

**Long Range Planning Committee
of the City of Onalaska**

Wednesday, September 30, 2015

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1 Purpose of the Meeting: The Long Range Planning Committee is hosting this Community Open
2 House to discuss and gather public comment on the draft 2015 Comprehensive Plan, a planning
3 document with a 20-year horizon. The public is welcome to stop in and attend the Open House
4 any time between 4:30 and 7:30 p.m. A presentation will be given at 5:30 p.m. to provide the
5 public with a formal overview of the draft 2015 Comprehensive Plan, which is a 10-year update
6 from the currently adopted 2005 Comprehensive Plan. The presentation will also identify
7 significant themes from the draft document as well as major changes in the draft 2015
8 Comprehensive Plan as compared with the 2005 Comprehensive Plan. A copy of the draft 2015
9 Comprehensive Plan may be found on the city's website at www.cityofonalaska.com

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11 The Meeting of the Long Range Planning Committee of the City of Onalaska was called to order
12 at 4:30 p.m. on Wednesday, September 30, 2015. The meeting had been announced and a notice
13 posted at City Hall.

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15 The following members were present: Debbie Clarkin, Kristen Odegaard, Jennifer Brown, Dana
16 Frederickson

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18 Also Present: Mayor Chilsen, Land Use & Development Director Brea Grace, Planner / Zoning
19 Inspector, Katie Meyer, Brad Hentschel of Short Elliott Henrickson, Ald. Jim Binash, Ald.
20 Harvey Bertrand, Ald. Barry Blomquist

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22 Excused Absence: Jim Warren, Gary Lass, Ken Schmocker

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24 **Item 1 – Presentation at 5:30 p.m. to provide an overview of the draft 2015 Comprehensive**
25 **Plan, a 10-year update from the currently adopted 2005 Comprehensive Plan**

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27 Katie Meyer welcomed and thanked everyone for attending. Katie clarified that this
28 Comprehensive Plan Update is a 10-year update to the current planning document required by
29 State Statutes. Katie noted that a draft of the update has been completed and has been reviewed
30 by City staff and many City committees. The City is now looking for public comment and
31 feedback on this draft. Katie then introduced Brad Hentschel, a consultant with Short Elliott
32 Hendrickson, who has been assisting with the Comprehensive Plan update.

33
34 Brad Hentschel said that according to State of Wisconsin Statutes communities must have a
35 comprehensive plan if they regulate land use. Decisions must be consistent with the
36 comprehensive plan. Brad said communities should plan if its citizens care about how the
37 community will grow and look 20 years into the future. Brad said the City of Onalaska began
38 the process of updating its Comprehensive Plan in the spring of 2014 and noted a survey had
39 been distributed to citizens. Nearly 1,100 surveys were returned, and the feedback was built into
40 each of the chapters. The Long Range Planning Committee has held monthly meetings. The
41 Plan Commission has received monthly updates and reviews, and city staff also has been
42 reviewing the chapters that pertain to them. Brad noted a two-day place-making event for

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43 various groups, community members and the general public was held in June 2014. Input on
44 what makes Onalaska an exceptional community was gathered from focus groups. Input also
45 was gathered regarding where the city is heading over the next 20 years. Brad said a vision
46 statement was developed through this process. Brad noted Planner/Zoning Inspector Katie
47 Meyer had met with students at Onalaska High School and given them the opportunity to discuss
48 what they believe is important to the community. This input was built into the Comprehensive
49 Plan Update as it addresses the needs of the younger generation. Brad said a 20-year vision was
50 built based on public feedback, Plan Commission meetings and “the big rocks” (e.g., the crucial
51 issues facing the community).

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53 Brad noted that the City of Onalaska is projected to have a population of nearly 24,000 by 2040.
54 This is a 32-percent increase from the current population, which is approximately 18,000.
55 Onalaska’s current median age is 37.4 years, which is slightly older than what is seen in both the
56 state and La Crosse County. The median household income is nearly \$60,000. La Crosse
57 County’s median household income is \$50,000, and the State of Wisconsin’s median household
58 income is \$52,000. Ninety-five percent of the city’s population has a high school diploma.
59 Thirty-five percent has a Bachelor’s Degree or higher. The Onalaska School District’s
60 enrollment ranks 73rd out of the state’s 449 school districts. Seven hundred students either attend
61 private schools or are home-schooled. The city’s top industries are education, health and social
62 services, manufacturing and retail trade. Twenty-eight percent of the city’s residents work in
63 Onalaska, and 90 percent work within La Crosse County. Brad said an estimated 3,300 housing
64 units will be needed by 2040 to accommodate the projected population increase. Two hundred
65 eight new single-family homes were constructed between 2010 and 2013. The current median
66 household value is slightly less than \$165,000. Brad said a threshold established by the
67 Department of Housing and Urban Development states affordable housing is defined by
68 households not paying less than 30 percent of their income toward housing costs. Eighty-four
69 percent of owner-occupied households in the city spend less than 30 percent of their income on
70 housing costs. By comparison, 35 percent of rental households pay more than 30 percent. The
71 vacancy rate is 3.6 percent (3 percent is optimal). Fifty-six percent of the city’s homes have
72 been constructed since 1980.

