



Marathon County Comprehensive Plan Executive Summary 2016



Introduction to the Comprehensive Plan

The Executive Summary includes a brief overview of the Marathon County Comprehensive Plan which was adopted in February, 2016. The purpose of this summary is to provide a snapshot of the plan and provide guidance on where to look in the full plan for more detailed information and direction.

The Marathon County Comprehensive Plan will help guide County decision makers on a wide array of issues over the next twenty years in creating a preferred place to live, work, visit, and do business. The Marathon County Comprehensive Plan is a policy plan. The overall goal of the Comprehensive Plan is to add a county-level perspective and planning direction that complements and strengthens local planning efforts. It will also provide guidance to the 41 towns, 15 villages and 6 cities within the County, along with community partners. All these communities, working together, make Marathon County a special place.

Currently, the 135,000 County residents enjoy economic opportunity, quality schools, and strong communities, along with access to a wide variety of recreational options. Although the County compares well when other counties there is still room for improvement. Marathon County's goal is to become the Healthiest, Safest and Most Prosperous County in the State. Therefore, this plan provides the foundation to achieve this goal.

Mission and Vision

Mission Statement

Marathon County government serves people by leading, coordinating, and providing county, regional, and statewide initiatives. It directly or in cooperation with other public and private partners provides services and creates opportunities that make Marathon County and the surrounding area a preferred place to live, work, visit, and do business.

Vision Statement

Marathon County government leads by providing high quality infrastructure and integrated services and by developing trusting, collaborative relationships among diverse partners. It is proactive in enhancing health and safety, protecting the environment, and providing cultural, recreational, and economic opportunities which make Marathon County and the surrounding area a preferred place to live, work, visit and do business.

Framework for the Comprehensive Plan

The Comprehensive Plan, an overarching planning document, is one part of the overall planning process in Marathon County. **Figure 1-1** shows the relationship between the Vision and Mission, the Comprehensive Plan, and the Strategic Plan.

Figure 1-1: Planning Framework



Background

Marathon County has a strong tradition of planning. Numerous planning efforts have taken place since the last comprehensive planning process a decade ago. The 2006 plan was the first comprehensive plan developed for the County and its focus was more on meeting the requirements of the State Planning Law rather than being developed as a tool to guide the County as a whole.

This plan moves in a new direction, while still addressing the requirements outlined in Wisconsin Statutes 66.1001, to the extent applicable. That law requires that at minimum these elements or issues be discussed: Issues & Opportunities, Natural, Agricultural & Cultural Resources, Housing, Transportation, Utilities & Community Facilities, Economic Development, Land Use, Intergovernmental Cooperation, and Implementation. New topics and chapters added to this plan cover Health and Human Services, Water Resources, and Community Character.

Plan Development

Task Force

A nine member Comprehensive Plan Task Force was created at the beginning of the planning process and included members from the County Board. The Task Force members served as liaisons to their respective standing committees, see **Figure 1-2**. Marathon County staff and North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (Planning Team) provided support to the Task Force. The Task Force held ten meetings over the course of the project. Their role was to represent the county's best interests in making important decisions. The Task Force provided guidance for developing the overall Plan and helped guide many of the decisions regarding the goals, objectives and action steps necessary to carry out the Plan. The Task Force's ultimate responsibility was to provide a final draft long-term Comprehensive Plan for Marathon County Board action by December 31, 2015.

Planning Process

Development of the Comprehensive Plan took place from January 2014 to February 2016. As the County Board Task Force led the planning process, they were assisted by the Planning Team and County Department Heads, who provided expert insights. Public input was also sought at several stages of the plan update process, as outlined in the Public Participation Plan.

Marathon County staff held public meetings mid-way through the planning process to meet with the general public, town officials, and others about the Comprehensive Plan. As part of this process, staff reached out to all local governments throughout the County. A series of meetings were held to inform citizens about the planning process and request input. An opportunity to identify land use changes was also offered. Representatives from numerous towns attended these meetings.

The planning team working on the day-to-day work of the plan consisted of staff from the Conservation, Planning and Zoning Department and staff from the North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission. Marathon County administration was also represented.

