

### **III. Physical Characteristics of the Community**

#### **Location**

The Village of Weston is a typical mid-western suburban community. The Village, which has an area of about 21.6 square miles and a population of 15,045 people, is situated southeast of the City of Wausau, east of the Village of Rothschild, and east of the City of Schofield, in central Marathon County (see Map 1 in Appendix D). The Village of Weston is connected to other urban areas in the state and Midwest via an expanding interstate highway network. The North Central Regional Planning Commission and the Marathon County Planning Department studied development trends in the area, and concluded that significant physical growth will occur in the Village of Weston and other suburban areas surrounding Wausau.

#### **History**

The Village of Weston has a long and interesting history. The Marathon County Board officially incorporated the Village as the Town of Eau Claire on November 12, 1856. This original township consisted of land in the current Village of Weston, the Town of Weston, the Village of Kronenwetter, the Town of Rib Mountain, the City of Schofield and the Village of Rothschild. The Town's boundaries were reduced and the name was changed in 1859 to the Town of Weston. The Town's boundaries were changed again in 1996 when the urban center was incorporated as the Village of Weston, leaving the rural sections of the township as the Town of Weston.

Originally, land in what is now the Village of Weston was heavily wooded (Hemlock, White Pine, and Red Pine) and inhabited only by Native Americans. The actual beginning of development in the town came in 1836 when the Menomonic Indians signed a treaty giving European settlers title to a strip of land six miles wide along the Wisconsin River as far north as Wausau. The first commerce in the town consisted almost exclusively of hunting and fur trading.

In 1839, the lumber industry developed in the town. Lumbermen began cutting the virgin pine trees and sending them down the Wisconsin River to mills in Mosinee and Stevens Point. As time passed, lumber mills were developed in Schofield and Wausau on the Wisconsin River, and, in the town of Weston on the Eau Claire. At the height of the lumbering era, there were several mills located along the Eau Claire River. Most notably, there were lumber mills near the Kelly Bridge, near Callon, and at the current site of the Dells of the Eau Claire River County Park. Eventually, the virgin forests were clear-cut, and the lumber mills ceased to operate and were either destroyed or left to fall apart on their own.

After the lumbering era, which ended in the town in the early part of the century, agriculture developed as the Town's main form of commerce. The gently rolling soils that remained after logging were fertile, and suitable for a variety of types of development. Eventually, other businesses developed, residential areas grew, and municipal support developed.

Few reminders of the early history of the Village of Weston are currently in existence. There are a few residences and other structures in the Village that are more than one hundred years old. However, all the old lumber mills on the Eau Claire River have either been destroyed or they have fallen apart and disintegrated. The only evidence of these mills is a few pilings along the Eau Claire River that have survived the elements. The best example of these pilings can be seen east of the Kelly Bridge in the Eau Claire River. Finally, the early logging operations have removed all the virgin timber that once covered the Village. The only forested areas are second or third growth wood lots, wetlands, and wooded areas along rivers and streams.

### **Natural Characteristics**

The Village of Weston has natural features similar to other communities in the region. With the exception of some undulating terrain in the northern sections, the Village is relatively flat. Most of the soils in the community are well drained and suitable for agriculture or for various types of development. There are extensive wetlands in the southern sections of the Village. There are two major rivers and three creeks that run through the Village. The largest and most significant water body in the region, the Wisconsin River, runs along the southwest edge of the Village. The Eau Claire River, which has significant recreation potential, meanders through the central part of the Village and empties into the Wisconsin River in the City of Schofield. The Sandy Creek corridor, which runs through the northern sections of the Village and empties into the Eau Claire River, is mostly wooded and natural. Finally, Bull Creek and Cedar Creek run through the low, wetland areas in the far southern sections of the Village. The Village of Weston does not have significant natural or artificial lakes.

The Village of Weston contains portions of five primary environmental corridors: the Wisconsin River corridor, the Eau Claire River corridor, the Sandy Creek corridor, the Cedar Creek corridor, and the Bull Creek corridor. These environmental corridors contain native plant communities, wildlife, and landforms indigenous to the region. These prime environmental corridors contain most of the Village's and regions most important natural resources, and special efforts should be made to acquire and/or preserve them.

### **Cultural Characteristics**

The Village of Weston has been one of the fastest growing communities in North Central Wisconsin. The population for the Village of Weston has increased 24.6% since 2000. The current state of the economy has slowed growth but the village has been able to maintain an annual new housing start rate of 21 houses per since 2008 and in FY 2011

constructed 12 single-family residences. For many years, Weston's proximity to Wausau made it a typical bedroom community relying mostly on residential development. However, in 1998 the Village established a tax incremental financing district that has allowed the community to develop on its own commercially. The 2007 analysis of the community shows that excluding traffic corridors 24.6% of the available land is dedicated to residential, 14.9% of the land is commercial, 2.2% is manufacturing/industrial, 16.9% is agricultural, 13.8% is undeveloped wetlands/swamp and 27.7% is dedicated to public or semi-public use.

The Village of Weston has two major transportation arteries in the community. County High X is a north-south corridor that runs from the Central WI Airport to the north of Wausau through the heart of Weston. State Highway 29 is a four-lane, interstate-compatible thoroughfare that runs East-West through the Village. STH 29 extends from Green Bay, WI in the east to Minneapolis, MN in the west. The Village is also four miles from U.S. Interstate 39 that extends from Tomahawk in the north to Portage in the south.