

# City of Alma

## **Comprehensive Land Use Plan**

**Adopted December 7, 2017  
By the Common Council**

**Prepared by Residents of  
The City of Alma**

## **City of Alma, Comprehensive Land Use Plan Buffalo County, Wisconsin**

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# **City of Alma, Comprehensive Land Use Plan**

## **Table of Contents**

	<b>Page</b>
<b>Definitions .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Planning Process.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Vision for City of Alma .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>History of the City of Alma .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Planning Elements.....</b>	<b>6</b>
Issues and Opportunities .....	7
Housing Element .....	12
Transportation Element.....	13
City of Alma Street Map.....	17
Buffalo County Snowmobile Trails Map.....	18
Utilities and Community Facilities Element.....	19
Agricultural, Natural and Cultural Resources.....	22
City of Alma Floodplain Map.....	25
Economic Development Element.....	26
Intergovernmental Cooperation Element.....	30
Land Use Element .....	31
City of Alma Current Land Use Map.....	33
Implementation Element .....	34

## **Definitions:**

**Bluff-** A steep headland, promontory (high ridge of land or rock jutting out to sea or other body of water), riverbank, or cliff.

**Dugway-** A section of roadway extending from the top of a bluff to the bottom of a bluff, generally through the wooded portion of the bluff with a steep grade, often with sharp curves and/or switchbacks. We assume the term originates from construction by digging into a hill.

**Prime Farmland-** Rural land with the best combination of physical & chemical characteristics for producing food, feed, forage, fiber, and oilseed crops, and is available for these uses. Normally includes classes I, II, III land as defined by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service.

## **Works Cited**

**“Bluff.”** The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000.

**“Dugway.”** Brevick, Dave. Buffalo County Highway Commissioner. Personal Interview. 4 Oct. 2001.

**“Prime Farmland.”** Official definition. National Resource Conservation Services.

## **Planning Process**

The land use planning process began with a presentation by the Buffalo County Extension Agriculture Agent to the Buffalo County Towns Association which also invited the cities and municipalities in 2006. The agent spoke on changes in agriculture and the effect of that change on land use. The City of Alma was the first city in Buffalo County to contact the Buffalo County Extension Office for help in developing a plan.

The Agricultural Agent then attended a City of Alma Council meeting and explained the process and the work that needed to be completed.

City of Alma officials then invited a number of people to serve on a planning committee. Other committee members asked to be included through a land use survey and through public meeting announcements. Efforts were made to invite a diverse group of residents. The planning committee provided needed views and input into issues that should be addressed and that are included in this document. Results from this effort are found later in this document.

Land use plans are not static documents, but are designed to change and be revised to meet current needs of the people. This document will be used as a guide to future change and development in the City of Alma.

## **VISION FOR City of Alma**

(This vision statement was developed by a subcommittee of the planning committee following the issues discussion. It helped to drive the discussions related to actions for the plan.)

### **City of Alma – Vision for the Future**

The vision of Alma in the future is a city that continues to both appreciate its history and build this community for the future. Citizens recognize the contributions that have been made by past leaders, and will focus on the youth and young families in planning for the future. Alma will not be a seasonal city, but rather be a vibrant small city with families of all ages and people employed locally. In that regard, the City of Alma will focus on three areas:

- **Youth**

- Continue the tradition of a local public school which shares programs and student opportunities with neighboring districts when appropriate. The independent identity of Alma Area Schools is an important asset for the City of Alma.
- Develop and implement a plan for bike/walking paths connecting commercial, residential, park, and school areas for safe access between these areas. Such paths will promote an active and healthy lifestyle for children and adults.
- Encourage the development of a business climate which encourages entrepreneurs and small businesses and, in turn, will attract families and help keep young people in Alma.
- Encourage and expand the availability of technology for our students both in the formal education system and informally through the library and other venues.

- **Infrastructure**

- The natural, historical and cultural beauty of Alma, including its small town atmosphere, will be an important priority in all decisions regarding infrastructure improvements and additions.
- Explore the use of the alley between First and Second Streets for upgrading utilities, burying utility lines and providing gas to residents and businesses.
- Upgrades and maintenance of all utilities will be part of the City's annual planning.
- The railroad is both a blessing and a curse. While the railroad does service the power plant, its through traffic produces noise and vibration. The City will work with the railroad in exploring ways to minimize the dangers of pedestrian and vehicular crossings of its tracks within the City
- Reduction of train/truck/motorcycle and other traffic noise will be studied and implemented where feasible without reducing safety of residents and visitors.
- Maintain the stair street structure in Alma as a unique feature of the

City (fewer than 10 other cities in US have this feature).

- The City of Alma will closely monitor the discussions around the expansion of the lock and dam system and study the effects that any change will have on the economy, infrastructure and aesthetics of the city.
- The natural amphitheater setting at Buena Vista Park will be considered for outdoor concerts and other entertainment.
- Speed limits in Alma will reflect the safety of both citizens and visitors.
- The City of Alma will coordinate with the Corps of Engineers of the United States to plan Corps use of City streets for hauling dredged materials within the City.

- **Business Development**

- Small business development will be welcomed into the City of Alma, in particular those businesses that have potential for providing a living wage.
- Businesses will be encouraged to work together through an active Chamber of Commerce to promote development and increase business activity within the City.
- All businesses located in the city will be encouraged to have minimal impact on the current beauty of the City.
- The Tourism Commission will continue to promote tourist visits to Alma by promotion funded by a portion of the room tax.

## **Brief History of the City of Alma**

It is important to understand a little about one's past before making decisions about the future. The following is a brief excerpt about the history of the City of Alma.

The first two settlers came to Alma in 1848. Their names were Victor Probst and John Waecker. They were both Swiss immigrants who traveled up river by steamboat from Galena, Illinois. Alma was called Twelve Mile Bluff named by riverboat pilots for a Prominent rock formation located on the bluff above the city cemetery. This rock was visible from the mouth of the Chippewa River twelve miles to the North. In 1855 the name of Twelve Mile Bluff was exchanged for the name Alma. W. H. Gates suggested the name Alma after hearing the name of the battle of the Alma River in Russia.

A major event in Alma's history occurred in 1867 when three local businessmen joined with some Chippewa Valley timberland owners to incorporate the Beef Slough Manufacturing, Booming, Log Driving, and Transportation Company.

Alma became a Village in 1868 and became City in 1885. In 1885 the first train arrives in the City. In 1932 work on the construction of U.S. Lock & Dam No. 4 begins. This signals the end of "Old Alma".



