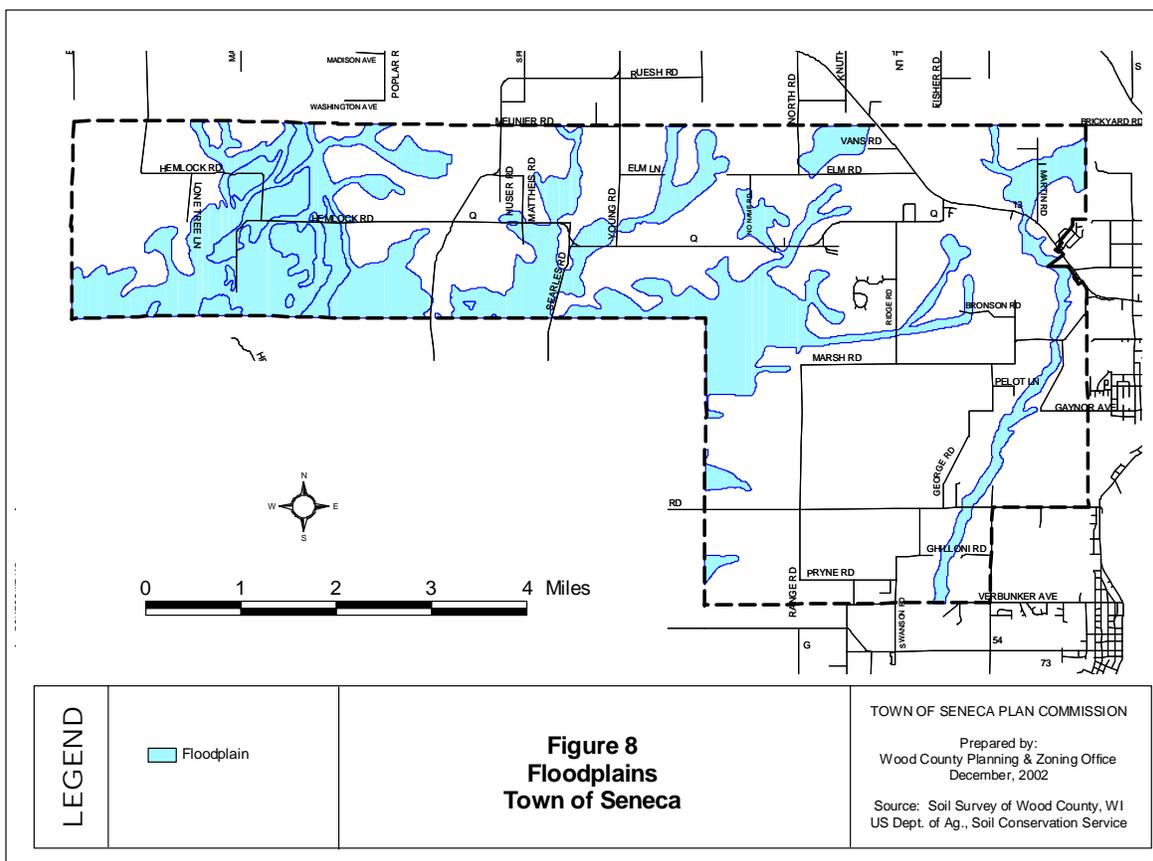
Surface water in the Town of Seneca consists of the Moccasin Creek, Elm Creek, Hemlock Creek, Little Hemlock Creek, a small portion of Ripple Creek and other minor tributaries. Surface water also includes the many ponds and reservoirs. Most of the ponds and reservoirs are manmade, many of which are used for flooding of cranberry beds. With the groundwater being so shallow, it is relatively easy to create ponds and reservoirs. It is important to protect the quality of Seneca's surface waters for the protection of the abundant wildlife in the Town and because contamination can migrate to residential wells.

Floodplains and Shorelands

Floodplains serve many important functions related to flood control, erosion control, ground water recharge, fish and wildlife habitat and water quality. The general public often does not fully understand floodplains or their function. A floodplain is a natural extension of a waterway and flooding is a natural physical event. When structures are placed in the floodplain,

the floodplain's water storage capacity is reduced, causing the next flood of equal intensity to crest even higher than the last, often flooding areas that were previously outside the floodplain.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) defines floodplains. Floodplains are comprised of the floodway, which is that area that actually carries the floodwaters, and the flood fringe, which is the area that accepts backed-up water for storage until the floodway can carry the water downstream. The flood fringe is sometimes referred to as the “backwater” areas. Floodplain boundaries have been established nationwide to delineate the 100-year and 500-year flood elevations. There is a one percent chance that the 100-year, or regional, flood will occur in any given year. The regional flood could occur two years in a row, or may not occur at all in a 100-year period. According to the Wisconsin Emergency Management Division, Wisconsin communities experienced significant flooding each year from 1990 – 2001, except 1994. Total damages to public and private property, including agricultural damages, during that time period totaled more than one billion dollars.¹¹



By State law, Wood County adopted a floodplain zoning ordinance in the late 1960s to regulate development in floodplains. FEMA floodplain maps identify areas where major floods occur. Regulations prohibit development in the floodway, the most dangerous flood area. Development is allowed in the flood fringe, provided it is built above flood levels and otherwise flood-protected. Although allowed, it is wise to restrict development from occurring in the flood fringe as well as the floodway.

¹¹ Ibid, page 28.

The floodplains in Seneca are shown in Figure 8. The floodplain follows streams and drainage patterns, but, in the western portions of the Town, the floodplain spreads out over wide areas. Although, from looking at the map, it does not appear that much land is in the floodplain, there are 5,835 acres of floodplain in Seneca.

Shorelands and floodplains are very closely associated. Like floodplains, Shoreland areas are protected under Wisconsin law. Also, like floodplains, counties are required to zone all shorelands within their jurisdiction.¹² The Shoreland includes that land that is located within 300 feet of a navigable stream or 1,000 feet of a lake, pond or flowage.

By reviewing the floodplain map (Figure 8) and the map that shows high groundwater areas (Figure 6), there does not appear to be a direct correlation between the two. Yes, floodplain areas have soils with high groundwater, but, there are also many acres in Seneca that are not included in a floodplain, but have seasonal high groundwater.

Wetlands

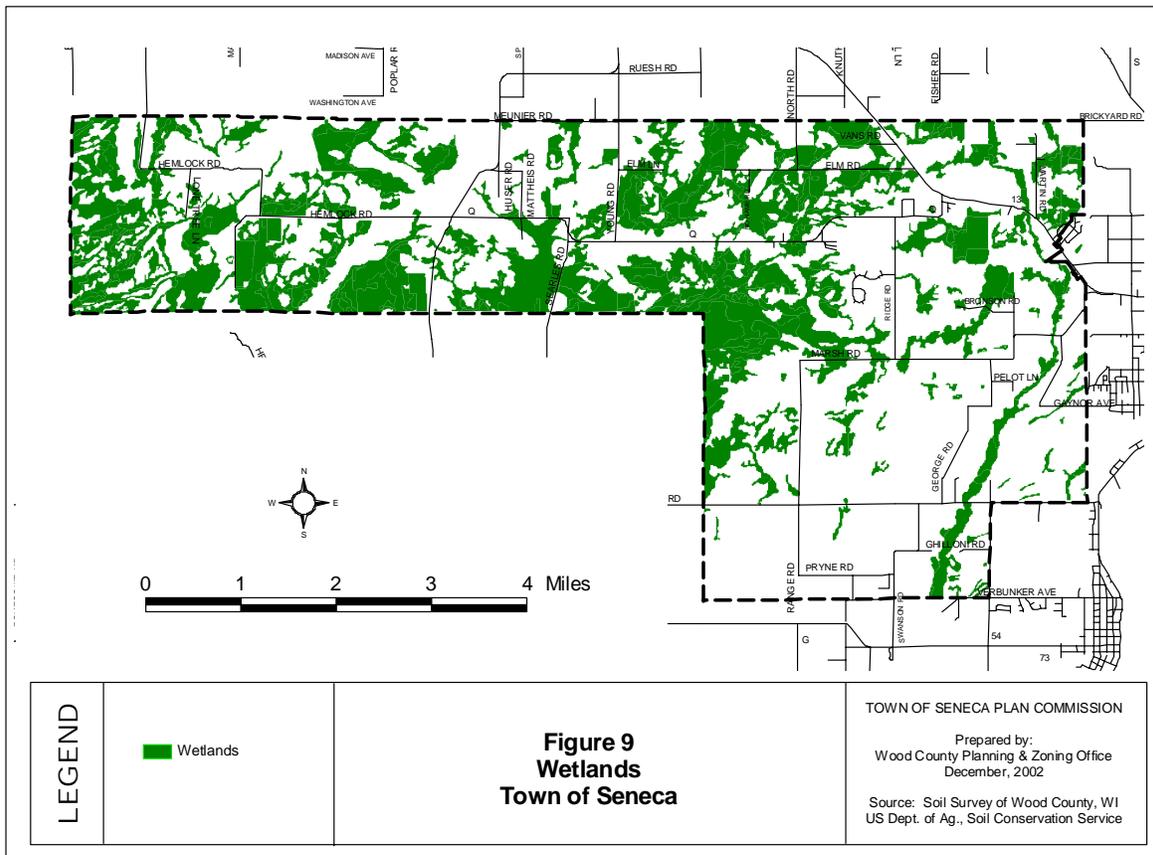
The value of wetlands is often disregarded or not understood by the public, although they are becoming more familiar with the benefits of wetlands to both humans and wildlife. Wetlands serve as a water storage and distribution system, filtering nutrients and purifying the water before it is reintroduced into the groundwater or surface water system. As more impermeable surfaces (rooftops, driveways, patios, roads, etc.) dominate the landscape, the capacity of wetlands to handle excess water runoff becomes increasingly important.

