

2023 Wisconsin Comprehensive Plan and Local Land Regulations Inventory Report

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

KEY FINDINGS

The *2023 Wisconsin Comprehensive Plan and Local Land Regulations Inventory Report* analyzes an inventory of local government comprehensive plan adoption dates and common local land regulations. The inventory was created based on the state's existing database of comprehensive plans, a web search of every local government ordinances webpage, and emails to hundreds of government clerks. For each of Wisconsin's 1,922 counties, cities, villages, and towns, the *Comp Plan and Land Regs Inventory* spreadsheet lists:

- Last known date of comprehensive plan adoption
- Whether a general zoning ordinance has been adopted
- Whether a subdivision ordinance has been adopted
- Link to the local government's ordinances webpage, if available

- ▶ **Over half of Wisconsin's local government comprehensive plans are out of date.**
- ▶ **479 local governments (25%) exercise general zoning or subdivision regulations AND do not have a current comprehensive plan, which may put them at more risk for violation of the Comprehensive Planning Law's consistency requirement.**
- ▶ **39% of local governments have no ordinances posted online or are lacking a significant portion of ordinances posted online.**

A comprehensive plan is meant to serve as a local government's guide to physical, social, and economic development. Ideally, comprehensive plans provide a rational basis for land regulations and some predictability to local real estate markets. Wisconsin's Comprehensive Planning Law (s. 66.1001) defines the contents of a comprehensive plan, which include a twenty-year vision and map of future land use.

Key to the Comprehensive Planning Law's implementation is the **consistency requirement**—a requirement for consistency between a local government's comprehensive plan and changes to its zoning, subdivision (land division), and official mapping ordinances. If a local government with an outdated plan wants to rezone land, for example, it must first go through a public planning process to update its comprehensive plan, which could be a time-consuming process. If the local government proceeds without an updated comprehensive plan, a citizen or organization could bring a lawsuit to void the action, because it lacks consistency with a valid comprehensive plan.

Comprehensive plans must be updated at least every 10 years. Analysis of the inventory found that **most comprehensive plans have not been comprehensively updated, or even amended in the last 10 years, and are therefore now out of date.** This may not be of consequence for many small villages and rural towns that do not exercise municipal land regulations. However, **479 local governments exercise their own zoning or subdivision regulations, without a current comprehensive plan adopted.**

During the process of inventorying zoning and subdivision ordinances, webpages hosting ordinances were sought out and searched online. It was found that while larger local governments typically post ordinances online in a way that is easy to search, using common platforms such as Municode or eCode360, approximately **39% of local governments do not have a website or do not appear to post a complete listing of ordinances on their website.** In some cases where they exist online, ordinances are posted as non-searchable PDFs scanned at a low resolution or not labeled. This lack of online accessibility to local laws contrasts with Wisconsin state laws, which are completely searchable by statute number or keyword.

The statistics provided in this report are based on the *Comp Plan and Land Regs Inventory* as it existed on June 13, 2023. The inventory spreadsheet is meant to be a living table and will evolve as local governments update their comprehensive plans, adopt new land regulations, or create ordinance webpages. Please **notify** the Wisconsin Department of Administration (DOA) of a comprehensive plan adoption. Email comp.planning@wisconsin.gov or call 608-267-3369 with any comments or corrections. ■

METHODOLOGY & SCOPE

This report was built on the experience of the *2011 Wisconsin Local Land Use Regulations and Comprehensive Planning Status Report*, which was the third edition of such a report by the Wisconsin Department of Administration. Almost all of the language describing land regulations and the Comprehensive Planning Law from the 2011 time period still applies in 2023, as these have remained relatively stable.

Local governments are required to [notify the DOA](#) of any plan amendments or updates adopted by ordinance, so the DOA already had a database of adoption dates. Yet, some local governments neglect to inform the DOA of a comprehensive plan adoption. Therefore, county and municipal clerks were emailed in the spring of 2023 and plans were searched online. While attempts were made to ensure the completeness and accuracy of the comprehensive plans database, it is likely lacking a number of comprehensive plan adoption or amendment dates.