## **ELEMENTS OF COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING**

Smart Growth legislation, signed into Wisconsin law as part of the State's 1999-2000 budget, is intended to provide local government units tools to create comprehensive plans, to promote more informed land-use decisions and to encourage state agencies to create more balanced land-use rules and policies. Nine elements are required by the Smart Growth legislation. These elements ensure that all aspects of community life will be considered as part of the comprehensive plan. The nine elements are:

Issues and opportunities  
Housing  
Transportation  
Utilities and Community Facilities Agriculture,  
Natural, and Cultural Resources Economic  
Development  
Intergovernmental Cooperation Land Use  
Implementation

### **Development of Goals for the City of Alma**

Land use planning is more than a set of rules for building, etc. It is a declaration of the priorities and values of the people within the City. These priorities and values should determine if and how property is developed and used.

The remainder of this document describes the priorities and values of the people of the City of Alma. It lists a set of action plans to achieve these priorities and values.

## ISSUES AND OPPROTUNITIES:

### Population and Population Projections:

Population of the City has varied over time from 1,008 in 1960 to 769 in 2017. Projections from the Wisconsin Department of Administration – Demographic Services Center, indicate that population is expected to increase slightly to XXX in 2020.

Residents felt that the City’s population could approach the projections as indicated, but only with a considerable active effort of economic development for the population to reach those levels.

### City of Alma Population Statistics and Projections – U.S. Census Data

<b>Jurisdiction</b>	<b>Census 1960</b>	<b>Census 1970</b>	<b>Census 1980</b>	<b>Census 1990</b>	<b>Census 2000</b>	<b>Census 2010</b>	<b>Est. 2017</b>
City of Alma	1,008	956	848	839	942	815	781
Buffalo County	14202	13743	14309	13584	13804	13,587	13,703

### Population by Race:

The City of Alma is predominantly white. This has been constant since records have been kept. There is an increasing population of Hispanic people (may not be reflected in the census) due to employment opportunities on farms and other business entry level positions.

### City of Alma - Population by Race – 2010 Census

<b>Race</b>	<b>Population %</b>
Total	781 (people)
White	98.5
Hispanic	0.0
Black	0.1
Asian	0.1
Native American	0.4
Other (2 or more races)	0.9

### Population by Education Level:

The City of Alma is similar to other neighboring municipalities except that they have a slightly higher percent of the population with high school and college graduate degrees in Buffalo County. This may be explained by the number of teachers that live in the community and have stayed and retired here, also a number of retired people moving to the community that have degrees.

### City of Alma Population by Education – Am. Community Survey

<b>Education Level</b>	<b>Population %</b>
Total (>25 years old) 601 population	100
No High School Diploma	9.9
High School Diploma Only	31.8
Some College	22.8
Associates Degree	11.1
Bachelor’s Degree	16.8
Graduate Degree	7.7

**Population by Age:**

Population in the City of Alma tends to be older than in Buffalo County. The median age is 50.3, Buffalo County is 44.1. This is most likely due to the large number of people that have moved to the City of Alma to retire. Very few young people in comparison to other municipalities as a percent of the population.

**City of Alma Population by Age – 2010 Census**

<b>Age – years</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Under 5	34	4.4
5-9	24	3.1
10-14	36	4.6
15-19	38	4.9
20-24	33	4.2
25-34	78	9.9
35-44	89	11.5
45-54	111	14.2
55-59	60	7.7
60-64	63	8.1
65-74	96	12.3
75 and older	119	15.3

**Per Capita Income:**

Per capita income has increased in the City of Alma faster than that of Buffalo County, and exceeded the State of Wisconsin income level in 2000. Some of this difference is higher income level of many of the retired people that have moved to the City.

**City of Alma Per Capita Income – 2010 Census**

	<b>1990 per capita income</b>	<b>2000 per capita income</b>	<b>2010 per capita income</b>
City of Alma	\$12,646	\$21,885	\$24,552
Buffalo County	\$10,947	\$18,123	\$22,579
State of Wisconsin	\$13,276	\$21,271	\$26,624

**City of Alma Planning Committee: Reasons for Living in the City of Alma – SWOT Analysis: with ranking****Strengths: (major)**

- ✓ School
- ✓ Beauty
- ✓ Fishing and Hunting
- ✓ Parks
- ✓ Homes with views
- ✓ Mississippi/History
- ✓ Friendliness of city

- ✓ Safety and lower crime rate

**Strengths: (minor)**

- Beauty
- School
- Size
- Community pulls together to help organization and families – one big family
- Location – 45 minutes from anywhere
- People want to come because of businesses
- Education
- Alma Public Library
- Parks
- Jobs
- Fishing and Hunting
- Recreation
- Museums
- History
- Historical homes
- New business – Winery
- Climate
- Homes with view – living nature
- Mississippi River – history and recreational use
- Health care options
- Kwik Trip
- Friendliness of city
- Safety – low crime rate
- County seat
- Main street – diverse businesses
- Midwestern solid character and values
- Local bank
- New residents bringing new ideas and beauty to city
- Dam observation
- Dairyland Power
- EMS ambulance base
- Stairways and walls
- Wings Over Alma –Art/Nature Center

**Weaknesses: (major)**

- ✓ Parking limited by terrain
- ✓ Little collaboration among businesses
- ✓ Shawnee Estates – stalled real estate project
- ✓ Development space

- ✓ Vacant buildings and lots
- ✓ Safety path to beach and school
- ✓ City Hall --required repairs
- ✓ Houses purchased by non-residents
- ✓ Lack of capital – business

**Weaknesses: (minor)**

- No hardware store
- Limited selection grocery stores
- No taxi
- Noise – highway/trains/tugs/ motorcycles
- Few safe places for kids to play/ride bike
- Limited locations for youth activities
- Location
- Night time lighting
- Signage – to many i.e. no parking
- Major highway through town
- Ordinances – wording etc....
- Barge lights
- Train safety
- Dairyland Power
- Communications towers on the bluff
- 7 miles long
- Stair cases – repair issues
- Above ground wires
- Grumpy people
- Rocky soil
- Buildings that need repair
- Vacant buildings and lots
- Number of liquor licenses in city
- Number of non-profit buildings – loss of tax
- Number of apartments
- Tourism – changes made for tourist and not residents
- Snow removal issues
- No natural gas

**Opportunities: (major)**

- ✓ Festivals—Fire in the Shire, Swiss Heritage Days, fishing tournaments
- ✓ Shawnee Estates—recreation, residential and business development
- ✓ Bus tours
- ✓ Regional hub for recreational biking – Flyway Trail
- ✓ City transportation

- ✓ Residents with kids: more families
- ✓ Mountain bike trails in parks
- ✓ Use vacant lots
- ✓ Canoe and Kayak access to Buffalo River and Mississippi backwaters