Under Wisconsin Administrative Code, cities and villages (and towns with village powers) are required to protect, at a minimum, all unfilled wetlands that 1) are within their borders, 2) are five acres or larger, 3) are shown on Department of Natural Resources wetland inventory maps, and 4) are located within shorelands.

Wetlands, in the Town of Seneca, are widely scattered throughout the Town (Figure 9). There are approximately 7,185 acres of DNR defined wetlands in the Town. This represents 34.6 percent of total land area in the Town of Seneca. Wetlands are often associated with floodplains, but not always, as can be seen on the maps. In all but a very few instances, obviously, wetlands are associated with soils that have high groundwater characteristics. This can be verified by studying the pertinent maps.

Development should be directed away from all mapped wetlands, both for the protection of the wetland and for the protection of the structures and persons using them. One town in Wood County requires a 100-foot setback from any mapped wetland for any new structure. Such a requirement will preserve the important functions of the wetlands for many years into the future. Wetlands are protected from development by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources when those wetlands lie within 300 feet of a navigable stream. There are wetland areas that lie further than 300 feet of the streams. These wetlands are not protected and have, in many communities, been destroyed. It should be a town policy to protect the unregulated wetlands from encroachment and destruction so they can serve the function of water runoff storage, wildlife habitat, etc.

¹² Sec. 59.692, Wis. Stats., and Chapter NR 115, Wisconsin Administrative Code.



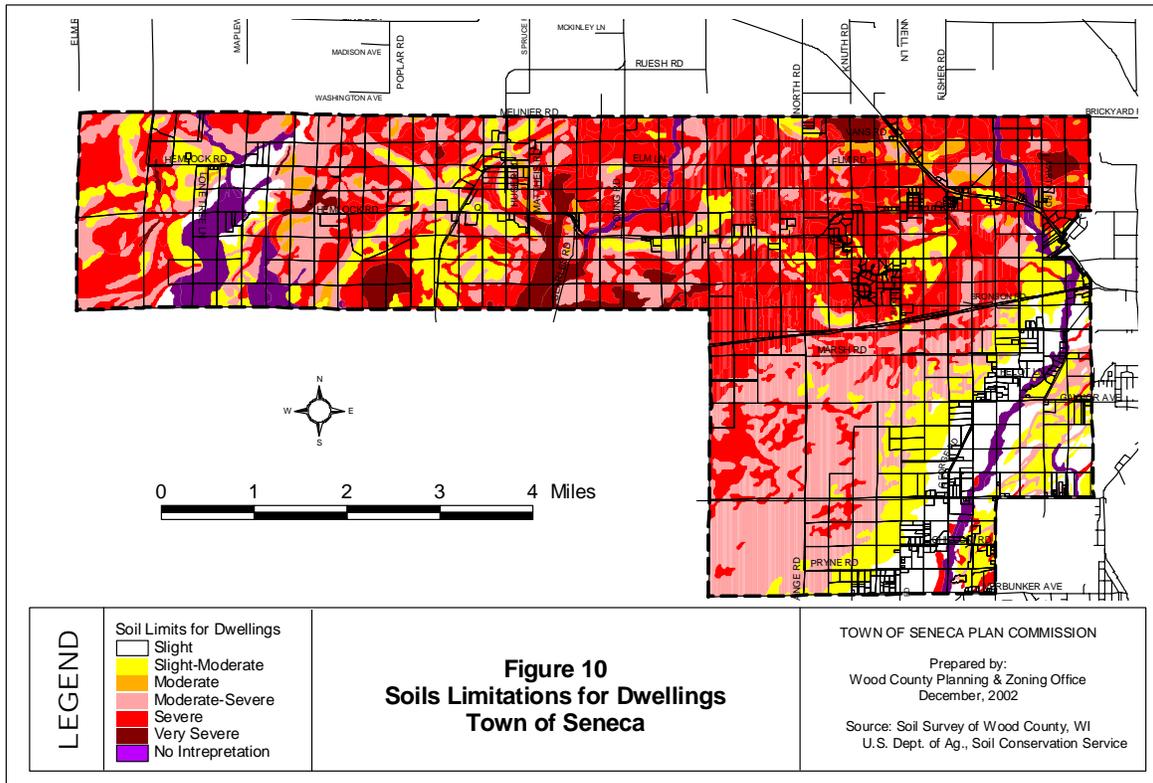
Soils: Limitations for Dwellings

Figure 10 is a map of Seneca showing the soils limitations for development of dwellings with and without basements. Soil limitations are indicated by the ratings “slight”, “moderate” and “severe.” A slight limitation means that the soil properties are generally favorable for the rated use, that is limitations are minor and easily overcome. A moderate limitation means that some soil properties are unfavorable, but can be overcome or modified by special planning and design. A severe limitation means that soil properties are so unfavorable and so difficult to correct or overcome as to require major soil reclamation, special designs or intensive maintenance. In Figure 10, transitional ratings of slight-moderate and moderate-severe are also used. In the slight-moderate category, limitations are slight for dwellings without basements and moderate for dwellings with basements. The same holds true for the moderate-severe classification. Those soils have moderate limitations for dwellings without basements and severe limitations for dwellings with basements.

Based on the information provided in Figure 10, nearly 73 percent of all land in Seneca has moderate to severe limitations for dwellings with and without basements, 23 percent has slight to slight-moderate limitations and four percent is not interpreted for this use.¹³ Looking at Figures 6 and 10, it makes sense that the areas with the most severe limitations for

¹³ “Soil Survey of Wood County, Wisconsin”, United States Department of Agriculture Soil Conservation Service, January, 1977.

development are directly associated with the soils that have high groundwater conditions. The majority of land that is best suited for dwellings with basements is along the George Road-Swanson Road corridor and the County Road D corridor. Some of those better areas can also be found along the County Road Q corridor. Because virtually all structures with bathrooms are served by Private On-Site Waste Treatment Systems (POWTS), it is important for town officials to keep the soil maps in mind when recommending areas for new development. It is imperative that all POWTS be properly maintained to protect the groundwater that is so close to the surface.