Standing Committees

The Marathon County Board of Supervisors has nine standing committees: Finance and Property, Human Resources, Executive, Education and Economic Development, Environmental Resources, Health and Human Services, Infrastructure, Technology, and Public Safety. Early in the planning process in 2014, all standing committees participated in an exercise to help define **"What does a preferred place to live, work, visit, and do business look like?"** Standing committee discussions identified trends and challenges that may impact Marathon County becoming a preferred place and the assets that could be leveraged and the opportunities that could be explored for Marathon County to become the preferred place. Themes evolved which resulted in the development of the comprehensive plan's guiding principles.

Structure of the Plan

The Comprehensive Plan includes thirteen chapters, see **Figure 1-3**, along with numerous tables, charts, and maps. The various chapters cover many issues impacting Marathon County today and in the future.

Chapter one provides an introduction and overview of the Comprehensive Planning process. The next eleven chapters focus on various topics, including: demographics; health and human services; community character; natural resources; water resources; public safety; infrastructure; land use; education, workforce development, and economic development; recreation, tourism, and cultural resources; and intergovernmental cooperation.

Each of the chapters are generally laid out covering these basic sections: introduction, previous plans and studies, inventory of current conditions, issues, goals and objectives. To indicate current conditions and to establish a base for various indicators, "Indicator bars" are included throughout the chapters. These provide a ranking of Marathon County compared to other counties and the state. These also provide basic benchmarks for future planning efforts to monitor overall progress.

The final chapter, Implementation, includes an Action Plan, which identifies strategies or actions to move forward the various goals and objectives from each of the previous chapters. Future Strategic Planning efforts will focus and further prioritize the Comprehensive Plan.

Figure 1-2: Task Force Members

Supervisor	Standing Committee
Kurt Gibbs, Chair	Executive
Charles Soukup	Education and Economic Development
Arnold Schlei	Human Resources and Infrastructure
John Robinson	Health and Human Services
Sandi Cihlar	Environmental Resources
John Durham	Finance and Property
Craig McEwen	Public Safety
Ken Day	Health and Human Services
Matt Hildebrandt	Technology

Figure 1-3: Chapters

1. Introduction
2. Demographics
3. Health and Human Services
4. Community Character
5. Natural Resources
6. Water Resources
7. Public Safety
8. Infrastructure
9. Land Use
10. Education, Workforce Development, and Economic Development
11. Recreation, Tourism, and Cultural Resources
12. Intergovernmental Cooperation
13. Implementation

Guiding Principles

The Marathon County Comprehensive Plan is based on principles that call for actions and outcomes that meet the overarching goal to ensure that Marathon County is the healthiest, safest, and most prosperous county in Wisconsin. The guiding principles serve as the foundation for shaping and navigating the future, and will ensure that the Comprehensive Plan remains consistent with the vision of Marathon County as a preferred place to live, work, visit, and do business.

Crossroads of Wisconsin

Encourage decisions that support options to allow safe and efficient movement of people and goods in and through Marathon County by a variety of modal means.

Education and Economic Development

Epicenter

Encourage decisions that support lifelong education, workforce development, and diverse opportunities for economic growth.

Environmental Stewardship

Encourage decisions that enhance the ecology and natural resources of Marathon County, while preserving and protecting them from human impacts and development, for the benefit of current and future populations.

Health Focused

Encourage decisions that promote the physical, mental, and social health of the community through affordable access, health education, health care systems, and infrastructure to encourage healthy living at all stages of life.

Multi-Partners Cooperation

Encourage decisions that support cooperation and collaboration with local, county, state, and federal governments, public-private partnerships, nonprofits, and other organizations to improve communication and efficiency.

Recreation Hub

Encourage decisions that enhance the cultural, entertainment, and outdoor recreation amenities to ensure Marathon County's future as a year-round destination for residents and visitors.

Safe and Sound

Encourage decisions that support the promotion of public safety and a sense of personal security within the community.