#### **Opportunities: (minor)**

- Bus tours – castle-museum-lock and dam-vine yard – Buena Vista
- Servicing tourism - rental – service tourist
- Shuttle service and or deliveries to marinas (food and other)
- “Fat Old Man” downhill bicycle tours
- Use vacant lots for parties/kid friendly places etc...
- Development of history – walking tours of stories from buildings – current businesses owners telling stories (be your own historian)
- Development of Farmers Market
- Year round – Coop (food)
- Big River Theater
- Buena Vista – music groups – natural atmosphere
- Develop a bike path/walking path to ball field and marina
- Commuter rail
- Taxi – development
- Opportunities for sharing with other school districts rather than closing
- Shuttle from marinas
- Dock to the north
- Alma Hills development
- Campers – seeking to purchase food

#### **Threats: (major)**

- ✓ Vision of our youth does not include Alma
- ✓ Loss of power plant(s)
- ✓ Stopping where we are – not being willing to change or discuss change
- ✓ Aging population – loss of population
- ✓ Loss of school

#### **Threats:**

- Aging population
- Not involving youth in planning
- Loss of population
- Loss of identity
- Stagnation of downtown district – seasonal
- Maintaining basic services for residents

## HOUSING ELEMENT:

New housing starts have been limited in the City of Alma. The topography of the City limits the number of houses in many areas. A number of housing lots have been sold in the two housing subdivisions that are currently under development within the City limits. There is a concern that the subdivision owned by the City is not being effectively advertised. Signs are not allowed on State Road 35 so road traffic advertising is not effective. The City will need to look at other means for advertising, such as: brochures at Wings Over Alma, City and Chamber websites, kiosk for weekend traffic when City Hall is not open, etc.

Rental property has increased with very little restriction on the type or quality of rental units. Planning committee members would like to see policy in place to maintain quality housing for all economic classes that are located within the City.

<b>Housing Units in the City of Alma and Buffalo County</b>					
<b>Area</b>	<b>1970</b>	<b>1980</b>	<b>1990</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2017</b>
City of Alma	393	438	414	495	488
Buffalo County	4,597	5,478	5,586	6,098	6,664

There are a total of 488 total housing units in the City of Alma. 84.2% of the homes were occupied. 47.3% of the homes (194) were occupied by families. 39.5% (163) had at least one individual 65 years or older living in the home. 32% were renter occupied homes. Average household size was 1.8 persons. The median home value was \$109,057. 66% of all homes were single family dwellings (7.8% of those homes were mobile homes). 92 of the homes are seasonal

### Goals and Actions:

- The City will conduct a study of the current renter population in the City to determine the demographic of the population that is renting and gauge their satisfaction with current rental facilities.
- Enhance and maintain the quality of the current housing through enforcement of current City policies.
- Maintain historical aspects of houses through cooperation with the Alma Historical District Board
- Explore an assisted living facility in Alma, in cooperation with local churches and other organizations
- Improve quality and appearance of rentals overall through granting of rental permits for owners.
- Explore cooperating with Habitat for Humanity for new housing in Shawnee Estates.
- City Council will develop a better plan to advertise the Shawnee Estates Housing development currently owned by the City.

## **TRANSPORTATION ELEMENT:**

The City of Alma is a dynamic transportation center. The City maintains of 12.05 miles of municipal roads. The Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad has 40 to 50 freight trains passing through the City each day. Lock and Dam Four on the Mississippi is the only such facility downstream of the Twin Cities which is located within a city, affording amazing access for viewing. In 2014 there were 1,116 barges, carrying 7,306,456,000 tons of cargo, 3,843 pleasure craft, and 11 commercial passenger vessels (The Queen's) that passed through the lock in Alma.

State Highway 35 also passes through Alma, creating economic potential and travel challenges. Highway 35 is a primary route for transportation of grain to the river terminals at Winona, Minnesota. It is also a main route for tourists travelling the Great River Road in all seasons of the year. Bicycle traffic is becoming more common on the Great River Road and must share the road through Alma with other motorized vehicles.

The Alma Area School and City parks at the beach and Riecks Lake are all located on the North end of town and children must ride on the side of State Highway 35 creating a hazardous traffic environment. Posted speed limit is 55 miles per hour 3.0 miles before reaching the school facility (from the Burlington Hotel to school).

No new road construction is anticipated in the timeframe of this plan. The major objective of the transportation plan is to maintain and improve the high quality of existing roads.

### **State and Regional Transportation Plans:**

At [www.dot.state.wi.us](http://www.dot.state.wi.us) the Wisconsin Department of Transportation home page under "Plans and Project", then, "Planning Resources", then, "Modal and Multimodal Plans", the Committee reviewed and considered the following State and Regional Transportation Plans that have potential affects or integration with the City of Alma plan.

**Connections 2030** - the current multimodal plan being developed for all forms of Transportation through the year 2030

**Wisconsin State Highway Plan 2020** – the current strategic plan for all facets of the 12,000 miles of the State's highways

**Wisconsin Highway Improvement Program 2017-2020** – the more specific construction programs for the Wisconsin DOT

**Wisconsin Airport System Plan 2030** – the plan for determining airport facility needs

**Wisconsin Bicycle Plan 2020** – comprehensive bicycle plan

**Wisconsin Statewide Pedestrian Policy Plan 2020** – the plan outlines State and local measures to promote safe pedestrian travel



**Wisconsin Rail Plan 2030** – the rail plan being developed for integrated rail development through 2030

**Buffalo County Highway Plans** – Currently, there are no plans for major county road work, beyond general maintenance for any county roads within the borders of the City.

Currently, the City of Alma is not specifically identified for any recommendations or included in any projects with these plans.

**Bus Service:**

There is no scheduled bus service in the City of Alma. The nearby commercial bus services by Greyhound Lines and Jefferson Bus Lines stop in Winona, Minnesota, and Eau Claire, Wisconsin.

**Freight Rail Service:**

The Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) runs along the entire western edge of Buffalo County and the City. The closest currently used spur is located at the Dairyland Power site.

**Passenger Rail Service:**

There is no passenger rail service to the City of Alma. Daily passenger service (AMTRAK) is available in Winona, Minnesota, with one southbound and one northbound train per day.

**Airports:**

There are no public or private airports in the City of Alma. Winona, MN has a public airport but no passenger air service. La Crosse, WI has the closest passenger air service which is about 60 minutes from the City and Rochester, MN is the second closest. Many residents traveling by air would fly out of Minneapolis/St. Paul International Airport (MSP) which requires about 120 minutes travel time. An airport shuttle service to the MSP Airport from Menomonie and Wabasha, Minnesota, is also available.