In contrast to comprehensive plan notification, there is no requirement for local governments to report whether they have adopted zoning or subdivision regulations, so a DOA employee undertook an inventory effort during 2022-2023 to determine which local governments exercise zoning or subdivision regulations. Instead of relying on self-reported information, such as with the similar 2011 inventory effort, the employee attempted a verified inventory by searching out the ordinances on local government websites and requesting copies of ordinances not posted online from municipal clerks.

This proved to be an exhausting effort. While the Wisconsin Law Library indexes local government ordinance webpages on an [Ordinances & Codes webpage](#), over 350 existing ordinance webpages were not listed. Where they exist, ordinance webpages may have an incomplete listing of ordinances and be a hassle to search, as described later in this report. Since the inventory effort was conducted during 2022-2023, some web resources may have been newly created or upgraded. Links to ordinance webpages specifically described in the text of this report as examples were last viewed on July 12, 2023.

Initially, official mapping ordinances, shoreland zoning, and shoreland-wetland zoning were to be included in this inventory effort, but were dropped because of the significantly greater amount of staff time required to find these ordinances online. For example, shoreland-wetland zoning often falls within the zoning chapter of a municipal code, so that it is a subset of the general zoning ordinance and would have taken substantial additional staff time to decipher. An inventory of whether the comprehensive plan or the plan's adoption ordinance can be found online was also outside of this project's scope.

While tribes and regional planning commissions also develop comprehensive plans and their comprehensive plan adoption dates are included in the [Comp Plan and Land Regs Inventory](#), they are not bound by the law's consistency requirement. Therefore, they are not included in this report's analysis.

The final section of this report describes future [report maintenance](#).

ONLINE AVAILABILITY OF ORDINANCES

The preface to the [code of ordinances for the City of Montreal, WI](#) states:

Democracy is a government of laws. Good democracy requires not only good laws, but laws which are readily available in written form to all who are subject to them, to the public officials and police officers who must administer them and to the judges and attorneys who must interpret and apply them. It is for this reason that the Common Council of the City of Montreal has adopted this Code of Ordinances.

This code of ordinances was originally “ordained and published” in 1989, basically before the internet existed in any recognizable form. Ironically, the scanned PDF of the original hardcopy is posted in a non-searchable format, so does not exactly meet today’s expectations for “readily available in written form,” but the spirit of this excerpt is one shared by Wisconsin’s [Public Records Law](#).

State statutes can easily be searched online on the [state legislature’s website](#), where you can type a statute reference number or key word to find relevant state laws and legislative histories. In contrast, local governments have various and sometimes incomplete means of posting ordinances or their entire municipal code online.

Typically, larger city, village, and county governments will utilize platforms like [ecode360.com](#), [municode.com](#), [amlegal.com](#), or [codebook.com](#) to post their ordinances online in a keyword searchable way across the entire local government’s code. Some popular platforms, such as Municode, allow the user to download and print select sections of the municipal code. While these platforms have many advantages, there are some disadvantages. For example, often the date of ordinance adoption is not included with the comprehensive plan adoption ordinance. Then it is not clear whether the plan is current or outdated.

Another platform type for hosting ordinances can exist in the form of a county government website. For example, [Pierce County](#) hosts town ordinance webpages. This provides the convenience of having all of the county’s town ordinances arranged in the same format, along with all the other relevant town information.