Sense of Place

Encourage decisions that support and enhance local history, heritage, culture, values, social pride, and community character in Marathon County to foster growth and coordinated development and to establish a vibrant sense of place.

Sustainable Agriculture

Encourage decisions that support preservation of productive farmland, growth of agribusiness, and promote innovative farming practices to maintain a strong local agricultural economy which contributes to the local and global food system.

Embrace Innovation

Encourage decisions that support the utilization of new technologies and opportunities for innovation.



The Guiding Principles help protect the natural and agricultural resources of the County.

Marathon County Six Regions: Diversity of Land and People

Antigo Flats

The Antigo Flats region includes the towns of Harrison and Plover. The area is characterized by large tracts of publicly owned land and outdoor recreation areas (Bitzke Bird Walk, Dells of the Eau Claire, Ice Age Trail, and Plover River state fishery). Private lands are mixed agriculture and forest lands with scattered large lot residential development. The agriculture industry in the Antigo Flats region is primarily seed potato and vegetable crops.

Heart of America

The Heart of America region is named after the Heart of America's Dairyland Agricultural Enterprise Area in eastern Clark and western Marathon counties. The region includes the towns of Bern, Halsey, Hamburg, Berlin, Holton, Johnson, Rietbrock, Rib Falls, Hull, Frankfort, Wien, Cassel, Marathon, Brighton, Eau Pleine, Emmet, Spencer, McMillan, and Day; the villages of Dorchester, Unity, Spencer, Stratford, Fenwood, Edgar, Marathon City, and Athens; and the cities of Marshfield, Abbotsford, and Colby. Pre-settlement, the area was dominated by wetlands, which were drained to make way for agriculture. The region is characterized by a flat to gently rolling landscape, with large tracts of contiguous farmland, and forest in the wetter areas and along streams.

Wisconsin River Influence

The Wisconsin River influence region includes the Big Eau Pleine Reservoir, Lake DuBay, Wisconsin River, Mead Wildlife Area, and the surrounding area in the towns of Cleveland, Green Valley, Bergen, and Knowlton. The region is characterized by a surface water features, forest, and farmland.

Wisconsin Central

Wisconsin Central region includes the cities of Wausau, Schofield, and Mosinee; the Villages of Rothschild and Kronenwetter; and the towns of Stettin, Rib Mountain, Mosinee, and Guenther. The area is the urban center of the county and serves as the employment, higher education, goods and services provider, and social recreation center of the county. Agricultural lands in the Wisconsin Central region are historically under the most non-agricultural development pressure in the county due to the availability of urban amenities. With the downturn in the economy and resulting decreased housing construction, this development pressure has lessened in recent years. However, it is anticipated to return to pre-recession levels in the future.

The agriculture industry in the Wisconsin Central region includes greenhouses, grain, ginseng, dairy, and agribusinesses that provide agricultural services and products. Wisconsin Central serves as a regional marketplace for producers to sell goods at farmers markets and local businesses.

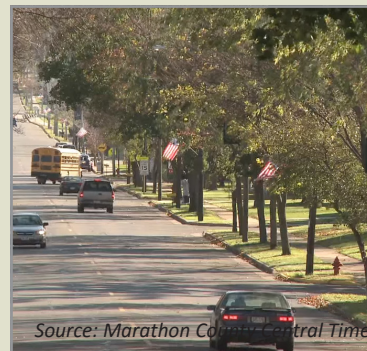
Lumberjack

The Lumberjack region includes the towns of Maine, Texas, Hewitt, Easton, Wausau, Weston, Ringle, and the village of Weston. The area is characterized by large tracts of forested lands with scattered smaller agricultural tracts, mixed with large lot residential development.

The agriculture industry in the Lumberjack region is smaller scale grain, beef, and "lifestyle farms". Lifestyle farming is characterized by family operations of small agri-tourism and activity farming such as corn mazes, pumpkin patches, and hayrides, etc.

