

**CITY OF ONAWAY**

**COMPREHENSIVE PLAN**

**Adopted October 7, 2009**

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### INTRODUCTION

Purpose of the Comprehensive Plan .....	1
The Planning Approach .....	2
Geography and History of Onaway .....	5
Locational Map .....	8

### INVENTORY

Population .....	9
Population Characteristics .....	9
Current and Historical Census Data .....	11
Employment and Economy .....	13
Land Use .....	15
Residential .....	15
Commercial/Industrial .....	16
Recreation/Open Space .....	17
Present Land Use Map .....	18
Services.....	19
Transportation and Communications.....	19
Utilities .....	20
Fire and Police Protection .....	21
Education, Health and Welfare .....	21
Government.....	22
Natural Resources.....	24

PROBLEMS, NEEDS AND ISSUES .....	26
GOALS, OBJECTIVE AND POLICIES .....	31
Future Land Use.....	42
Future Land Use Map.....	44
ADOPTION AND IMPLEMENTATION PROCEDURES .....	45

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **PURPOSE OF THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN**

The comprehensive plan serves as a guide for change and growth within a community. Citizens should realize that change is inevitable, and that no area can remain completely stable in the midst of fluctuating economic and social conditions throughout the region, state or nation.

Without a statement defining residents' needs and desires any changes that do take place would be haphazard or influenced by interests outside of the community.

By establishing a comprehensive plan, the community shows its concern for having control over its own future. The plan serves as an aid for avoiding land use conflicts and for providing sufficient, effective public services.

It provides a means for preserving those aspects of the City's character that the residents are content with, while defining places where improvements can be made.

All of this is done with the intent of insuring a decent quality of life for the future in Onaway by creating a logical system for dealing with change and development.

## THE PLANNING APPROACH

In order for any plan to be effective a careful analysis must be made of all the elements that interact to form the City and its social and economic environment.

First, the history of the area should be reviewed. This gives an idea of the changes that have taken place over the years, and helps to explain how the City reached its present status. Next, the elements that made up the City at the present time should be considered. It is the interaction of these elements and the residents' feelings about their quality that provide the major impetus for changes that will take place in the future.

In order to better understand the people and activities in the City, the following outline will be used for the analysis section of the plan.

### Population

Population Characteristics

Population Projections

Economy/Employment

### Land Use

Residential Land Use

Commercial/Industrial Land Uses

Recreation/Open Space

Present Land Use Map

## Services

Transportation/Communications

Utilities

Fire and Police Protection

Education, Health and Welfare

Government

## Natural Resources

Climate

Geology

Soils

By looking at the existing characteristics of the City and by gauging the residents' feelings about the benefits or shortcomings of each element, problems, needs and issues of concern can be defined.

This process involves establishing at least a partial consensus on both how the community can be improved and on characteristics desired for the area 5, 10, 20, or more years in the future.

This particular plan is primarily a short-range document, giving the community an idea of immediate steps that can be taken for improvement. Long-range goals must be kept in mind, however, and planning should continue through time.

Once the problems and needs of the community are more clearly defined, it is possible to establish the goals, objectives and policies that will be used to guide future development in Onaway.

Based on the problems and issues noted previously, the goals and objectives represent the general feelings on growth and development, the results the residents would like to get from the comprehensive plan.

The policies are the steps that need to be taken in order to meet the established objectives. It is very important to consider the impact of these policies on the future of Onaway.

This section of the plan will include an evaluation of possible impacts in order to give officials and residents a better understanding of where the plan could lead the community.

The next step in the development of the comprehensive plan is the representation of the information gathered on the future direction of the City in a proposed land use plan.

This part of the document shows where physical changes in the community should be made, where residential, commercial, industrial or open space expansion should be encouraged or discouraged, and where existing conditions should be allowed to continue.

The future land use plan has to consider all elements studied up to this point, taking into account the problems to be solved, the objectives that were established for future growth, and the citizens' concerns for the direction of their community.

The comprehensive plan should also be viewed in a regional context. For this purpose, both the Presque Isle County and Allis Township comprehensive plans will be reviewed.

In order to avoid conflicts, planning objective and future land use considerations established for the area by the county and township plans will be weighed when finalizing these elements of the Onaway plan.

The final section of the comprehensive plan presents a program for implementation, outlining various methods that can be used to fit the objectives of the plan into place within the community.

The planning process cannot stop at this point, however. Using all of the information collected, the analyses made, and the direction established by the planning policies and land use proposals, it is up to the residents and officials of the community to work toward making the plan a reality.

Only by keeping the development policies and objectives in mind on a day to day basis, using them as a guide for making decisions on possible changes in the physical and economic make-up of the City, and updating them as time passes, can order and constructive growth be encouraged.



## **GEOGRAPHY AND HISTORY**

Onaway is located in Allis Township at the western end of Presque Isle County. This is in the extreme northeast portion of Michigan's Lower Peninsula. The City is surrounded primarily by open farmland, with Black Lake, a popular summer home area, five miles north. Two major state trunk lines, M-68 and M-33, intersect within the City.

Onaway's location is somewhat unique within the region in that it is not adjacent to I-75 and is inland from Lake Huron. Most other northeast Michigan cities have developed either along the Interstate (Grayling, Gaylord) or the shoreline (Alpena, Cheboygan).

The influence of the City's location on population, tourism, economic development and other aspects of the community should be considered when analyzing current characteristics and establishing a plan for the future.

