



Winona County Comprehensive Plan

August Township Officers

Meeting Engagement Summary

Overview

Winona County and consultant staff hosted a visioning workshop at the Winona County Township Officers Meeting on August 13, 2025, from 7:00 to 9:00 pm. Participants were provided with a short presentation on the Comprehensive Plan. The presentation introduced the project team and touched on the comprehensive planning process, why the process is important, and ongoing public engagement activities.

In total, there were 27 township officers and Winona County representatives present, four Winona County staff members, and two consultant staff members. Representatives from the following 12 townships were present: Dresbach, Fremont, Hart, Hillsdale, Homer, Mount Vernon, New Hartford, Norton, Saratoga, Warren, Wilson, and Wiscoy.

Countywide Visioning

The first series of activities during the workshop focused on understanding participants' vision for Winona County as a whole. Participants each completed one individual worksheet and two activities. During this time, participants had insightful conversations about the County with each other, County staff, and consultant staff. Some of the common concerns voiced to staff during this portion of the workshop were pavement quality on County roads, rural representation on the Winona County Board of Commissioners, affordability and quality of life, agricultural preservation, and natural resource protection (including water quality).

Open-Ended Visioning Worksheet

Each participant completed an individual worksheet that posed four questions about the future of Winona County. In total, 23 worksheets were submitted to staff. A summary of the responses received is below. Each question summary includes a word cloud of responses, which displays the words that appeared in submitted answers. The bigger the text of the word, the more times it appeared in responses. In rare cases, minor edits have been made in the form of words to accurately reflect the number of times they appear in responses (ex. agricultural to agriculture, taxing to taxes). Stop words including “the,” “are,” and “a” are not included in the word clouds.

What are three things that Winona County should protect most of all?

When asked “What are three things that Winona County should protect most of all?” the following themes emerged:

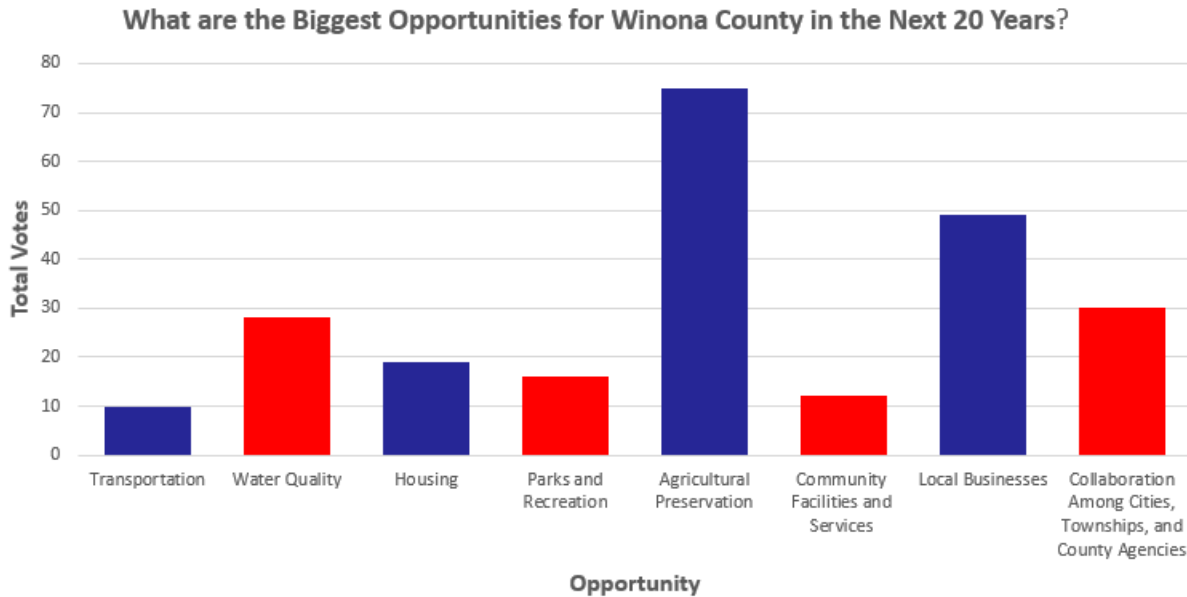
- Agriculture, agricultural land, farmers (by far the most common response)
- Landowner rights
- Natural resources
- Water quality and water bodies
- Rural way of life and heritage




The word cloud below displays words that appear two or more times in answers to question one.



What are the Biggest Opportunities for Winona County in the next 20 years?

Upon arriving at the workshop, participants were each given a bag with ten small pom poms. During the countywide visioning portion of the workshop, participants distributed their ten pom poms between eight jars, each of which represented an opportunity for Winona County over the next 20 years. Participants could distribute their votes (pom poms) among the jars however they desired. Below are a graph and table displaying the opportunity categories and the number of votes (pom poms) that each received.



