



TOWN OF WYOMING NEWS

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MAJOR CHANGES TO WISCONSIN FARMLAND PRESERVATION LAW WILL AFFECT TOWN

The Iowa County Farmland Preservation Plan (FPP), adopted in 1980, will be revised this coming year, along with the sections of the Iowa County Zoning Ordinance that cover A-1, Exclusive Agriculture zoning districts. Also, Wyoming's Comprehensive Plan will need to be updated to reflect changes to the above. This is in response to an essential rewrite of the Farmland Preservation Law, (Chapter 91 State Statutes), that was included in the biennial budget bill (Act 28) and signed into law in June, 2009. All revisions, including that of identifying the land to be included in the Iowa County FPP, will be addressed in public hearings at the town and county level. Input from Wyoming residents and property owners will be important.

The changes to the Farmland Preservation Law were the outcome of the **Working Lands Initiative (WLI)**. This project was started in 2005 by the Wisconsin Dept of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) with the dual purpose of protecting farm and forest land from development and helping farmers to continue to farm, by expanding and modernizing the state's **Farmland Preservation Program**, and renaming it the **Working Lands Initiative**. The new standards are complex and the ramifications to all the changes are not yet well understood by the general public.

THE CHANGES

(1) Eliminated will be the Farmland Preservation Program as we know it. In its place will be a system of per acre tax credits based on farmland preservation goals and standards set forth in WLI. These new farmland preservation rules will become

WYOMING VALLEY CHURCH



Last year's *News* pictured the *Wyoming Valley United Methodist Church*, surrounded by floodwaters following a downpour. By the next day the water was in the Wisconsin River on the way to the Gulf of Mexico, and there was no damage to the church or the "Ladies Hall" (the original church) next to it. This year's photo is of the same structure but now it is the *Wyoming Valley Church*. It has been a place of worship since it was organized in 1846. The present structure was built in 1902.

But last year the dwindling congregation was too small to continue, and the final service was held on Dec. 28, 2008. It included a de-consecration of the building and grounds, enabling the Methodist Conference to sell the property. Herb Kritz, now of San Francisco, but originally from the Town of Wyoming and a descendent of Ignatius Kritz, (b 1834, Bohemia, d 1882 Wyoming Valley) an early and prominent settler in the town; acquired the church early this year. After having the interior and exterior refurbished and painted, he made it available for community use. The 30th season of Hymn Sings, now under the sponsorship of the Rural Musicians Forum, was held in the church, and there will be a 31st season. Andrea Bakken, Manager of the Rush Creek Sportsman's Club was married there, and funeral services for Wyoming resident Jerry Crook were held there.

effective when Iowa County completes its revisions to its Farmland Preservation Plan and Zoning Ordinance, and they are certified by DATCP. Until

certification, existing rules will remain in effect, except for Number 2 below.

(2) Effective January 1, 2010, a per acre conversion fee will apply to all land zoned out of A-1 into AR-1 or the various business districts. The conversion fee will be three times the "Use Value" of Grade 1 tillable cropland. In Wyoming that will be \$879 per acre, payable by the party requesting the zoning change. The county will collect the fees and remit them to DATCP where they will be deposited in the working lands fund to be used for purchase of development rights.

(3) For the 2010 tax year and beyond, Iowa County landowners can collect a flat \$7.50 per acre if their land is within a certified Farmland Preservation Zoning District, i.e. A-1. There is no minimum acreage and it must be devoted "primarily to ag use", with at least \$6,000 of gross farm profits (or \$18,000 over last three years), or be enrolled in a farm commodity or conservation program. There will be higher expectations for conservation, and timelines for completion will be shorter. To qualify for the tax credits, the land must be in compliance with soil and water conservation standards.

Under the prior program, the tax credit was based on household income and came to about \$3.00 per acre in Iowa County. Since inception in 1980, farmers in the County have received \$50 million in tax credits, with the last few years, dropping below \$1 million annually. Projections for the new program are up to \$2.5 million annually.

(4) A Purchase of Agriculture Conservation Easements (PACE) program has been added to WLI for land located in a county FPP. PACE will help local governments or non-profit conservation organizations purchase easements from willing sellers. DATCP will reimburse up to 50 percent of the fair market value of the land. Easements would prohibit the land from being developed for any purpose other than agriculture.