Very little is known about the prehistory of the Onaway area. Northern Michigan was inhabited soon after the last ice age (about 6000 B.C.) by wandering groups of hunters and gatherers.

These people depended on wild plants and animals as their food source and spent much of the year moving about the area to various hunting and fishing grounds.

During the time of European exploration and settlement, the Chippewa were living in the Presque Isle County area. The Native American population was fairly small when the lands of northern Michigan were ceded to the government in the Treaty of Washington in 1836.

Modern development in the Onaway area began in the late nineteenth century. Through the 1870's major settlements in northern Michigan were located along the lakeshores, with scattered homesteads and some lumbering in the inland forests.

In the early 1880's the Presque Isle and Little Traverse Road was completed from Petoskey to Presque Isle Harbor. This made the interior portion of the region both more attractive and more accessible to settlers.

In 1881, Allis Township was organized and, by 1883, a north-south road was completed from Black Lake to the Allis Township line. This intersected the Presque Isle and Little Traverse Road at the center of the City of Onaway.

Merritt Chandler had contracted with the state to build the roads that opened the interior to settlement and trade. In accordance with the policies of the Swamp Land Board of Control, he was paid with 40,000 acres of forestland near these roads.

To a great extent, his efforts lead to the growth that was to take place in the area and the establishment of the Village of Onaway. These events were almost entirely based on the utilization of the region's dense forests.

Between 1877 and 1899, the population of the area grew, from 35 to over 500, as lumbering mills and manufacturing plants were established. In 1899, Onaway was incorporated as a village and by 1900 the population had grown to 1200.

The Detroit and Mackinaw Railroad completed its tracks through Onaway to Tower in 1901, opening up markets downstate for wood products from the area.

Onaway incorporated as a city in 1903. By 1904 the population reached 2400 and the City had amenities including newspapers, schools, hotels and opera houses as well as water and phone systems.

An unsuccessful attempt was made to relocate the county seat in Onaway. Following that, a move was started to create an entirely new county, joining western Presque Isle County with portions of eastern Cheboygan County. This also was unsuccessful.

Regardless of these political failures, Onaway continued to prosper and remained an active population and business center through the early decades of the twentieth century.

The 1920 population was 2800, the largest recorded for the City. In 1926, a fire destroyed the American Wood Rim Company, severely hurting the local economy, and by 1930 only 1500 people lived in Onaway.

Growth and economic development continued to decline as marketable timber resources were depleted. This was the case throughout the area, but portions of the county along Lake Huron were able to turn to limestone extraction to take up the losses in jobs and revenue.

The interior region did not have the extensive resources or the access to lake shipping that would have aided their economic transition. Onaway remained a commercial center for the immediate area, but its status as a regional center of business and industry diminished as the wood resources of the area were exhausted.

## INVENTORY

### POPULATION

#### Population Characteristics

As mentioned in the preceding section, Onaway's population reached its high point of 2800 in 1920. At that time it was the largest unit of government in Presque Isle County.

With the depletion of the area's timber resources and the shift in the county's economy to limestone extraction based along the Lake Huron shore, the City's population declined to 1500 in 1930. Census figures since that time show a pattern of continued gradual population loss to a 2000 figure of 993.

Why has the population dropped? The boundary limits of the City have not gotten smaller over time, nor have homes been replaced by businesses. That said, the number of homes in Onaway has decreased over time, as more than 50 percent of the City's homes were built prior to 1960, with 37 percent built prior to 1939.

Neighbors in need of space for a garage, or wishing to increase the size of their yards, have torn old houses down. Others sit empty. The number of occupied housing units in Onaway dropped by five percent between 1990 and 2000. Eleven percent of the City's housing units are vacant, more than twice the state average of five percent.

In addition, the homes that are occupied are occupied by fewer people. Census data indicates that homes that once housed families with children now house single individuals, often senior citizens.

In fact, 42 percent of Onaway's homes are occupied by just one person (the state average is 26 percent), and in 60 percent of those instances, that homeowner is at least 65 years old (true in just 36 percent of those instances statewide).

While Onaway's population decreased by 10 percent between 1990 and 2000, the population in the greater Onaway area (Allis, North Allis, Case, Ocqueoc, Bearinger, Forest, and Waverly townships) increased by 21 percent during that same period.

Of the 753 homes built or installed in the greater Onaway area between 1990 and 1999, only five percent were built or installed within the City limits, where lots are smaller and taxes are higher than in the townships, and water and sewer utility rates exist.

A large percentage of Onaway's population lives below the poverty line (26.9 percent versus the state average of 10.5), with Onaway's 1999 median household income of \$20,787 well under half of Michigan's median household income of \$44,667.