Historical and Cultural Resources

The Wisconsin Historical Society has only one record for the Town of Seneca and that dates back to the late 1970s.¹⁴ That record was “an older railroad car” that “was in deteriorated condition” when it was inventoried. There are no other records of historical or cultural sites in Seneca. The tribal office of the Ho-Chunk Nation has advised the Town that several historical and cultural sites exist in the Town, including burial sites and sites of religious significance.¹⁵

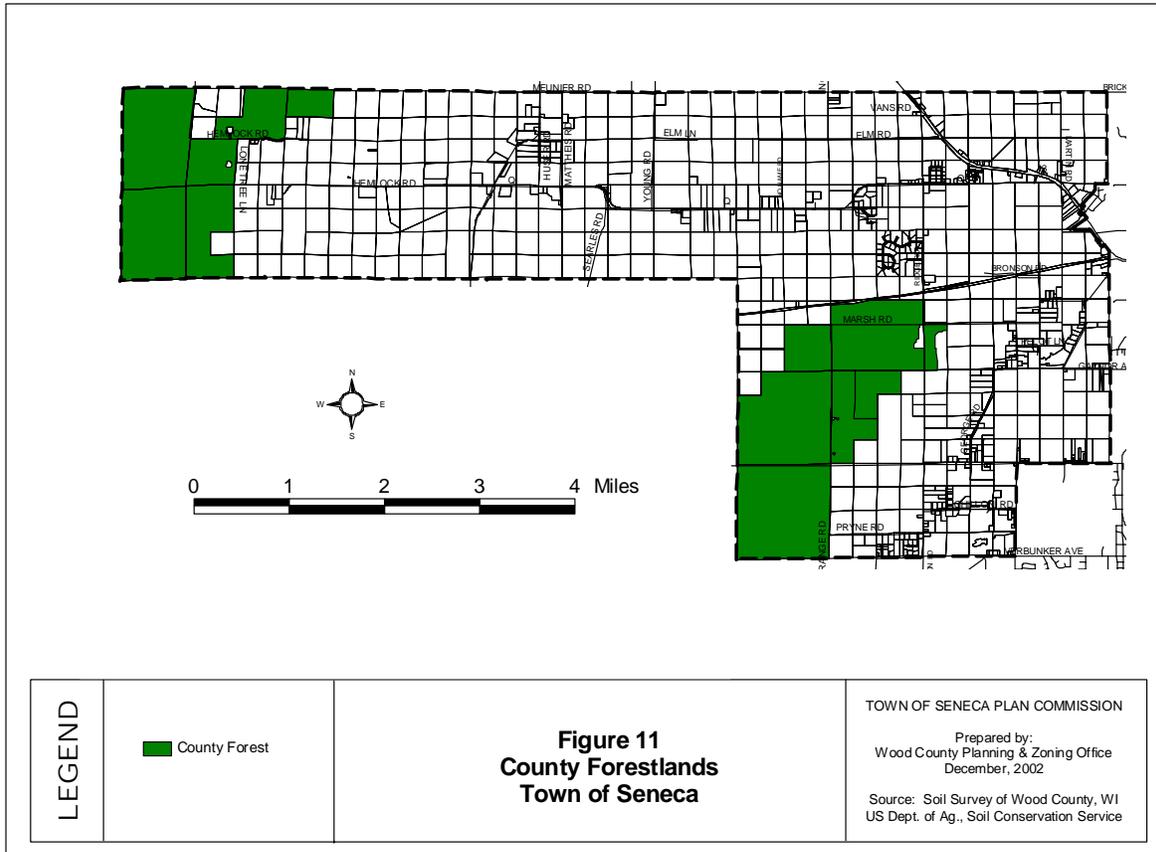
Forests

Forests are a prominent land cover type in Seneca. According to land use surveys, as much as 13,330 acres are classified as forests, wooded lots, tree farms, or something similar. Wood County owns about 3,960 acres of forests in the town (Figure 11) and the rest is under private

¹⁴ Correspondence from Richard A. Bernstein, Wisconsin Historical Society, March, 2002.

¹⁵ William Quackenbush, Ho-Chunk Nation, Department of Administration, Black River Falls, WI, Dec., 2002.

ownership. The county forest is available for public hunting, hiking and snowmobiling. The County forestlands shown in Figure 11 extend beyond Seneca’s boundaries into the towns of Port Edwards, where there is an all-terrain vehicle trail, and Cranmoor. Two hundred acres of forest is owned by Domtar Industries, Inc., which, although privately owned, is also used by hunters and nature observers.



Wildlife Habitat & Endangered Species

The Town of Seneca has an abundance of wildlife, including deer, rabbits, ducks, geese, turkey and more. Through the years, there have been sightings of endangered species, examples of which include the following:

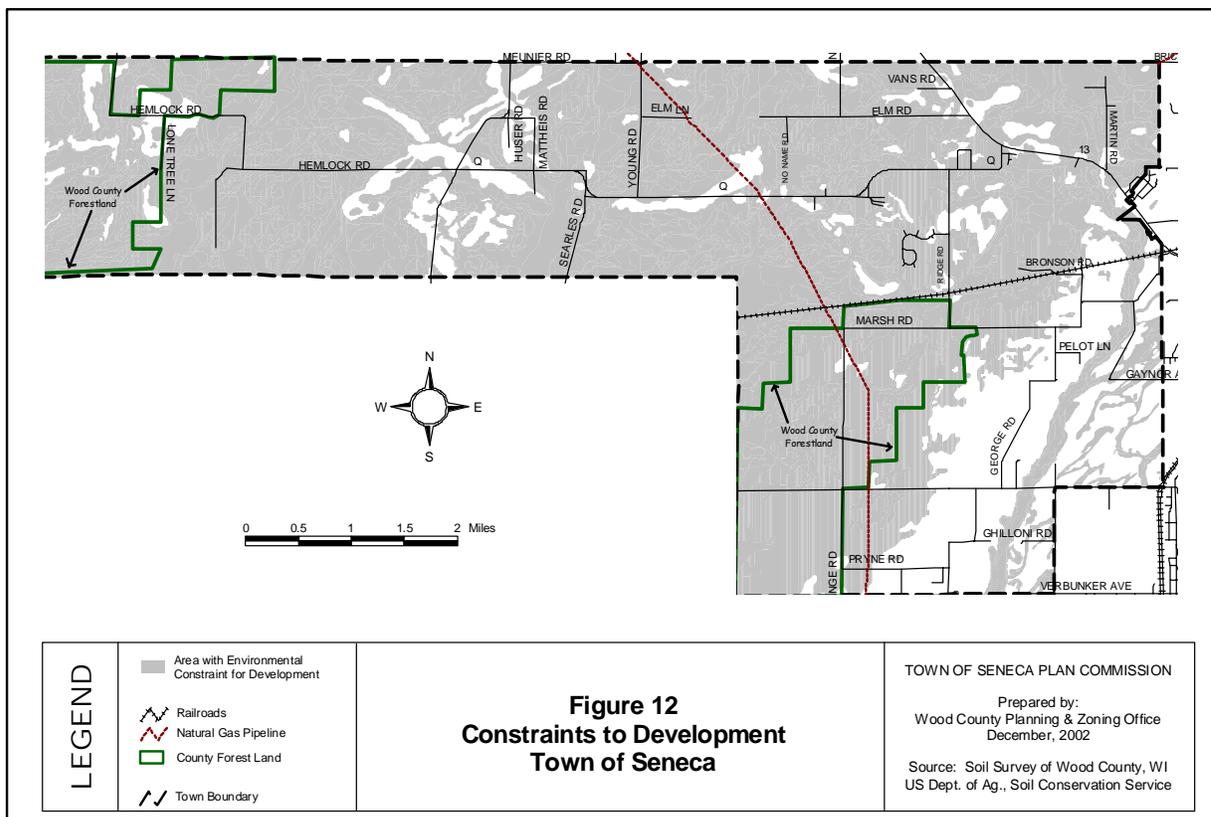
- Blanchard’s Cricket Frog
- Blanding Turtle
- Massasauga Rattle Snake
- Red-shouldered Hawk
- Karner Blue Butterfly
- Timber Wolf
- Bald Eagle
- Trumpeter Swan

Some endangered species sightings were reported several years ago and it is not known if all the endangered species listed above inhabit Seneca today.

Suburban development, like that in Seneca, sometimes encroaches on wildlife habitat, often destroying former homes and breeding areas for wildlife. Seneca officials and residents recognize the value of their wildlife and, through this planning process and town land use ordinances, will establish development densities that will assure protection of wildlife habitat.