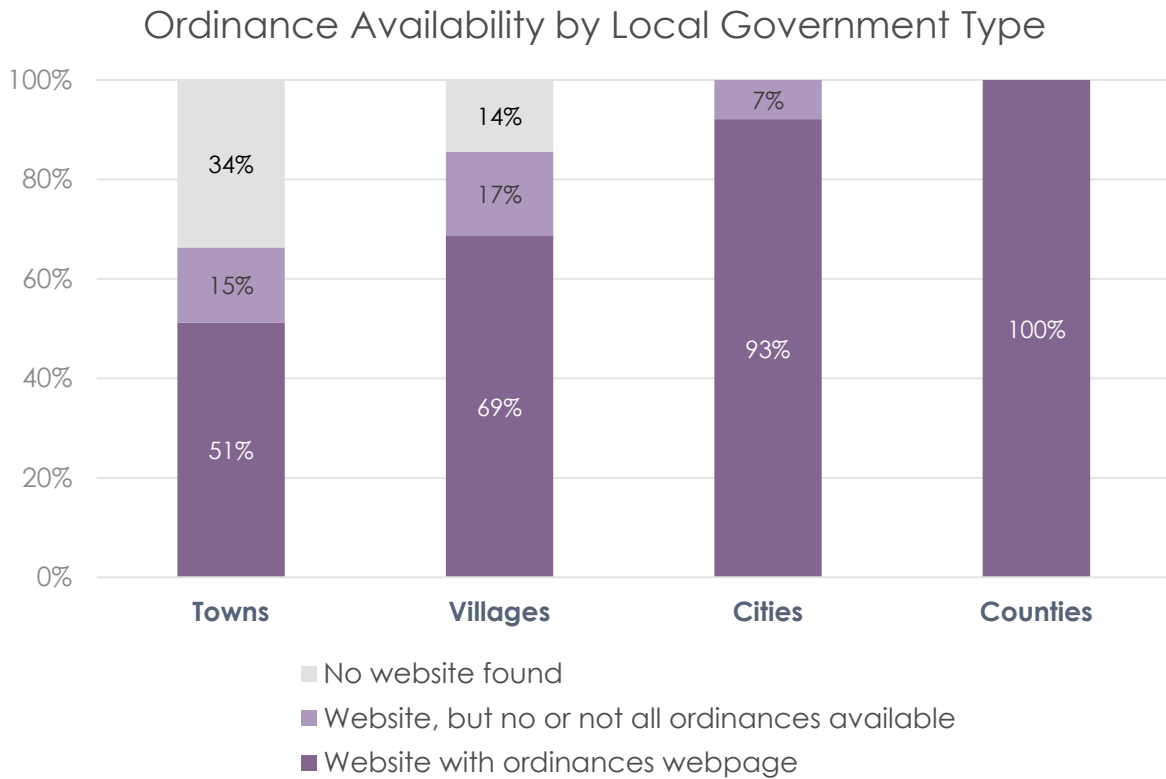
However, **752 local governments (39%) do not have an official website, do not post ordinances on their website, or have an obviously incomplete listing of ordinances.** Sometimes it is difficult to discern whether all of the ordinances are posted as currently adopted, and this effort was focused on only zoning and subdivision ordinances, so the above figure may be an undercount. Below is a sample of the numerous difficulties encountered in finding and inventorying ordinances online:

- The municipal code may be in the form of a giant PDF without a table of contents. For example, the [City of Bloomer](#) has its municipal code posted as a 912-page PDF without a table of contents for the document, although it is keyword searchable. Ordinances posted in PDF format are not always keyword searchable due to scanning at a low resolution. Or the PDFs posted are not labeled (e.g., [Town of Sheboygan Falls](#)).
- Sometimes unadvertised to the website visitor, the zoning/subdivision code can be on a different webpage than the local government’s webpage titled “Ordinances” (e.g., the [City of River Falls](#) or [Town of Ratoul](#)) or on a separate webpage than the platform hosting the general code (e.g., [Juneau County](#) or the [Town of Genesee](#)).
- The website visitor may not be aware of ordinances existing offline without the clues provided on “ordinances webpage.” For example, the [City of Elroy](#) did not post a zoning ordinance, but other ordinances posted by the city reference a zoning code. In another variation on the same theme, there are amendment ordinances posted to the original ordinance not posted.
- Sometimes common land regulations have an unusual title for their link on the local government ordinances webpage. For example, [Lafayette County’s](#) link to general zoning was listed as “Comprehensive Zoning” and its link from Chapter 6 Zoning was to its “Nonmetallic Mining Reclamation Ordinance.” Likewise for Lafayette County, the land division ordinance is labeled as the “Land Information Ordinance.” In another example, the [City of Onalaska](#) groups zoning and subdivision regulations in a “Unified Development Code.”