## 2000 CENSUS DATA

	<u>Onaway</u>	<u>Presque Isle County</u>	<u>State</u>
Percentage of population 65 and over	17.0	22.3	12.3
Percentage without high school diploma	30.8	23.0	16.6
Percentage with college degree	10.6	17.5	28.8
Percentage married	35.0	62.8	53.9
Percentage 21-64 with disability	34.7	18.8	18.1
Percentage 65+ with disability	57.0	41.8	42.3
Percentage in labor force	50.5	51.3	64.6
Median household income (\$)	20,787	31,656	44,667
Percentage drawing social security	44.0	41.1	26.2
Percentage drawing other public assistance	19.7	8.1	7.8
Percentage living below poverty line	26.9	10.3	10.5
Percentage of homes built before 1940	36.6	19.0	16.9
Percentage of homes valued under \$50,000	56.2	21.4	9.9
Percentage of homes valued over \$100,000	1.7	31.1	58.7
Median value of home (\$)	46,000	77,800	115,600
Percentage of households without a vehicle	15.6	5.6	7.7
Percentage of households with no phone	8.9	3.3	2.6
Rental units as percentage of total homes	36.2	14.4	26.2
Percentage paying < \$500 per month for rent	83.8	74.5	39.1
Median rent (\$)	271	345	546

## HISTORICAL POPULATION FIGURES

### POPULATION (1900-2000)

	<u>1950</u>	<u>1960</u>	<u>1970</u>	<u>1980</u>	<u>1990</u>	<u>2000</u>
Onaway						
Population	1,421	1,388	1,262	1,084	1,039	993
% + or -	(1.9)	(2.3)	(9.1)	(14.1)	(4.2)	(4.4)
PI County						
Population	11,996	13,117	12,836	14,267	13,743	14,411
% + or -	(2.1)	9.3	(2.1)	11.1	(3.7)	4.9
NE MI						
Population	71,617	82,962	94,106	115,779	122,886	141,199
%+ or -	5.2	15.8	13.4	23.0	6.1	14.9

### AGE DISTRIBUTION (1900-2000)

	<u>POPULATION</u>	<u>MEDIAN AGE</u>	<u>% &lt; 18</u>	<u>% 18-64</u>	<u>% 65+</u>
Onaway					
1990	1,039	N/A	25.8	51.5	22.7
2000	993	38.3	26.1	56.9	17.0
PI County					
1990	13,743	N/A	25.5	54.7	19.8
2000	14,411	45.1	20.9	56.8	22.3
State					
1990	9,295,297	N/A	26.5	61.6	11.9
2000	9,938,444	35.5	26.1	61.6	12.3

## Employment and Economy

The largest single employer in the Onaway area is the United Auto Workers Reuther Training and Recreation Center located northwest of the City. The staff is seasonal, however, ranging from only a few employees in the winter months to over 100 at the peak of the summer season.

Presque Isle Electric and Gas Cooperative Cooperative, located just east of the City, is the largest year-round employer, with close to 70 employees. The major employers in the Onaway area are:

1. Reuther Education Center (Waverly Township)
2. Presque Isle Electric Co-op (Allis Township)
3. Onaway Area Community Schools (Allis Township)
4. Tube Fab/Roman Engineering (Afton)
5. Brewbaker Furniture (Onaway)
6. Brewbaker Housing (Onaway)
7. Moran Iron Works (Forest Township)
8. Onaway Community Federal Credit Union (Onaway)

Based on employment by type of business, the largest single sector of Onaway's economy is concerned with retail trade. This is followed by education, manufacturing, professional services and construction.

The retail trade sector of the economy serves not only residents of the City, but also people living in the surrounding areas, including Black Lake, Millersburg, Tower, and Canada Creek Ranch, and those visiting the area for seasonal recreation.



Although specific vacation patterns may be altered by increasing energy costs, the northern Michigan region should still serve as an accessible, desirable recreation area for people throughout the midwestern United States and Canada, and the Onaway area should continue to benefit from the tourist and summer resident trade.

Though there is no data on the unemployment rate for the City of Onaway, the unemployment rate for Presque Isle County was 14.2 percent in 2008 and 24.5 percent in March 2009. The high unemployment rate has contributed to a lack of economic activity and an inability to keep younger residents in the City.

An additional problem is the City's relatively low tax base. In 2008, the state equalized value for all property in the City was \$15,363,670, while the townships it borders had taxable values of \$28,941,756 (Allis) and \$23,211,497 (North Allis).

The lack of tax base has made it difficult for the City to make the municipal improvements necessary to pave the way for economic sustainability, and has made it necessary for the City to proceed slowly on projects and seek grant assistance whenever possible.

## LAND USE ACTIVITIES

Land uses within the City of Onaway follow fairly consistent lines. The greatest percent of land is taken up by residential use. The areas south of State Street and Washington Avenue are almost entirely residential.

The area north of State to Cedar and the railroad tracks is also primarily residential. The area running roughly from Michigan and Washington Avenues to State Street and then along State to First is fronted almost entirely by commercial facilities, while Main Street north of Cedar (M-211) has some commercial facilities and the county airport.

The Presque Isle Co-op and a county road department garage are located on M-68 east of town. Onaway's existing land use patterns are shown on Page 18.

### Residential

A 2009 Onaway housing survey counted 500 housing units, including apartments. The majority of these (385) were single unit structures, with most of the rest located within Lynn Street Manor, the Jamestown Apartments, Onaway Apartments, and Shady Grove Trailer Park.

Of the 385 single-family units, 200, or 52%, were built before 1960. This is a much higher proportion of homes nearly 50 years old than either the state or the county.

This could point to a need for housing rehabilitation or new construction programs to improve the City's housing stock. Table 5 gives the housing data available from the 2000 census.

The area surrounding Onaway has also experienced residential development. The shoreline of Black Lake has been platted and subdivided extensively, as were the other large lake areas in the county.

Many of the lots were 50 feet wide or smaller and the area is fairly crowded, especially during the summer months. Forested and agricultural land in adjoining townships, especially Allis, also have been converted to residential use.

