

## **Introduction**

### **1. Purpose**

In 2009 the West Monroe Town Board authorized the development of an updated Comprehensive Plan. This document will chart a strategy for addressing the Town's goals through specifically identified action items.

A Comprehensive Plan is an important tool in mapping out a Town's future. It identifies issues that must be addressed in order to ensure economic growth. It also identifies a community's character and the resources necessary to preserve that positive character and to address community shortcomings.

### **2. Methodology**

This plan was developed using a classic methodology:

#### **a. Review of existing reports, studies, and local laws**

The consultant team reviewed the many existing reports and studies that are applicable to this planning effort.

#### **b. Existing land use assessment**

Two methods were used to document and map existing land use. The first used a database of land use classifications keyed to individual properties. That database was then visually verified through a windshield survey of land uses. Discrepancies were resolved and an existing land use map developed.

#### **c. Assessment and mapping of existing infrastructure, wetlands, and floodplains**

Mapping was prepared depicting existing infrastructure (water and sewer), the extent of wetlands, and 100-year floodplains. This information was utilized during consideration of future land use recommendations.

#### **d. Identification of vision, goals, strengths, weaknesses, actions, and issues.**

Working with the advisory committee, the consultant team identified the Town's goals, strengths, weaknesses, and the specific issues that face the Town. Each goal has specific, measurable actions associated with it to enhance the likelihood that goal will be reached.

#### **e. Public participation**

Throughout the planning process the public was involved in the process. An advisory committee was formed. Two public meetings were held and a public hearing was held near the end of the process.

**f. Future land use**

Recommendations were made regarding changes in land use throughout the Town. These changes were geared to balancing the Town's residential development with commercial and industrial development.

**g. Traffic and infrastructure impact assessment**

The impact of future land use recommendations on traffic was assessed, particularly in the Routes 49 corridor. Likewise, the potential need to extend infrastructure to accommodate recommended growth patterns was assessed.

**h. Identification of an implementation strategy**

Without specific action items connected to each Town vision and goal, this plan would be incomplete. In every case where a goal has been identified, one or more action items were identified as a means to accomplish that goal.

**3. Strengths, Weaknesses, and Planning Framework**

As the planning committee addressed the many issues that face the Town of West Monroe, strengths and weaknesses were identified. They are as follows:

**Strengths**

- There are a variety of choices in single-family housing and price ranges.
- A quality school system.
- Parks and other recreational facilities have a variety of offerings including recreational programs.
- A good off-road trail system.
- Oneida Lake provides excellent recreational benefits and its

shoreline provides a special residential alternative.

- Excellent fire protection.
- There are significant amounts of open space in the Town.
- Large areas of undeveloped farmland (active and inactive) contribute to the overall impression of low-density development in the Town.
- Safe living environment.
- Low cost of local government.
- Property taxes are fair.
- The Town is a sportsman’s paradise.
- Great location – right off Rt. 81.
- The Town is a clean palette.

**Weaknesses**

- The existing zoning law provides limited protection to landowners.
- Limited infrastructure.
- There is no readily identifiable Town “center.”
- There are inconsistencies in the site plan review process.
- The Town offices are over scheduled.
- Inconsistencies in Town assessments.
- A shortage of business, office, and industrial uses in the Town.
- There aren’t a wide variety of alternative housing types – apartments, condominiums, etc.
- Rt. 49 is overtaxed during rush hours.
- Some Town roads are still dirt.
- There are occasional incongruous land uses – i.e., auto repair

in an otherwise residential area.

- The Town could be more pedestrian and bicycle friendly.
- Public transit is virtually non-existent in the Town.
- Need a walking/biking trail by the Lake.
- No supermarket or shopping.
- No community center
- The Town is not business friendly
- Contradictory terms in local laws.

## **Policy, Goals, and Actions**

### **Regional Context**

The Town of West Monroe will be impacted by the long-range plans at the County level. While West Monroe will and must determine its own future, local planning efforts like this one should be cognizant of, and related to, the broader plans for the surrounding region.

### **Town Policy, Goals, and Actions**

#### **▪ Growth**

*The Town recognizes the importance of non-residential growth and wishes to maintain and enhance an environment that encourages commercial, retail, office, business, and industrial development.*

Town Goals:

- Identify areas of the Town where expansion and consolidation of industrial, retail, and business land uses

can occur.