**Water Transportation:**

The Mississippi River runs on the entire west side of Buffalo County, with the Port of Winona being the closest terminal. Grain, coal, and other commodities travel through Lock and Dam 4. Much of the grain produced in Buffalo County and areas to the north travel through Alma by truck to Winona and sold to one of three grain buyers to be loaded onto barges. Fertilizer, Chemical, Liquid Propane and other commodities are shipped to Winona and distributed throughout the region by truck. Occasional cruise vessels pass through Alma with closest boarding at Wabasha, Minnesota.

**Trucking:**

Most commercial shipping in the City is by truck, with State Highway 35 being a major transportation route. Currently, grain being transported to Winona, results in a lot of the truck traffic through Alma. There is much concern about potential increased truck traffic from the hauling of frac sand and dredged material through the City.

**Pedestrian and Bike Trails:**

There are no designated bike path and two designated walking trails in the City of Alma. Proposals have been made for a bike path to the School, to increase safety and provide better access to existing city parks. Development of the Flyway Trail as an off-highway recreational bike/hiking trail along the Highway 35 corridor is underway. A system of mountain-bike trails in City parks is being developed.

**Snowmobile Trails:**

There is a very strong network of snowmobile trails in Buffalo County. These trails are located on private property. Maintenance and property agreements are completed by local clubs. The City is working to get better access to Alma businesses for snowmobiles. See map on page 18.

**City of Alma City Street Improvement Plans**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Road Name</b>	<b>Improvement</b>
<b>2015</b>	<b>Cedar Street</b>	<b>Reconstruction</b>
<b>2015</b>	<b>2<sup>nd</sup> Street</b>	<b>Crack sealing and seal coating</b>
<b>2015</b>	<b>Vista Drive</b>	<b>Crack sealing and seal coating</b>
<b>2015</b>	<b>Riverview Drive</b>	<b>Some reconstruction</b>
<b>2015</b>	<b>River Street</b>	<b>Reconstruction</b>
<b>2015-16</b>	<b>Badland Road</b>	<b>Reconstruction in cooperation with The Town of Nelson</b>

Wish list if funds become available:

Bicycle usage in rural areas is on the increase. The planning committee expressed concerns about safety on city, county, and state roads due to the amount of motorized traffic, farm traffic and bicycle traffic all sharing the same roads. Many visitors to the City of Alma may not be aware of the amount and size of truck traffic and modern farm machinery.

Some elderly transportation is available through Buffalo County Health and Human Services, Meals on Wheels program. Transportation is also available for veterans through Veteran's services.

The City of Alma currently cooperates with the following units of government on transportation issues: Buffalo County, Town of Nelson, and Village of Nelson.

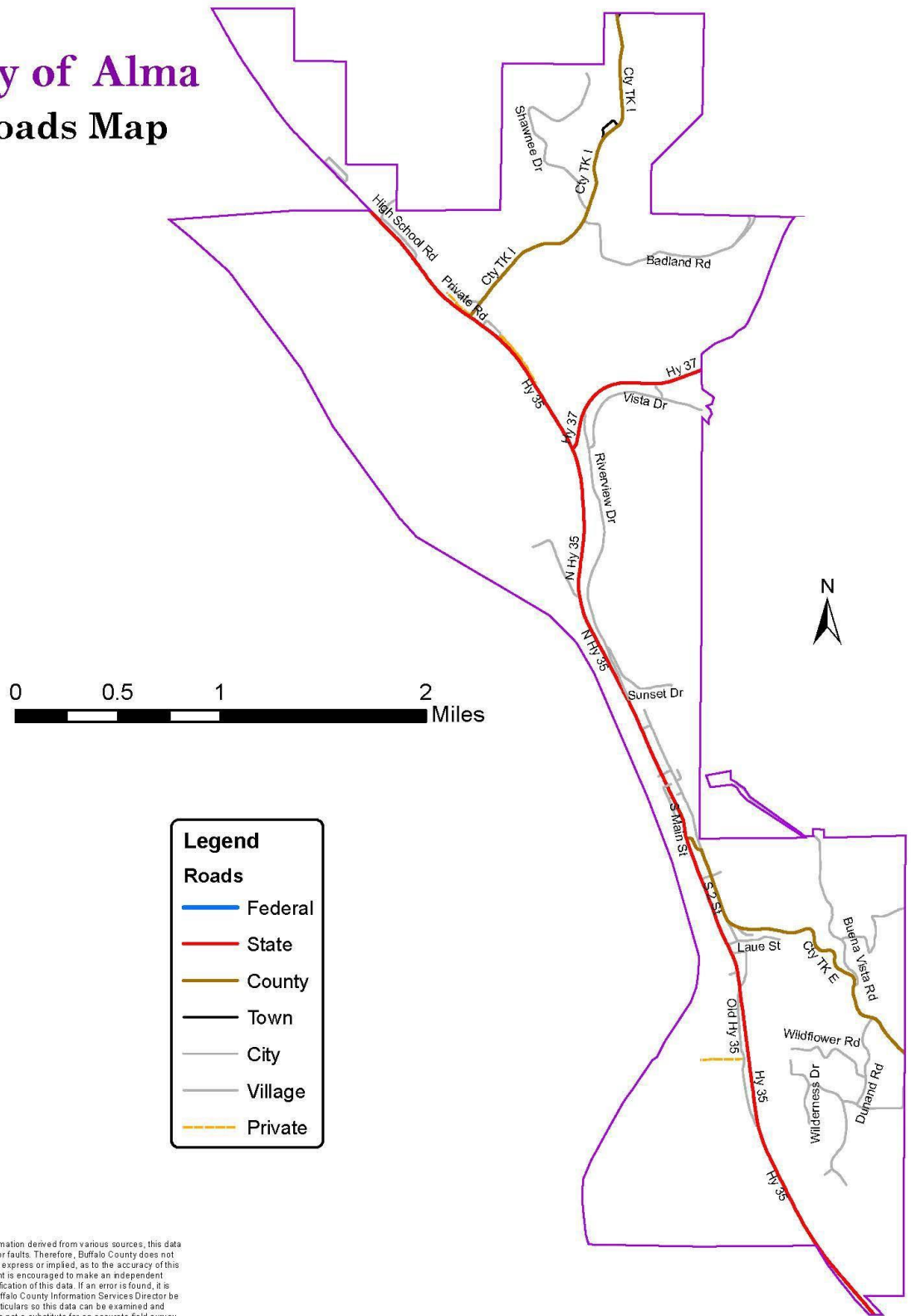
**Goals and Actions:**

- Maintain quality streets in the City.
- More handicap accessibility throughout the City. This will require working together with the business community in the City.
- Improve parking by trying different options and working with the residents in the commercial district to explore different parking options that leave store front parking available for customers.
- Continue working with Buffalo County and Wisconsin Department of

Transportation in developing a bicycle path to the public beach and the Alma Public School. Include a bike path in the updated Buffalo County Outdoor Recreation Plan.