- The web version may come with a disclaimer that it is not the official version. For example, the [Village of North Prairie](#) has the following caveat: “This electronic version is provided for information only and should not be considered the official version of the code. Please consult the printed version before citing provisions of this code.”
- Adding to the confusion, sometimes the statute numbers listed authorizing an ordinance are from a very outdated codification of the state statutes (e.g., [Jackson County Zoning Ordinance](#)).

In cases where the ordinance is not online, it varies as to whether it will be provided in a timely manner upon contacting the [clerk](#). Record-keeping is often inadequate, due to regular turnover, idiosyncratic ways of storing records, or the unexpected departure of a clerk (e.g., sudden death). The only way to view the ordinance may be to visit the town hall per appointment. Or what might happen in practice on occasion is that a town or village official just verbally talks through what a property owner can and cannot do with their land. The absence of ordinances online may lead people to rely more on licensed surveyors, real estate agents, attorneys, or other professionals to navigate various land regulations.

The following figure, table, and map display ordinance availability by local government type.



Ordinance Availability Online

Towns

Website with ordinances webpage	635	51%
Website, but no or not all ordinances available	192	15%
No website found	417	34%
<i>Total</i>	<i>1244</i>	<i>100%</i>

Villages

Website with ordinances webpage	287	69%
Website, but no or not all ordinances available	69	17%
No website found	60	14%
<i>Total</i>	<i>416</i>	<i>100%</i>

Cities

Website with ordinances webpage	176	93%
Website, but no or not all ordinances available	14	7%
No website found	0	0%
<i>Total</i>	<i>190</i>	<i>100%</i>