This provides an opportunity for many individuals to work, shop and use the services in Onaway, while living in a more rural setting. At the same time, these residents are not contributing directly to the City's tax base.

### Commercial and Industrial

With only a few exceptions, commercial activities are located along Michigan Avenue, Washington Avenue, State Street, and Main Street. The businesses along this stretch include retail stores, service stations, groceries, restaurants and professional and financial offices. A fairly wide range of goods and services is available along this business row.

Though there are no true industrial activities taking place at present, there is a pair of industrial parks located either side of Main Street, one of them surrounding the county airport on the east side of the road, the other across Main on the west side of the road.

At the present time there is very little conflict of land uses within the City. Commercial facilities are located primarily along the trunklines and only a small number of non-residential uses, primarily churches and parks, are interspersed within neighborhoods.

Only a former auto body shop on Shaw at the end of S. Veterans and a small industrial building on the corner of Spruce and Maple come to mind. These could be screened with trees, shrubs or fencing, providing some form of buffer between these facilities and their neighbors.

Every effort should be made to maintain the existing land use patterns and avoid conflicts in the future. Any new industrial operations should be channeled to the industrial parks, and new commercial facilities should locate along the commercial-zoned trunklines in or near existing commercial sections.

### Recreation and Open Space

Recreation is an important activity throughout northern Michigan and the Onaway area has many popular sites. Onaway State Park is five miles to the north, and there are several other campgrounds in the Black Lake State Forest within 10 miles of the City.

These areas provide facilities for fishing, boating, camping, swimming and hiking. The area surrounding Onaway is filled with rivers, streams and small lakes offering residents and visitors excellent opportunities for fishing and boating.

Within the City itself there are three parks, all located in the northwest residential section. Maxon Field, between N. Veterans and Main, south of Spruce, is home to a baseball field used by Little League, Onaway High School and the general public.

The Edna Lound Recreation Area, between Beech and Poplar north of Spruce, offers facilities for baseball, tennis, ice skating and basketball. Chandler Park, between Poplar and Hemlock, features a children's playground, pavilion, and paved walking trail.

The former railroad grade, now the Alpena-Cheboygan multi-use trail, also extends through Onaway. It can be used by snowmobiles during the winter, and walkers, cyclists, and horseback riders during other seasons.

## SERVICES

### Transportation and Communications

Onaway's transportation system includes most modes used today for the movement of goods and people. The major state trunk lines (M-68 and M-33) passing through the city provide access to I-75, 18 miles to the west, and the Lake Huron shipping facilities, 22 miles to the east, as well as other portions of the State to the north and south.

There is daily bus service to and from Onaway through Indian Trails, which takes Onaway passengers to larger communities where they can catch buses to virtually anywhere in the state or country they need to go.

There also is a Presque Isle County Council on Aging bus, which takes senior citizens without other transportation means on daily errands, and the Straits Regional Ride, which takes passengers to various stops around northeast Michigan.

There is a county airport located within the Onaway city limits. Owned by Presque Isle County, the runway is 2700 feet long, paved and lighted. The airport is classed as general aviation, providing service for private planes. An airport plan was drafted recently, which paves the way for future expansions, such as cross-wind runways.

The Alpena-Cheboygan trail, formerly the railroad grade, has been a common mode of transportation of those on snowmobiles since the tracks were removed and it was open to this use in the mid-1990s.

Onaway has no local radio or television stations. The local paper, the Onaway Outlook, is published weekly. The local cable television and high-speed Internet provider, Sunrise Communications, features a local channel that airs broadcasts of government meetings, high school sports, etc.

### Utilities

Presque Isle Electric and Gas Cooperative provides electricity to the City. Aurora Gas Company began providing natural gas in the 1980s, though some residents continue to heat with wood. The City does not allow outdoor wood furnaces.

Onaway's water system is made of two wells, with a total capacity of 750 gallons per minute. The water is stored in a 300,000 gallon elevated tank that can deliver 720,000 gallons a day.

There are many dead end and undersized mains in the delivery system, some of which is more than 100 years old. This creates problems with leaking, low pressure, and seasonal freezing.

The service area for the water system includes the land within the City's corporate limits, and a few establishments on the perimeters of town, including the Onaway Area Schools, located in Allis Township. Though 117,000 gallons of water are produced per day, metered water consumption is only 77,000 gallons per day.

Construction of a municipal sewer collection system and aerated lagoon wastewater treatment plant was completed in 2007, and most City residents (the primary exception being those who reside in the "Frenchtown" part of town) have access to the system and are connected.

The system, believed important by the City for both economic and environmental reasons, was constructed with more than \$11 million in grant dollars. The local match was \$2.5 million in sewer revenue bonds, which should be considered strongly before the City considers further debt.

Much of the City's storm water is collected in open ditches, with run-off going to ground water and creeks. There are storm drains in some City streets that into the open ditches.

Soils are generally capable of handling the run-off, but problems have occurred in wet weather or during spring thaws, and an improved collection system would be beneficial to the community. This is especially true in streets that have deteriorated by a lack of adequate drainage.

The City has employed a contractor to conduct a weekly pick-up of residential trash for the past decade, and has required all occupied single-family residences to pay for the service. The City also pays a contractor to remove brush and leaves, hauled to the edge of road by residents, in the spring and fall.