73

74 Brad noted that the city received the Bicycle Friendly Community Award in 2013 and referred to
75 bicycle lanes located along Sand Lake Road, 3rd Avenue South and Theater Road. Brad noted
76 that the La Crosse Regional Airport will receive \$28 million in improvements from 2014 to
77 2019. Brad said there is a desire for better service in the city from MTU. Better route timing,
78 additional routes and infrastructure will support this. Brad noted that an estimated 60 trains pass
79 through Onalaska daily and said it is his understanding this is the heaviest freight rail in the state.
80 Water rates in the city are among the lowest in the region. There are 27 parks covering more
81 than 290 acres in the city. There are 2,600 residents in the city 65 years of age or older, but there
82 is a senior living capacity (assisted living facilities) of 489 units. Brad noted Well No. 9, which
83 produces much of the city’s water, is being reconstructed. Brad mentioned the Aquatic Center,
84 the Omni Center, the YMCA North, which is putting on an addition, and said they are “great

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85 community assets.” Brad noted there is little agricultural acreage in the city and said community
86 gardens and farmers markets bring local agriculturally produced food to consumers. Brad noted
87 the State Trunk Highway 35 corridor and adjacent blocks have two large Native American burial
88 sites that are not catalogued. The City of Onalaska was awarded “Tree City, U.S.A.” status for
89 the 15th consecutive year.

90
91 Brad referred to the economic development chapter and said one of the city’s strengths is the
92 environment; specifically, the coulees and the bluffs. Other strengths include education and
93 training opportunities, a strong customer base, transportation facilities, significant disposable
94 incomes, strong infrastructure, specialized area businesses (niche markets), a high-tech medical
95 field, and several redevelopment opportunities. Brad noted there is a wide range of desired
96 businesses and said questions were raised about the city’s downtown; specifically, what should
97 its characteristic and vision be? Questions were raised about where industrial and manufacturing
98 properties should be located. Brad said the city is primed for economic growth due to access to
99 infrastructure (highways, railroad, and the airport). Brad noted some weaknesses include limited
100 financial resources for development assistance, employer difficulty locating entry level and
101 skilled workers, higher taxes and land costs, topographic restrictions, minimal mass transit,
102 limited available development space, lack of affordable private utilities (telephone, internet, 4G
103 network).

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105 Brad referred to the intergovernmental cooperation chapter, which examines how the city works
106 in a region-wide basis and how the city will proceed with working with the Town of Onalaska,
107 the Town of Medary, the Town of Hamilton, the Village of Holmen, and the City of La Crosse.
108 Brad referred to the land use chapter and noted that the city has seen significant growth over the
109 last decade in residential and commercial development. Brad said an area identified by the Long
110 Range Planning Committee and through public input as being poised for change include
111 boundary expansion. Brad noted there are redevelopment opportunities along the STH 16 and
112 STH 35 corridors as well as along Sand Lake Road. Brad referred to the Future Land Use Map
113 and said the Long Range Planning Committee had identified the following land uses that would
114 be appropriate in the city: Environmentally Sensitive Residential, Mixed Density Residential,
115 Mixed Use, Commercial, Residential, Downtown Mixed Use, Commercial Industrial, Medical
116 Facility, Institutional (churches and schools), Parks and Open Space, and Environmental
117 Corridors. Brad referred to the implementation chapter and said action steps have been built for
118 some of the “big rocks” such as having a variety of housing styles, price ranges, and being
119 sensitive to special needs populations. Other goals include having multimodal transportation,
120 maintaining a sound infrastructure system, encouraging environmentally friendly development,
121 collaborating with public and private schools, maintaining an acceptable fire rating and response
122 times and coordinating this into the development plan, maintaining communitywide park and
123 recreation resources, creating a strategy and master plan to guide public and private investment,
124 establishing a downtown redevelopment plan (identifying the downtown area and determining
125 what its identity should be), strengthening intergovernmental cooperation, improving key
126 corridor and entranceways, and attracting high-quality development within the niche medical

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127 market.

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129 Brad said the Long Range Planning Committee's next step is to do edits based on feedback from
130 tonight's open house. The Plan Commission will hold a public hearing and recommend that the
131 Common Council approve the final document.

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133 Brad invited the public to stay for the open house and to provide comments to himself, City staff
134 or Long Range Planning Committee members.

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136 **Item 2 – Public Input**

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138 Public input was gathered throughout the Open House portions of the meeting.

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140 **Item 3 – Adjournment at 7:30 p.m.**

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142 The Community Open House was adjourned at 7:30 p.m.

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145 Recorded By:

146

147 Kirk Bey