- Encourage commercial development along the entire length of Route 49.
- Encourage neighborhood commercial at the intersections of Rt. 49 and County Route 11 and Rt. 49 and Toad Harbor Rd.

Town Actions:

- Revise the Town Zoning Code and Map to identify, expand, and/or consolidate areas of the Town where commercial industrial uses are allowed as of right.
- Extend sewer and water to those industrial and commercial areas to enable and encourage new development.
- Develop an information base about specific sites in non-residential areas where development or major rehabilitation of obsolete buildings and sites would be appropriate. Make this available for use by realtors in assembling land and/or attracting clients.

*It has long been recognized by the planning profession that the public cost of infrastructure to support single-family homes exceeds the tax revenue these new homes generate. In conjunction with the policy noted above, the Town will attempt to balance the development of new single-family homes with increased non-residential growth.*

Town Goals:

- Balance the rate of single-family home development with on-going commercial, retail, business, and industrial development.

Town Actions:

- Over the next five years, encourage new single-family homes to develop where sewer and/or water are in place and to parcels directly contiguous to areas served by sewer and/or water.
- In year four, reevaluate and recommend appropriate areas (where extension of water and/or sewer is most cost effective) for continued single-family development.

*The Town will strive to maintain and promote quality-of-life standards found in our current residential neighborhoods and ensure those standards are reflected in new developments.*

Town Goals:

- Promote high quality residential development

Town Actions:

- Create and map new residential zoning districts.

*The Town wants non-residential development to complement the quality-of-life standards already found in the Town's residential neighborhoods.*

Town Goals:

- Promote high quality non-residential development.

Town Actions:

- Formalize a set of design guidelines/standards for private development that reflect a high standard for site/building design.
- Enable and authorize the Town Planning Board to apply those standards to all non-residential development – both new construction and renovation/redevelopment.
- Revise the Town Code to enable the use of these standards.

*The Town feels that establishing a Town center will enhance its standing and provide a point of reference for residents and visitors.*

Town Goals:

- Create one or two hamlets in the Town.

Town Actions:

- Identify suitable geographic location(s) along Route 49 for the development of a new hamlet.
- Create a new zoning overlay district to promote hamlet type development in the designated location.

**Extension of Utilities (sewer and/or water)**

*In an effort to discourage sprawl, new residential development should occur within the boundaries of the sanitary sewer district(s) (whenever possible) before infrastructure is expanded into areas not currently served.*

Town Goals:

- Over the next five years, encourage new single-family homes to locate where sewer and/or water are already in place and to areas contiguous to areas served by sewer and/or water.
- Develop a rational program for the extension of utilities that is based upon this Comprehensive Plan.

Town Actions:

- Prepare a map for Planning Board use of areas not included in a public sewer or water service area or where capacity is limited.
- Identify existing water or sewer services that are deteriorating or obsolete and need replacement within the next five years.

*In keeping with the policy of encouraging sensible non-residential development, strategically extend water and sewer service to areas designated for non-residential uses.*

Town Goals:

- Service the entire length of Route 49 from Rt. 81 to County Rt. 11 with sewer.

Town Actions:

- Extend sewer service as necessary along the Route 49 corridor.

**Housing**

*Housing is predominantly single-family owner-occupied in a variety of styles and prices.*

Town Goals:

- Maintain owner-occupancy as the prevailing form of tenancy.

Town Actions:

- Undertake a housing study that identifies the impact of key trends such as changes in household configuration, aging of the population, and income trends on housing supply and demand.
- Review assessment practices to ensure regular maintenance and improvements to property are supported and not penalized by significant tax increases.
- Review assessment practices to ensure consistency Town wide.

*Provide a controlled number of opportunities for rental or condominium style homes. Provide alternatives to single family dwellings for empty nesters and retirees.*

Town Goals:

- Provide some diversity in housing type.

Town Actions:

- Alter the zoning ordinance and map to identify measures to allow additional multi-family developments.
- Include multi-family housing as an allowed use in the Hamlet Overlay district.

**Non-residential Development**

*It is Town policy to accept appropriate and beneficial new non-residential activity and to promote and encourage the continuing upgrading of older properties. The Town will continue to pursue quality job opportunities through new projects and redeveloped parcels that complement existing businesses but not create additional traffic pressures on existing streets. It is the Town's policy to, over an extended period, eliminate non-conforming uses.*

Town Goals:

- New, revitalized, or upgraded projects that are compatible with adjacent and surrounding development in terms of

use, size, character, landscaping treatment and that can efficiently capitalize on available utility infrastructure and the existing system of roadways.

