

On June 13, 2006 this document was presented to the full County Board stating the top ten reasons why Washington County needs to implement a Purchase of Development Rights Program.

The supervisors appointed to present this document were Dan Stoffel, Mary Krumbiegel, Herb Tennes, Ralph Hensel and Don Berchem.

Purchase of Development Rights

Top 10 Reasons Why Washington County Needs PDR

1. A PDR program is Good for the Economy

Agriculture is an industry that is already here – and going strong. A 2005 UWEX survey shows that agriculture in Washington County supports 5,000 jobs and each year pumps \$630 million into the local economy, contributes over \$200 million to the county's total income and pays over \$20 million in local and state taxes. It is a feeder or foundational industry, meaning that many other businesses either branch off from it or support it. A few examples are seed, feed and fertilizer dealers, crop consultants, veterinarians, legal and financial services, canneries, retail stores and implement dealers.

PDR encourages long-term planning and investment in farming operations. As large blocks of farmland are protected, it reduces risks to producers from future land use conflicts. Outside sources of PDR grant funds pump additional money into the local economy. With the development rights removed, PDR land can be sold to future generations of farmers at more affordable prices. Having a strong agricultural presence helps maintain economic diversity in the community, reserving the most productive lands to raise food for people and livestock and biomass for future energy markets.

2. PDR is a Vital Tool for Implementing Local Land Use Plans and a Community Vision

A successful PDR program is based on a comprehensive land use plan that reserves prime agricultural lands, natural areas and plenty of space for future growth. The plan must be supported by all the communities involved, serving as a shared vision, guiding future land use decisions and encouraging intergovernmental cooperation. Realtor and developer groups support this because the plan does not try to control growth. It simply encourages orderly growth, where urban services can be provided in a more cost-effective manner. Since everyone knows where development is planned and where it is not, this minimizes related controversy and litigation, and ultimately saves tax dollars.

Zoning ordinances are the primary tool to implement and enforce the comprehensive plan. However, history shows that more tools are needed to effectively preserve prime farmland. Local officials often find it difficult to deny long time community members from rezoning farmland for a rural subdivision, especially if financial issues are involved. Agricultural zoning districts can also change with each election cycle. A PDR program provides another alternative to the rural landowner and empowers local officials to uphold land use plans.

3. Good Land Use is Good for Other Businesses

Good management of community growth, protection of natural areas and preservation of prime agricultural lands conveys a powerful quality of life statement for a community. This helps current employers attract a quality workforce and encourages business growth and investment. The positive impression left on visitors encourages their return. The county already enjoys significant tourist

destinations such as the Kettle Moraine State Forest, Holy Hill, Pike Lake, etc. These sites are significantly enhanced by the surrounding agricultural and natural areas. Preserving these areas enhances the experience of visitors while improving property values for county residents. Sales taxes from a robust tourist industry can be used to support the PDR effort. Preserved agricultural areas attract other businesses that are supported by or serve the ag industry. Business leaders in the county support PDR because of the many positive impacts on the local economy.

4. The Time is Right - We are at a Land Use Crossroad in Washington County

Since 1995, the county's rural landscape has been converted to urban or residential uses at a rate of over 2.3 square miles per year - double the rate from the previous 30 years. Prime farmland and natural areas are finite resources. Once they're gone, they're gone. Large areas of prime farmland, working farms and farm services remain in the county, but won't for long unless a concerted effort is made to protect them. Communities across the county are currently planning for their future, deciding what they want to look like many years from now. Farmland preservation and preserving rural character consistently come up as key objectives in local land use plans. State statutes charge counties with coordinating these efforts through the preparation of county farmland preservation and park and open space plans. In short, the time is right. PDR is great way for the County to help local communities meet their land use vision.

5. PDR Protects the Environment and Improves Quality of Life

Farmland and natural areas are where our drinking water comes from. Rainwater soaks into the ground, recharging the aquifers that feed our public and private wells. Due to the local geology, municipalities especially rely on the western part of the county for this to occur. Open spaces also help minimize runoff volumes, water pollution and downstream flooding. To protect our soil and water resources, PDR program rules require all participating farmers to follow strict conservation standards. Farms and their associated natural areas also provide the majority of local wildlife habitat, hunting opportunities and recreation trails for outdoor enthusiasts. To build on this, the PDR program would be closely coordinated with land acquisitions through the county's park and open space plan. Surveys show that all of these items are important to what people collectively consider "quality of life" in their community.

