Hyperscale data centers & Land Use Compatibility

April 14 Topic of Focus:

- Land use and environmental compatibility, including potential conversion of farmland and consistency with county plans for rural preservation, natural resource protection, and efficient infrastructure use.

Meeting outline

- State-wide ag producer group – Wisconsin Farmers Union 2026 policy on data centers
- Overview of county planning context and land use variables
- What are the land use compatibility issues with hyperscale data centers?
  - Potential risks, consequences, and opportunities for:
    - Farmland preservation and producers
    - Natural resource protection
    - Efficient use/deployment of public and private infrastructure/utilities
- Tools and mechanisms to promote land use compatibility and mitigate impacts
  - Recap from last meeting
  - Other tools/mechanisms? Are they sufficient?

Questions to Consider for Each Topic Area

- What are the risks, consequences, and/or impacts? Are they local or regional?
- Are there mechanisms that can mitigate the above?
- What are the opportunities?
- What are the most useful tools for local govt? Are there others?
- What are the decision points, and who has jurisdiction?

Wisconsin Farmers Union

Michelle Ramirez-White, Governmental Affairs Director
Tara Greiman, Director of Conservation and Stewardship

WFU 2026 Policy on Data Centers:

- Oppose Data Centers that:
  - Increase local electricity rates, cause brownouts, deplete or contaminate, or exacerbate contamination of local water supplies, or that increase the local tax burden, indirectly as well as directly, on any citizens of Wisconsin, especially township residents. We oppose the siting of data centers on Prime farmland.
- WFU recommends that Wisconsin should require data centers developers to pay the full cost of providing their power.
- WFU recommends that additions to the power grid to accommodate data centers come from renewable sources.
- WFU recommends that developers must be fully transparent with citizens and governments.

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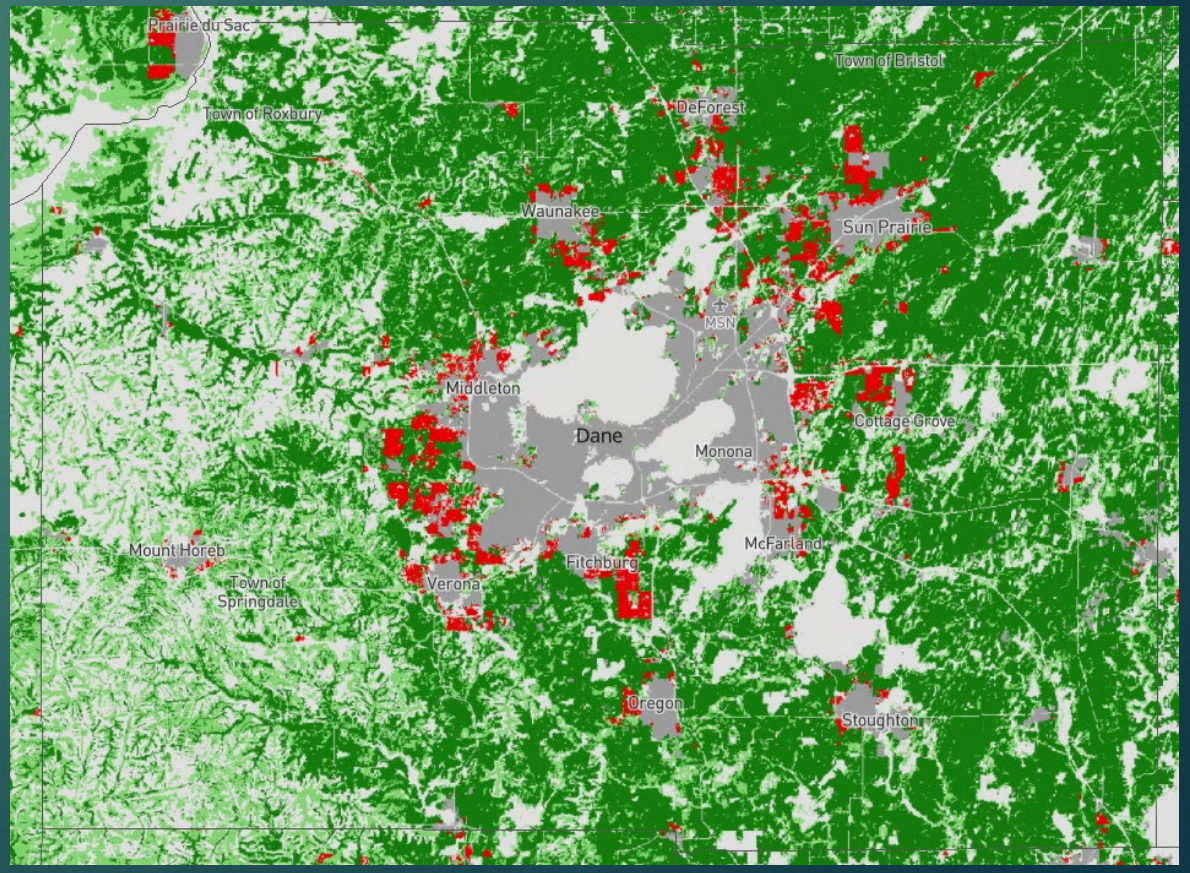
WFU 2026 Policy on Data Centers:

- States have the authority to set standards and regulate data centers in their state.
- Wisconsin Farmers Union **supports Community Benefits Agreements that mitigate local impacts** of large infrastructure projects, and benefit farmers, local communities, and the environment and oppose the use of Tax Incremental Financing (TIF) to establish data centers.
- We call for comprehensive revision of Wisconsin's TIF statutes in order to:
  - Revise the definition of "blight" to ensure that it is limited to properties that are abandoned, dangerous, or in disrepair.
- With the intent to keep agricultural land in production, Wisconsin Farmers Union opposes the use of First Right of Refusal contracts by large companies.

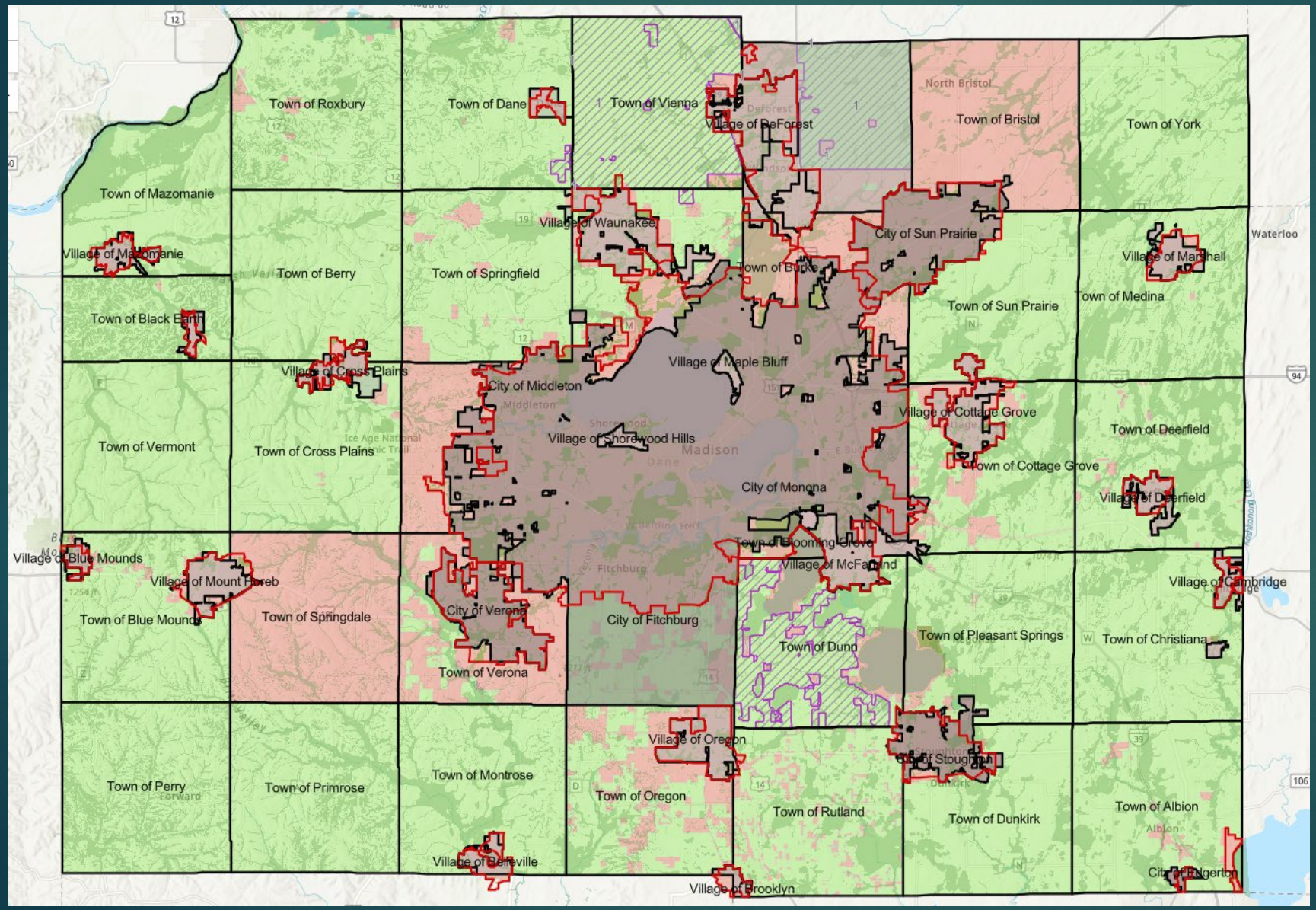
Agricultural Indicators and Trends in Dane County