- Revise the Town code to include non-conforming non-residential uses.

Town Actions:

- Establish zoning regulations affecting non-residential development, particularly site plan review regulations and requirements.

*Provide Town wide uniformity in the number and size of business, retail, and commercial signs.*

Town Goals:

- Regulate the impact of signs, similar advertising, and identification methods.

Town Actions:

- Establish sign regulations in the zoning ordinance.
- Address the issue of LED signs in the sign regulations.

*Address car sales facilities. Better regulate used car sales and automobile repair facilities.*

Town Goals:

- Better regulate the development and operation of all automobile related businesses.

Town Actions:

- Conduct a comprehensive review and update of the zoning ordinance and map to define which districts will allow automobile related uses as of right.
- Consider development of a Town permitting process for all used car sales and automobile repair facilities.
- Specifically address used car sales and automobile repair facilities in the newly created design guidelines.

*The Town wants to encourage home occupations.*

Town Goals:

- Incorporate relaxed guidelines governing home occupation in the revised zoning ordinance.

Town Actions:

- Revise the zoning ordinance to encourage home occupations in residential zones.

*The Town wishes to regulate the location of adult uses.*

Town Goals:

- Strictly govern the location of adult uses.

Town Actions:

- Establish the zoning district(s), which will allow adult uses.
- Establish other siting standards for adult uses.

**Natural Resources**

*It is the Town's policy to protect natural resources such as open spaces, streams, wetlands, shorelines, and floodplains from inappropriate development.*

Town Goals:

- Create low-density land use buffers at the boundaries of sensitive natural resources.

Town Actions:

- Develop a natural resources inventory of environmental features as well as ownership.
- Building on the natural resources inventory, evaluate the advisability of designating Critical Environmental Areas within the Town in accordance with New York State Environmental Conservation Law.
- Investigate tools such as overlay districts, easements, and incentives for developers to preserve and protect natural resources.

### Traffic and Transportation

*Increased traffic on regional and local roads is an anticipated byproduct of the expansion of West Monroe and adjacent Towns.*

#### Town Goals:

- Develop a highway system with an integrated network of local, collector, and arterial streets to encourage traffic movement and eliminate points of conflict and/or delay.

#### Town Actions:

- Create Town Subdivision Regulations to require connectivity between neighboring subdivisions whenever possible and to strongly discourage the use of cul-de-sacs.
- Use the new Subdivision Regulations to enforce design guidelines in new subdivisions.
- Seek assistance from appropriate elected officials to identify and secure federal highway funds.
- Seek funding from state and federal agencies.
- Require developers to complete reasonable off-site mitigation where the new project negatively impacts the highway system.

*It is Town policy to encourage increased use of public transit.*

#### Town Goals:

- Increase ridership on public transportation.

#### Town Actions:

- Practice a proactive relationship with CENTRO to improve services.
- Conduct a study to ascertain whether additional/alternative transit routes or schedules are warranted and/or can be supported.

*The town wishes to make its neighborhoods more pedestrian and biker friendly.*

Town Goals:

- Develop systems that can safely accommodate pedestrians and bicycles as well as automobiles on local streets.

Town Actions:

- Identify important pedestrian generators and destination points that could be beneficially linked by walks and paths.
- Establish a formal Town policy and standards for the location, design, construction, maintenance, and retrofitting of sidewalks.

**Recreational**

*The Town recognizes a growing interest in off-road recreational activities.*

Town Goals:

- Address the concerns and potential conflicts between landowners and off-road recreational bikes and motorized vehicles.

Town Actions:

- Identify suitable areas in the Town for this activity.
- Work with state and local organizations and law enforcement to implement a policy and recommend possible legislation.

*The existing park is subject to vandalism and is hard to police.*

Town Goals:

- Identify a better location for the Town's park.

Town Actions:

- Relocate the park to a more public/observable site in the vicinity of Town Hall.

*Maintain access to Oneida Lake in the Town of West Monroe.*

Town Goals:

- Create an environment where the marinas can continue to operate.
- Retain and improve boat launch facilities on state owned land.

Town Actions:

- Examine the current tax assessments for the three marinas and determine if said assessments are fair and equitable. Adjust as necessary.

