
I. Introduction

A. Origins of Planning Effort

In association with expansion projects for Highway 12 between Lake Delton and Middleton, the Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT) provided \$250,000 to help Sauk County and its communities along Highway 12 plan for growth-related impacts of those highway projects. In 2001, Sauk County convened a group of representatives from communities along Highway 12 to decide how to use the State planning grant. This group, the Highway 12 Local Planning Assistance Advisory Committee, decided that it would be best to prepare a plan that benefits the County and the Highway 12 communities as a whole, instead of dividing pieces of the grant off for each community. In March 2002, Sauk County hired VANDEWALLE & ASSOCIATES, a planning consulting firm, to assist with the preparation of this *Highway 12 Corridor Growth Management Plan*.

B. Purpose of the Plan

The *Highway 12 Corridor Growth Management Plan* includes an overall vision and detailed recommendations for the entire 24-mile Highway 12 corridor in Sauk County. The *Plan's* recommendations are focused on identifying areas for development, preserving natural areas and farms, protecting community appearance and views, promoting appropriate economic development, and making the most of transportation improvements. The *Plan* also includes potential tools and techniques, located in the Appendices, which may be adopted by local governments to implement the recommendations of this *Plan*.

The *Plan* does not make detailed recommendations for possible Highway 12 expansion or realignment projects. Instead, it responds to various highway proposals by suggesting complementary land use, preservation, access, economic development, and community image approaches. The *Plan* also assesses the impact of various highway proposals on each of the potentially affected communities within the Study Area.