- Dane County Farmland Preservation
  - 2,284 Total Farms
  - 28% of total producers are new/beginning farmers
  - Average Farm Size = 197 acres
  - A Leading Ag Economy in WI & US
    - Market Value of over $653,000,000
      - 1. Milk from Cows (#7 in state)
      - 2. Grains, Oilseeds, Dry Beans & Peas (#1 in state)
      - 3. Cattle/Calves (#4 in state)

- Conversion of Agricultural Land (2001-2016) in red
  - Darker the green = Better farmland for long-term cultivation
  - https://csp-fut.appspot.com/



County Farmland Preservation Planning Areas

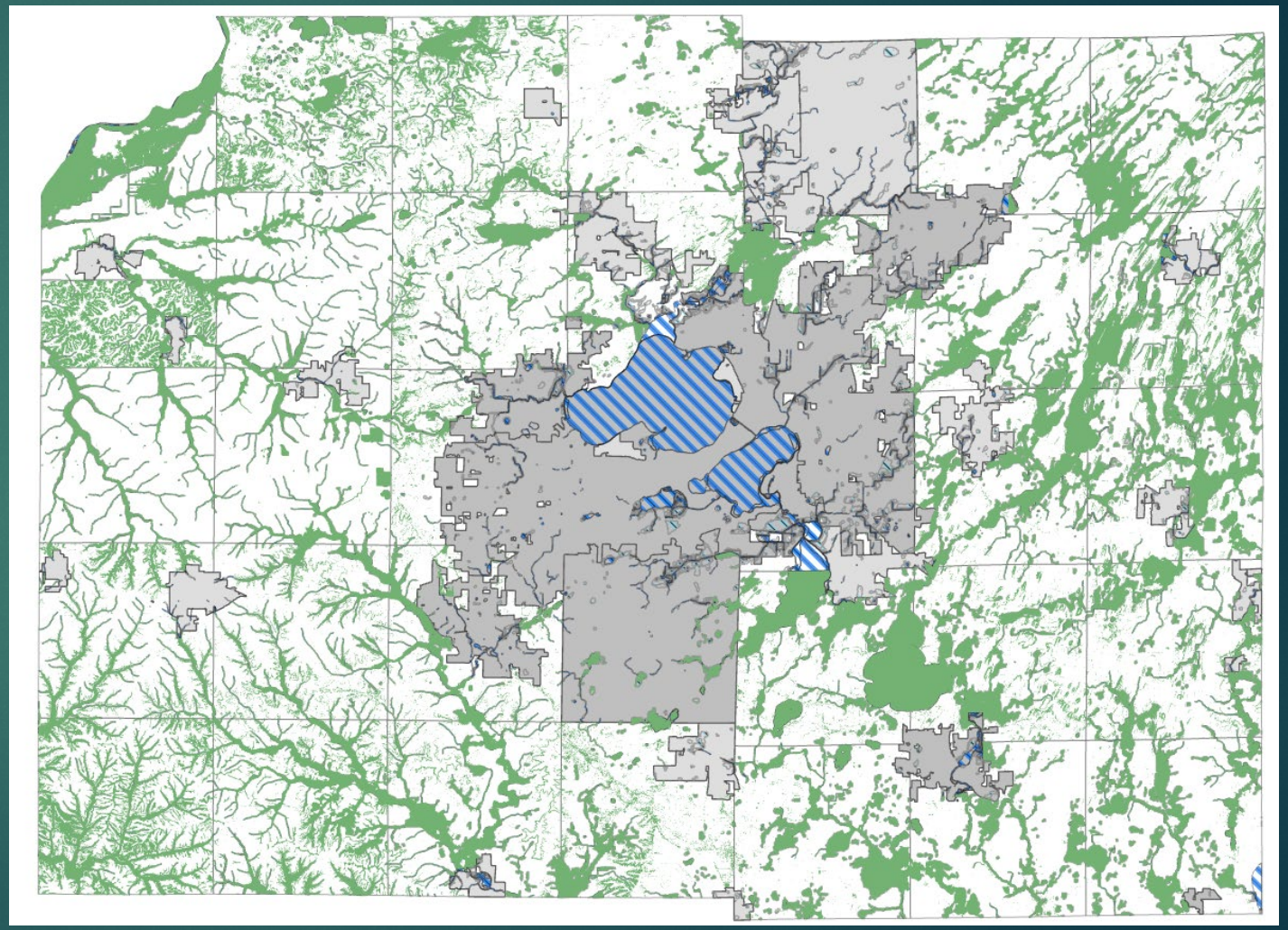


- State Farmland Preservation Program participant since late 70s
- Designated areas intended to remain in Ag/Open Space for 20+ years
- Ag preservation zoning, restrictive land use policies, conservation easements limit farmland conversion
- Approximately 77% of land area in ag / open space use as of 2022