**Procedural**

*The Town desires to standardize and professionalize the site plan review process.*

Town Goals:

- Provide consistent policies and procedures to applicants/developers.
- Professionalize the review of site plans

Town Actions:

- Eliminate the role of the Codes Enforcement Officer in the site plan application/review process.
- Assess reasonable fees to applicants/developers for use in retaining professional planning/engineering consultants to review applications and site plans.

*The Town wants its tax assessment process to be fair and equitable.*

Town Goals:

- Examine and overhaul existing assessment procedures.

Town Actions:

- Retain a third party to examine and critique existing procedures and assessments. Garner third party recommendations for changes to the tax assessment procedures and assessments.

## **B. Comprehensive Plan**

### **1. Assumptions**

The assumptions listed below have been established in an attempt to describe the variety of variables that impact the way land in West Monroe will be used in the future:

- Growth trends in the Town of West Monroe will remain stable (reflecting a similar growth rate as has occurred over the past decade) for the next five to seven years. At that time a slight increase in growth can be expected.

- Family size will not increase in the future but the number of people in older age groups (over 50) will constitute a larger percentage of the Town's population.
- West Monroe will begin to capture a share of the region's commercial and industrial development upon completion of infrastructure improvements.
- Strategic expansion of water and sewer districts will encourage industrial and commercial expansion.
- The number of vehicles circulating within (and passing through) West Monroe will continue to increase.

## **2. Plan Recommendations**

### **a. Hamlet development**

This plan recommends the creation of new hamlets along Route 49 in the central region of the Town. It is anticipated the hamlet will be developed using the well-established principles of New Urbanism. While it is viewed primarily as a higher density residential cluster, a mixture of neighborhood commercial and business land uses, or multiple uses in one structure, will add to its visual and physical diversity.

The hamlet(s) will serve the important function of providing a sense of identity for the Town. The hamlet should feature an open space suitable for civic functions and provide a space for passive recreational activities.

It's important the hamlet be walkable and that linkages to nearby residential neighborhoods be established and maintained. Traffic will be generally slow moving due to the integration of traffic calming measures in the hamlet's design at its inception.

The eventual physical extent of the hamlet area must be flexible since it will blend into adjacent residential areas at its edges. Planning issues relate to providing adequate water and sewer services to encourage growth.

### **b. Residential development, traditional**

Planning concerns in traditional residential areas include the need to maintain the character of the various neighborhoods; encourage infill with sensitive and compatible development on the lots that remain vacant; improve visual and environmental quality through landscaping, building sidewalks as appropriate; and encouraging a high level of property maintenance. Limiting

extraneous vehicular traffic in these areas is a challenge that should be a high priority for the Town. Linkages (pedestrian, biking, and vehicular) to neighboring developments should be encouraged in all cases – infill and expanding residential areas.

c. Residential development, rural

Agriculture is a diminishing activity in the Town of West Monroe. A few farming operations survive and will probably remain active for another decade or so. Most of these areas are not currently served by public sewer systems and probably will not be served in the foreseeable future. Some non-farm development, mainly residential, has occurred in rural areas; more can be expected and would be suitable if the essentially open character now existing can be preserved. There will be continued pressure to subdivide in rural areas but this should be endorsed only in those areas already served by public infrastructure or immediately adjacent to serviced areas where extension of services is feasible and cost effective.

Planning concerns in rural residential areas relate to the ability to retain the existing rural character until public utilities are available. If development pressure occurs before utility districts are expanded, the density of such development should be low with lots large enough to meet performance standards for on-site sewage disposal systems. Large lots will minimize the impacts of surface water runoff and erosion.

d. Residential development, multi-family

Alternative housing types should be developed in the Town to meet the growing needs of West Monroe's aging population. Providing condominium, town house, and apartment style housing will provide more housing choices to current and incoming residents while providing a method where West Monroe's seniors can remain in the community without bearing the financial burden of maintaining a single family home.

