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Smart Growth News

Wisconsin

Verona Hopes for Record Crowd at Final Comprehensive Plan Open House

After year-long work to incorporate public input in a 20-year city Comprehensive Plan that the state's 1999 Smart Growth law requires by the end of December, Verona officials spared no effort to give local and nearby residents, and others involved or affected, yet another chance to comment on the plan draft at the fourth and last open house, March 30, sending the text to the state, Dane County and other area governments and groups, posting it online, and publicizing it through TV, fliers and e-mails to Chamber of Commerce members, writes *Verona Press* editor Jim Ferolle, all "to keep the city's goals as harmonious as possible with those of its neighbors and residents."

City Planning Director Bruce Sylvester looked forward to a record crowd.

"If people want to weigh in, they still can, and if they don't, it's probably going to stay exactly the way it is," he told the editor. "We can still add things, and we can still change things."

Right now, the editor observes, the plan sets 24 goals, ranging from rather general, such as "protect the natural environment" and "work with other units of government," to city-specific ones.

The city, just a mile southwest of Madison, would maintain its "small-town" feel, control growth, use its sports facilities for self-promotion, move to expand its industrial and manufacturing base, concentrate economic development in the downtown area, and -- perhaps to some consternation -- continue taking advantage of its extraterritorial powers to block outer development and preserve farmland.

"That is a clear goal in this plan," said Director Sylvester, with the editor noting that the city would also require sidewalks for all new projects, try to improve traffic flow along key routes, build "first class" public facilities, ensure high-density downtown housing and "carefully evaluate" retail proposals for areas other than downtown and the Verona Avenue corridor, convert North Main Street to commercial uses, and make its transportation systems accommodate bicycles and alternative vehicles.

The wording on these last several recommendations "is far softer" and open to varied interpretations, the editor comments, mentioning "encourage," which "could mean anything from simply giving positive lip service to providing economic incentives."

The Comprehensive Plan Committee explained the vagueness by the need "to keep the city's options open rather than be too prescriptive and force the hands of future leaders," the editor writes, adding that the committee will discuss the input from the final open house and possible plan readjustments at a meeting in April, with a formal public hearing in the summer, and plan adoption expected in the fall.

See the plan draft at <http://www.ci.verona.wi.us/> -- *Verona Press* 3/23/2009

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