Summary

Taken together, the maps presented in this section show areas of Seneca that should not be developed, along with those that are best suited for new development. The map in Figure 12 combines the other maps in this section into what is called “Constraints to Development”. Each of the environmental factors discussed and illustrated in this section – floodplains, wetlands, etc. – present hindrances to development that must be considered with each development proposals. Those factors are displayed as a group in this map to illustrate the extent of environmental issues in Seneca. Also shown on this map are other uses that constrain development, uses such as power lines, pipelines and railroads. Finally, the boundaries of county forests are shown as a constraint to development. County forestland will, in all likelihood, not be sold for development. If economic factors forced the sale of county forests, the maps show that there is little land within the forests that can support private on-site waste treatment systems, so the best uses would be those that do not require waste disposal, such as hunting land, camping or something similar.



6. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The Town of Seneca is, basically, a commuter, or “bedroom” community whose residents work in the adjacent urban municipalities. In the year 2000, well over a third of the town’s workforce (36.6%) were employed in the manufacturing sector. Another 11.9 percent were employed in the education, health and social services sector. These two categories account for nearly half (48.5%) of Seneca’s labor force. Other strong job classifications for Seneca residents include retail trade (8.6%), construction (7.9%) and arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodations and food services (7.8%). Table 10 provides a breakdown of all job classifications for those Seneca residents that are in the labor force.

In a recent community survey, Town residents indicated that, while they do not want to see large industrial or commercial developments come into the Town, they do not discourage small commercial ventures and, in fact, many residents want to see convenience stores, motels and restaurants locate in their community. Large industrial and commercial developments are encouraged to locate in the incorporated communities of Biron, Wisconsin Rapids, Port Edwards, Nekoosa and Vesper where public water and sanitary sewer services are available. One of the Town’s strengths in the economic development area is their ability to work with neighboring municipalities to encourage larger developments that will create jobs for all area workers.

| Table 10 JOBS AND THE LABOR FORCE TOWN OF SENECA - 2000 | |
|---|---------------------------|
| INDUSTRY | PCT OF LABOR FORCE |
| Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting and mining | 6.0 |
| Construction | 7.9 |
| Manufacturing | 36.6 |
| Wholesale Trade | 2.3 |
| Retail Trade | 8.6 |
| Transportation and warehousing, and utilities | 3.6 |
| Information | 2.0 |
| Finance, insurance, real estate, and rental and leasing | 4.5 |
| Professional, scientific, management, administration, and waste management services | 1.5 |
| Educational, health and social services | 11.9 |
| Arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation and food services | 7.8 |
| Other services (except public administration) | 3.5 |
| Public administration | 3.8 |

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000, Table DP-3.

Because most of Seneca’s residents work in the incorporated municipalities to the east and southeast, the Town’s future land use plan needs to take careful consideration of the transportation network to move workers (and school children) to and from the cities and villages. Land use plans that allow for future road improvements, including extension of city and village roads into the Town, should be considered.

The major weakness of attracting anything other than small industrial and commercial uses is the lack of public sewer and water systems. Many larger businesses use a lot of water and, as a result, need to dispose of a lot of wastewater. Because all of Seneca is on private,

on-site waste treatment systems, disposal of large quantities of water can be hard on systems and pose a potential of contaminating private drinking water supplies.

The Town has several strengths to offer businesses and industries that are considering locating or expanding in the neighboring incorporated communities. A quality labor force and good work ethic is chief among the strengths. Seneca residents have skills in a good cross-section of jobs, primarily manufacturing jobs as shown in the table above. Another strength is the quality school systems in Wisconsin Rapids, Port Edwards and Pittsville. Consistently scoring higher than the national average in testing, parents can be confident that their children get a quality education. Recreation opportunities abound, including high quality county parks, a broad selection of youth sports in state-of-the-art facilities and hundreds of acres of public land for hunting and hiking. Finally, the simple beauty of the Town, with its forests and streams and abundant wildlife, is an attraction to persons who are looking for the peaceful quietness of rural living. Yet, the Town of Seneca is only minutes for work, schools and shopping.

Given the information and past practices discussed herein, it shall be the Town of Seneca's overall objective to encourage and support development of large commercial and industrial concerns in the incorporated communities of Biron, Wisconsin Rapids, Port Edwards, Nekoosa and Vesper, while continuing to allow for small businesses and industries that do not require large amounts of water or public sewer services in the Town.

7. INTERGOVERNMENTAL COOPERATION

The Town of Seneca has cooperated with neighboring communities, Wood County and the school districts in Pittsville, Port Edwards and Wisconsin Rapids in various service areas for many years. Cooperative efforts may have evolved out of State mandates, but, more often, intergovernmental cooperation has been the result of economy of scale. With growing shortages of funding and increasing demand for services, it makes sense for communities to discuss increasing shared services and to coordinate new or expanded municipal programs. Like many towns in Wood County, the Town of Seneca's overall objective for this planning element is to cooperate with neighboring municipalities and school districts when such cooperation and shared services are cost-effective and economically feasible. A listing of current intergovernmental cooperative services in Seneca includes the following:

- Seneca works cooperatively with the Town of Sigel, the City of Wisconsin Rapids and Wood County for sanitary landfill siting issues.
- Mutual aid with the Villages of Vesper and Port Edwards for fire department services.
- Mutual contract for ambulance service, including Seneca, and the Towns of Sigel, Rudolph, Grand Rapids, Grant and the Village of Rudolph.
- Boundary roads are maintained under agreements with adjacent municipalities.
- Informal discussions have been held with Wisconsin Rapids, Rudolph and Sigel regarding the possibility of boundary agreements.
- The Wood County Highway Department does all paving of town roads and assists with snow removal and salting if the Town's equipment breaks down.
- Participating cooperatively with all Wisconsin Rapids urban area communities, the Wisconsin Department of Transportation, the North Central Wisconsin Regional Plan Commission and Wood County on an area-wide transportation study.

With recent proposals to curtail general revenue sharing in Wisconsin and with demands for use of funding growing, Town officials should consider basic planning options, many of which reflect input from Seneca's community survey. Future objectives of the Town, then, include the following:

- Encourage new development to locate in areas that can be efficiently and economically served by existing and planned streets and public utilities.
- Coordinate comprehensive planning with neighboring communities, the County and the Pittsville, Port Edwards and Wisconsin Rapids Public School Districts.
- Support industrial and business development in the cities of Wisconsin Rapids and Nekoosa and the villages of Biron, Port Edwards and Vesper.
- Coordinate boundary developments with the Wisconsin Rapids and Village of Port Edwards Plan Commissions.
- Review contracts and agreements with neighboring communities to determine what changes or additions can be made to make provision of services more cost effective and efficient for Town residents and land owners.
- Provide the school districts an opportunity to comment on subdivision proposals so that new developments will be adequately serviced by school busses and classroom equipment additions, etc.

8. LAND USE

Current Land Use

The land-based classification standards (LBCS) method of classifying land uses is used by the Wood County Planning & Zoning Office in each community plan it develops. Land-based classification standards provide a consistent method for classifying land uses based on their characteristics. LCBS extends the notion of classifying land uses by refining traditional categories into multiple dimensions, such as activities, functions, building types, site development character and ownership constraints. Each dimension has its own set of categories and subcategories for classifying land uses. Classifications are based on field surveys, aerial photographs, topographic maps, local knowledge and other data.

For purposes of this plan, current land use analysis will focus on the activity dimension of LBCS. Activity refers to the actual use of land based on its observable characteristics, or what is actually taking place on the land, such as farming, shopping, manufacturing, etc. This is the most commonly referred to method of defining land uses and is the most easily understood by the average individual.

The map in Figure 13 shows the observable activity on each parcel in Seneca and Chart 9 summarizes what is shown on the map. A description of each activity follows.