Eastern Lakes

The Eastern Lakes region includes the towns of Norrie, Elderon, Franzen, Reid, and Bevent; and the village of Hatley. The area was glaciated, resulting in a forested landscape with many kettle lakes. The area is characterized by smaller tracts of forested and agricultural lands. Many residences are seasonal lake homes and hunting cabins. Residential development averages 1.8 acres, but lot size is highly variable due to the mix of larger residential area in agricultural areas, smaller residential area in the forested areas, and smallest residential area along lakeshores.



The Six Regions of Marathon County include many types of places.

Summary of the Chapters of the Plan

The overarching goal of the plan is that “**Marathon County is the healthiest, safest, and most prosperous county in Wisconsin.**” This goal was used to structure the Comprehensive Plan into three sections. The chapters of the plan take stock of the current situation in Marathon County by topic, identify key issues which may affect the County in the future, and propose a goal to work toward for each topic. This is a summary of the ten content chapters of the Comprehensive Plan.

Demographics

The Demographics chapter presents the most recent demographic information available at the writing of the plan to provide a context for the rest of the document. Information presented includes change in population and households, age, income, educational attainment, and employment. One section of the chapter shows the demographics of Marathon County compared to the State of Wisconsin and other neighboring counties. The second section breaks down the demographic differences between the six regions within Marathon County. See page 5 for more information about the six regions.

Healthiest

Health and Human Services

The Health and Human Services chapter identifies ten complex problems that affect the lives of people and communities in Marathon County, referencing existing programs. The need for partnerships between organizations and County departments is critical to address these issues. The ten complex problems identified are 1) disparities and vulnerable populations, including the economic wellbeing of children and adults, and persons with disabilities; 2) the need for healthy homes; 3) infectious diseases; 4) the need for safe food and water; 5) adverse childhood trauma; 6) the burden of chronic diseases, addressing healthy eating, active living, and tobacco use; 7) the culture of alcohol and other drugs; 8) access to health care; 9) mental health and substance abuse; and 10) an aging population.

Community Character

The Community Character chapter addresses housing, community character, and livability. The housing section takes an inventory of the current state of housing in Marathon County then identifies several housing issues including the age of housing, housing affordability, and special services to vulnerable populations such as the homeless and senior citizens. The community character section discusses the different community identities within Marathon County, both rural and urban, and the important role they play in establishing community identities. Livability is defined in the plan as the sum of the factors that add up to a community’s quality of life. Six livability principles are put forth to guide decision making.

Natural Resources

Marathon County has identified natural resource protection as critical because the economic strength and vitality of our community is dependent on the quality of these resources. The Natural Resource chapter is divided into four sections. The air resources section includes climate and air quality. The land resources section includes the terrain, soil resources, and mining. The farmland resources section includes agriculture and farmland preservation. The biological resources section includes vegetation and wildlife.

Water Resources

Water resources are given their own chapter, rather than being a piece of the Natural Resources chapter to emphasize their importance and include greater depth of information. The Water Resources chapter addresses surface waters, groundwater, water quality, and water use.

Safest

Public Safety

The Public Safety chapter covers organizations, such as law enforcement, fire departments, emergency medical services, and emergency management departments, which provide public safety services to the County. The 911 communications network is discussed, as are crime and corrections. Sections on vehicle and road safety and on hazard mitigation close out the chapter.

Infrastructure

The Infrastructure chapter includes two major sections: transportation and utilities. The transportation section includes the road network, transit service, bicycle and pedestrian facilities, airports, and freight services such as rail and trucking. The utilities section includes sanitary sewer service, wastewater management, water utilities, energy utilities, telecommunications services, and solid waste management.

Land Use

The Land Use chapter discusses the different patterns of development that are found in Marathon County, such as metropolitan and rural development and agricultural uses. The existing land uses and land use changes, as well as expected future land use are discussed as well. Current land use regulatory tools are included, such as zoning, land division regulations, and the farmland preservation program.

Most Prosperous

Education, Workforce Development, and Economic Development

This chapter addresses three key topics under the aim of being the Most Prosperous county. Education includes the public school districts in the County, as well as higher education, technical training, and the library system. Workforce development looks at labor force and programs to assist job seekers, workers, and employers. Economic development encompasses job creation, economic growth, and quality of life, with a discussion of the key industries and drivers of the local economy.