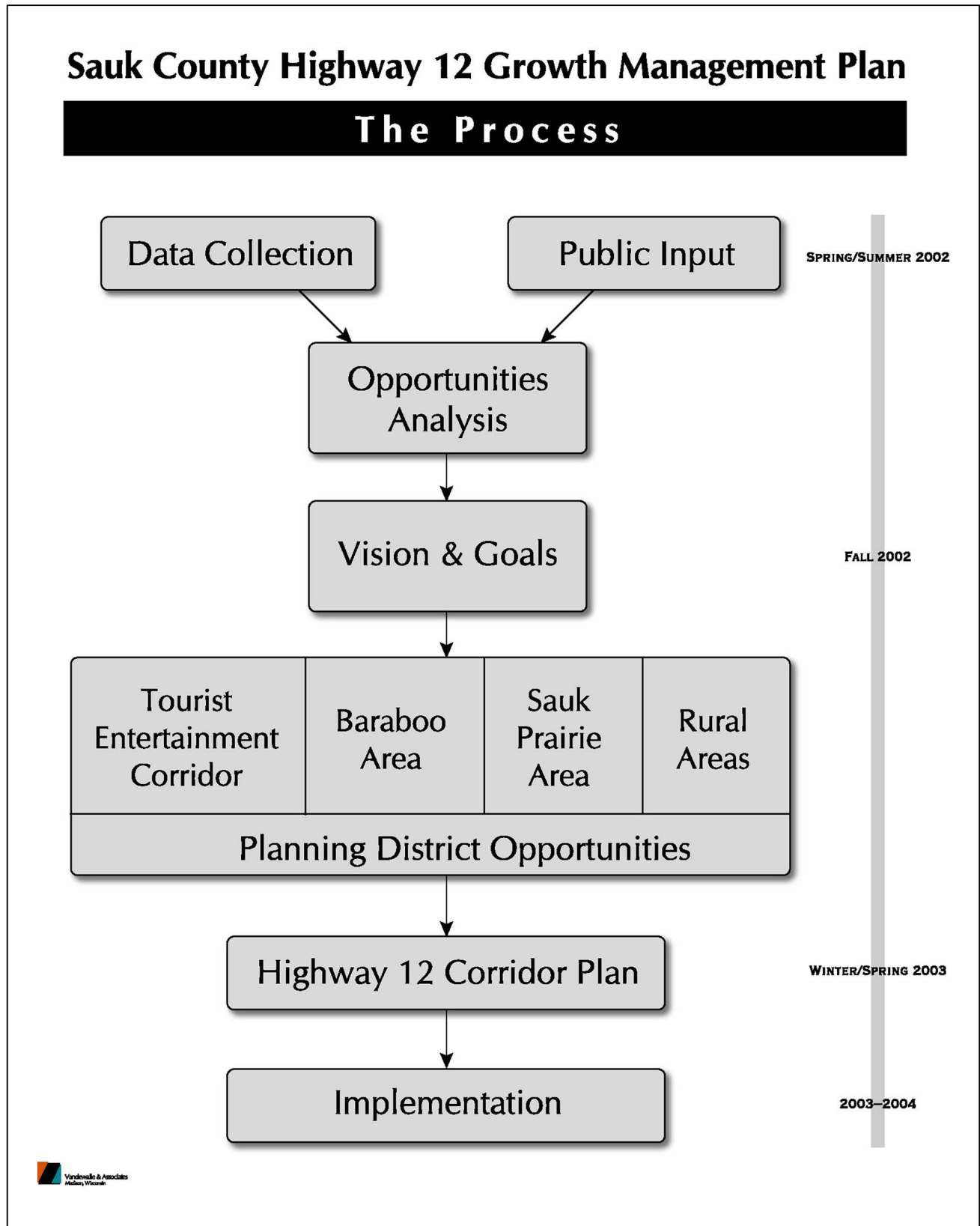
C. Selection of the Study Area

The Study Area includes 20 communities in eastern Sauk County. Because Highway 12 capacity expansion projects have different impacts on communities located on the highway as opposed to away from the highway, the Study Area is divided into the Detailed Planning Area and the General Planning Area (see Map 1). The Detailed Planning Area includes communities located directly along Highway 12, including the Ho-Chunk Nation; the City of Baraboo; the Villages of Lake Delton (interchange area only), Prairie du Sac, Sauk City, and West Baraboo; and the Towns of Baraboo, Delton, Prairie du Sac, and Sumpter. The General Planning Area includes communities that are not located directly along Highway 12, but will probably experience some secondary or “spin-off” impacts from future Highway 12 capacity expansions. These communities include the Villages of Merrimac, North Freedom, and Rock Springs; and the Towns of Dellona, Excelsior, Fairfield, Freedom, Greenfield, Honey Creek, Merrimac, and Troy.

D. Summary of Planning Process

The planning process began in Spring 2002. The Committee engaged in an extensive public participation process to prepare the *Growth Management Plan*. Public participation activities included a household survey, corridor vision workshops, focus groups, opportunities open houses, and draft plan open houses. The results of those activities are described in Chapter II of this *Plan* and included in full in Appendix B. The following figure generally illustrates the planning activities and the timetable in which they were completed.

Figure 1: Planning Process Flowchart



Map 1: Jurisdictional Boundaries

E. Organization of Plan Document

The *Sauk County Highway 12 Corridor Growth Management Plan* is divided into the following chapters:

- **Chapter I: Introduction.**
- **Chapter II: Background.** The Background chapter summarizes and analyzes existing conditions and trends in the Study Area. Subjects include natural resources, population, housing, economic activity, land use, transportation, public utilities, parks, community facilities, historic resources, and past plans.
- **Chapter III: Regional Vision and Opportunities.** The Regional Vision and Opportunities chapter summarizes results from the extensive public participation efforts used to formulate the plan recommendations. These include a community survey, two corridor vision workshops, focus groups, public evaluation of alternative future scenarios, and selection of a preferred alternative. This chapter also includes a section entitled Regional Opportunities Analysis, which lays out the range of future opportunities for the Study Area and is based on the inventory information and the results of the public participation efforts.
- **Chapter IV: Planning District Opportunities and Recommendations.** The fourth chapter consists of the plan recommendations and implementation approaches for each of four planning districts established from the overall Study Area: Sauk Prairie Area, Baraboo Area, Tourist Entertainment Corridor, and Rural Area. These recommendations are based on public input, past plans, new opportunities, and different alternatives considered during the planning process.
- **Chapter V: Community Impacts.** This chapter projects the general impacts of the recommendations of this *Plan* and of proposed highway projects on the future of the Study Area.

