

Eau Claire Comprehensive Plan 2015

Governmental Cooperation Assessment



City of Eau Claire Wisconsin

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The Growing Need for Cooperation among Local Governments

Local governments are the general-purpose public service delivery organizations, the workhorses of the American political system. The extraordinary number and types of governmental organizations at the local level in the United States is striking. There are over 87,000 units of local government, including nearly 39,000 county, municipal, and town governments. There are over 3,000 local governments in Wisconsin, the state ranking third nationally in the number of governmental units per capita. In the Eau Claire metropolitan area alone, there are 16 governmental jurisdictions.

In Wisconsin, the organizational structure of local governments has remained virtually unchanged through most of the 20th century. Through most of this period, local governments have been generally successful in delivering the public services needed to accommodate sustained economic and community growth. Local government programs and services expanded or contracted in response to changing needs, but always within well-defined limits and expectations, and always according to a well-established and stable view about the political and institutional environment in which local governments in Wisconsin functioned.

Examples of Cooperation

While operating in a fragmented jurisdictional pattern, local governments have never operated in complete independence from one another. Intergovernmental relations in the Eau Claire metropolitan area includes many examples of intergovernmental cooperation and partnership, such as the consolidation of the City-County Health Department, the joint dispatching operations of the Emergency Communications Center, and a myriad of formal or informal agreements regarding the public safety, street maintenance and purchasing.

The Changing Landscape

However, the local government landscape is changing. The pace and quality of change in government in the 21st century will be unprecedented. Over the coming years unparalleled changes in the operating environments of public sector organizations may evoke a broad public debate about the fundamental purposes and structure of local governments.

The political and institutional landscape of local government in Wisconsin is being reshaped by the “perpetual fiscal crisis” of the public sector cited by David Osborne and Peter Hutchinson in *The Price of Government*, along with the ‘perfect storm’ convergence of major demographic, technological and economic trends.

These forces are creating a permanent imbalance in the mix of services, citizen expectations and fiscal resources of local governments. This imbalance is unlikely to be resolved by future

increases in local tax revenues, nor by state or federal revenues, nor by a growing economy, nor by working harder or faster at doing the same things the same way. In the future, local governments will be compelled to consider substantive changes to their own organizational structure as well as to their patterns of relationships with other jurisdictions. At a minimum, there will be a significant re-alignment of many local government organizations to provide a much greater level of intergovernmental cooperation, shared services and consolidation.

Reasons for Cooperation

The reasons for this renewed emphasis on cooperation among governments in our metropolitan area are straightforward. The Eau Claire area is one of the few projected growth areas in Wisconsin over the next twenty years. The growth of the metropolitan area will mean accelerated fragmentation of the capacity of local governments to provide services. The realities are that many of the major responsibilities of local government will increasingly cross jurisdictional borders. Existing governmental boundaries will be made irrelevant by complex social, economic and political realities accompanying future growth.

Quite simply, public policy-making in the 21st Century will be affected by new forms of intergovernmental cooperation and collaboration, a blurring of jurisdictional boundaries, extra-governmental alliances and the growing interactions of local governments within a loose network of many organizations and institutions.

The Key Question

The key question will not be whether local governments should cooperate, but how they do so in a way that:

1. Engages both citizens and officials in a genuine and informed discussion of the issues, obstacles, and opportunities for intergovernmental cooperation;
2. Recognizes that decisions about cooperation, shared services, and consolidation are primarily about the assignment of costs and benefits;
3. Recognizes the importance of building long term intergovernmental relationships; and
4. Moves participating jurisdictions in the direction of finding a new balance of public services and public costs generally acceptable to a community consensus.

Purpose of this Chapter

The purpose of this chapter is to begin to lay the groundwork for building more effective intergovernmental partnerships in the metropolitan area that will meet the standards for successful partnerships envisioned by the Wisconsin Commission on State-Local Partnerships in the 21st Century, namely:

- **Reduce tensions** and improve the working relationships of local government and community organizations in the metropolitan area;
- **Increase the overall productivity of local governments** by applying contemporary management techniques to improving the quality of public services and stretching the impact of scarce tax dollars;
- **Reduce the duplication and overlap of government services** through area-wide cooperation and making services more cost-effective;

Intergovernmental Cooperation Analysis

- **Enhance economic growth** by putting into place the infrastructure needed for sustainable metropolitan growth.
- **Stabilize taxes** by improving the performance and delivery of local government programs and services.

Progress since the 2005 Plan

Much progress has been made since the 2005 *Comprehensive Plan* in terms of cooperation between the City and its five adjacent Towns with regard to the planning and regulation of land use, utilities and roads on the periphery of the City.

The major planning issue in the 2005 plan was: *What should the City do to ensure that urban expansion is compact, cost-efficient and designed for lasting value?*

Intergovernmental Agreements

In response to that issue, the City proposed and the Towns each accepted subdivision regulations stating that land divisions for residential purposes shall be permitted based on an overall base density standard of one single family lot per 10 acres in the Sewer Service Area of the Town unless features were included that facilitate future urban growth with City utilities. Each Town subsequently amended its land use plan to conform to a legally binding intergovernmental agreement to that effect; Eau Claire and Chippewa Counties did the same. The provisions of those agreements are outlined on pages 4-10 through 4-13 of the Land Use and Development Assessment of this plan. The City then prepared and adopted a plan for land use that would apply to properties that successfully petition for annexation in each of the five Towns, along with general plans for the extension of public utilities and major roads.

These agreements are of historic proportion and demonstrate that governments can work together for the greater good even when it requires bending entrenched practices and convictions.

Major Issues in Intergovernmental Cooperation

- 1. Cooperative Metropolitan Planning:** What should the City of Eau Claire do, if anything, to encourage implementation of a consistent overall metropolitan growth strategy that accommodates future economic and population growth while protecting environmental and rural assets from premature development?
- 2. Minimizing Development Sprawl:** What should the City of Eau Claire do, if anything, to improve intergovernmental cooperation in minimizing development sprawl and reducing long-term costs of public services in the metropolitan area?
- 3. Shared Services:** Should the City of Eau Claire encourage local jurisdictions to share services and facilities?
- 4. Consistent Land Use Regulations:** Should the City of Eau Claire encourage more consistent standards for development codes, land use regulation, building inspection, and code enforcement in the metropolitan area?
- 5. Boundary Change:** What should the City of Eau Claire do, if anything, to reduce the uncertainty among local communities about the timing, sequence, and costs of boundary changes while ensuring that development in the urban service area is consistent with the *Eau Claire Comprehensive Plan*?
- 6. Intergovernmental Trust:** What should the City of Eau Claire do to foster effective intergovernmental working relationships that exhibit mutual trust and respect?
- 7. Community Facilities:** Should the City of Eau Claire encourage intergovernmental collaboration in the location, construction and use of public buildings and facilities?
- 8. Open Space and Environmental Asset Conservation:** Should the City of Eau Claire take the lead in encouraging cooperation among metropolitan area jurisdictions to protect key environmental assets such as rivers and wetlands, woods, scenic areas, and prime farmland?
- 9. Intergovernmental Transformation:** What should the City of Eau Claire do to help transform intergovernmental relationships in the metropolitan area so as to provide a long-term balance among the services that citizens should expect, the services that governments can provide and the services that communities are willing to fund?