Recreation, Tourism, and Cultural Resources

This chapter describes the recreation amenities, tourism and visitor facilities, and cultural resources in Marathon County. The recreation amenities consist primarily of a strong county park and forest unit system, as well as several prominent state and private facilities. Tourism is important to the local economy, so attention is paid to current tourist attractors and opportunities for expansion. The cultural resources section includes a history of Marathon County, as well as a catalogue of the historic properties and sites and the arts and performing arts spaces in the County.

Intergovernmental Cooperation

The Intergovernmental Cooperation chapter describes existing activities that Marathon County uses to coordinate with other various units of government including municipalities, school districts, the State of Wisconsin, and the federal government. The chapter summarizes the major challenges and issues regarding intergovernmental cooperation and identifies mechanisms for cooperation and coordination, including intergovernmental agreements, contracts, and regulatory authority.

Implementation

The Implementation chapter discusses the tools, both regulatory and non-regulatory, that facilitate implementation of the Plan, as well as the process for plan adoption, monitoring, and amendments. The chapter also includes the Action Plan, which includes the goals and objectives identified in each chapter, as well as proposed action steps to help reach those goals. The full Action Plan can be found on pages 158 to 165 of the Plan. A summary of the goals and objectives is included in this Plan Summary.

Summary of the Action Plan

The overarching goal of this plan is that “**Marathon County is the healthiest, safest, and most prosperous county in Wisconsin**”. This goal was used to structure the Comprehensive Plan into three sections breaking healthiest, safest, and most prosperous into separate chapters. Achieving this big, overarching goal will require many different small steps taken concurrently in a coordinated effort across Marathon County. This Action Plan was designed to help Marathon County improve in the many interrelated areas necessary to become the healthiest, safest, and most prosperous county in Wisconsin.

The Action Plan is structured into goals, objectives, and actions. Goals are statements about Marathon County’s aspirations in the topic area. Objectives are vision statements which provide direction to the subtopics within the areas of each goal. Actions are key steps which should be taken on the road to meeting the objective and reaching the goal, and can be found in the full Plan.

Each chapter concluded with goals and objectives which address the issues identified in the chapter. The Action Plan compiles the goals and objectives from each chapter and includes a list of action steps which can be taken to reach the goals. The objectives are drawn from the content of the chapters, focusing on the major topics within the chapter that need to be addressed moving forward. Not every topic mentioned in the plan has a corresponding objective in this Action Plan.

Healthiest

Chapter 3: Health and Human Services

Health and Human Services Goal: Marathon County promotes the physical, mental, and social health of the community and takes steps to support healthy living for residents at all stages of life.

1. Persons with disabilities and older adults will live safely and independently.
2. Promote access to safe, healthy, affordable food.
3. Ensure that every child makes it to adulthood with health, stability, education, and growth opportunities.
4. Prevent and decrease the effects of chronic disease.
5. Maximize innovative technology, systems, and infrastructure to meet current and emerging health and social needs.
6. Promote innovative modes for injury prevention.
7. Ensure that every person has local access to effective mental health treatment.
8. Ensure Marathon County is an open, inclusive, and diverse place to live and work.

Chapter 4: Community Character

Community Character Goal: The local history, culture, social pride, and community character are established and enhanced as defining elements which make Marathon County a vibrant and inviting place to be.

1. Promote a variety of safe and affordable housing options that meet the needs of all community members.
2. Preserve and protect the county’s landscape, environmental resources and sensitive lands while encouraging healthy communities.
3. Enhance the unique characteristics of all communities by investing in healthy safe and walkable neighborhoods throughout the county.
4. Enhance community livability.

Chapter 5: Natural Resources

Natural Resources Goal: The natural resources of Marathon County are managed in a balanced way (so they are protected and preserved) for current and future generations’ health, enjoyment, and benefit.