- Continue to expand and improve hiking and mountain-biking trails to Buena Vista Park, Mill Creek Road, and through the Mossy Hollow Natural Area and the City property surrounding Shawnee Estates development.
- Continue to work with the Burlington Northern Railroad to reduce the impact of train whistles on the City of Alma Community while maintaining safety for residents and visitors.
- Explore ways to make the City of Alma more accessible to Mississippi River pleasure craft and commercial passenger vessels.
- Address the effects of an expansion of the lock and dam system at Dam 4 in Alma. An expansion could have a profound effect on the landscape of Alma.
- Encourage development of the Flyway Trail as an off-highway recreational bike/hiking trail along the Highway 35 corridor.

# City of Alma Roads Map



As with all public information derived from various sources, this data may contain errors or faults. Therefore, Buffalo County does not provide any warranty, express or implied, as to the accuracy of this data. The recipient is encouraged to make an independent investigation or verification of this data. If an error is found, it is requested that the Buffalo County Information Services Director be advised of the particulars so this data can be examined and corrected. This map is not a substitute for an accurate field survey.



## **UTILITIES AND COMMUNITY FACILITIES ELEMENT:**

This element looks at existing utility service and community facilities benefiting the citizens of the City of Alma. Items include solid waste disposal, recycling services, parks, telecommunication services, emergency response services, schools, government facilities, parks and others.

### **Sanitary Waste and Water Supply:**

The City of Alma provides sanitary sewer service to 98% of City dwelling units. City water is provided only to residents on Main Street, Sunset Drive, Laue Street, Nelson Road, Second Street and a portion of Riverview Drive (approximately 45% of City dwelling units). Other residents use private wells for their water supply. The Marina and Ballfield/Beach facilities share a well. Dairyland Power is a large industrial water customer. There are currently no plans to expand sewer and water services.

### **Solid Waste/Recycling:**

Garbage disposal and recycling is mandated in the City. The City of Alma currently has curbside service for garbage once per week using labelled bags purchased through the City and recyclables are accepted at the city recycling center on Wednesday and Saturday mornings. The City collects compostable waste four times per year and accepts demolition waste at the Alma Landfill Site.

### **City Facilities:**

The City of Alma currently has serious issues with the condition of City Hall and Alma Public Library, located on Main Street. The building was not properly designed or constructed for the area. Constant vibration from the trains has weakened the facility and repairs or replacement will be required in the near future. Such repair costs are difficult to estimate because of a lack of visual access to the failing structure. The Library shares its structure with City Hall and faces the same issues. It also is not large enough to meet current and projected future demand.

The Fire and EMS station is connected to City Hall to the South.

The City Garage is located on Laue Street and built in 1993. The City Recycling Center is also located on Laue Street.

There are two cemeteries located in the City, Alma Public and Alma Memorial. Funds for cemetery maintenance are part of the City of Alma budget.

### **Telephone/Electricity/Internet Services:**

Landline telephone service is provided by copper-based TDS Communications and fiber-based Cochrane Telephone Cooperative. DSL Internet service is available through TDS and fiber access to the Internet, by Cochrane Telephone.

Copper-based cable television is available in much of the City through MidContinent Cable. Cochrane Telephone provides the fiber equivalent of cable television, as well.

Cell Phones reception in City of Alma

Poor	25% - includes the industrial park area
OK	25%
Excellent	50%

WiFi is provided at several City businesses and at the Alma Public Library but is not available in most of the City.

Riverland Energy Cooperative and Xcel Energy both supply electrical service in City of Alma. Alternative energy sources such as wind, solar and methane seem acceptable to most people in Alma..

#### **Natural Gas:**

There are no natural gas services in the City. Most people rely on Liquid Propane gas.

#### **Libraries:**

The Alma Public Library is funded 80% by City funds and operated by a Volunteer Board. Currently the library is open Monday, Wednesday and Fridays.

#### **Education:**

As with many small communities, the school is a strong part of the culture of the community. Residents are very proud of their school and take ownership in the facility and the students. Students residing in the City attend Alma Area Schools and the Chippewa Valley Technical College.

#### **Fire Protection, Police Protection and Emergency Management:**

The Alma Volunteer Fire Department and Western Buffalo County Ambulance Service provide fire and ambulance services. The Towns of Alma, Nelson, Modena, and Lincoln cooperate in these services.

#### **Health Care and Long Term Care Services:**

There are no health care providers in the City of Alma. Excellent Medical Services are provided by services in La Crosse, Eau Claire, and Winona, and Wabasha MN. Long term care services are provided in Winona, MN, Fountain City, Pepin, and Wabasha.

#### **Public Parks:**

There are three public parks in the City: Alma Beach Area Recreation, Rieck's Lake Park, and Buena Vista Park. Mossy Hollow Natural Area and the undeveloped City property surrounding its Shawnee Estates development provide recreation, as well. The City also maintains four boat landings with access to the Mississippi River.

#### **Utilities:**

City of Alma residents purchase their electricity from Exel Energy and from Riverland Energy Cooperative. The industrial park is serviced by Riverland Energy.

**Goals and Actions:**

- City government to plan for eventual replacement/refurbishment of City Hall. A suitable lot adjacent to the current building has been acquired.
- CAP X 2020 power transmission towers have a significant visual impact on the landscape of the City.
- City owned parks would be of greater benefit to the children and other City residents if a bicycle path could be established to the beach and school.
- City will research ways that snowmobiles can legally access fuel.
- The City will work with all phone and cell phone providers to improve the cell phone coverage in the City. Special emphasis will be placed on improving cell phone service to the industrial park area.
- Hiking trails provide exercise and access to natural areas for both residents and visitors to the City. Continued improvement will be made on hiking trails and trail access.
- Mountain bike trails can provide recreation for residents and visitors, as well. A system of trails can be a significant economic development for tourism in Alma.
- Alma has flooding with some regularity. A detailed record of flood plans will be assembled and kept up to date by the City Clerk.

**Community Facilities****Goals and Actions:**

- City council will plan several scenarios for the City Hall including replacement at the current location, repair the current facility, move to a new location, other options
- The City Council will prepare a long-range facility plan for the city. This will include a maintenance plan for the sewer and water system, and a facility plan for City Hall, parks, city garage and other municipal buildings.
- Library facility options will be explored together with the Alma Public Library Board.
- Find ways to encourage the Alma Area Schools to thrive and provide a quality education to the students of the district.
- Encourage development of senior living facilities, including assisted and independent living facilities in Alma.