II. Background

A. Summary of Inventory Report

Good planning relies on an understanding of the current characteristics of the Study Area, the relationships between different types of characteristics, and how those characteristics have been changing and may change over time. This chapter summarizes Appendix A: Inventory Report, which describes existing conditions and trends within the Study Area.

1. Natural Resources Summary

Understanding the relationship between the Study Area and its natural features suggests possible locational advantages for particular land uses. It is also essential to understand the location of where development may or may not be appropriate. Maintenance of these natural features is also important for community appearance, natural habitat, recreation, and tourism. Key natural resource findings affecting the Study Area include:

- The Study Area offers a diverse set of interconnected natural areas unique for this region.
- The Baraboo Range, which bisects the Study Area, is a one-of-a-kind geologic and natural community recognized locally, regionally, and nationally.
- The terminal moraine from the last glacier has resulted in significant changes in topography when comparing the east and west sides of the Study Area.
- The Wisconsin River, at the east edge of the Study Area, is a major natural, recreational, and cultural resource.
- Waterways, floodplains, and wetlands—along with parks and places like the Baraboo Range—form the foundation for an interconnected environmental corridor system.



2. Agricultural Resources Summary

Farming is a key part of the local economy and heritage of the Highway 12 corridor. It is also the way of life for many Study Area residents. The seasonal changes of growing crops, the colors and textures of farm fields, and farm buildings contribute to the rural appeal of much of the Study Area. Key agricultural resource findings for the Study Area include:

- Areas directly along Highway 12 and adjacent to cities and villages include some of the most productive agricultural soils and have the greatest development pressures in the County.
- Further off Highway 12, the Sauk Prairie Area at the south end of the Study Area and lands in the Town of Baraboo also include very productive farmland.
- Within the Study Area during the 1990s, the amount of farmland dropped by about 900 acres per year and the number of farm operations dropped by about 14 operations per year.



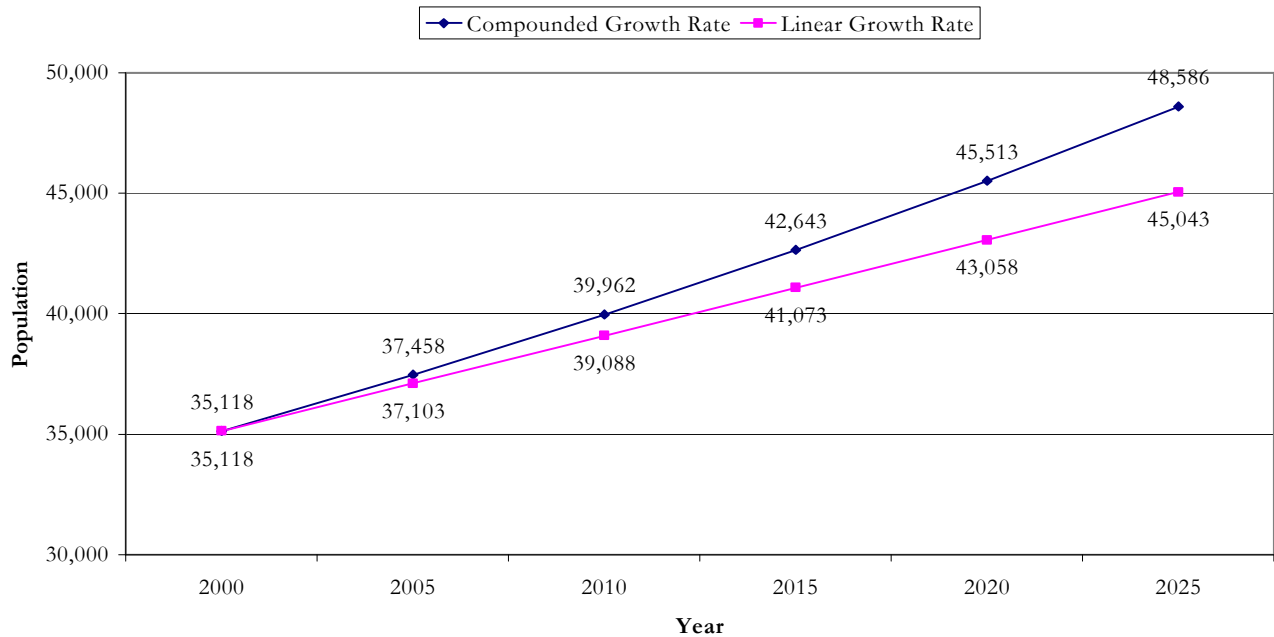
- Most of the decreases in numbers of farm operations were in dairy farms.
- Farming remains a key part of the Sauk County economy, and farm support businesses and large contiguous tracts of active farmland remain.