1. Protect vulnerable natural resources.
2. Promote sound land use decision that conserve and preserve natural resources in decisions with economic development and growth.
3. Mitigate and adapt to climate change impacts.
4. Protect and improve air quality.
5. Protect and improve soil health.
6. Promote balanced use of non-metallic mineral resources and ensure mine reclamation.
7. Protect and preserve prime agricultural areas.
8. Protect and sustainably manage public and private county forest resources.
9. Manage solid waste and contaminants to reduce negative impacts on the environment and on health.

Chapter 6: Water Resources

Water Resources Goal: The water resources in Marathon County are of the highest quality, for the safety of residents and the health of aquatic ecosystems, and are protected from damaging behaviors like overuse and pollution.

1. Protect and enhance surface water resources and natural habitat areas.
2. Manage lake and reservoir resources to balance concerns of shoreland residents, users, and local businesses.
3. Protect and enhance the quantity and quality of potable groundwater and potable surface water supplies.
4. Reduce agricultural nonpoint runoff to surface water (soil sediment, organics, and nutrients).

Safest

Chapter 7: Public Safety

Public Safety Goal: Marathon County is a safe and secure community for all residents and visitors.

1. Provide cost-effective and high quality public safety services.
2. Mitigate the impacts of the heroin and methamphetamine epidemics in Marathon County through evidence-based practices.
3. Reduce recidivism.
4. Improve road safety and reduce crashes
5. Plan for appropriate disaster mitigation preparedness, response, and recovery.

Chapter 8: Infrastructure

Transportation Goal: The transportation infrastructure in Marathon County is maintained to the highest standards to allow safe and efficient movement of people, goods, and services in and through the County.

1. Provide a safe, efficient, fiscally sustainable, multimodal transportation system.
2. Improve access management on major roadways.

Utilities Goal: The utilities infrastructure in Marathon County is maintained to the highest standards to support the residents and businesses of the County.

1. Promote efficient and coordinated sewer and water expansion.
2. Ensure compliance with state codes for new and replacement private on-site waste treatment systems.
3. Promote energy conservation and the increased use of renewable energy.
4. Ensure adequate energy and telecommunications services.
5. Strive to provide affordable, accessible, high-speed internet access throughout the County.
6. Provide cost-efficient solid waste management.

Chapter 9: Land Use

Land Use Goal: Marathon County makes sound land use decisions which balance the needs of agriculture, recreation, economic development, and growth to wisely maximize the land's potential.

1. Minimize scattered rural development and preserve rural character.
2. Preserve active farming.
3. Encourage redevelopment of under-utilized areas.
4. Provide tools for managing and coordinating growth.

Most Prosperous

Chapter 10: Education, Workforce Development, and Economic Development

Education Goal: Every child and adult in Marathon County has the opportunity to get a quality education.

1. Ensure that every person has the opportunity for education and employment to be self-supporting.
2. Support a high-quality and cost effective public school system.

3. Continue support for University of Wisconsin—Marathon County.
4. Continue support for Northcentral Technical College (NTC) and other higher education institutions.
5. Provide high-quality library service.

Workforce Development Goal: Marathon County is a community where every person can find a family supporting job and every business can have a strong workforce.

1. Ensure the future availability of a skilled and flexible workforce prepared to meet the needs of both existing and emerging industries and technologies.
2. Promote and increase communication between economic development, workforce development, and other organizations.

Economic Development Goal: Marathon County has a diverse economy that is a place of opportunities where people and businesses can grow and be successful.

1. Encourage development and redevelopment of key employment centers in areas that possess strong market potential, provide good transportation access for workers, and promote the efficient movement of goods.
2. Organize effectively and develop programs and tools to support key industries and a healthy economy.
3. Create an innovative atmosphere to foster an entrepreneurially supportive environment.
4. Encourage a globally competitive economy.
5. Maintain infrastructure to support economic growth.
6. Support the Central Wisconsin Airport.

Chapter 11: Recreation, Tourism, and Cultural Resources

Recreation, Tourism, and Cultural Resources Goal: Marathon County takes advantage of its many natural and cultural amenities to provide opportunities for residents and visitors to be active and engaged in a wide array of activities and events.