## **AGRICULTURAL NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES ELEMENT:**

### **Natural Resources:**

Alma is a river town. It is defined by the Mississippi River and its valley. The resources available to Alma because of this are many and spectacular.

The Mississippi itself brings a flow of tens of thousands of cubic feet per second of fresh water from a watershed of thirty-four million acres in Minnesota and Wisconsin. This abundance of water ensures a supply of pure water for the city from wells drilled through hundreds of feet of purifying sand below the riverbed. The water quality of the main channel benefits from the large settling basin effect of Lake Pepin, a 21 mile by 1.7 mile wide spot in the river some 12 miles upstream of Alma.

At least 120 species of fish are to be found in the Upper Mississippi. An abundant and diverse clam population used to thrive in its waters, but federal water management policies since the 1930s have decimated these species.

The Nine Foot Channel Project of the US Army Corps of Engineers for barge and commercial traffic is maintained by a series of 27 locks and dams along the Upper Mississippi. One of these, Lock and Dam Four, is located at Alma. Because of this, Alma fronts both the lower end of Pool Four and the upper end of Pool Five, giving the city a view of the more natural terrain of Pool Five below the dam as well as the open areas of permanently flooded lands in Pool Four above.

The Main Channel of the river is also well suited to recreational boating. Alma capitalizes on its setting with four boat ramps, a marina and a municipal dock.

The flood plain (see also City of Alma Floodplain Map) of the Mississippi Valley at Alma is largely part of the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. This refuge encompasses 240,000 acres along 261 miles of the river. It coincides with a major migratory bird flyway which provides a uniquely diverse set of bird species for birding enthusiasts. The secluded backwaters allow waterfowl hunting, as well. The complex system of sloughs and islands in non-flooded areas is ideal habitat for beaver, muskrat, otter and other small mammals. The valley has a long history of fur trapping, though now it is carried on at a hobby scale.

This complex of backwaters is also ideal for canoeing and kayaking. Unlike lake paddling, paddling on the river provides opportunities for voyages that can go hundreds of miles without a portage. The wild backwater areas are long and narrow, so that access is available from many points. The Buffalo River passes through Alma, providing a small-stream paddling experience and even tubing, as well.

Railroads follow the edges of the flood plain, making the level valley a major rail connection between Chicago, the Upper Midwest and the Pacific Northwest. Burlington Northern Santa Fe trains stretching up to a mile and a half in length pass through Alma

many times a day.

The sides of the Mississippi Valley at Alma are lined with bluffs extending up to 500 feet above the river. Many of these bluffs have vertical cliff sections in their upper regions, making the views from the valley floor exotic and as nearly alpine as the Midwest can claim. The views of the valley from the tops of these bluffs can be spectacular. Above Alma, the views from Buena Vista Park are exceptional.

Because Alma is tucked close into the base of a high bluff, its wind climate is less violent than in surrounding, unprotected areas. During storms blowing out of the northeast, Alma is in the wind shadow of its bluff. During air movement from the southwest, most flow lifts over the bluff, moderating the effect in Alma.

Small side valleys and coulees punctuate the bluffs into sculpted units and provide more gentle walking paths for their exploration. Alma has one hiking trail from the center of town to the top of Buena Vista following one of these coulees. Another trail follows Sleepy Hollow coulee in a heavily forested area. Historically, many more paths were used, for livestock and direct communication; these fell into disuse as auto transport dominated. Many areas of the bluffs are now difficult to reach on foot and present relatively undisturbed wild habitat.

The clay deposits in local creeks were used in brick manufacture during the nineteenth century, as was limestone fired into mortar. Many of the buildings in Alma from that era are made of these locally mined and manufactured materials. There is the possibility that Alma's bluffs may contain commercially valuable deposits of silica sand used in oilfield hydraulic fracturing. If this proves to be true, a regulatory solution must be found to protect the scenic value of the bluffs.

### **Goals and Actions**

- Monitor frac sand activity in the area to avoid an unexpected mining operation on the bluffs within the City.
- Pursue coordination with federal and state agencies in the planning of projects which affect the City.

### **Cultural Resources:**

The first immigrants were of Swiss and German descent that arrived in Alma where they sought to maintain their cultural traditions by establishing societies similar to ones that existed in their homelands. The cultural organizations were the Schuetzenverein (target-shooting society), Turner-Verein (gymnasts), Singing Societies, Orchestras, Bands, Literary and Debating Societies.

The City strives to keep the cultural heritage of the accomplishments of the past through our schools, churches, theatre, arts and crafts and Rod and Gun Club.

The Alma Area Museum is operated by the Alma Historical Society at the former Buffalo

County Normal School (Teachers College). This building is owned by the City and at one time housed the City of Alma offices and the Alma Public Library.

