**Intergovernmental Cooperation**

**Introduction**

Intergovernmental cooperation involves working with neighboring communities, school districts, and agencies to understand how their future planning and development activities may impact the Town of Mercer. At a minimum, this should involve sharing information about the Town of Mercer’s plan with neighboring communities and agencies and neighboring communities and agencies sharing their plans and initiatives with the Town of Mercer. Intergovernmental cooperation should not end with the sharing of plans. Instead, this process should be the beginning for joint planning and decision-making, conflict resolution, and other strategies to promote local and regional cooperation. As part of the planning survey that was distributed to all landowners in the Town of Mercer, **88.2 percent** of respondents thought neighboring towns and counties should work together toward shared goals.

**Relationships to the Town of MErcer**

The Town of Mercer shares a municipal border with seven governmental units represented within three counties. In addition, the town has other relationships with state, local, and regional organizations.

**Adjacent Governmental Units**

The Town of Mercer shares a municipal border with the Towns of Agenda (Ashland Co.); Carey (Iron County); Knight (Iron County); Manitowish Waters (Vilas Co.); Oma (Iron County); Sherman (Iron County); and Winchester (Vilas Co.).

Mercer’s relationship with all neighboring towns can be characterized as one of mutual respect and compatibility from a land use and political standpoint. The borders between the Town of Mercer and adjacent governmental units are fixed due to a town’s inability to annex from adjoining jurisdictions, resulting in no boundary disputes. The Town of Mercer and its adjoining jurisdictions share a common rural or “northwoods” character. In the future, as mutually beneficial opportunities for shared service arise, the Town of Mercer and adjoining governments should consider shared service options.

Most jurisdictions adjacent to the Town of Mercer completed a comprehensive plan in the mid-2000s. The neighboring towns that have completed a comprehensive plan update in the last 10 years are the Town of Sherman (adopted in 2023), which is located in Iron County and borders the southern portion of the Town of Mercer, and the Towns of Manitowish Waters (adopted in 2017) and Winchester (adopted in 2021) in neighboring Vilas County.

**County and Regional Governmental Units**

Iron County has some jurisdiction within the town, particularly as it pertains to zoning (both shoreland and non-shoreland), as Mercer has adopted the Iron County Zoning Ordinance. In areas where Iron County has jurisdiction, the county seeks input from the town before making decisions affecting the town. Likewise, the town has attempted to maintain that link of communication with Iron County by providing recommendations. The county’s jurisdiction has at times created conflict with the town. Future cooperation will be especially important as it relates to:

* Coordination with the Iron County Comprehensive Plan.
* Enforcement of zoning and shoreland regulations.
* Revision to the Iron County Zoning Ordinance.

The town expects that the county will fully consider recommendations provided by Mercer’s comprehensive plan. Likewise, the town expects the county to understand that the “Future Land Use Map” provides a general pattern for future development.

***Ashland & Vilas County***

Ashland County borders the Town of Mercer and Iron County to the west, while Vilas County forms the eastern boundary of the Town of Mercer and Iron County. This close proximity requires the Town of Mercer to on occasion communicate with both counties and their bordering towns. Increased communication can help to minimize or mitigate potential problems that may arise on road maintenance or the sharing of other services and facilities in the future. Continued interaction between the Town of Mercer, and the Counties of Iron, Ashland, and Vilas is encouraged, especially relating to future land use decisions and potential development projects.

Iron County last adopted a comprehensive plan in 2018. Ashland County last adopted a comprehensive plan in 2016, with an update planned in 2025. Vilas County last adopted a comprehensive plan in 2023.

***Regional Agencies***

Northwest Regional Planning Commission (NWRPC) was formed under Section 60.0309 of Wisconsin State Statutes to provide a range of services to local units of government within the Regional Planning Commission (RPC) boundary. RPCs provide planning assistance, assist local interests in responding to state and federal programs, serve as a coordinating agency for programs, and provide other technical and advisory assistance to local governments. The Town of Mercer is within the boundary of the NWRPC. Under Wisconsin’s 1999 Comprehensive Planning legislation, each regional planning commission was to develop a full nine element comprehensive plan. Under this law, the NWRPC adopted a regional comprehensive plan for the ten-county northwest region in 2015.