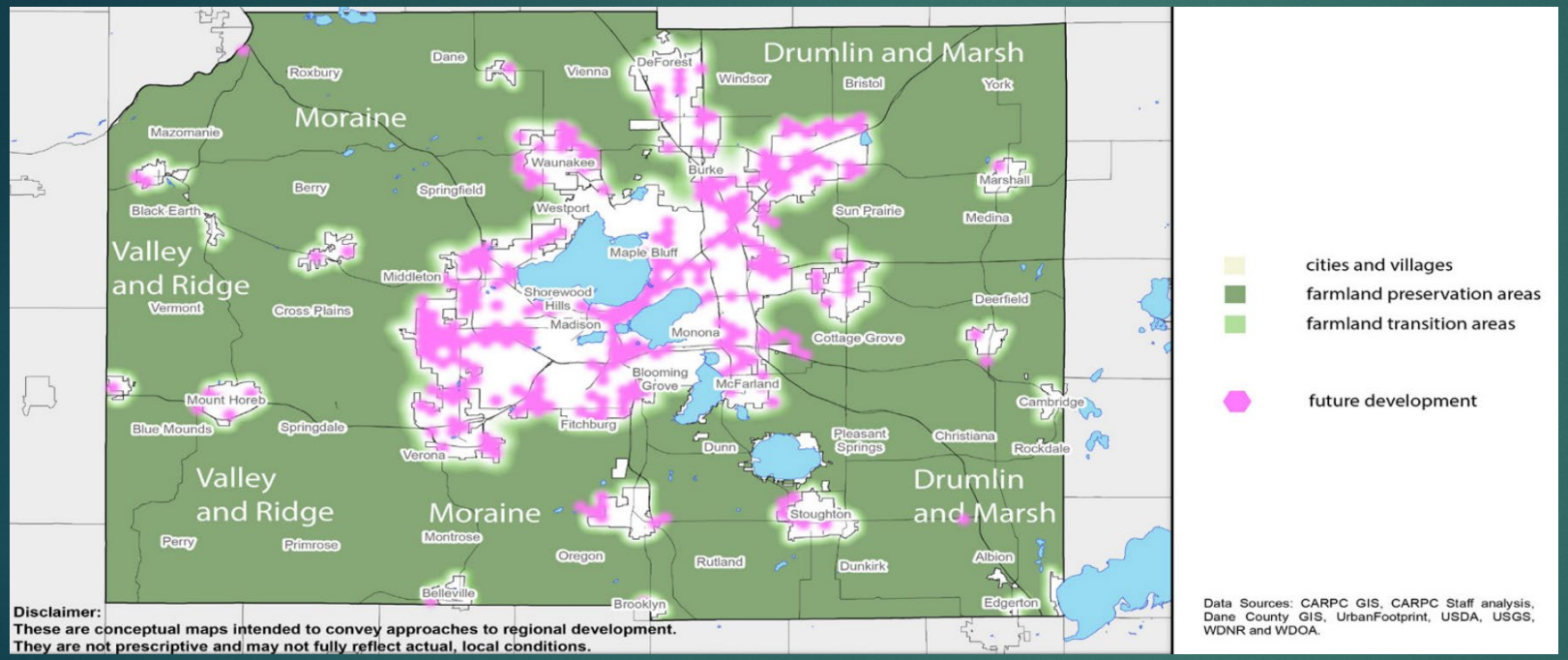
Environmental and Natural Resources

State and Local Plans and Regulations:

- Protect wetlands, floodplains, shoreland, recharge areas, vegetative buffers, and environmental corridors
- Reduce runoff, impervious cover, erosion, and water quality degradation
- Emphasize groundwater and surface water protection, soil health, infiltration, and habitat
- Mitigate hazards and promote climate resilience
- Promote recreational opportunities for growing population