(5) At the time Iowa County's FPP and related revisions to its Zoning Ordinance are certified by DATCP, the provisions of new Chapter 91 will apply. Some provisions of interest are:

- Non-farm residences up to four in number, that do not exceed a ratio of one residential acre to 20 farm acres on a "base farm tract", and don't interfere with ag use, are allowed with a Conditional Use.
- Non-farm businesses are allowed as permitted uses if limited to existing farm residences or

structures that are an integral part of ag use, that do not impair or limit current or future ag use on the farm, or on other parcels under FPP zoning, and utilize no more than four full-time employees annually.

- Land to be designated for the county's FPP must be devoted primarily to ag use or ag related uses. Natural resource acreage and open spaces also may be included. Land intended for development in the next 15 years is to be excluded. Presently, all land in Wyoming that is not in AR-1 or the various business districts is zoned A-1 and will be subject to these new FPP provisions.

This article may leave some scratching their heads with questions or a need for more detail. DATCP has complete information on its website <http://workinglands.wi.gov>

Look for upcoming town and county meetings. Notices will be posted at the Town Hall, the Recycling Stockade and Valley Repair and will be published in the Spring Green Home News and Dodgeville Chronicle. Also, check Wyoming's new website, <http://www.iowacountyedc.org/2790html> prepared by Rick Terrien, Executive Director of the Iowa Co Area Economic Development Corp., a year old organization formed and supported by the Iowa County Board, with additional support from towns.



Shown above is the cover of the Iowa Co Farmland Preservation Plan, adopted in 1980. At that time Leonard Olson was the Iowa County Conservationist and on the Advisory Committee for the Plan. Thirty years later in 2010 he will again play a role, this time as a Town of Wyoming Board Member. The logo on the cover was created for the nation's bi-centennial in 1976 under the direction of Everett Olsen, UW Extension Resource Agent at that time.

TAXES - OUCH!

It was predicted. It was expected. And it happened. Property taxes increased significantly, as state aids to schools, counties and municipalities were reduced to help balance the state government budget, which is experiencing shortfalls in sales tax and income tax receipts due to "The Great Recession". There were also significant reductions to most state offices, with furloughing of employees and various streamlining efforts.

Taxes levied against property in the Town of Wyoming increased \$220,500 to \$1,768,798, an increase of 14.2%, which compares to an increase of 3.5% last year and 3.0% the year before. Because of a net increase to the tax base of \$1.7 million (\$2 million in new construction, less \$300,000 in land value transferred to Manage Forest Law), individual tax bills will increase in the 11% to 12% range, depending on which school and fire district the property is located.

The levy from the River Valley School District increased \$104,000, up 18% from last year, primarily for two reasons. (1) State School Aids allocated to Wyoming decreased \$65,000. River Valley fares poorly with the formula because of declining student enrollment and high assessed value per student, and the state is no longer committed to providing two-thirds of the revenue required to fund education. (2) The Town's share of the School District's total valuation increased, due in big part to a 7% decline in the valuation of the Town of Spring from \$178 to \$166 million, as 28 residences lost to last year's flood are no longer on the tax rolls.

The levy from the Dodgeville School District also increased 18%, as the state will be providing only 49.1% of the revenue needed to fund school costs. Also, \$300,651 was budgeted to pay back Sears/Lands' End for 2005 and 2006 property taxes it paid. The company recently won a lawsuit over the tax assessment of their property.

The Spring Green Area Fire Protection District levy against Wyoming also increased, from \$66,873 to \$72,025, as the town picked up a bigger share of the levy due to losses in valuation in the Town of Spring Green. In addition, the higher costs of operating the new fire station are in this year's levy. The Dodgeville Fire Dept levy was down because they cut their budget by 10%.

The town levy was kept flat by budgeting less for seal coating roads, now at \$13,300 per mile.

<u>Levies</u>	<u>2009</u>	<u>2008</u>
Town	\$ 96,254	\$ 96,413
Fire – Spring Green	72,025	66,873
Fire – Dodgeville	9,640	10,115
Ambulance – Dodgeville	<u>2,630</u>	<u>2,485</u>
Total Town	180,549	175,886
State	17,086	16,566
County	531,791	492,520
School – River Valley	694,259	590,485
School – Dodgeville	345,422	292,371
Voc. – MATC	90,769	81,811
Voc. – SWTC	<u>67,197</u>	<u>56,862</u>
TOTAL LEVIES	1,927,073	1,706,501
State School Cr – RV	(108,673)	(109,449)
State School Cr – DV	(49,602)	(48,754)
PROPERTY TAXES	1,768,798	1,548,298
Lottery Credit	(8,119)	(7,896)
First Dollar Credit	(19,314)	(9,352)
TO BE COLLECTED	1,741,365	1,531,050
State Aids	1,140,369	1,184,723
Lottery Credit – RV	81.35	78.69
Lottery Credit – DV	88.67	87.47
First Dollar Credit RV	71.31	34.10
First Dollar Credit – DV	77.73	37.90
ASSESSED VALUE	89,213,200	87,491,200
EQUALIZED VALUE	100,681,700	97,616,500
AVE ASSESS. RATIO	89.63	88.61