***State Agencies***

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR), Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT), and the Wisconsin Department of Revenue (WDOR) are the primary state agencies the Town of Mercer must coordinate with to achieve the goals and objectives of this plan. WDNR takes a lead role in wildlife protection and the sustainable management of woodlands, wetlands, and other natural wildlife habitat areas. WisDOT is responsible for planning and development of state highways and other multi-modal transportation systems. Through the WDOR shared revenue program, the State of Wisconsin distributes tax revenues to municipal and county governments for use at their discretion. Open communication and participation in land use, natural resources, and transportation decisions, which may impact the town, is an important priority for intergovernmental cooperation in the future.

***Federal Agencies***

There is no federal land or agencies that require the Town of Mercer to coordinate with for intergovernmental cooperation.

***School Districts***

The Town of Mercer is served entirely by the Mercer School District. The town’s relationship with the school district can be characterized as cooperative. Regular and open communication is critical to ensure the cooperative relationship will continue to be strengthened. The Town of Mercer must continue to work with the Mercer School District/Board on all siting and building of public facilities and services and for the sharing of such facilities and services. School facilities located in the Town of Mercer include the K-12 and alternative schools. The local tax base supports the overall services provided by the district.

**Intergovernmental Comprehensive Planning Process**

On an element-by-element basis agencies and organizations were contacted regarding their available services. For example, during development of the Utilities and Community Facilities element, the Iron County Highway Commissioner was contacted to gather information on planned county highway projects impacting the Town of Mercer.

In addition, the multi-jurisdictional comprehensive planning process between Mercer, adjoining towns and Iron County allowed for greater interaction and understanding of local issues impacting one or more units of government.

**Conflict Resolution Process**

Potential conflicts related to land use decision-making have been greatly diminished due to the concerted development of local jurisdictional plans through the planning process. Although it is important to recognize that unplanned future variables may result in conflict, planning for potential future conflict between jurisdictions requires a process to resolve such disputes. The conflict resolution process developed for the Iron County planning process outlines the appropriate steps to be taken by the local governing body to resolve these disputes in a logical, systematic, and equitable manner. See Appendix C for a detailed description of the conflict resolution process.

**Agreements With Neighboring or Overlapping Jurisdictions**

The Town of Mercer has established both formal and informal agreements with adjacent and overlapping units of government.

See list below:

1. MSD (Mercer Sanitary District)
2. Fire
3. Ambulance – Sherman and Oma
4. Law Enforcement
5. Snowplowing

**Existing and Potential Conflicts**

At this time there are no known existing or potential conflicts with the Town of Mercer and other municipalities or jurisdictions.

**Intergovernmental Goals, Objectives, & Actions**

A set of recommended goals, objectives, and actions have been developed to assist the town in engaging and working with adjoining and overlapping jurisdictions. Implementing these statements will provide continued discussion and cooperation on a broad range of issues and opportunities affecting the town and other jurisdictions.

Goal: Develop strong communication and cooperation in planning and decision making between the Town of Mercer and adjacent local governmental units and county, regional, state, and federal governmental entities.

Objective 1: Identify existing or potential conflicts among local governmental units.

*Action 1: Assertively address processes to alleviate or resolve such conflicts.*

Objective 2: Work with local, county, and state governmental agencies regarding common services.

*Action 1: Actively participate in Iron County management, including championing for a greater portion of the Iron County budget to be allocated toward the Mercer area.*

*Action 2: Communicate regularly with the WI DOT regarding future plans for the U.S. Hwy 51 corridor. In addition, secure necessary road improvements for said highway.*

*Action 3: Actively participate with the Mercer Chamber of Commerce ~~and its~~ ~~downtown development committee~~ on common tourism issues and downtown renovation and development.*

*Action 4: Actively participate with the governmental units from the Towns of Sherman and Oma regarding goals and issues that pertain to and overlap the adjacent jurisdictions.*

*Action 5: Develop partnerships with adjoining townships regarding future land use to avert potential discrepancy issues.*

*Action 6: Continue active membership in the ~~Iron County~~* ***Wisconsin*** *Towns Association.*