3. Demographic Trends Summary

An analysis of Study Area demographics suggests current influences and likely future directions for housing, jobs, and land use. Key demographic findings affecting the Study Area include the following:

- Population in the Study Area grew from 29,921 in 1990 to 35,118 residents in 2000—a 17.4% increase. This growth is comparable to the 17.6% increase for Sauk County as a whole.
- Over one-half of Sauk County's population lives within the Study Area.
- Based on 2000 Census numbers, communities on the north side of the Baraboo Range have generally grown quicker than on the south side.
- Population in the Study Area is forecasted to grow from 35,118 people today to between 45,043 and 48,586 people in 2025—about a 30 to 35% increase (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Population Forecast Comparison for the Study Area



4. Housing Framework Summary

A community’s housing stock is its largest long-term capital asset. As is typical in most communities, residential development encompasses a large amount of land in the city and villages in the Study Area, less in the towns. Key housing findings affecting the Study Area include the following:

- About two-thirds of all housing in the Study Area is single family.
- Nearly three-quarters of all housing in the Study Area is owner occupied, with the greatest percentages of renter occupied housing in the city and villages.
- Much of the newest housing in the Study Area is focused on its northern end.
- Housing demand in the Study Area is forecasted to grow from 15,647 units today to between 21,615 and 23,315 units in 2025—about a 30 to 40% increase.



5. Economic Activity Summary

The economic condition of a community, particularly the composition of its economic base, closely relates to its potential for economic expansion or improvement. Key findings related to economic activity include the following:

- The County unemployment rate was 4.4% in 2002. This is low historically and compared to other areas in the state.
- More people commute into Sauk County for work than commute from Sauk County.
- Sauk County's largest job sectors are services, retail trade, and manufacturing.
- The two largest employers in Sauk County are the Ho-Chunk Nation and Land's End, Inc.



- Job growth in Sauk County has recently been highest in retail, hotels, and business services.
- Major manufacturing employers in the Study Area focus on food processing, plastics, and printing.
- Most manufacturing employers are generally in one of nine industrial parks. Four of these parks have improved lots available and three have room for expansion.
- Major non-manufacturing employers focus on tourism, health care, and government services.
- The Baraboo/West Baraboo Highway 12 area serves regional shopping needs. Lake Delton and Madison's west side are other emerging regional shopping districts with Study Area implications.