Efficient Infrastructure Use – CARPC Regional Development Framework

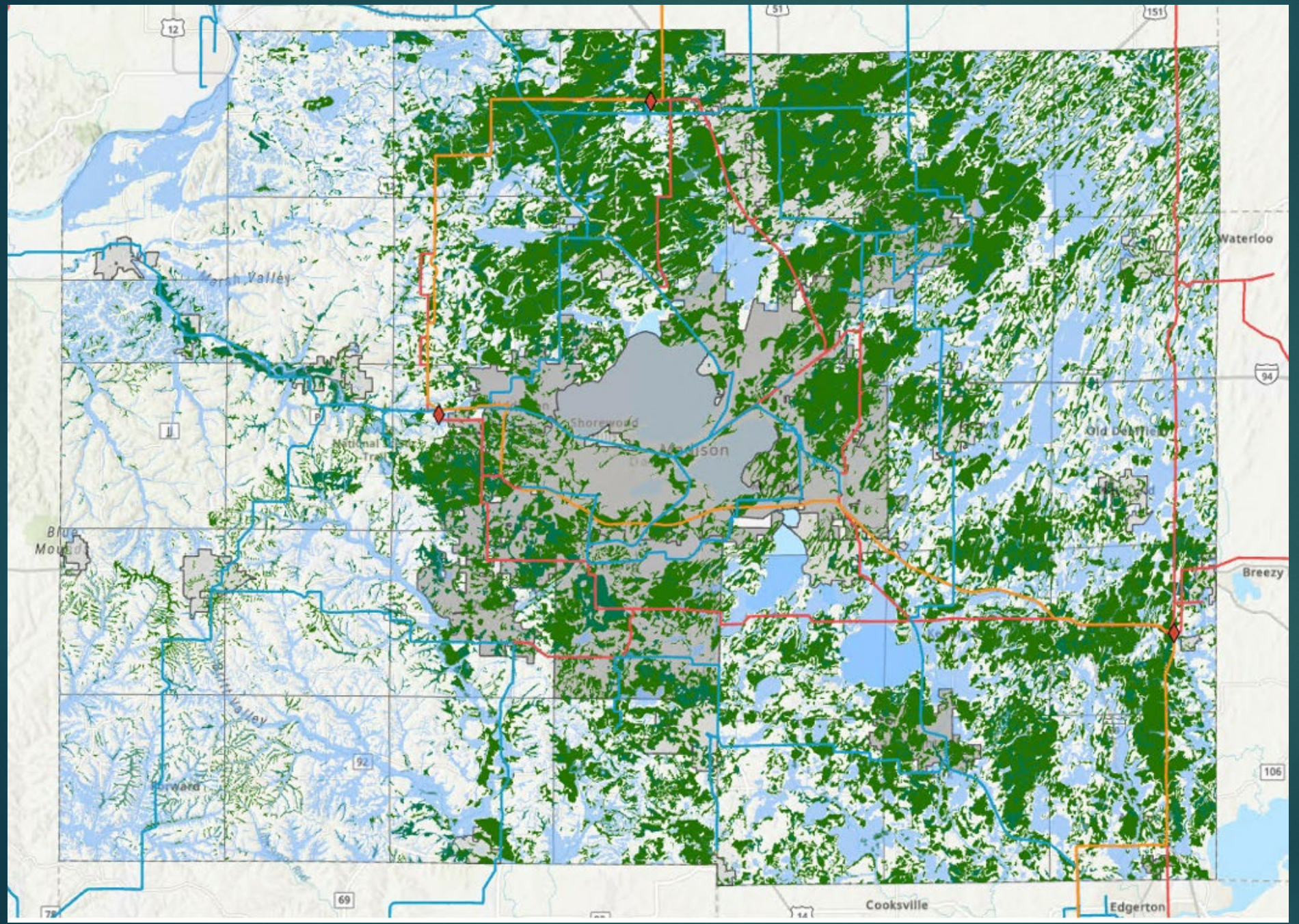


- Regional plan to guide anticipated growth (+200k population by 2050)
- Promotes compact development that:
  - Reduces greenhouse gas emissions; climate resilience
  - Increases access to housing/jobs/services
  - Conserves farmland, water resources, natural areas, and fiscal resources

Land Use Compatibility Risks

Examples:

- Farmland Loss and Impacts – Location of existing utility infrastructure within / near ag preservation areas
- Annexation Pressures – Industrial "islands" in ag areas
- Resource Strain - Water and electricity consumption; new generation and/or transmission facilities required
- Aesthetic Impact – Size/scale conflict with rural character
- Others??



Map shows:

Existing utility lines and substations (red diamonds)

High quality farmland (green)

Resource protection areas (light blue waterbodies, floodplain, wetlands)

Land Use Compatibility Opportunities

Examples:

- Conservation Funding: Potential for tax revenue or negotiated agreements to fund Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) on other lands
- Biodiversity Gains: Approvals could be conditioned on restoring native prairie within campus buffers or other designated areas.
- Compact Growth: Concentrating high-value development on one site to prevent lower-density industrial sprawl elsewhere.
- Others??

From Last Meeting: What Influences Land Use?

County and Local Plans, Policies, Processes

- Comprehensive Plans
- Farmland Preservation Plans
- Parks and Open Space Plans
- Land and Water Resources Conservation Plans
- Detailed plans and studies: neighborhood, corridor, economic development
- Mapping (official mapping, Future Land Use Maps)