6. PDR Prevents Land Use Conflicts and the Slow Death of Agriculture

People tend to buy their acre of paradise in the country to enjoy the scenery, but then complain about the noise or odors of farming. Commuter traffic on local roads is not compatible with large, slow moving farm machinery. Products farmers use to protect crops or improve soil quality may not be tolerated by people or pets in nearby subdivisions. These types of conflicts often peak during planting and harvesting seasons, and tend to be worse for livestock operations. Left unchecked, they cause farmers to stop investing in their business, or move out of the area. The community ultimately suffers as more land is sold for development and the conflicts snowball. Good land use planning, zoning and PDR can help minimize these conflicts. A robust agricultural industry can then be sustained in harmony with surrounding land uses.

7. PDR Preserves Our Farming Heritage and Rural Character

Less than 2% of the nation's population makes a living farming. As a result, people have become out of touch with their rural heritage, the source of their food and how it is produced. PDR would help preserve some of this heritage in the county, providing a local place for children and adults to learn about agriculture and its role in our economy and quality of life. The popularity of the annual *Breakfast on the Farm* is a good example of the local interest in this type of activity, attracting over 4,000 visitors each year. Scenic vistas of farmland and the Kettle Moraine landscape define the "rural character" that residents always say is so important in local surveys. PDR would set Washington County apart from

other urbanizing counties by demonstrating that significant growth can occur without sacrificing the agricultural industry in the process.

8. PDR Demonstrates Political Leadership and Vision

As a primary recommendation of the *Working Lands Initiative*, Wisconsin is currently considering joining 27 other states that have a PDR program. State leaders are looking to Washington County to demonstrate how a state/local partnership could work here. With our diverse landscape, strong agricultural industry and high development pressures, we are a logical place to start. The county sales tax makes it economically feasible to match PDR grant funds, something towns can't do. When the county sales tax was recently extended, it was with the understanding that a minimum of 10% would be used for PDR. This funding source also takes advantage of the 14% currently generated from visitor shoppers, which is bound to increase in the future. A PDR program in Washington County is a great opportunity for County Board members to demonstrate to citizens that they have a long-term vision of the county, including growth in the urban and agricultural sectors - and are the leaders needed to get us there.

9. PDR Provides Food for Local Markets & Land for the Future Bio-economy

Less than 2% of the Earth's surface has suitable soils and climate for growing the food needed to support its ever growing population. Washington County happens to be in one of those areas, supporting a diverse agricultural industry of livestock, cash grain and specialty farming. Farming is a sustainable industry – always adapting, making technological advances and rising to current challenges. Locally grown food has minimal security risks compared to imports, a growing concern nationally due to the nature of foreign threats these days. A nationwide movement is also underway to transition away from petroleum dependence, and toward proven biobased, zero-waste alternatives, that are more sustainable and environmentally-benign (i.e. bio-plastics, biodiesel and bioethanol). It is important to preserve productive soils close to markets to produce the biomass for these initiatives, as well as healthy food products for local markets.

10. PDR Benefits Everyone and the People Want It!

Whether it's preserving green space and rural character, attracting quality employees, encouraging business investment, planning for future markets, avoiding land use conflicts, creating jobs, providing wildlife habitat or recharging our local drinking water supplies, a PDR program would benefit everyone in Washington County. Like planting a tree, PDR has some immediate paybacks, but most of the benefits will be enjoyed by future generations. Survey after survey shows the vast majority of county residents support the preservation of prime farmland and natural areas. The County has been studying PDR for over 3 years, with the assistance of experts from around the country. Less than 3 months ago, a county-sponsored PDR Task Force provided a full report of PDR program recommendations, which the County Board voted to support 17-11. It has been all over the news. Fourteen local communities and business organizations have already weighed in favor of PDR. It is not some unknown, untried idea. It has been used successfully for decades in 27 other states. The only question is, will the County Board follow the wishes of its citizens and make farmland and natural area preservation a priority?