6. Existing Land Use

An accurate depiction of the Study Area's *existing* land use pattern is the first step in planning for a desired future growth pattern. Map 2 depicts the existing (2002) land use in the entire Study Area. Key findings related to the existing land use pattern include the following:

- The existing land use pattern within the Detailed Planning Area is punctuated by urban development in Sauk City/Prairie du Sac, Baraboo/West Baraboo, and Lake Delton.
- South of the Baraboo Range, agricultural and undeveloped woodlands dominate the landscape outside of the villages. Notable exceptions include the Badger Army Ammunition Plant, the adjacent Bluffview Development, and agricultural-based commercial uses and an airstrip near the intersection of Highways 12 and PF.
- North of the Baraboo Range, there is significantly more development outside of cities and villages, including the Ho-Chunk Casino and Hotel, commercial uses along Highway 12 in the Town of Delton, and scattered rural residential subdivisions.
- The existing land use pattern in the General Planning Area is predominantly agricultural and open lands. Exceptions include the small villages of Merrimac, North Freedom, and Rock Springs, Devil's Head Resort, the rural hamlets of Leland, Denzer, Blackhawk and Witwen, and rural residential development near the Wisconsin River and Lake Wisconsin, Mirror Lake, and Lake Virginia.

Map 2: Existing Land Use

7. Transportation Facilities Summary

Access is a key determinant of growth because it facilitates the flow of goods and people. The Study Area is well connected in the region through the existing roadway network, most notably Highway 12 and the Interstate. Other transportation facilities, such as freight and passenger rail, airport service, and bike and recreational trails are located in or easily available to the Study Area.



This access could improve further with planned and proposed expansions and realignments for Highway 12.

The Highway 12 expansion project between Middleton and Sauk City within Dane County is scheduled for completion in 2005. Improvements to existing Highway 12 through Sauk City (Phillips Boulevard) are tentatively programmed for 2008. There is considerable local interest in beginning planning for a Sauk City Highway 12 bypass.

WisDOT is now in the final stages of evaluating the environmental impacts of alternative improvements scenarios to Highway 12 north of the Baraboo Range. It expects to issue a Final Environmental Impact Statement in 2003 with a selected alternative. For planning purposes, the Highway 12 Corridor Plan assumes implementation of the preferred alternative described in the Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement issued in March of 2001. This includes a relocated Highway 12 between Fern Dell Road to Old Highway 33 and improves the existing alignment to a four-lane road. This would occur in 2007-2008. In 2015 or later, a bypass would be constructed around Baraboo from Old Highway 33 to Ski Hi Road. The proposed realignments would be between ¼ mile and ½ mile west of existing Highway 12. Two lanes would be constructed initially, but sufficient right-of-way is being acquired for a divided four-lane highway. Interchanges would likely be at Fern Dell/Moon Roads, Reedsburg Road, Highway 33, Highway 136, Highway W, and Point of Rocks.

While the planning process proceeded with the assumption that WisDOT's preferred alternative would be selected, the recommendations of the corridor plan can be implemented under virtually any improvement scenario. Implementation will benefit the communities greatly by bringing a cohesive, well-planned approach to future development in the area.

Key findings related to the existing transportation system include the following:

- Over the past 20 years, traffic volumes on Highway 12 have increased by roughly 100% south of Baraboo and by about 200% north of Baraboo.
- There is a strong network of intersecting arterial and collector roads to Highway 12; however, there are few continuous arterial or collector roads paralleling Highway 12.
- Rail has been a strong part of the area's heritage, but one line went out of operation in the 1990s.
- State, county and local governments are working towards an integrated trail network in the County.

8. Community Facilities Summary

A number of public facilities within the Study Area provide community services and contribute to the area's growth potential, education, character, and quality-of-life. Key findings related to Study Area community facilities and utilities include the following:

- Public sewer and water utilities are available in and near cities and villages in the Study Area. Large systems also serve the Ho-Chunk Casino and Hotel and the Bluffview Development in Sumpter.
- Most of the Study Area is served by the Baraboo School District or the Sauk Prairie School District.
- Higher education is provided through a two-year UW campus in Baraboo and a technical college in nearby Reedsburg.
- Owing to its rich natural resource base, the Study Area is home to several large parks and protected resource areas.
- The Baraboo Range National Natural Landmark recognizes this exceptional geological and natural resource and includes Devil's Lake State Park and Natural Bridge State Park.
- Devil's Lake State Park, located in the center of the Study Area, is the most heavily visited State park.