- Extraterritorial jurisdiction ordinances/reviews
- Boundary agreements
- Zoning ordinances
- Subdivision ordinances
- Design standards/guidelines
- Site plan review
- Public land acquisition
- Transfer/purchase of development rights programs

Regional Plans, Policies, Processes

- Dane County Water Quality Plan
  - Sewer service area planning
- Regional Development Framework
- Regional Transportation Plan
- Economic development planning

What Else Influences Land Use?

Other Factors and Trends impacting farmland and environmental protection

- Easements
- Property owner and developer decisions, and municipal decisions (ex. annexations, Comp Plans)
- Utility and infrastructure planning
- Current/future trends in agriculture:
  - Succession planning
  - Fluctuating input/output prices
  - Climate change

Reminder: Questions to Consider for Each Topic Area

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Some Questions Specifically for this Topic

1. Based on adopted County plans, should specific agricultural, natural resource, or other areas be specifically designated as "no-build" zones for industrial development?
2. What additional risks/impacts could result from new utility extensions and major infrastructure upgrades, and could these be reasonably mitigated by tools/mechanisms available to local governments?
3. What siting criteria or thresholds should guide communities in distinguishing potentially compatible locations from incompatible ones?
4. How can Intergovernmental Agreements (IGAs) synchronize standards across jurisdictions to prevent "jurisdiction shopping"?
5. How do we balance the potential fiscal windfalls of hyperscale data center development against the permanent, multi-generational loss of Dane County's finite agricultural and natural heritage?