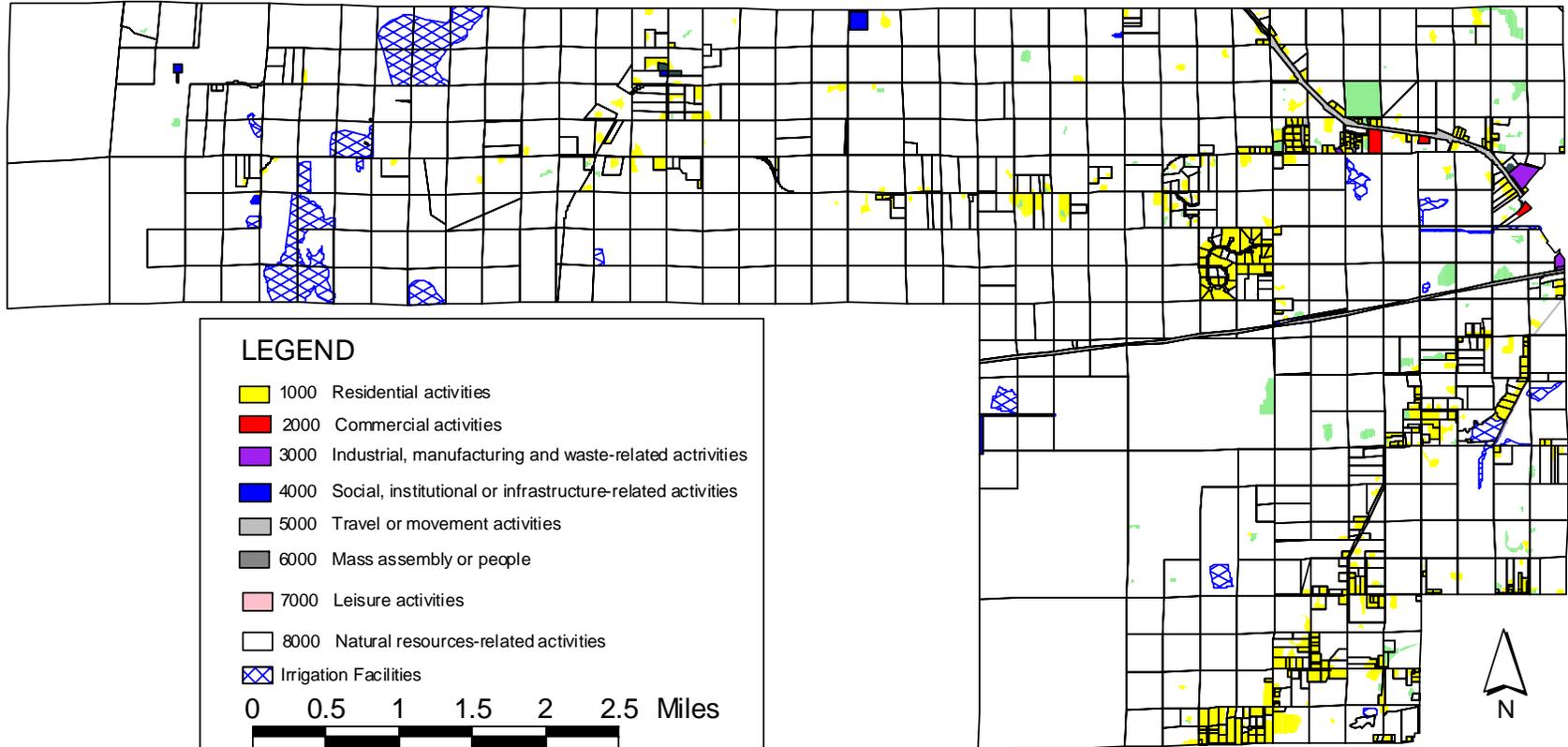
Residential

These activities fall into the 1000 LBCS code. There are 675 acres classified as residential in Seneca. This accounts for 3.3 percent of the total land. There are 475 total parcels that have residential activity on them. Of the total, 232 parcels, or 49 percent are within one-half mile of the route that follows George Road to Swanson Road, between Highway 13/73 and Highway 54. Another 110 residential parcels, or 23 percent, are located on the route that follows County Road Q to Ridge Road to the railroad tracks from Highway 13/73. That is a total of 342 of the 475 residential parcels (72 percent) along these two main transportation routes in Seneca. What is even more significant is the fact that nearly half of all residential properties (222 or 47 percent) are within one mile of the corporate limits of Wisconsin Rapids and Port Edwards and almost 25 percent are within one-half mile. This is significant when considering future urban service needs that may drive annexations. It also lends support for the need for cooperation and possible joint ventures with the neighboring city and village.

Commercial

The 2000 category of the land-based classification system includes shopping, business or trade activities. Because Seneca is primarily a commuter town of relatively small size, there are not a lot of commercial support activities in the Town. In fact, only four properties fall into the commercial listing, including TJ's Auto Repair and Sales, Cranberry Creek Furniture Restoration, Ruesch Drywall and an area for the sale of topsoil. Total acreage for these uses is about 16 acres. Three of these establishments uses are located along Highway 13/73 and one is on County Road Q. There is interest for more commercial development in Seneca. Several respondents to the recent community survey indicated some desire to have restaurants and convenience stores and a few responded that general retail establishments would be good for the town. Because of the size of Seneca and because the Wisconsin Rapids urban area is growing to the southeast instead of west, it is unlikely that many commercial ventures will be

FIGURE 13
EXISTING LAND USE BY ACTIVITY
TOWN OF SENECA: 2001



LEGEND

- 1000 Residential activities
- 2000 Commercial activities
- 3000 Industrial, manufacturing and waste-related activities
- 4000 Social, institutional or infrastructure-related activities
- 5000 Travel or movement activities
- 6000 Mass assembly or people
- 7000 Leisure activities
- 8000 Natural resources-related activities
- Irrigation Facilities

0 0.5 1 1.5 2 2.5 Miles



Source: Wood County Planning & Zoning Office.

| Table 11 LAND USE BY ACTIVITY TOWN OF SENECA 2001 | | | |
|---|--|--------|-----------------|
| LBCS* Code | LAND USE BY STRUCTURE ON PARCEL | ACRES | PCT OF TOTAL |
| 1000 | Residential activities | 675 | 3.28% |
| 2000 | Shopping, business or trade activities | 16 | 0.07% |
| 3000 | Industrial, manufacturing and waste-related activities | 20 | 0.10% |
| 4000 | Social, institutional or infrastructure-related activities | 452 | 2.19% |
| 5000 | Travel or movement activities | 174 | 0.84% |
| 6000 | Mass assembly of people | 7 | 0.03% |
| 7000 | Leisure activities | 120 | 0.58% |
| 8000 | Natural resources-related activities | 19,145 | 92.91% |
| 9000 | No human activity or unclassifiable activity | 0 | 0.00% |
| TOTAL | | 20,609 | 100.00% |
| * Land-Based Classification Standards Source: Wood County Planning & Zoning Office, 2001 | | | |

started in Seneca. It is likely, however, that future commercial may very well include the restaurants and convenience stores suggested in the survey, but not until the market can support them.

Industrial

Three industrial establishments are identified in the land use activities, including Badger Utility, Seneca Garage and a self-storage unit. There are 20 total acres in this classification. In the community survey, residents of Seneca are overwhelmingly opposed to developing either an industrial park or business park. Therefore, this is an area of development that will not be promoted in the Town. Instead, town officials will support new and expanded industrial development in the neighboring communities of Biron, Wisconsin Rapids, Port Edwards and Nekoosa, as well as Vesper and Pittsville.

Social, Institutional or Infrastructure-Related

Four hundred fifty-two acres, or 2.19 percent, of the land in Seneca is classified in this category. The category includes school or library activities, emergency response or public safety-related activities, activities associated with utilities (water, sewer, power, etc.), inactive mass storage (including open storage of water), and health care activities. The utilities area includes irrigation water storage, an activity common in Seneca's cranberry-growing areas.

Travel Activities

There are 174 acres listed in the 5000 code. Travel and movement activities include roads, parking lots, bicycle/pedestrian trails and other such activities. In the Town of Seneca, nearly the entire acreage in this classification is roads, including town and county roads and state highways. As the town develops with new subdivisions, additional streets may be added, but this category will not have a major impact on the Town's land uses in the future.

Mass Assembly of People

Four parcels are classified as places of mass assembly. They are the St. Joseph Catholic Church, St Joseph Church parish hall, Victory Christian Church and the Homestead Golf Course Restaurant. Together, these sites account for about 10 acres.