9. Review of Existing Plans and Studies

The array of growth and preservation plans already adopted and being implemented by county and local governments along the Highway 12 corridor influences the direction of the *Highway 12 Corridor Growth Management Plan*. Each plan attempts to influence future patterns of land use, transportation, and natural area and farmland preservation.

One of the goals of the *Highway 12 Corridor Growth Management Plan* is to help advance and provide a regional framework for future local plans. Given these relationships, it is critical to understand key recommendations and findings of existing plans affecting the Highway 12 corridor. Appendix A summarizes those key recommendations. Map 3 is a composite of the various comprehensive plans, land use plans, and transportation plans affecting the Study Area. In general, there is agreement among the plans, particularly south of the Baraboo Range. In other cases, the plans of different units of government have conflicting recommendations for the same geographical area. This is particularly true in the Baraboo area. This is probably the result of policy differences among the various local governments. One major objective of the *Highway 12 Corridor Growth Management Plan* is to suggest strategies, techniques, and possible areas of common ground to resolve these differences.

Map 3: Composite Adopted Plans



B. Public Participation

To understand the goals, desires, and vision of the communities in the Study Area, the planning process included an extensive public participation effort. The participation exercises guided the overall vision and goals for the project and the creation of the different future scenarios for the four planning districts, both described later in this document. Participation results are summarized below and included in full in Appendix B.

1. Committee Issues and Opportunities Summary

At the project kick-off meeting in March 2002, the Advisory Committee members identified issues and opportunities for the Study Area that they felt needed to be incorporated into the planning process. The Committee comments were divided into three categories: transportation, development, and preservation. The Committee felt the *Plan* needed to include recommendations to:

- Plan for long-term regional and local transportation needs, including alternative modes of transportation.
- Promote intergovernmental cooperation and possible tax-base sharing.
- Develop consistent setback and design standards for development along Highway 12.
- Promote redevelopment and infill development along Highway 12 and in older commercial areas.
- Explore opportunities for farmland and natural area preservation, including purchase and transfer of development rights programs and scenic view preservation.
- Develop tourism as an asset by promoting heritage-based tourism and addressing conflicts between commercial-based tourism and nature-based tourism.

2. Community Survey

In June 2002, the County administered written surveys to a random sample of 2,000 households (1 of every 5) within the Detailed Planning Area. The 23-question public opinion survey focused on demographic information, opinions on existing conditions, and attitudes on growth and development. A total of 500 completed surveys were returned, representing a response rate of 25%. This sample size results in a margin of error of 4% on all responses at a 95% confidence level.