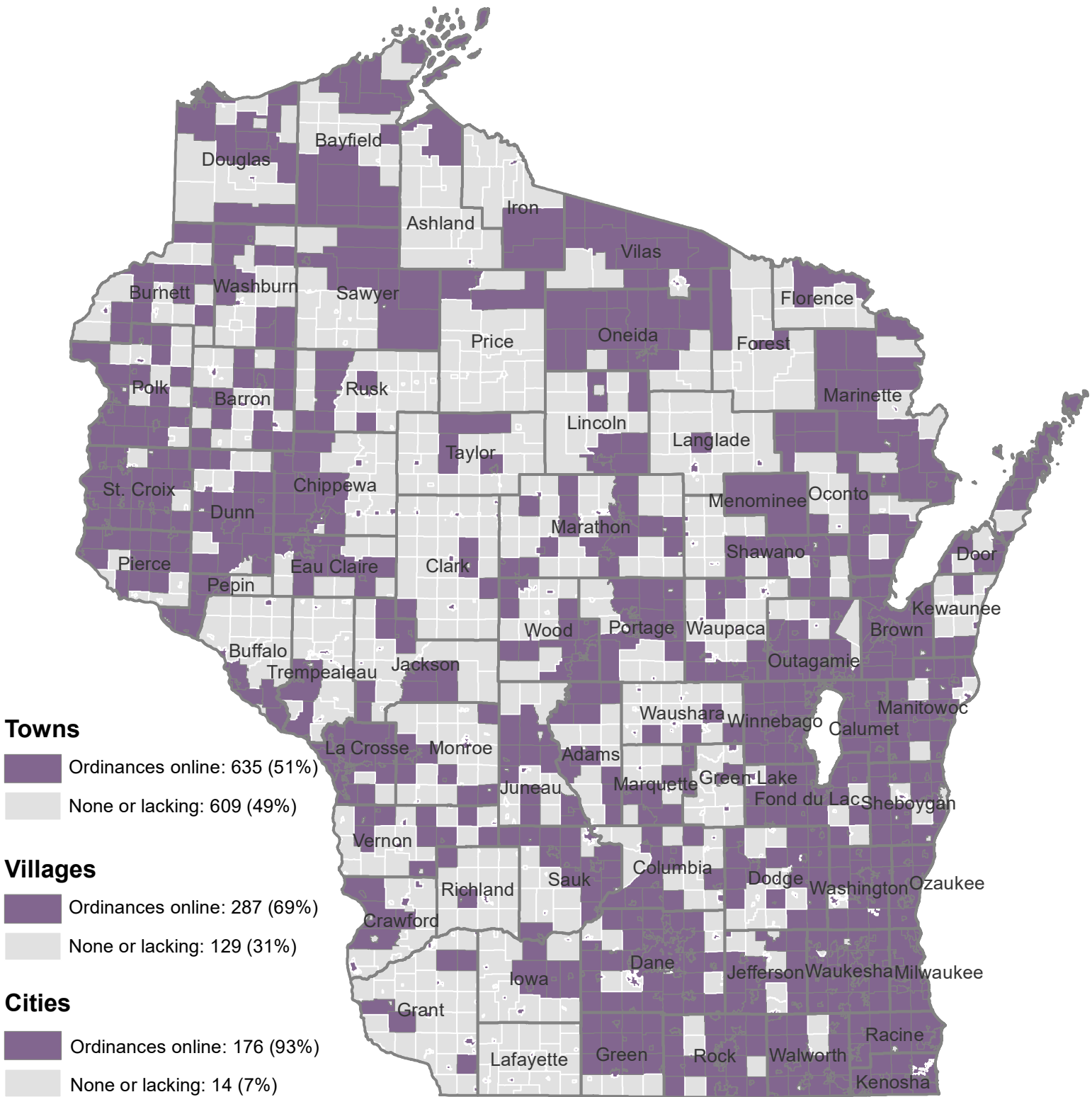
Counties

Website with ordinances webpage	72	100%
Website, but no or not all ordinances available	0	0%
No website found	0	0%
<i>Total</i>	<i>72</i>	<i>100%</i>

(All) Towns, Cities, Villages, and Counties

Website with ordinances webpage	1170	61%
Website, but no or not all ordinances available	275	14%
No website found	477	25%
<i>Total</i>	<i>1922</i>	<i>100%</i>

Online Ordinance Availability by Municipality



Of the municipal websites with no ordinances online or lacking ordinances online, a website could not be found for 417 towns and 60 villages. For those with a website, but lacking ordinances online: there were either no ordinances online, it was stated that the ordinance listing is incomplete, or it was obviously incomplete to the website visitor. Municipal websites indicated by this report as having ordinances online, may not actually have all ordinances online (e.g., official map adopted in 1984).



COMP PLAN ADOPTION STATUS

When the Comprehensive Planning Law was enacted in 1999, the Comprehensive Planning Grant Program was created to help local governments develop their comprehensive plans before the law's consistency requirement came into effect in 2010. During the period 2000 - 2010, DOA awarded comprehensive planning grants to 1,171 local governments, but has not provided any more since 2010.

The Comprehensive Planning Law states that comprehensive plans "shall be updated no less than once every ten years." The law does not define what updated means. Optimally, the update would include updating the background information, such as demographic data and the current land use map. It would also go through a new public participation process to review the goals, objectives, policies, and programs in the original plan and update them as needed, as well as the future land use map. At a minimum, the local government must go through the process outlined in s. 66.1001(4) to adopt the updated plan or readopt a version of the original plan if it still meets the community's needs.

For the purposes of this inventory, it is assumed that a plan was updated if it was adopted or amended within the last 10 years. It does not matter how small or large the amendment was. Even by this loose measurement standard, **most of the comprehensive plans originally adopted are now out of date and in need of update.** Communities without a plan or an out-of-date plan tend to be more rural and not exercise general zoning or subdivision regulations. Many towns simply rely on the county for comprehensive planning and to regulate land use and land division.