Logo	Element	Number of Votes
	Transportation (County Highways, Dial-A-Ride, Winter Maintenance, Transit)	10
	Water Quality (Surface Water Quality, Groundwater Quality, Wellhead Protection)	28
	Housing (Senior Housing, Affordable Housing for Families, Expanded Housing Options)	19
	Parks and Recreation (County-Owned/Operated Facilities Including Parks and Trails)	16

	Agricultural Preservation (Farmland Preservation, Support for Small Farms, Support for Family Farms)	75
	Community Facilities and Services (Schools, Community Centers, Utilities, Social Services)	12
	Local Businesses (Including Food Service, Retail, Agricultural, and Industrial)	49
	Collaboration Among Cities, Townships, and County Agencies (Land Use Planning, Utilities, Infrastructure Projects)	30

By far, the most common opportunity identified by workshop participants was agricultural preservation, which received 75 votes (31.4% of total votes). The second most common opportunity identified by workshop participants was local businesses (49 votes), followed by collaboration among cities, townships, and County agencies (30 votes). The least common opportunity identified was transportation, which only received ten votes.

What are the Biggest Challenges Currently Facing Winona County?

Workshop participants were asked to respond to the question “What are the biggest challenges currently facing Winona County?” using sticky notes placed on a poster board. The following four responses were received for this activity:

- Natural resources
- Water quality
- City annexation of township land with no way to stop
- 3 to 2 votes (referring to urban vs. rural representation on the Winona County Board)

Township Visioning

After the countywide visioning activities, participants split up into groups of 3-4 people with others in their township. Two townships that did not have many representatives at the workshop grouped together to form one group. Each group was given a worksheet that asked specific questions about issues and opportunities in their township.

Given Winona County’s large geographic footprint and 19 different townships, the project team felt that it was important to identify specific characteristics, issues, and opportunities for each township. The tables below display the responses for each worksheet that was submitted. Some cells are blank because responses were not provided on the worksheet. The worksheet focused on three areas: our township today, our township in 2045, and land use in the township.

Our Township Today

Township(s)	Our township is...	We love that our township...
Dresbach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conservative • Beautiful 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is on the river • Is on the bluffs
Fremont	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rural • Quiet • Strong 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Votes • Safe • Cares
Hart		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All agriculture • A+ road maintenance
Hillsdale	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agricultural • Small 	
Homer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mostly rural with small villages throughout 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listens to all members of our community and tries to value the opinions of all
Mount Vernon		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is rural
New Hartford	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concerned people 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has good people



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- Less farmers

Norton, Saratoga		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has family farms that want to expand • Still exists • Watches out for our local residents
Warren	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agriculture • Dairy • Crop and timber 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rural lifestyle • Strong community • Safe
Wilson	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beat up by the City • Water quality-conscious • Trying to maintain our rural heritage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has a great volunteer fire department • Supportive community • Is independent
Wiscoy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small family farms • Increasingly residential with off-farm work • Scenic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scenic • Has clean air and water • Nice mix of agriculture and forest

Our Township in 2045

Township(s)	Over the next 20 years our township should...	In 2045, we hope that our township is...
Dresbach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diversify 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Affordable • Still beautiful
Fremont	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preserve • Thrive • Plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustainable • Drug-free • Thriving
Hart	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stay agriculture oriented • Maintain Township government 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Still a township! • Maintain Township government
Hillsdale	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer more housing/home opportunities 	



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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grow our tax base = revenue (not higher taxes)! 	
Homer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to value our rural land and agriculture 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unaffected by over population
Mount Vernon		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Existing
New Hartford	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fix the roads • Listen to the planning and zoning • Better communication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Still intact • Still operating
Norton, Saratoga	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have more rural development of internet technology • Improve road infrastructure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Still active to support our rural communities • Thriving
Warren	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agriculture • Rural lifestyle • Control housing numbers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agriculture • Local cannabis control • A desirable place to live
Wilson	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hopefully remain the same (not retail development) • Not be annexed by the City • Fill our limited industrial area (WAIDA Acres) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Still viable • Grown but not too much • Still has a volunteer fire department
Wiscoy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remain affordable to small/family landowners and farmers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Still dominated by family farms • Allow for residential development that protects farms and natural spaces

Land Use in the Township

Township(s)	The three biggest land use concerns in our township are...
Dresbach	1. Limitation- zoning restrictions



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2. Consider agricultural income versus residential/commercial/industrial

Fremont	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Biomass use 2. Non-ag use 3. Zoning
Hart	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. DNR owns too much land i.e. nontaxable- losing tax base 2. Taxation of “recreational” woodland 3. Rural vs urban taxation rate/formula
Hillsdale	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Overregulation of agriculture practices and building restrictions on rural lands
Homer	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Loss of agricultural land 2. Loss of land to residential development (large scale) 3. Overregulation of land use by upper government
Mount Vernon	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Outvoted by commissioners from the City 2. Put solar farms on lower quality land
New Hartford	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Overregulation- repression of landowner rights 2. Flood plains
Norton, Saratoga	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Multi-housing sites 2. Restrictions on family farm size and progress
Warren	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Control by City of Winona 2. Increase animal unit cap follow MPCA rules 3. Loss of EMT service
Wilson	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Annexation 2. Runoff and erosion 3. Selling agricultural land for residential building
Wiscoy	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Large agricultural machinery damaging township roads 2. Consolidation of agriculture land into larger land holdings