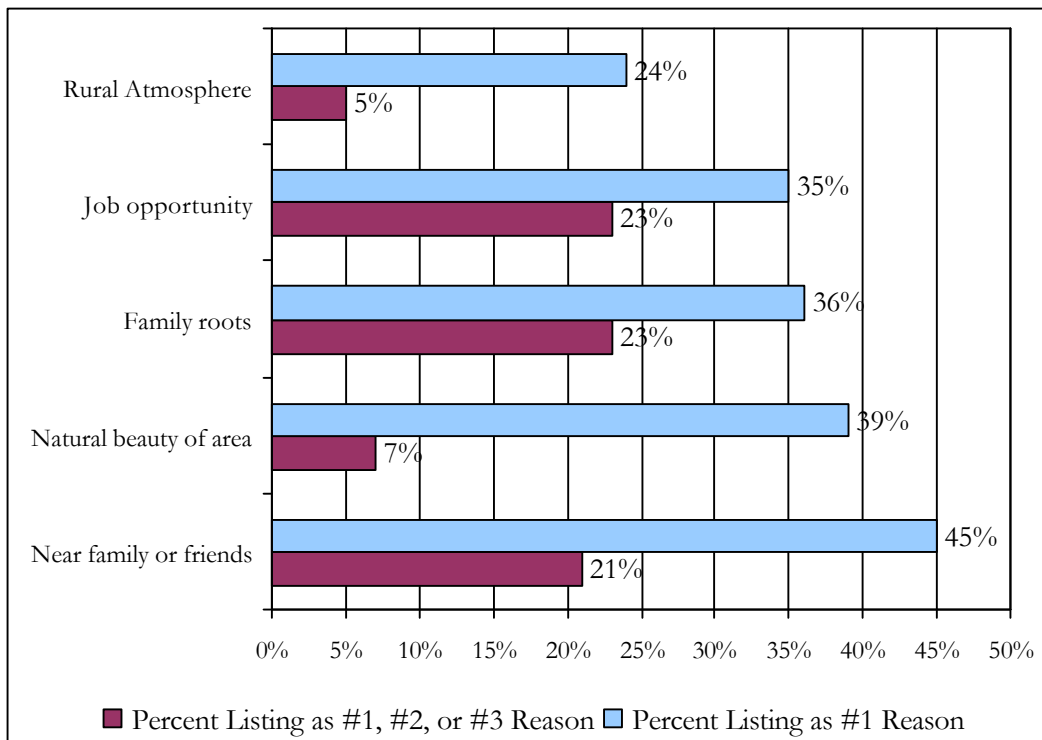
a) Demographic Information

Each survey included questions requesting basic demographic and statistical information. The survey sample was generally reflective of the overall adult population in the Study Area, except that it was over-represented in households that resided in single-family homes and owned their home, longer-term residents, and retirees—all of which are common in a mail survey.

b) Opinions on Existing Conditions

The survey attempted to get opinions on existing conditions, which is useful in understanding what people value. From a list of 18 choices, households were asked to identify, in order, the three most important reasons that the household chose Sauk County as a place to live. Figure 3 shows the top six responses to that question. “Family roots,” “Job opportunity,” and “Near family and friends” were three very common responses (particularly as the #1 response). “Natural beauty of the area” and “Rural atmosphere” rated highly as second or third choices.

Figure 3: Top Reasons for Choosing to Live in Sauk County



Ninety-two percent of respondents were satisfied with Sauk County as a place to live. Fifty-five percent were dissatisfied with travel conditions on Highway 12. Common reasons for dissatisfaction included: poor and dangerous road conditions, too much traffic, and not enough travel lanes.

The appearance of the Highway 12 corridor shapes residents’ and visitors’ image of the Study Area, and can either enhance or detract from overall quality of life. Understanding what people find attractive also provides guidance on future development decisions. Respondents were asked to rate the entire Highway 12 corridor divided into seven segments between the Sauk City bridge and the Interstate. The South Baraboo Range and the area within the Town of Prairie du Sac generally rated the highest. The appearance of the Highway 12 corridor north of West Baraboo generally rated the lowest.

c) Attitudes on Growth and Development

Several questions gathered initial impressions on future growth and development in the Study Area. Respondents were asked to indicate whether they “agreed,” “disagreed,” or had “no opinion” with 20 different statements suggesting future directions for the corridor communities and the County as a whole. Figure 4 lists some of those statements along with the percentage that agreed. On average, 15% responded “no opinion.”

Figure 4: Percentage of Respondents Agreeing with Statements on Future Directions

Statement	Percentage Agreeing
The scenic beauty and rural appearance along Highway 12 should be preserved through sign and other appearance regulations.	87%
Expanding Highway 12 can be done in a way that preserves the character of the communities along it.	86%
Coordinating the future land use plans of the communities along Highway 12 should be a high priority.	86%
It is generally becoming more difficult to get on Highway 12 from intersecting roads.	81%
Traffic is a growing problem along Highway 12 north of the City of Baraboo.	81%
Most new development along Highway 12 should occur next to areas that are already developed.	80%
Traffic is a growing problem along Highway 12 south of the City of Baraboo.	73%
Sauk County should promote the preservation of farmland along the highway south of the City of Baraboo.	68%

Households were also asked to rank the most desirable locations for new development. Figure 5 shows the average ranking for the four options provided, with 1 being the most desirable and 4 being the least. “In and near cities and villages” was considered the most desirable location for both new residential and business development; “In rural areas” was considered the least desirable.