#### Fire and Police Protection

The Onaway Area Fire Department is housed on Beech Street, centrally located within the City, and is staffed by 13 volunteer fire fighters. The department's equipment includes three pumpers, one tanker, and a truck equipped for brush fires. The area served consists of the City of Onaway, Allis, and North Allis Townships, which operate the department through an interlocal agreement.

Onaway employs a local police department with just one employee, its chief of police. Cuts have been made to that department over time as expenses have climbed and revenues evaporated. The station is on Beech Street, next to the fire department and across from City Hall.

The Presque Isle and Cheboygan county sheriff's departments, and Michigan State Police also provide patrol in the City, with officers from those departments encouraged to use the City's police department.

#### Education, Health and Welfare

The Onaway school system includes an elementary school, junior high school, and high school, all located just south of the City in Allis Township. The system serves an area including the City and seven surrounding townships with a total population of approximately 6,100. Though the area has grown slightly over time, school enrollment has declined significantly.

Presque Isle Academy, an alternative high school operated by the Cheboygan-Otsego-Presque Isle Educational Service District, also operates out of Onaway.

Onaway's hospital closed in the early 1990s. The closest hospitals to Onaway are located in Cheboygan and Petoskey, both between 35 and 40 miles away. A branch of the Thunder Bay Clinic operates in the City, and there is both a doctor's and dentist's office located in town. At present, there is no pharmacy, though at least one is expected to be open in 2009.

Onaway Area Ambulance Service is housed on the north side of town, on M-211. In addition to the City of Onaway, service is provided to Allis, North Allis, Bearinger, Case, Ocqueoc, Waverly and Forest Townships.

The eight entities operate the service, which employs two fulltime and multiple part-time paramedics as well as several emergency medical technicians, through an inter-local agreement.

### Government

Onaway is governed by a five-member board that includes a mayor and four city commissioners. A full-time city manager oversees the day-to-day operation of city services, while a full-time clerk/treasurer handles the day-to-day finances.

A five-member planning commission, which includes one member of the city commission was established in 2008, per state law, to guide future development in the city.

Additional resources within the city that should not be overlooked include two buildings of historic value. The Onaway Courthouse, under extensive restoration for parts of the last 10 years, is more than 100 years old and can be found on the state and national historic registers.



It presently houses City hall, the Onaway Historic Museum, the Onaway Area Chamber of Commerce, and the Onaway branch of the Presque Isle District Library.

The Masonic Temple, located on Washington Avenue, served as the general offices for the Lobdell and Bailey Company, a major supplier of wood products from 1901 into the 1920's. It is under private ownership at the current time, which likely makes grant dollars available for building restoration difficult to obtain.

## NATURAL RESOURCES

Detailed information on resources for Onaway itself is not available. The following sections are based on facts for Presque Isle County with specific attention given, where possible, to the Onaway area.

Onaway does not benefit as greatly as coastal portions of Presque Isle County from the moderating effects of Lake Huron on the climate. The Onaway area has between 90 and 110 frost-free days per year, compared to 120 to 140 in the shoreline region of the county.

Annual mean precipitation is 28 inches, with snowfall averaging 80 inches per year, both slightly higher than eastern portions of the county. The temperature in the Onaway area is normally slightly lower than the lakeshore, with an annual mean temperature of 43, a January mean of 18 and a July mean of 66. These conditions are suitable for most Michigan crops and provide no obstacles to development.

The geology of the Onaway area is composed primarily of limestone bedrock. In many portions of Presque Isle County this limits the ground water resources available, often to less than 10 gallons per minute. The limestone below the Onaway area is more porous, yielding between 10 and 100 gallons per minute.

The limestone bedrock also allows the formation of sinkholes. The sinkholes develop when water dissolves underground limestone, forming caverns. When the roof of the cavern collapses from lack of support, the holes fill with water. There are several sinkholes located in the areas surrounding Onaway, providing an interesting and unique natural attraction.

Soils overlying the limestone bedrock are generally clay ranging from 5 to 100 feet deep in the northern section of the City. In the southern section there is

generally a layer of sand found over the limestone, ranging from 10 to over 100 feet in depth, with some clay over the sand.

The topography of the area is generally flat to gently rolling. The one major exception is the hill in the south central portion of the City, which provides an excellent location for Onaway's water storage facility.

The Onaway area is located in the Cheboygan-Black River Watershed. The lake and river system provides many opportunities for recreation and sports activities, such as boating, canoeing, skiing and fishing.

These water resources, along with the amount of forested or open lands available for recreation use, give the Onaway area natural character that tends to attract visitors and summer residents while providing amenities for local residents.

## **PROBLEMS, NEEDS AND ISSUES**

### INVENTORY AND ANALYSIS

The analysis of existing conditions in Onaway points out several areas of concern that need to be addressed in this plan. These problems can be broken down into four categories as follows:

Economy:       High unemployment rate  
                  Low value of local tax base  
                  Lack of diversity in economic base

Population:    Declining overall population  
                  High percentage of elderly population  
                  High level of poverty

Land Use:       Zoning ordinance in need of update  
                  High percentage of old housing stock

Infrastructure: Street and sidewalk systems need significant work  
                  Inefficiencies in water supply and storm drain systems

It must be remembered that these items are highly interrelated. The state of the economy can have an impact on population patterns, for instance, or the condition of the City's infrastructure can affect efforts at improving the economy.

The interrelationships are important in the process of setting priorities for steps to be taken towards a solution to the problems. Before a specific action is agreed upon its overall impact must be gauged.