Leisure Activities

Activities listed as leisure activities in Seneca include the Homestead Golf Course, rifle range, ballpark, and the many ponds that exist in the Town. Together, leisure activities comprise 120 acres in the Town. Seneca has the land for new and expanded leisure activities and would, in the future, be a good location for new parks, trails and other outdoor activities. While development of formal outdoor leisure activity areas was requested by less than 10 percent of community survey respondents, the quality of life issues were important. Fifty-two percent of survey respondents said they lived in Seneca because of quality of life factors, including the low population density, and the rural setting. The character of Seneca is defined by the wooded areas, quietness of the community, wildlife, streams, low activity, forests and simplicity, among other similar characteristics. Some residents want safer bike routes and a few suggested that new community parks would add to the character of the Town.

Natural Resources-Related

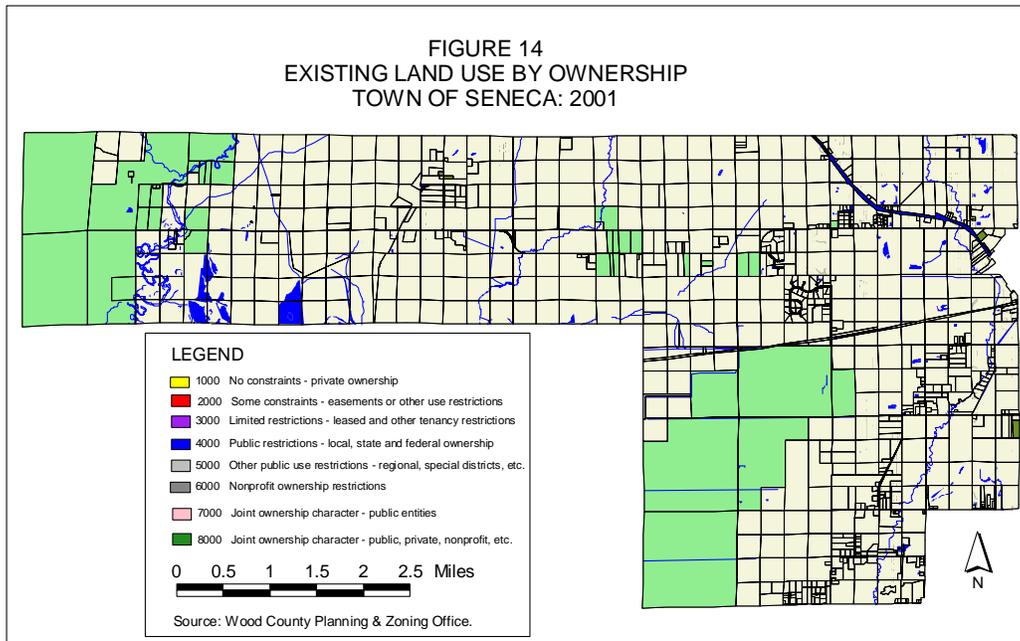
Over 92 percent of the land in Seneca is classified as natural resources-related. The category includes numerous land uses, such as forests, wood lots, farm fields, cranberry marshes, and the like. Total acreage is 19,145 acres. Although this total will decrease as residential activities grow, the proportion of natural resources-related lands will continue to dominate the Town for many, many decades.

Ownership

There are five categories of classifying land uses. The previous section described the activity classification of the land-based classification standards. Ownership is another of the five categories and one that is worth mentioning in the Seneca plan. Not surprisingly, most land in Seneca (77.6%) is privately owned. According to the land use survey, nearly 22 percent is under public ownership, primarily in the form of county-owned forestlands. What is unique about land ownership in Seneca is the mix of land that is privately owned with that that is owned by the County and by Indian Trusts. Few towns in Wood County have similar ownership characteristics. Figure 14 and Chart 10 list the ownership of land in Seneca.

Land Use Trends & Projections

The previous section shows land uses in Seneca, as classified today. A comprehensive land use analysis was completed by Wood County in 1972 and updated in 1979. Land use coding techniques have changed since those studies and technology now allows greater accuracy in determining land uses. A comparison of current information with that of the earlier years, coupled with data on the preceding maps and charts, can help document any trends in land use changes. Housing data, presented earlier, can also be used to determine any trends in development and land use trends in Seneca.



**Table 12
Land Use by Ownership
Town of Seneca, 2001**

| LBCS* Code | LAND USE BY OWNERSHIP OF PARCEL | ACRES | PCT OF TOTAL |
|--------------|---|---------------|----------------|
| 1000 | No constraints – private ownership | 15,994 | 77.62% |
| 2000 | Some constraints – easements or other use restrictions | 126 | 0.61% |
| 3000 | Limited restrictions – leased and other tenancy restrictions | 0 | 0.00% |
| 4000 | Public restrictions – local, state and federal ownership | 4,468 | 21.68% |
| 5000 | Other public use restrictions – regional, special districts, etc. | 0 | 0.00% |
| 6000 | Nonprofit ownership restrictions | 17 | 0.08% |
| 7000 | Joint ownership character – public entities | 0 | 0.00% |
| 8000 | Joint ownership character – public, private, nonprofit, etc. | 0 | 0.00% |
| 9000 | Not applicable to this dimension | 0 | 0.00% |
| TOTAL | | 20,605 | 100.00% |

* Land-Based Classification Standards
Source: Wood County Planning & Zoning Office, 2001

In 1972, it was estimated that 4.2 percent of the land in Seneca was “developed”¹⁶. The definition in 1972 did not include land that was developed for crops, grazing, forestry, etc. Today – nearly 30-years later – the amount of developed land has increased only a slight

¹⁶ Developed land uses included residential buildings; commercial buildings; industrial establishments, including manufacturing, wholesale and gravel pits; public/quasi-public uses, such as churches, schools, cemeteries and government facilities; public and private recreation areas; roads and road rights-of-way; farmsteads and abandoned buildings.

amount to 5.95 percent. The increase in developed area has been restricted by poor soils for private on-site waste treatment systems, compared to other urban-area communities. An interesting aside is from the 1979 land use plan for Seneca. That plan said, “[G]rowth pressures may be heavy in the 3 mile area adjoining the City of Wisconsin Rapids in the next twenty years. The remainder of the Town should experience light to moderate residential growth.”¹⁷ That plan projected Seneca’s population to be 1,700 in 2000 (year 2000 census for Seneca was 1,202).

Residential

In the 1972 land use analysis, Seneca was included among the towns with the highest percentage of residentially developed area.¹⁸ Nearly 10.5 percent of the “developed” acres was classified as residential that year. In 2001, 3.3 percent of the total land area is considered a residential activity. The residential structures themselves use 459 acres of land. The additional land dedicated to residential activities brings the total to 675 acres. In 1970, there were 257 housing units in the Town.

There are now 422 housing units in Seneca, occupying 675 acres of land, or 1.6 acres/housing unit. There is a two-acre minimum lot size in the east half of the Town, which is the area that will continue to receive the most residential development pressure. A five-acre minimum lot size is required in the west half of the Town. Housing needs were projected to 465 by 2010, an increase of 43 units. If we assume that 90 percent of the growth will occur in the east half of Seneca and 10 percent will occur in the west half, a minimum of 98 acres will be required to accommodate the growth.

Commercial

The 1972 plan suggested that there could be commercial growth pressure along the Highway 13/73 corridor, near Wisconsin Rapids. It was estimated that 10 acres was developed into commercial ventures by 1972. Today, 14 acres is classified as being in a commercial activity. The projected commercial development pressure has not occurred, mainly because the urban area growth has been to the east and south of Wisconsin Rapids. It is not anticipated that Seneca will require much additional space for new commercial uses; possibly another 20- to 30-acres. Any new commercial businesses will be in the form of small businesses that are either home-based or in small buildings along the Highway 3/73 corridor. The community survey revealed some desire for some new businesses, such as convenience stores and restaurants.

Industrial

Most industrial uses require public water and sanitary sewer services. Seneca residents do not want an industrial park or business park to locate in the Town, but would support new industrial jobs in the industrial parks of adjacent incorporated municipalities. The Town’s policy in regard to new industrial uses will be to allow such development as conditional uses under

¹⁷ “Land Use Analysis, Wood County, Wisconsin, Second Edition, Comprehensive Development Plan Volume IV”, July, 1979, page 85.