TOWN PLANNING

The Plan Commission was twice as busy this year verses last, addressing six land use proposals, as well as organizing the annual town picnic with pig roast at Tower Hill State Park in September. Look for this event the same month next year, on the Saturday after the Spring Green Area Fire Dept Dinner/Dance.

This coming year, the Plan Commission will play a vital role in shaping the town's response to the forthcoming changes to the Farmland Preservation Law. It meets as needed on the first Tuesday of the month. It consists of seven members appointed by the Town Board. Mike Degen is the Chairman and Town Board Representative. Judy Symon-Hanson is the Secretary, and other members are John Dunagan, Lewis Lama, Mary Lloyd-Jones, Mark Olson, and Taliesin Representative, Floyd Hamblin. To get on the agenda for a land use proposal, the person to contact is Mike Degen at 608/588-5346.

CENSUS 2010. Be counted.

WHAT'S LAND WORTH IN WYOMING ?

For the reporting years 2007 and 2008, the Wis. Dept of Revenue reported no land transactions in the Town, although there were some property transactions at the House on the Rock Resort. But this past half-year there were five land transactions. Assessor Randy Edge now has on-line access to the Real Estate Transfer forms, and reported that 732.2 acres changed hand for \$3,041,894, an average price per acre of \$4,154. Parcel sizes ranged from 52.6 acres to 235.6 acres, with a price range from \$3,820 to \$4,238 per acre.

While the nation's economy was mired in a de-leveraging, deflationary, asset-bubble-bursting recession, land values held up in Wyoming. Two years ago the average price per acre was \$4,301, the year before \$3,862, and the year before that, \$3,893.

DOGS

There are enough unlicensed dogs running around Wyoming, some without the required rabies shots, that Treasurer Laurie Baruch has prepared a new Dog License Application form. It is included with the tax bills. It is to be returned with tax payments by all property owners, including those without dogs. Be sure and read the backside of the form - *Why should I license my dog?*

Wyoming has been charging the minimum statutory license fee of \$8 for intact dogs, and \$3 for neutered dogs, with the Town keeping a quarter per dog for its efforts. The rest is turned over to the County to be used to pay for damages to farm animals preyed upon by dogs (not very common any more), and to help support the Iowa County Humane Society. The 14 towns in Iowa County, all of which use the services of the Society, are also asked to help support it. Wyoming contributed \$1,000 this year and budgeted the same for 2010, and is grateful for the services provided for dogs and cats and other animals.

For 2010 we have raised the license fees to \$5 and \$10, and increased the Kennel License to \$40 to help cover the payment to the Humane Society. This year 82 dogs were licensed, 91 the year before. Should be interesting to see what the count will be in 2010, which will be reported in next year's newsletter.



Mary Lloyd-Jones was appointed to the Clerk position in April to replace Carrie Rodamaker, who stepped down due to expanded job responsibilities at the Frank Lloyd Wright Visitors Center. Here she is pictured with Tom Harnisch, Education Director of the Wisconsin Towns Association (WTA) at a training session for new officers in Mineral Point. The WTA plays a vital role in bringing new officers up to speed and keeping continuing officers pointed in the right direction, as well as providing legal advice and influencing legislation that effects towns.

Precycling n.- Reducing waste by limiting consumption

USAGE: "Precycling is being thoughtful at the point of purchase in addition to at the point of throwing out. It saves precious natural resources, helps with greenhouse gas reduction and can save you money."

- Minneapolis *Star Tribune* - Aug 4, 2009

Freecycle.org - A website that moves 24,000 usable unwanted items per day to people that want them. This is also being done on a smaller scale at the Town of Wyoming Recycling Stockade. See Dean Fahrni about this.

TOWN OFFICERS

Chairman	John Hess	588-7082
Supervisor	Len Olson	588-2064
Supervisor	Mike Degen	588-5346
Clerk	Mary Lloyd-Jones	588-9000
Treasurer	Laurie Baruch	753-9247
Assessor	Randy Edge	623-2719