This requires looking at solutions not only in terms of the immediate problem being solved, but also in terms of the other problem areas. The City must be looked at as a whole instead of as a set of fragmented parts.

The importance for this type of approach should become more evident when related needs are added to the problem listing. Broken down into the same four categories, Onaway's needs include:

Economy:            Providing new job opportunities  
                          Attracting new sources of tax revenue

Population:        Providing incentives to stabilize population  
                          Improving emergency services for elderly residents

Land Use:           Developing a comprehensive zoning ordinance  
                          Upgrading the City's housing stock

Infrastructure:     Undertaking a capital improvement program to reconstruct  
                          failing streets and sidewalks

                          Undertaking a capital improvement program to replace  
                          undersized mains, complete looping of the water delivery  
                          system and provide adequate storm drains

When these two listings are combined, relationships between various problem areas and needs can be defined more clearly. To begin with, the needs within each category apply directly to the problems in that specific category.

This is illustrated in Figure 3 by the adjoining sets of problems and needs. Economic problems create specific economic needs, population problems create specific population needs, etc.

The broken lines in Figure 3 point out the relationship between problems and needs in different categories. Steps toward solutions of some problems can draw on needs from other categories.

The economic need of providing new job opportunities, for instance, is an important factor in attempting to halt the loss of younger residents, a population problem.

Figure 3 also illustrates the interrelationship between needs in different categories. Providing an improved housing stock or a better water, street, and sidewalk systems can be coupled with the need for new job opportunities in a program to help stabilize the population.

The City's ability to attract new sources of tax revenue is partly dependent on improving the existing infrastructure in order to provide better utility services for new businesses and updating its zoning ordinance to ensure control over land use development.

These interrelationships show that no action is isolated and that the overall impact of any step should be kept in mind throughout the planning process.

Failure to realize the importance of upgrading the water and street systems, for example, would not only leave the existing residents with problems, but could also make it difficult to attract new job sources or to keep residents from leaving the City.

Each need requires an action that is an integral part of the effort aimed at improving the quality of life in Onaway. These steps could be ranked as to their priority or importance, but none should be overlooked in planning for Onaway's future.

PROBLEM/NEED RELATIONSHIPS

**Problem Area**

**Related Need**

High unemployment rate

Work toward new job opportunities

Low value of local tax base

Attract new sources of tax revenues

Lack of diversity in economic base

Increase existing property values

Declining population

Improve town's appearance

High percentage of elderly population

Keep taxes, rates down

Improve services for elderly residents

Dated zoning ordinance

Update zoning ordinance

High percentage of old housing stock

Improve City's housing stock

Improvements needed to street and sidewalk systems

Undertaking a capital improvement program to improve street and sidewalk systems.

Inefficiencies in water supply system

Undertaking a capital improvement Program to replace undersized mains, Complete looping of water delivery System.



## **GOALS AND OBJECTIVES**

### **1) Improve property values**

### **2) Improve appearance of neighborhoods**

### **3) Upgrade housing stock**

As stated earlier, more than half of the homes in the City are at least 50 years old. Most remain occupied but are in dire need of repairs. Others have been vacant for some time and should be demolished.

Some 40 buildings have been demolished and removed since 2000, and while the immediate effect of those demolitions is less tax base, neighboring property values should increase over time.

While the private sector has been responsible for most of the demolitions, the City has been responsible for some, usually tax foreclosures acquired from Presque Isle County.

Usually, after acquiring a property, the City first looks into whether a non-profit, such as Habitat for Humanity, is interested in constructing a new home once the vacant structure is removed.

If that interest isn't there, the property is made available to neighboring property owners, who can increase the size of their lots through the acquisition, sometimes giving them sufficient room for a garage.

The City should continue to acquire and remove vacant structures that have outlived their useful life, and continue to pursue the construction of new structures in their place whenever possible.

More than \$1 million in housing grant and low-interest loans have come into Onaway since 2000 through partnerships between the City and regional and county housing non-profits.

Some of that money went to demolish three structures and replace them with new homes. The rest went toward improvements to existing homes, including new siding, shingles, windows, and doors.

Those dollars are available to those of low to moderate income, and thus are available to many Onaway residents. They improve individual quality of life as well as neighborhood appearance and property values.

The City should continue to pursue partnerships that bring housing grants and low interest loans into the community, and should stay active in promoting those funds to those who qualify for them.

The City also should rigidly enforce its zoning ordinance as it applies to housing standards, including minimum square footage and width requirements to protect existing properties.

The City should stringently enforce its blight ordinances, including those that prohibit junk, debris, and inoperable vehicles in yards and require that grass be mowed.

The City should keep the proximity between homes in mind when considering future ordinances, as what one person does often has a direct impact on his neighborhood, and on neighboring property values.

Finally, the City should continue to offer a weekly residential trash collection, a program that has been in place since the mid-1990s and has played a considerable roll in improving neighborhood appearances.

#### **4) Improve business district 'curb appeal'**

The lasting impression many visitors have of a community is its business district, and those passing by are more likely to stop and spend money if a community's downtown is inviting.

Many of Onaway's business owners have taken it upon themselves during the past 10 years to improve their storefronts. Some have taken advantage of low-interest façade loans through Citizen's National Bank.

That program exists through a partnership between the bank and the City, and the City should continue that partnership to allow for those funds to remain available.