¹⁸ “Land Use Analysis, Wood County, Wisconsin”, Comprehensive Development Plan Report Volume IV, July, 1972, page 7.

their zoning ordinance, but encourage large scale development to locate in neighboring community's.

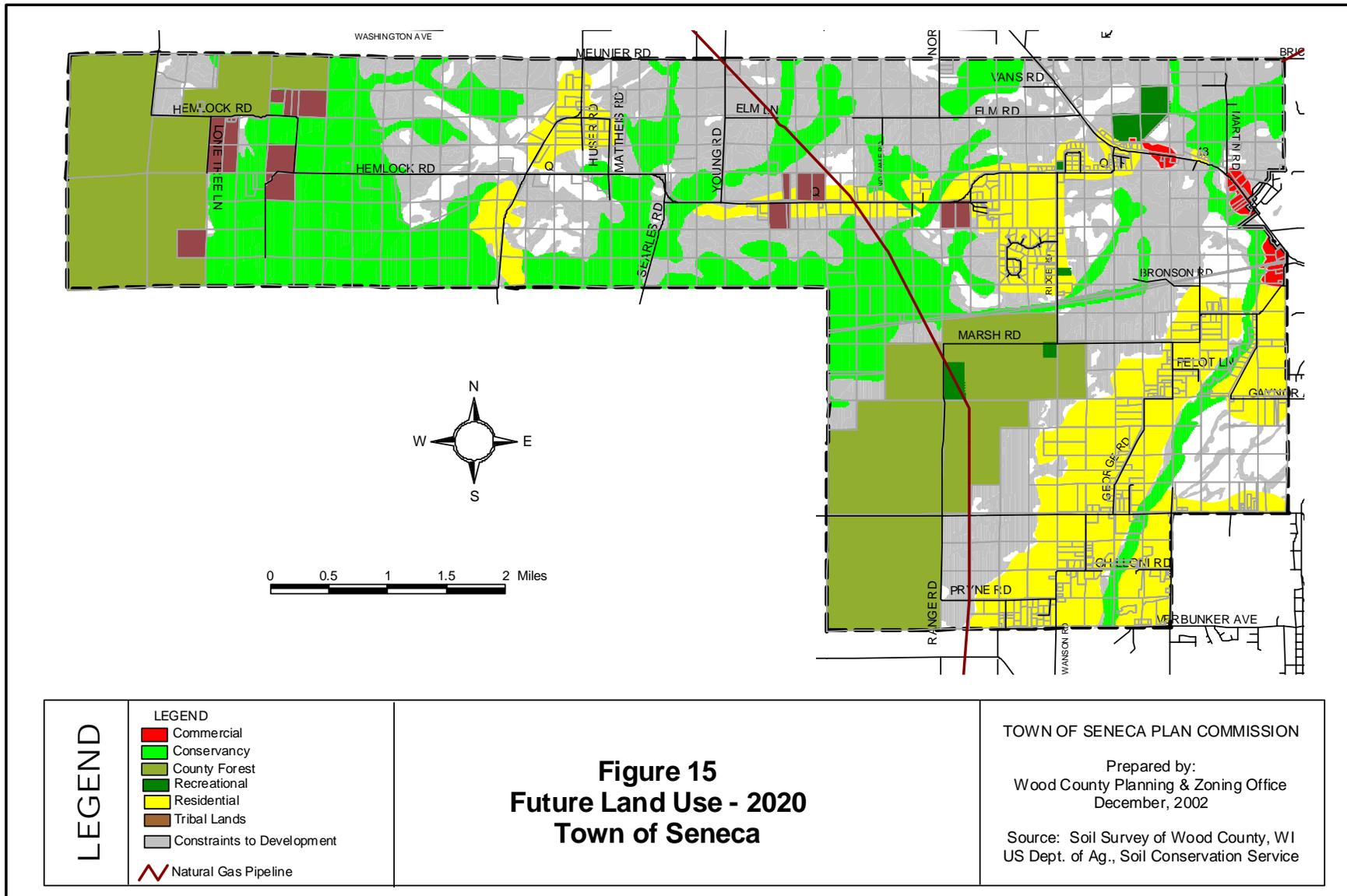
Agricultural

According to the 1972 land use inventory, there were 5,220 acres of cropland and pasture in 1972. Now, nearly 30-years later, the land use inventory shows a total of 2,577 acres in crop production. While the actual classification methodology of these land uses has obviously changed, resulting in a somewhat inaccurate comparison, the point to be made is that agricultural land use has declined in Seneca during the past two decades, an experience that is similar to the rest of the State and nation.

The cranberry industry has grown in the past several years with the introduction of upland marshes. Currently, 400 acres are developed as cranberry marshes and additional acres are in reservoirs. In the 1972 land use survey, 23 acres was classified as "special farms" – cranberry farms – and there were only 55 acres of water, which would include the reservoirs.

Future Land Use Plan

The following map is the future land use plan for the Town of Seneca to the year 2010. The map takes into consideration environmental constraints to development and shows those areas that can accommodate the 98 acres for residential development and 20-30 acres for commercial development. No additional acreage is needed for recreational purposes and industrial uses will be small and considered as conditional uses under the Town's zoning ordinance.



| | |
|---|--|
| LEGEND | LEGEND |
| | ■ Commercial |
| | ■ Conservancy |
| | ■ County Forest |
| | ■ Recreational |
| | ■ Residential |
| | ■ Tribal Lands |
| | ■ Constraints to Development |
| — Natural Gas Pipeline | |

**Figure 15
Future Land Use - 2020
Town of Seneca**

TOWN OF SENECA PLAN COMMISSION

Prepared by:
Wood County Planning & Zoning Office
December, 2002

Source: Soil Survey of Wood County, WI
US Dept. of Ag., Soil Conservation Service

9. IMPLEMENTATION

Plan Adoption

The first step toward implementation of the comprehensive plan is adoption of the plan by the Town Board. Wisconsin Statute 66.1001 provides specific procedures that are necessary to adopt the plan. As allowed by statute, the Seneca Town Board has delegated the responsibility of preparing and maintaining the comprehensive plan to the Seneca Plan Commission. Once the plan has been completed, the Plan Commission must adopt a resolution by a majority vote of the entire commission before sending the plan to the Town Board for adoption.¹⁹ The comprehensive plan does not take effect until Town Board enacts an ordinance that adopts the plan and that ordinance cannot be adopted unless the plan contains all of the elements specified by the comprehensive planning statute.²⁰ At a minimum, a class 1 public notice is required to be published at least 30 days before the hearing is held.²¹ Once adopted and no later than January 1, 2010, any program or action of the Town Board or its authorized commission, that affects land use shall be consistent with the comprehensive plan.²² This statutory requirement will primarily impact the Town's zoning ordinance and any other land use-related ordinance or program that they may adopt.

The following paragraphs provide information about the options that are allowed under Wisconsin law to implement a comprehensive plan at the town level.

Zoning Ordinance

The zoning ordinance is the most common land use regulatory instrument that is used in rural Wisconsin communities. The Town of Seneca has adopted village powers under Wisconsin Statute 60.22 and, therefore, adopts its comprehensive plan under s. 62.23, Wis. Stats. Under that statute, zoning "regulations shall be made in accordance with a comprehensive plan..."²³ The contents of a comprehensive plan are defined in the new planning legislation, Wisconsin Statute 66.1001. The relationship between the plan and the zoning ordinance is easy to understand if one considers that the plan identifies a pattern of desired land use development and the zoning ordinance specifies the range of conditions of use that can occur on parcels of land pursuant to the plan. In this relationship, the zoning ordinance is clearly a tool to implement the land use recommendations of the general plan, and in Wisconsin, it is a statutory requirement.

An effective and manageable planning tool, zoning offers many possibilities for confronting the issues presented in this comprehensive plan. Natural conditions such as geology or geography are very difficult, if not impossible, for man to alter to the advantage of both. Zoning is an acceptable solution because of the nature of the land. Fitting compatible uses with suitable natural conditions saves expense for the landowner or homeowner as well as protects natural conditions.