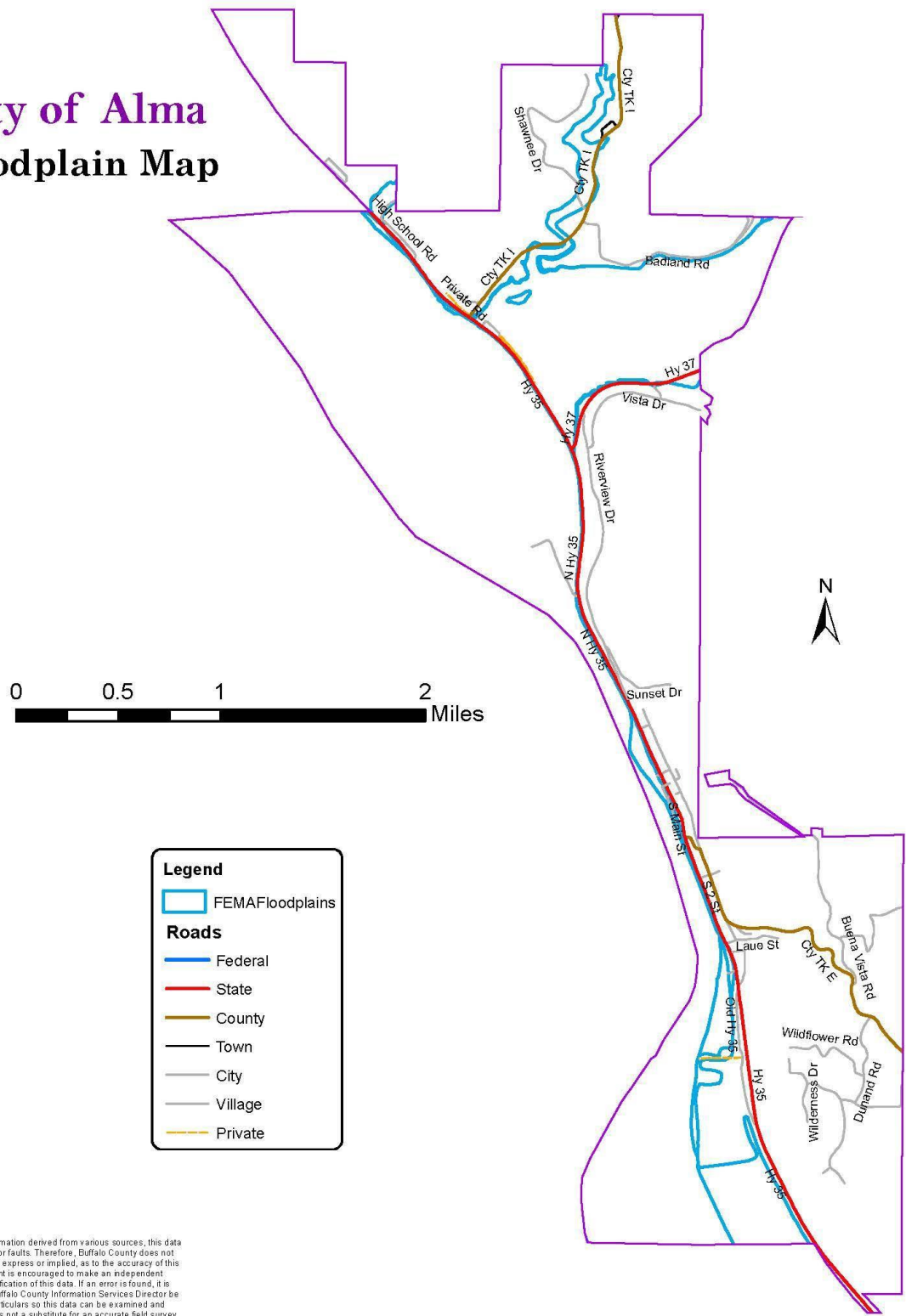
Alma is also home to the Buffalo County Historical Society, which operates in the Buffalo County Courthouse and provides an extensive capability for historical and genealogical research of local interest.

### **Goals and Actions:**

Future planning within the City of Alma should provide the preservation of important/unique historical resources. Historical resources need to preserve to maintain the character of the community and which is vitality important to its citizenry. To do this the following actions are recommended:

- Promote current and future history museums:
  - Alma Area Museum
  - Castlerock Museum
- Promote private museums
- Promote the Historic District on the State and National Register of historic places.

# City of Alma Floodplain Map



As with all public information derived from various sources, this data may contain errors or faults. Therefore, Buffalo County does not provide any warranty, express or implied, as to the accuracy of this data. The recipient is encouraged to make an independent investigation or verification of this data. If an error is found, it is requested that the Buffalo County Information Services Director be advised of the particulars so this data can be examined and corrected. This map is not a substitute for an accurate field survey.

## **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ELEMENT:**

Alma is becoming more of a destination community for travelers. Hunters and fishermen still utilize many of the establishments, but other recent businesses have helped to grow the economy. The additional of a few additional attractions and businesses could make the visitor economy a year-round, sustainable economy.

Most of the data for this section came from the U.S. Census Bureau, Selected Economic Characteristics: 2005-2009 5-Year Estimates. Other sources of information were the Department of Workforce Development and citizens from the City of Alma.

### **Employment Information:**

Most employment for Alma residents is in manufacturing, construction, finance, and the education/health/social occupations. The City is within commuting distance of manufacturing, school and health care jobs in Arcadia, Mondovi, Eau Claire, La Crosse, Wabasha, and Winona. The City of Alma and the rest of Buffalo County tend to have very low rates of unemployment, due to the variety of jobs in the region and the growth of industry in Arcadia (Ashley Furniture and Golden Plump Chicken).

#### **City of Alma Employment Statistics – Census Data**

<b>Employment Status</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<b>Population 16 years and older</b>	679	100
In Labor Force	344	50.7
Civilian Labor Force	344	50.7
Employed	323	47.6
Unemployed	21	3.1
Armed Forces	0	0
Not in Labor Force	335	49.3
<b>Occupation</b>		
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing	12	3.7
Construction	40	12.4
Manufacturing	35	10.8
Retail Trade	20	6.2
Professional, management, etc.	11	3.4
Education, health care	79	24.5
Transportation	28	8.7
Arts and entertainment	24	7.4
Finance, insurance, real estate	42	13.0
All others	32	9.9
<b>Class of Worker</b>		
Private wage and salary	244	75.5
Government workers	57	17.6
Self-employed	22	6.8
Unpaid family	0	0

**Commuting to Work:**

Many employed residents of the City of Alma, commute out of the City to work. Arcadia, La Crosse, Eau Claire, Wabasha, Rochester, and Winona, MN are within 60 minutes for all residents.

**City of Alma, Commuting Habits – Census Data**

<b>Means of Travel</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Car, truck, van – drove alone	74.2
Car, truck, van – carpooled	8.1
Public transportation	0.7
Walked	9.2
Other means	0.3
Worked at home	7.5
	<b>Minutes</b>
<b>Mean travel time to work (minutes)</b>	23.5

**Buffalo County Industries:**

Buffalo County has a very small manufacturing base. Only one industry, La Crosse Milling (oat miller) is in the top ten employers in the County. Most all of the employment opportunities in the near future will be outside of the City or Buffalo County.

**Table 10: Buffalo County Top 10 Employers – WI DWD**

<b>Company</b>	<b>Service</b>	<b>Size</b>
Marten Transport	Trucking	1,000+
Mondovi Public Schools	Education	100-249
CFC Public Schools	Education	100-249
County of Buffalo	Government	100-249
American Lutheran Homes	Nursing Care Provider	100-249
Dairyland Power	Electrical Power Generation	100-249
School District of Alma	Education	50-99
Midwest Dental	Dental Care	50-99
US Army Corp of Eng.	Engineering Service	50-99
La Crosse Milling	Oat Miller	50-99

**Environmentally Contaminated Sites in the City of Alma:**

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources Bureau of Remediation and Redevelopment Tracking System (BRRTS) was utilized in identifying contaminated sites in the City of Alma. There is one open contaminated site in the City of Alma identified in the database.

The Wisconsin DNR Solid and Hazardous Waste Information System was reviewed for waste disposal sites in the City of Alma. There were eight waste disposal sites in the registry located in the City of Alma.

