



November 11, 2022

Brian Standing
Senior Planner
Dane County Planning & Development

Re: Dane County Farmland Preservation Plan

Dear Mr. Standing:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the draft Dane County Farmland Preservation Plan. We appreciate all of the work that Dane County Planning and Development staff have put into updating the plan. Farmland preservation is important to the economic vitality and quality of life of our region. One of the three goals of our recently adopted Regional Development Framework is to promote growth that “Conserves farmland, water resources, natural areas, and fiscal resources”. This shared goal was developed from the public priorities identified during the A Greater Madison Vision process and refined based on feedback from local government officials.

The Dane County Farmland Preservation Plan and the Regional Development Framework support and reinforce each other in many ways. The final development pattern strategy in the adopted Regional Development Framework is to minimize development in long-term farmland preservation areas that are designated in farmland preservation plans and to coordinate development within farmland transition areas at the local level. Agricultural Enterprise Areas are typically characterized by large tracts of contiguous farmland and/or high-quality soils. These areas are generally outside of the agricultural transition areas that have been identified for long term urban expansion. The Regional Development Framework includes two metrics for measuring our collective progress in this area; the acres of land designated as long-term farmland preservation areas, and the acres of farmland under conservation easements. The policies of the Dane County Farmland Preservation Plan and our inter-agency collaboration on the Land Use Inventory help support this goal.

One area in which greater consistency between these plans could be achieved is in the discussion of Urban Service Areas. More specifically, we’d like to recommend revisions to two items in the draft plan, noted below, that are directed at the Urban Service Areas administered by Capital Area Regional Planning Commission under a contract with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources.

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d) County/ Regional Benefits to Farmers in an AEA.

1) Urban Service Areas. Dane County will continue to advocate for state legislative changes that would establish objective standards for Urban Service Area approvals that take into account potential agricultural impacts. Dane County will work with the Capital Area Regional Planning Commission and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources to explore options that would:

- (a) protect AEAs from urban service area expansions intended to serve new urban development, while;*
- (b) allowing for limited public sewer or water service needed to support agriculture-related industries.*

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Consistent with county, town, city, village or extraterritorial cooperative plans adopted as part of the Dane County Comprehensive Plan, the county will:

- h) Work with the DNR and the Capital Area Regional Planning Commission to establish objective standards for Urban Service Area approvals that take into account potential agricultural impacts.*

As you may know, there are state statutes that explicitly prevent the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, who has the sole legislative authority for approving Urban Service Area amendments, from taking potential agricultural impacts into account when reviewing Urban Service Area amendments.

Wisconsin State Statutes 283.83(1m) states:

(a) The department shall approve or reject proposed revisions to the areawide water quality management plan for the area consisting of Dane County. The department shall base a decision under this paragraph on whether the proposed revision complies with the water quality standards under s. 281.15. The department may place conditions on its approval of a proposed revision to the plan.

(b) The department, or a person contracting with the department under par. (f), may not require information concerning a proposed revision to the areawide water quality management plan for the area consisting of Dane County other than information that is reasonably necessary to determine whether the proposed revision complies with water quality standards under s. 281.15.

Fortunately, State Statutes (66.1001) also requires local units of government to prepare comprehensive plans and furthermore require an agricultural, natural, and cultural resources element to be included as part of these plans. CARPC has recently embarked on an effort to work more closely with the communities in our region on comprehensive planning, as well as, to promote more joint planning efforts between neighboring communities in our region. We firmly believe this is the most appropriate and the most effective stage of planning to address important regional issues like farmland preservation.

We recommend revisions to the above noted items in the draft Farmland Preservation Plan by replacing them with the following, to provide greater consistency with the requirements of State Statutes:

d) County/ Regional Benefits to Farmers in an AEA.

1) Dane County will work with the Capital Area Regional Planning Commission and local governmental units to establish comprehensive plans that explore objectives, policies, goals, and programs for the conservation of and promotion of the effective management of Agricultural Enterprise Areas.

h) Work with the Capital Area Regional Planning Commission and local governmental units to establish comprehensive plans that take into account potential agricultural impacts.

Thank you for your consideration of these revisions. We wholeheartedly agree that preserving agricultural areas is critical to supporting a key sector of our regional economy and we fully support the Dane County Farmland Preservation Plan with the changes noted above. As the region grows, we can work together to protect farmland by minimizing development in long-term farmland preservation areas and coordinating development within farmland transition areas at the local level through better comprehensive planning. Preserving farming areas also presents an opportunity for expanding sustainable agricultural practices that reduce greenhouse gas emissions and increase climate resilience, which is another top priority of the Regional Development Framework. We also recognize the need for legislative changes that would strengthen farmland preservation.

In summary, we look forward to collaborating with Dane County and the local governments in our region on farmland preservation and more effective comprehensive planning to achieve our mutual regional goals.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David Pfeiffer". The signature is written in a cursive style with a prominent, sweeping initial "D".

David Pfeiffer
Executive Chair