1. Ensure access to quality, accessible, affordable recreation opportunities.
2. Promote tourism throughout the County.
3. Encourage protection of historically significant buildings and sites from development impacts.
4. Increase and expand awareness of cultural resources.

Chapter 12: Intergovernmental Cooperation

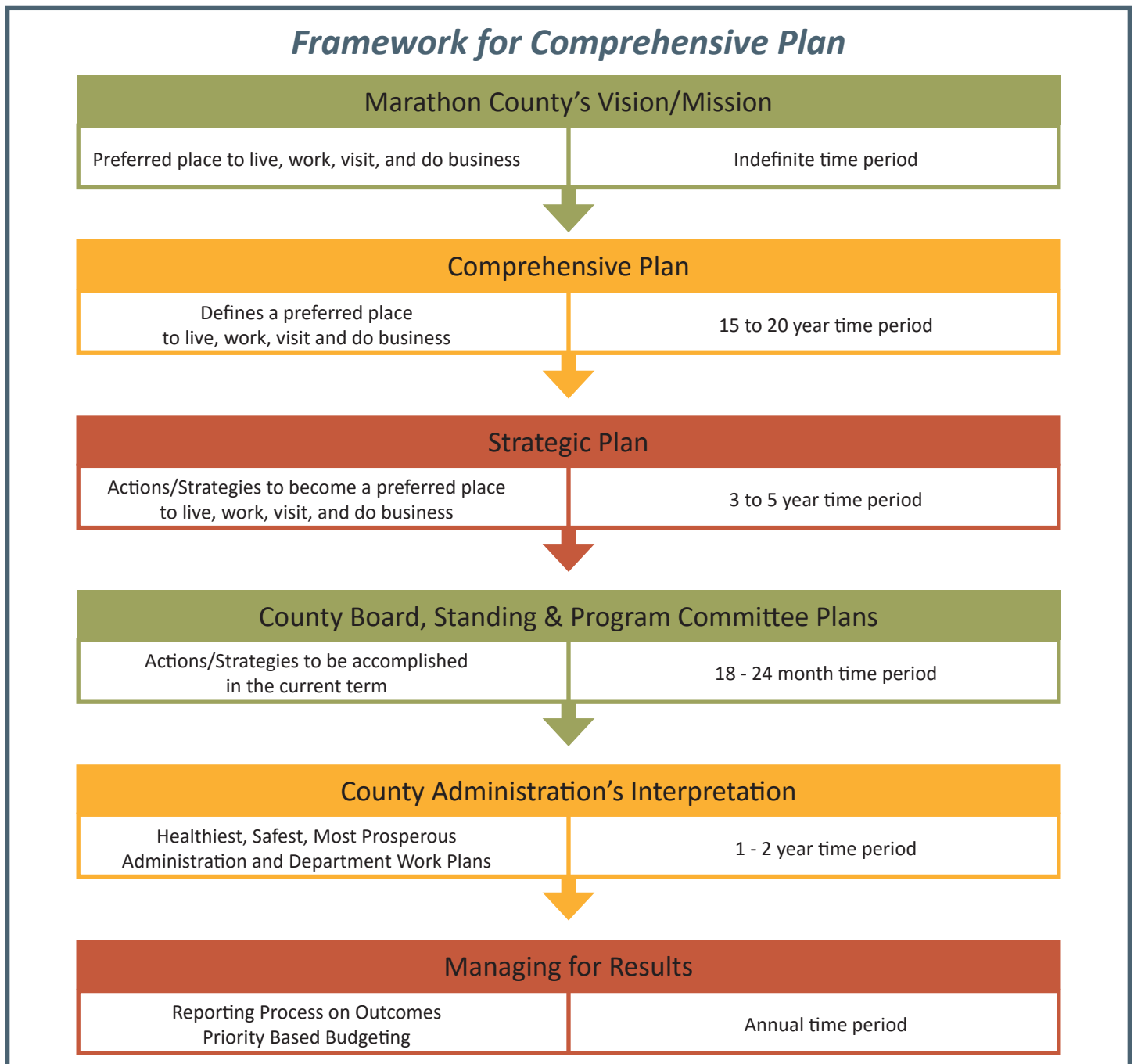
Intergovernmental Cooperation Goal: Marathon County is a cooperative and collaborative partner with other municipalities and organizations to most effectively and efficiently provide services to residents.

