

Fundamental. It's a key word for Wisconsin's town government. Ninety-five percent of Wisconsin's geography and thirty percent of its population is served through the fundamental provisions of Wisconsin's 1245* towns ("Town Government"). Wisconsin Towns Association lists important basic services provided by each town, which include administering elections, conducting property tax assessments, disputing procedures, billing and collection; fire protection and ambulance service; providing for a recycling program, and maintaining town roads. So when asked, *What priorities should local town government officials pursue to improve the quality of town life in my community?*, I know the improvements must fall within the scope of function authorized by Wisconsin state law for Wisconsin towns. Although there are many pursuit-worthy possibilities, I believe communication, educating the community, and land use management/economic development are three concepts which, if considered, could generate positive ameliorations.

Effective and clear communication between the town board (composed of a town chairperson and usually two to four supervisors) and the community it serves is vital for bettering the quality of life. *A Citizen's Guide to Land Use in Wisconsin* encourages communication, stating, "Newsletters and information meetings are important ways to keep citizens informed about the progress of the planning...a continuous flow of information is crucial..." In our tech-savvy world, information can also be shared through email, online updates, and social media posts. Communication is important in town leadership because it will unify people around a shared purpose and goal (Chabot). It ensures the community feels engaged and valued. Projects, budgets, land use changes, service adjustments...these and many other topics will be better received and conducted when both sides, town officials and town dwellers, are communicating clearly. Blogger Leonard Horowitz from Ultatel notes the following on

communication in government, “In the world of governance, strong communication plays a vital role. It’s like the glue that holds everything together, helping people understand what’s happening and why it matters.” It builds trust. It creates connections. Communication should serve to improve life in our community!

Secondly, it is important each town is well-educated on town government, on how the town’s elected board members continue to serve and improve the quality of life. Educating both youth and adults would allow residents in their respective towns to better understand and appreciate the duties and responsibilities of town government. Simple informational and interactive educational programs could be introduced in classrooms for children as young as kindergarten. This material could be re-presented at various ages, giving students repeated opportunities to learn and understand town government. Similarly, programs for adults could be created and offered intermittently to encourage understanding, participation, and appreciation for services provided by towns. Repeated educational opportunities should encourage knowledgeable participation when it comes to improving the quality of life in one’s own community. If folks do not understand the function of town government, or if they are intimidated by it, they may be less willing to contribute. An informed people betters a town, ideally producing cooperation, collaboration, and additional education between townspeople and town government.

Finally, residents of towns often choose town life because it offers benefits that cities may not: spacious areas, residential properties, sense of community, lower taxes and cost of living. The list goes on. Land use and economic development are central components to how a town looks, “feels”, and functions. A map of Wisconsin shows Wisconsin divided into seventy-two counties, and from there, 1245 towns (*Wisconsin Blue Book 2023-2024* #341). With such

small divisions, the land in Wisconsin can be managed very carefully, very thoughtfully. Each town, its government and population, has the responsibility to care for the land within it, bringing the best quality of life to the families and the businesses within. There must be a balance of recreational, residential, and business (and agricultural) space. With wise distribution, positive results occur: agricultural and business zones generate income, open spaces enable recreation or preservation, and spacious areas accommodate comfortable living. The decisions made about a community's growth and development have an important impact on landscapes and on individuals and should incorporate input from town residents (The Land Use Institute). It is common to assume that growth is progress and therefore, desirable. After all, a growing town brings in more revenue. However, many people choose to live in towns because of what they are, not what they could grow into. Those people intentionally picked town living; they may not want their town to grow into a city. Town government is capable of assessing, addressing, and prioritizing needs, while gleaning valuable insights from town residents. Careful management of land and economic growth will certainly improve life in our communities.

In summary, communication, education, and proper land use are components which can contribute to improving the quality of life in a community. *A Citizen's Guide to Land Use in Wisconsin* reminds us, "One of the most significant outcomes of proper land use is to create a community that functions cohesively, looks pleasant, and feels welcoming." Town government should strive to make connections and communicate with its people, educate residents on town government services and functions, and work to utilize town land which offers optimal benefits to the community. Improving a community's quality of life is a partnership. Town government and town residents can work together on fundamental issues to create a dynamic, economically healthy, and flourishing community.

*Numbers conflicted. Statistic from website (1250 towns) adjusted with information from 2023-2024 Wisconsin Blue Book

Works Cited

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