Figure 5: Desired Locations for New Development

Residential	Business	Location
1.2	1.2	In and near existing cities and villages
2.6	2.7	In and near the Bluff View area
3.1	2.6	In and near the Ho-Chunk Casino area
3.0	3.5	In rural areas (away from cities and villages)

3. Corridor Vision Workshops

Corridor Vision Workshops were held in July 2002 at two different locations within the Study Area. The purpose of these workshops was to identify a shared future vision for the Highway 12 corridor and somewhat more detailed strategies for achieving that vision. In total, 79 residents attended the two workshops. Participants were asked to express their opinions about the Study Area’s strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. Attendees were then asked to develop Key Vision Elements (or goals) for the future of the corridor.

The top ranking vision statements at the workshop in Prairie du Sac included:

- Acquire right-of-way and building a Sauk City bypass as soon as possible.
- Build a trail from Sauk Prairie to the Badger Plant.
- Preserved greenspace/limit sprawl.
- Plan and design for safe crossings of Highway 12 for all modes of transportation.



The top ranking vision statements at the workshop in Baraboo included:

- Preserve rural character and scenic beauty.
- Promote well-planned, tightly controlled development in rural and urban areas.
- Reconstruct the highway north of the City of Baraboo within the existing Highway 12 alignment instead of building a new Baraboo bypass. (Over the course of the planning process, there were a wide variety of opinions expressed on this subject).
- Encourage planned Highway 12 commercial growth between Baraboo and the Interstate.

4. Focus Groups

Five focus group meetings were held in September 2002. The focus group concentrations were agriculture, business and economic development groups, schools of higher education, commercial-based recreation providers, and nature-based recreation interests. The consultant also conducted interviews with several area business and large property owners along and near Highway 12, including the Ho-Chunk Nation. The focus groups and interviews allowed the consultant and key stakeholders to discuss ideas and concerns about the future of the corridor in a relatively non-confrontational setting. In this type of setting, participants were more open to discussing issues that would likely not be discussed at a typical public meeting. During the focus groups and interviews, the consultants developed preliminary ideas for the future of the corridor and tested the viability of a range of potential recommendations and implementation tools.

5. Opportunities Open Houses

The Committee and consultant presented an overall vision for the corridor communities and alternative future growth and preservation scenarios for four planning districts—the Sauk Prairie Area, Baraboo Area, Tourist Entertainment Corridor, and Rural Areas—at open houses in early December 2002. These scenarios were based directly on earlier public input and Committee understanding of that input. At the meeting attendees were asked to comment on specific aspects of each scenario. A total of 75 people attended the open houses. Nearly 90% of attendees selected the “vision” scenario for each planning district as their preferred alternative. Attendees also provided guidance on their tolerances for various implementation activities, including zoning regulations, access control along Highway 12, public land acquisition, and binding intergovernmental agreements.

The Advisory Committee and the County Board were also asked to fill out similar questionnaires to gauge their opinions on the scenarios and the potential implementation activities. Once again, the Vision Scenarios were the preferred alternatives. The detailed results of the public, committee, and county board questionnaires are included in Appendix B.

6. Public and Government Review of Draft Plan

In March 2003, the Advisory Committee forwarded a public review draft of the *Plan* for full local government and public review. The consultant presented the draft *Plan* at three local government/public open houses in the Highway 12 corridor communities in April and May 2003. In summer 2003, the Advisory Committee and the governing bodies of eight of the ten participating communities adopted or endorsed the *Plan*. On September 23, the County Planning, Zoning, and Land Records Committee held a formal public hearing. Following the public hearing, the Committee adopted and recommended County Board adoption of the *Plan*. On October 21, 2003, the Sauk County Board of Supervisors adopted the *Growth Management Plan*.