These alternative housing types should be located in areas offering a variety of services. The new hamlets are a logical location for this housing – providing these residents with services a short walk from their home.

e. Traffic and transportation

f. Infrastructure

g. Conservation areas

Large areas of the Town of West Monroe are covered by wetlands and 100-year flood plains. These sensitive lands are protected by state and federal regulations that virtually prevent their development. To the extent possible, development in conservation/open space areas should remain restricted to preserve the environmental integrity of such areas and provide the Town with large areas of open space for its residents. Cemeteries are included in this designation. Planning concerns focus on ensuring that wetland requirements and federal floodplain regulations are followed when development is proposed.

h. Parks and recreation

These areas include land and facilities used for public and private recreational purposes. Golf courses are included in this designation. Many of these recreation areas and open spaces have been in existence for a number of years and their continued importance to Town residents is clear. The relocation of the Town's park is a high priority.

i. Institutional

Several land use types fall in this category including sewer-related facilities, and Town facilities. Of particular note are the Town Hall and Highway Department facilities.

j. Commercial

This land use category describes development that includes retail sales of all types and scales, offices ranging from small individual businesses to corporate headquarters, regional shopping centers and a variety of large and small professional, retail and service business. Some of these commercial activities have a large employment and/or customer base, require extensive areas for buildings and parking, and generate substantial traffic. Small owner-operated businesses or specialty shops with few employees and limited impact on their surroundings are at the other end of the scale. Restaurants, entertainment, professional and personal services, and convenience shopping will also be found in these areas.

Planning considerations of importance in these areas are primarily site accessibility and traffic impacts on surrounding land. Adequate off-street parking, surface water drainage, landscaping of the site, and the visual impact of such things as parking lot lighting and signs are important concerns. It is very

important to promote shared access off major roads and connectivity between individual properties and the abutting neighborhoods.

k. Industrial

The dominant character of such areas is established by manufacturing buildings or planned developments for industry or offices with special emphasis and attention given to integrated site planning and aesthetics. Manufacturing activities occupy sites large enough to accommodate employee parking and other transportation services. Direct and easy access to the regional highway network is a major benefit. Industrial, warehouse, and office parks are typically developed in accordance with an overall plan that provides for individual lots, an integrated street system, landscaping, and provisions to assure development compatibility. Industrial parks often contain activities related to research, testing, electronics, computer hardware and software production, prototype refinement, and other high-tech development, experimentation and refinement. Large parcels of undeveloped land with utilities, adequate drainage and highway access are likely sites for these types of land uses.

Planning concerns relate to the level of compatibility of such development with the surrounding area, traffic impact on adjacent local or collector roads, and the quality of site improvements such as landscaping, parking lot design, signage, and lighting. Site plan review with minimum standards for such development is important. Buffering of adjacent dissimilar land uses is required.

## **Plan Implementation**

### **Land Use and Development Regulations**

As growth and change occur, the Town will employ a variety of tools and techniques to assure sound land use patterns, to enhance the built environment and to prevent the loss of existing natural resources. Amendments to zoning laws, subdivision regulations, and related laws will be necessary to implement parts of the Town's Comprehensive Plan Update and to provide maximum effectiveness in directing the extent, location, and aesthetic impact of new and modified development.

#### **Goals:**

- Revise zoning and subdivision regulations and standards to help implement the objectives of the Comprehensive Plan.
- Institute a process for updating local regulations as necessary to promote flexibility and encourage quality development in West Monroe.
- Seek clarity and efficiency in land use controls and the approval processes.
- Create a fair and equitable tax assessment procedure.

In order to accomplish these goals, the following specific actions must be taken.

- Begin a detailed review of the zoning ordinance and subdivision regulations.
- Develop design guidelines that would help guide the Planning Board.
- Standardize and professionalize the site plan review process.
- Conduct a third party review of tax assessment procedures.
- Amend local ordinances and laws as appropriate after public comment and SEQR review.

#### **Implementation**

As noted in *Policy, Goals and Actions*, goals have been identified for each policy coupled with specific actions that should be taken to achieve the goal. The specific actions recommended will require considerable time and, in some cases, resources to implement. Clearly, some are more important than others in affecting future development in the Town.

These actions should be engaged in a rational and systematic manner. Priorities should be set and timeframes for execution established. The Town should track and record the successful completion of each action and proceed to the next priority.

The highest priority action items and the keys to the success or failure of this planning effort are as follows:

- Revise the zoning and subdivision ordinances.
- Create and apply design guidelines.
- Formalize and professionalize the site plan review process.
- Conduct a third party review of tax assessment procedures.
- Implement an access management ordinance.
- Create an environment where new hamlets can be developed.
- Balance the rates of residential and commercial development.
- Extend sewer service along Route 49 to encourage commercial development.
- Begin to eliminate nonconforming and/or special use parcels whenever possible.