¹⁹ Chapter 66.1001, Wisconsin Statutes, 1999-2000, pg. 1706.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Chapter 62.23 (7) (c), Wisconsin Statutes, 1999-2000, pg. 1581.

Zoning typically creates different zones, or districts, for various categories. Each district has some clearly permitted uses and other uses requiring approval of a zoning board for specific site proposals. Other uses are prohibited. Flexibility can be built into the zoning ordinance to allow for some variance in land use rules. This is important because the unique characteristics of some lands preclude them from being categorized to be used the same as other lands in a specific zoning district. For example, odd-shaped lots may preclude a parcel from meeting lot line setbacks, while the lot may, in fact, contain adequate area for development.

Area Water Quality Management Plan

Seneca participated in the original Wisconsin Rapids Area Water Quality Management Plan although no Seneca land was included in future service areas under that plan. It is in the interest of Seneca residents and businesses that the Town be actively represented in the next update of the plan. Including areas of the Town that may need sanitary sewer service during the planning period will avert the need to amend the plan as parcels are annexed to Wisconsin Rapids because they need sewer. The plan has required two amendments, including public hearings and Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources approval, because of the fact that none of the developed areas of Seneca that were adjacent to Wisconsin Rapids were included in the 20-year service area.

Subdivision Ordinance

As a comprehensive plan implementation tool, subdivision regulations attempt to minimize the creation of lots that fail to satisfy zoning or sanitary ordinances. The control of land splits promotes the dedication and reservation of land for roadways and drainage ways. In addition, landowners benefit from an effective subdivision code by assuring that properties don't overlap when new parcels are created by metes and bounds land descriptions. It is not uncommon in suburbanizing towns, like Seneca, that landowners find themselves in either a debate or in legal action to determine who owns what land because of improperly subdivided land. It is also uncommon to find towns with subdivision ordinances. Most rely on the County to monitor and regulate land divisions.

Capital Improvement Program

A capital improvement program (CIP) is a plan for the capital expenditures of the Town over a period of years, usually five years. The CIP addresses the Town's capital needs that require attention during the period and helps establish priorities and financing for those needs. A capital budget is a concurrent document that outlines the plans for the expenditure of funds for capital projects. A tax impact analysis, or development impact analysis, is sometimes used to develop the CIP and helps Town officials determine both the advantages and disadvantages of various projects or developments. Capital improvement programs are very useful for urbanizing towns. They should prepare a CIP and review it each year.

Official Street Map

As a supporting document to a land use plan and map, the Official Street Map is a valuable tool. The Official Street Map is a legal document that must be adopted by the Town Board after public hearing. According to State law, "The map is conclusive with respect to the location and width of streets, highways, waterways and parkways, and the location and extent of

railroad rights-of-way, public transit facilities, parks and playgrounds shown on the map. The official map is declared to be established to conserve and promote the public health, safety, convenience or general welfare."²⁴

State law also allows the official street map to be used as a planning document. Section 62.23(c), of the law, allows a community to "amend the official map of the city so as to establish the exterior lines of planned new streets, highways, historic districts, parkways, railroad rights-of-way, public transit facilities, waterways, parks or playgrounds, or to widen, narrow, extend or close existing streets, highways, historic districts, parkways, railroad rights-of-way, public transit facilities, waterways, parks or playgrounds. No such changes may become effective until after a public hearing concerning the proposed change..."

The City of Wisconsin Rapids has an official street map that extends into Seneca. The map is used during land subdivision reviews and for planning and coordinating future improvements. The Town of Seneca could prepare and adopt their own Official Street Map, coordinating with both Wisconsin Rapids and the Village of Port Edwards. This type cooperation would aid with future, orderly development and coordinate with future expansion of Wisconsin Rapids and Port Edwards. The official map would help to keep the cost of road improvements to a minimum and would coordinate street location and right-of-way widths. The map could also provide for minimum disruption to existing development that could occur with future development where new streets, parks and other public facilities might be needed.

Town of Seneca Planning Administration

The Town of Seneca has established a hierarchy for their planning and zoning activities. Pursuant to appropriate Wisconsin Statutes, the Plan Commission has been established to prepare and amend the Town's comprehensive plan.²⁵ Zoning reviews and ordinance administration has been delegated to the Zoning Committee, a separate body from the Plan Commission. Although referred to in this plan, the Zoning Committee's functions and duties are detailed in the Town Zoning Ordinance. Plan Commission functions and duties are spelled out in the following paragraphs.

Plan Commission Function

The relationship of the town plan commission and the town board is important. The town board consists of elected officials and is primarily a policy-making body charged with conducting the town's affairs. The plan commission is an appointed body with the main duty of developing a plan and implementation measures for recommendation to the town board for adoption. The plan commission should, therefore, function in a more objective fashion than the town board, but must realize that, in developing plans and ordinances, it operates within a political system where the town board has the final say.

The plan commission can be of great assistance to the town board by involving citizens and developing expertise in planning, which can be a time-consuming and controversial undertaking, thereby freeing the town board to carry out its other functions. The plan commission is an appointed body whose policy-making function is advisory-only to the town board. If the town board wishes to delegate additional powers to the plan commission, beyond

²⁴ Chapter 62.23 (6) (b), Wisconsin Statute, 1999-2000, pg. 1580.

²⁵ Chapter 62.23 provides for the appointment of the Plan Commission and Chapter 66.1001 (4) (b) authorizes the Plan Commission to prepare and amend the comprehensive plan.

advisory powers, it may do so. For example, the town board may allow the plan commission to issue conditional use permits under town zoning under village powers and allow it to approve subdivision plats.

There needs to be a good working relationship between the plan commission and the town board because the existence of an adopted comprehensive plan and implementation measures depends upon both bodies – the plan commission to develop the proposals with public support and the town board to support the effort and ultimately adopt the legislation and implementation programs.

Plan Commission Structure

A plan commission is created by town ordinance under s. 62.23, Wisconsin Statutes. The ordinance may create a 7-member commission²⁶, or, if the town is under 2,500 population, a 5-member commission.²⁷ A town under 2,500 population may, by ordinance, change from a 5- to a 7-member commission and vice versa. The town chairman appoints the members and chooses the plan commission chair. Elected and appointed town officials may be appointed to the commission. There must, however, be at least three citizen members who are not town officials on the 7-member commission and one citizen member who is not a town official on the 5-member commission.²⁸

Plan Commission Powers and Duties

The powers and the duties of the plan commission are spelled out in state statutes and applicable town ordinances. The primary duty of the commission is to develop the town's comprehensive plan, under the specifications of Chapter 66.1001, Wisconsin Statutes. Under statutory requirements, the plan commission must solicit citizen participation and intergovernmental communication and coordination in developing the plan. The plan commission must oversee coordination and development of the comprehensive plan and, once completed, forward the plan to the town board by formal resolution.

After the comprehensive plan has been adopted, the zoning ordinance will be amended to reflect the goals, objectives, policies and programs of the plan. Updating and maintaining the zoning ordinance is the function of the Town Zoning Committee. Although the zoning committee is a different group from the Plan Commission, the two bodies coordinate their efforts to assure a seamless transition from the comprehensive plan to the zoning ordinance.

Once the zoning ordinance is amended to comply with the comprehensive plan, the Town of Seneca Zoning Committee is charged with administering the plan through their zoning ordinance. The Seneca Town Board has delegated authority to the Zoning Committee to review zoning amendments, conditional use applications and to recommend special exceptions from ordinance provisions to the town board. The town board may, in fact, authorize that committee to issue conditional use permits.

The plan commission typically becomes involved in development and administration of other plan implementation vehicles. Specifically, if an official map or subdivision ordinance is

²⁶ Chapter 62.23 (1), Wisconsin Statutes, 1999-2000, pg. 1579.

²⁷ Chapter 60.62 (4), Wisconsin Statutes, 1999-2000, pg. 1547.

²⁸ Chapter 60.62 (4) (b) and (c), Wisconsin Statutes, 1999-2000, pg. 1547.

developed in the Town of Seneca, it will likely be accomplished as a joint project of the plan commission and zoning committee. In the Town of Seneca, administration of such plan implementation tools is then delegated to the zoning committee, who is either authorized to act on changes or recommends actions to the town board.