The City also should pursue the creation of a Downtown Development Authority, which would allow the City to seek grant dollars it cannot secure without the existence of a DDA.

Streetscape (decorative lamps, sidewalk, stamped concrete, trees, etc.) is among what can be funded to communities with DDAs, and adding these items to the downtown could greatly enhance its attractiveness.

The existence of a DDA also would allow for the capture of Tax Increment Financing, dollars presently leaving the community that instead could be invested in the central business district.

In addition, a DDA board could gather, discuss, and provide to the City concerns involving the business district (including parking, loitering, etc.) and could be a source for ideas on how to enhance the district's appearance.

As part of its effort to improve the curb appeal of its business district, the City also should focus on completing the restoration of its historic

courthouse, a project that began in the late 1990s. At present, the third floor is unfinished and a second means of egress to that floor is needed.

The courthouse for many years sat in a state of disrepair and, in that state, was somewhat symbolic of Onaway's struggles from its glory days of the early 1900s to its woes in the many years that followed.

The courthouse not only is an integral part of Onaway's past, it is an important part of the community's future in that it is a key piece of the City's downtown.

**5) Keep taxes and utility rates down**

**6) Seek grants to complete important projects**

**7) Avoid substantial debt**

The census figures discussed earlier in this document make it very clear that Onaway is among the most impoverished communities in the state, with 26.9 percent of its residents living below the poverty line in 2000.

The number of old buildings - and the lack of existence of zoning and blight ordinances until the 1990s - has created a small tax base from which the City can collect.

The City maintains a water distribution system that includes many pipes that are well over 100 years old and in constant need of repair, and debt associated with a sewer system completed only three years ago.

This has created a scenario where, despite employing only five full-time employees, the City levies the maximum millage permitted in its charter and has some of the highest water and sewer rates in northern Michigan.

Though it would be virtually impossible to lower the millage or utility rates without eliminating an entire department, it is imperative that improvements are made without substantial increases to the cost of living.

Increasing utility rates, or introducing new millages, not only would create a hardship for many existing residents, it would deter much-needed commercial, industrial, and residential development.

Onaway's demographics make it eligible for federal and state grant dollars that more affluent communities cannot attain. The City therefore should seek grants to assist it with important projects.

That said, the City recently took on more than \$2.5 million in debt associated with the construction of its sewer system. It therefore should make every attempt not to add to its debt load.

This means the City should pursue projects where it is able to meet matches, when required, with cash on hand instead of endlessly adding to existing debt.

### **8) Upgrade water system**

At the request of the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality, the City in 2000 employed an engineer to perform a study of its water distribution system.

That study determined that Onaway's 300,000-gallon overhead storage tank and two municipal wells, both of which can pump more than 350 gallons per minute, were adequate to meet the needs of its water users.

The study, however, concluded that many of the City's mains were undersized and should be replaced by larger diameter pipe. It also determined that there were too many dead-end mains.

During peak demand, the system is providing inadequate flows and less than ideal pressure. The problem is made worse in that many of the older pipes consistently break and leak.

The study included a recommendation that mains be enlarged and looped in phases, with the enlargement of the central part of the system, extending along M-68, from four-inch to 12-inch the top priority.

The cost to complete that project, which would involve the reconstruction of M-68 after the street is excavated to install the new pipe, is beyond what the City can afford.

The City therefore should seek grant funds to install the new water main and work with the Michigan Department of Transportation for the funding necessary to reconstruct the street.

If debt is necessary to secure the grant, the City should keep the payment consistent with that associated with the construction of the water tower, which will be retired in 2011.

Doing so would allow the City to simply continue a payment it has been making for the past 40 years, a payment that is built into the existing rate structure, which would allow it to avoid a substantial increase to its rates.

Main lines under City streets and alleys should be replaced and/or looped year by year, as funds allow, based on a priority list established by the City manager and water department.

Every effort should be made to construct new lines outside of paved roads, within the right-of-ways, to avoid asphalt replacement during future repairs.

Additional hydrants are needed in some locations, and additional valves, which would allow the water department to terminate service to smaller areas during repairs, are needed throughout town.

To stretch out the limited dollars the City has at its disposal, the City should avoid engineering costs whenever possible and perform as much of the work as possible with its own employees and equipment.

#### **9) Upgrade street system**

#### **10) Upgrade sidewalk system**

More than half of Onaway's street system has been reconstructed within the past five years as part of the recently-completed installation of a sanitary sewage collection system.

The City reconstructed a few sections of road that had crumbled to the point that they were almost impassable near the conclusion of its sewer project.

There are several more sections in desperate need of work, however, and they are included on a street reconstruction priority list compiled by the City manager with the assistance of the public works department.

Though a simple overlay is the most cost-effective way to address a street, most of those in need of work in Onaway will at the very least need to be pulverized before they can be paved.

Some have drainage issues that must be addressed by some combination of storm drains, catch basins, and ditching. Others require additional sub-base. Some need all of the above.

State gas tax revenues have decreased in recent years, making it impossible to perform much in the way of street projects, particularly following years where long, severe winters eat up street funds.

The City at present is transferring approximately \$40,000 per year from its general fund to its sewer fund to subsidize sewer operations and keep rates down.

The goal, through debt retirement and testing reductions, is to eliminate that transfer by 2011, freeing up that money to instead be transferred to the street funds.

That would allow the City to repair a few road sections every few years (adding drainage when needed) as funding allowed. The priority list mentioned above should be updated as needed and used to determine order.