**County, Regional and State Economic Develop Programs:**

## County Programs:

- Revolving Loan Fund

## Regional Programs:

- Mississippi River Regional Planning Commission, Economic Development Program, Revolving Loan Fund

## State Programs:

- USDA – Rural Development

**Brainstorming of desirable business characteristics:**

- General store that carries everyday items
- Small business that uses one of the existing buildings
- Cooperation between several businesses utilizing the same building or space
- Business that has limited heavy traffic – software, high tech, knowledge business
- Fitness center
- Value added business using local resources – lumber, agricultural products
- Boating business (other business that relates to “the River”)
- Small industrial – not large freight
- “Sell” the beauty of the area – rural tours, walking tours, museums current and future
- “Clean/Green” industry&/or business

## Organizations in the City which consider economic development:

- Alma Area Chamber of Commerce
- Wings Over Alma
- Mississippi River Regional Planning Commission
- USDA –Rural Development Administration

## Issues with current economic development activities:

- Undefined missions for organizations
- Overlap on current activities by organizations
- Poor cell service in industrial park
- The 2017 transient lodging stock is 55 rooms. Is this sufficient?

□

**Goals and Actions:**

- Work with area organizations to get defined missions and plans
- Look at cell phone tower that serves the industrial park &/or a booster that serves that area of the city
- Develop area in the Chamber office (WOA) that addresses economic development
- Develop website links for economic development including light industrial development, site should include contact information for City Hall (including hours) and what land/buildings might be available for economic development
- Improve the relationship between the City and the Marinas to increase support of local businesses
- Encourage the Chamber to sponsor tourism development meetings including roundtable discussions on business development. Include some of Alma's current successful businesses on a panel discussion.
- Work with the Alma Area Community Development Corporation to increase their activity on business development
- Develop a plan to use the room tax in effectively promoting Alma as a tourist destination
- Develop a plan to support local businesses, grow in the community and possibility build in the industrial park
- Work with Buffalo County to develop a non-profit countywide economic development corporation.



## **INTERGOVERNMENTAL COOPERATION ELEMENT:**

The City of Alma participates in cooperative agreements, formal and informal, with area units of government and businesses. A few examples are:

- Mutual aid fire agreement with the Nelson Fire Department, Tri-Community, Waumandee/Montana/Lincoln, and the City of Wabasha, Minnesota.
- Fire and EMS agreements with the Towns of Alma, Belvidere, Lincoln, Modena and Nelson.
- Mutual aid agreements for police protection with Buffalo County and the State of Wisconsin.
- Town of Nelson for maintenance for Badlands Road
- Village of Nelson, for radar speed sign.
- US Army Corp of Engineering for Kiosk/Community Bulletin Board located by the overhead railroad crossing to the dam.
- Federated Library System and Buffalo County for Alma City Library funding.
- Cooperative agreements between Alma and Pepin School Districts.
- Dairyland Power for cooperation and mutual support in various projects, most importantly, fire safety at the power plant.

## **Goals and Actions:**

- Explore additional options for sharing of equipment with Buffalo City, Cochrane and Nelson, i.e. shared street sweeper, and other road maintenance equipment
- Formal written flood plans base on Mississippi River levels prepared in cooperation with Buffalo County Emergency Management, Buffalo County Highway Department and US-Army Corp of Engineering.

**LAND USE ELEMENT:**

<b>Table 2 Property Assessment in the City of Alma (2010)</b>			
<b>Property Classification</b>	<b># of Parcels</b>	<b>Total Value</b>	<b>Total Acres</b>
Residential	444	38,052,700	145
Commercial	87	11,573,100	48
Manufacturing	0	0	0
Agricultural	68	83,150	580
Undeveloped and Other	33	445,800	340
Productive Forest Lands	57	1,380,400	543
Other	8	831,200	13
Woodland Tax Lands	17	598,700	381
Exempt Lands	132		1,852
Alma Area School	839	52,305,750	
Cochrane Fountain City Schools	1	89,600	
Chippewa Valley Tech	839	52,305,700	
Western Wisconsin Tech	1	89,600	
Alma City TIF1	37	4,048,900	
Alma City TIF2	61	1,269,650	

Since 1976, all real property in the City has been zoned. The Historic District was established in 1982. There are also four buildings that are listed on the National Historic Register including; The Burlington, Hotel de Ville Grande, Schams Building, Laue House.

The City established the Historical Preservation Advisory Commission in 1988. Owners of buildings in the district must meet with the board prior to receiving a building permit and before proceeding with their project.

Zoning Districts are divided into eleven districts:

- R1 – Residence - sewer and water services available
- R2 – Residence - sewer but not water
- R3 – Residence - sewer and water - small lots
- R4 – Residence – no sewer, no water
- B – Business District
- R-RC – Residence-Restricted Commercial Use
- I – Industrial
- I-R – Industrial-Restricted Use
- A – Agricultural
- P – Planned Unit Development
- C - Conservancy

Conditional use permits have been issued for many main street buildings that are in the business district. Below are some positives and negatives of granting conditional use permits in the city.

Positives allowing zoning conditional use permits for residential use within the business district

- Businesses/buildings are occupied
- Apartments provide additional income for some business owners
- Increased population means increased utility credit income for city
- Residents help with school population
- Helps other businesses
- Increased community involvement

Negatives – allowing conditional use permits for residential in business district

- Creates increased parking issues for businesses
- Some apartments are not viable (rental income is low so little economic incentive to maintain or improve the buildings)
- Some apartments are in poor condition
- Apartments are not inspected currently
- Poor quality apartments result in increased renter problems

Low impact businesses are allowed in residential areas

**Goals and Actions:**

- City Council should look at tightening the rules that are currently used to grant conditional use permits from business to residential
- Very small/poor quality apartments should be improved when they become vacant
- City council should explore changing the definition of a business (a building with three apartments is currently a business) to more of a commercial emphasis
- Review rules for granting conditional use permits that allow residential to business. This currently is going better but could change in time.
- Business district(s) should be expanding to reflect current and future trends
- Research on historical structures will continue to identify unique and pivotal building structures
- Work with Wisconsin Department of Transportation to allow for appropriate signage along State Highway 35

33

## **IMPLEMENTATION ELEMENT:**

### **Goals and Actions in Implementing Plan:**

- The Comprehensive Plan will be reviewed each July meeting of the City Council. Updates that are needed will be the responsibility of the Common Council of the City of Alma and will be incorporated by notification of public meetings, surveys if necessary and public hearings.
- The plan will be updated at least every ten years.
- The implementation of the plan will be the responsibility of the City Council of the City of Alma
- The City Council of the City of Alma will work together with other Towns and Buffalo County to implement other portions of the plan.