1. Promote technology and resource sharing.
2. Encourage proactive conflict resolution.
3. Promote cost-effective public services.
4. Provide coordination of regional development and planning activities.
5. Encourage participation in all levels of government.

Organizational Framework for the Comprehensive Plan

The Comprehensive Plan is the foundational “issues” reference and planning document that guides the overall planning, budgeting, policy developing, programming, and results monitoring process in Marathon County. Figure 1-1 shows the relationship of the Vision and Mission (our collective sense of who we are, how we want to serve our residents and visitors, and what we wish to be as a county) and the Comprehensive and Strategic Plans which serve as guiding documents that identify specific goals, objectives, and implementation strategies.

The figure furthermore conveys the flow of work generated by the Comprehensive Plan into policies and strategies (standing committees) and specific work plans (administrative and program departments), as well as the tracking, assessment, and reporting of our proposed program’s outcomes and investments to ensure community financial and service accountability (Managing for Results – Balanced Scorecard).



Collaborative Governance

In addition to the Action Plan, the Comprehensive Plan contains the following recommendations for internal process changes to improve the operations of Marathon County Government.

Goal 1: Improve community engagement and community education through communication, technology, and social media.

The first goal of Collaborative Governance is about helping community members get informed and involved with government and improving the community. The tools of communication, technology, and social media were key elements in how the Department Heads envision community engagement and education being strengthened. Three ideas were recommended on how to potentially reach this goal. First, consider hiring a County Public Information Official (PIO). This role would ensure that the public receives a consistent message with an organized, proactive response. Second, develop a stronger portal for the community to connect with government information. This portal could potentially be an enhanced version of the County website. Finally, hold public dialogues which invite the community into conversation with government about relevant subjects. The Ketterling public engagement method was suggested as a balanced way to inform as well as engage.

Goal 2: To improve customer service, Marathon County must keep pace with technology demands and the expectations of the public.

The expectations the public has of their government's responsiveness have increased dramatically with advances in technology. Marathon County government recognizes that keeping pace with technological advances is necessary to maintain a high level of customer service. The first recommendation is to enhance the capacity to receive electronic information from citizens. This includes the Emergency Services' Dispatch's ability to receive advanced 911 social media (text messages, twitter, VoIP) as well as the Highway department among others. Second, Marathon County government should consider utilizing blast messages to communicate with the public based on interest, such as road conditions, traffic, crime, meetings, and parks. Third, utilize current technology to communicate messages with the public. For example, rather than writing step-by-step directions for something, consider making a YouTube video to explain.



The Marathon County Courthouse is located in Wausau.

Goal 3: To improve efficiency of public resources and increase achievement of desired results.

Using public resources in an efficient and effective manner is vastly important. The first recommendation towards reaching this goal is to create a culture of continual learning within County government. Investing in training opportunities for staff at all levels will improve the efficiency of work. Second, there is a need to focus on departmental and inter-departmental planning for desired results by scheduling and allocating structured time and resources on specific issues and initiatives. Finally, drive down decision making and be willing to accept a greater degree of risk with decisions.

Goal 4: Encourage citizens to express their needs and to be part of the solution.

An active and vocal citizenry is necessary to reach the goals of the community and reach solutions to complex problems. The three top recommended action steps for this goal are to 1) offer forums for communities as needed to publicize issues, 2) train government officials to develop engagement skills, and 3) build relationships with media outlets.



County Goal:
Marathon County is the healthiest, safest, and most prosperous county in Wisconsin.

Marathon County Comprehensive Plan 2016

Adopted by the Marathon County Board of Supervisors on February 16, 2016.

Developed by staff from the Conservation, Planning, and Zoning Department with assistance by the North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission.

Read the full plan online at www.ncwrpc.org/marathon/county