To stretch out the limited dollars the City has at its disposal, the City should avoid engineering costs whenever possible and perform as much of the work as possible with its own employees and equipment.

Though roads should be given preference over sidewalks, if gas tax funding increases and sidewalks can be addressed, they should be constructed in an order that makes sense.

They should be constructed block by block, as funds allow, with a current year's section connecting to a section constructed the year before, creating a non-motorized pathway for pedestrians over time.

A good place to begin a residential sidewalk program would be S. Lynn, where those who live at the 60-unit Lynn Street Manor have no choice but to walk down the street when they venture into town to shop.



All existing sidewalks would be reconstructed, and new sidewalk would be added on both sides of the road along the east and west portions, if M-68 is reconstructed as part of a water main replacement project.

### **11) Improve parks and recreational facilities**

The Edna Lound Recreation Area is home to three baseball and softball fields, shared by Onaway Area Little League, Onaway High School, and the general public.

Little League is working toward the construction of a junior/senior baseball field at the park, which also would be shared by the school and the public.

Little League also is interested in improving parking around the fields, constructing a concessions building near them, and turning the existing gravel roads within the park into pedestrian paths only.

Other groups have come to the City in the past about the possibility of installing an ice rink and skate park at the facility, which also includes a community center owned by the local VFW post.

Though the City must prioritize the spending of the limited funds at its disposal, it should assist Little League and other public groups interested in improving the park whenever practical.

The City also should consider drafting and adopting a parks improvement plan, not only for its Edna Lound facility, but for Maxon Field, presently home to the junior/senior baseball field, and Chandler Park.

The City also should support efforts to improve the Alpena-Cheboygan trail (formerly the railroad tracks) that extend through its borders, and should include those improvements in its parks plan.

## **12) Improve emergency services**

Because there are a high percentage of senior citizens both within the City and in the surrounding area, but no hospital in Onaway, it is important that local emergency services be strong.

The City and two neighboring townships operate the Onaway Area Fire Department through an inter-local agreement. A similar agreement between the City and seven townships creates the Onaway Area Ambulance Service.

Though the OAFD has recently purchased two trucks and is in pretty good position from a fleet standpoint, it is in desperate need of turnout gear and would benefit from improved equipment.

The OAAS likely will have to improve its facility in the near future to allow multiple paramedics to stay at that facility. Its crew also would benefit from improved equipment.

Because both entities operate from within the City limits of Onaway, both would be eligible for grant dollars based on Onaway's demographics if authorities were formed in place of the interlocal agreements.

In both instances, equipment that might not be affordable without grant dollars, could be used by the services to the benefit of Onaway and its neighbors.

Therefore, the City should make an effort to see that authorities are created, and to assist the authorities in seeking funding for equipment that would improve the service provided by those authorities.

### **13) Economic development**

Though keeping cost of living down, upgrading infrastructure, adding curb appeal to the business district, and improving neighborhood appearance all play a role, more should be done.

The City should partner with the Onaway Area Chamber of Commerce and Presque Isle County Development Commission on those programs that market the area for development.

The Renaissance Zones, located near the Onaway Airport, become less valuable to potential developers each year as the tax advantages attached to those lots proceed toward their expiration.

The City should partner with the PICDC in every practical way possible to work toward the use of those lots. It also should consider abatements for new development when state law allows.

With the potential for the construction of large power plant in nearby Rogers City, the potential for spin-off businesses is there throughout the region, including Onaway.

The City, through the aforementioned partnerships, should do its best to be considered by developers who choose to build such businesses in the region.

Development brings both jobs and increased tax base, even if through Renaissance Zone development or other tax breaks, the City doesn't collect on the added revenue for several years.

### **14) Update of zoning ordinance**

The potential for growth brings with it the need for an up-to-date zoning ordinance that is as clear and easy-to-understand as possible. Onaway's zoning ordinance was drafted nearly 25 years ago.

It is in need of an update, a process that should begin as soon as an updated master plan is legally in place. The zoning ordinance should allow for growth, while protecting existing property values.

## **FUTURE LAND USE RECOMMENDATION**

The City of Onaway adopted a zoning ordinance, including a map, in 1997. Though the ordinance, which was drafted in the early 1980s but not adopted until 15 years later, is in need of an update, the map needs very little work.

Though M-68 east of Second Street is primarily residential dwellings at present, the zoning map includes all of M-68 as commercial. The northern section of M-33 and much of M-211 also is zoned commercial, though M-211, like eastern M-68, features more homes at present than businesses.

The two City industrial parks, and the land north of the west industrial park (most of it a stone quarry at present) are zoned industrial, though very little development has occurred in these areas. All City-owned properties, and the county airport, are zoned for public purposes.

Parcels that presently include apartment buildings are zoned multi-family, as is a large property in the southeast section of town, which is slated for a residential subdivision.

The eastern most portion of the airport remains zoned for public purposes as part of the airport, but it is included in the City's Renaissance Zone and could be rezoned for use such as multi-family that is compatible with the residential section it adjoins.

Properties removed from the state trunklines are zoned residential, and primarily are residential at present, exceptions being a large former school gymnasium in the south half of town, and the former hospital buildings on the north part of town.

Though the City should make an effort to stick to the land use applications shown in its zoning map, it also should consider amendments where doing so would allow for growth and development without negatively impacting quality of life and existing property values.