The Comprehensive Planning Law clearly states in s. 66.1001(4)(c) that **a comprehensive plan must be adopted by ordinance in order to take effect.** This does not mean that the entire comprehensive plan is an ordinance, rather the elected body (e.g., village board) must adopt an adoption ordinance (typically a 1-2 page document). However, many local governments have adopted comprehensive plans by resolution or by motion. It is not clear if a comprehensive plan that was not adopted by ordinance would withstand a challenge in court. For this inventory, comprehensive plan updates or plan amendments known not to be adopted by ordinance were not counted.

The adoption ordinances are also often not posted on a local government ordinances webpage. Instead, they are frequently found at the beginning of the plan or at the end in the appendices. As of 2023, a copy of the adoption ordinance is now requested by the DOA for verification of adoption dates.

Comprehensive plans are not required to be posted online. Their availability ranges. Some communities prominently display links to the comprehensive plan on the municipal homepage, while others do not post their plan online and it is difficult to get a copy offline. Plans may be hosted on a county website or regional planning commission website, particularly if that agency was contracted to prepare the plan.

The following table, figure, and map display inventory results for comprehensive plan status.

Comprehensive Planning Status

(*as of June 13, 2023)

Towns

Current comprehensive plan	402	32%
Out of date comprehensive plan	583	47%
No comprehensive plan	259	21%
<i>Total</i>	<i>1244</i>	<i>100%</i>

Villages

Current comprehensive plan	151	36%
Out of date comprehensive plan	211	51%
No comprehensive plan	54	13%
<i>Total</i>	<i>416</i>	<i>100%</i>

Cities

Current comprehensive plan	122	64%
Out of date comprehensive plan	62	33%
No comprehensive plan	6	3%
<i>Total</i>	<i>190</i>	<i>100%</i>

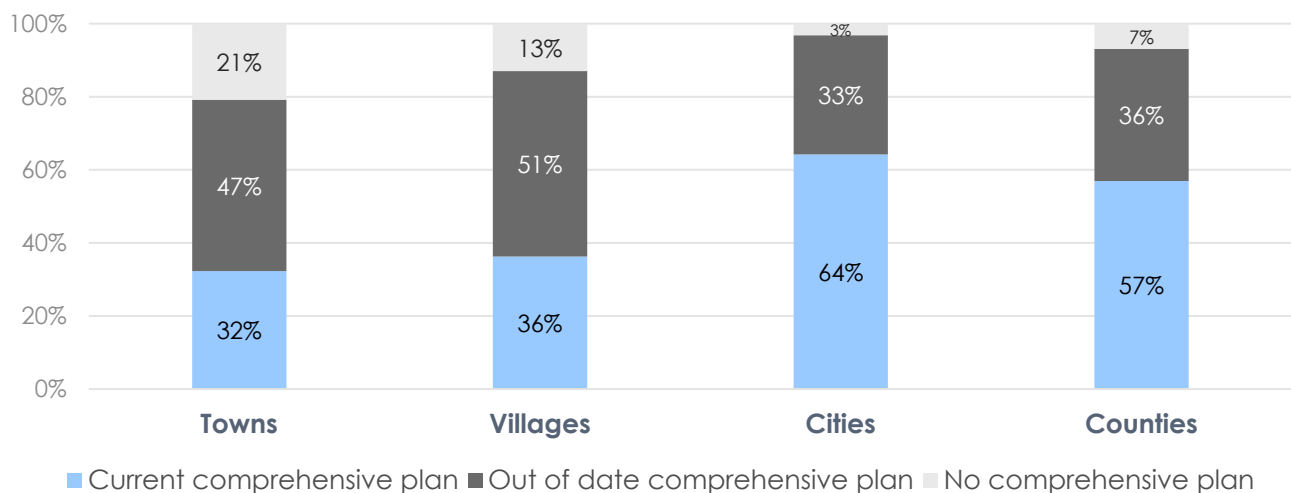
Counties

Current comprehensive plan	41	57%
Out of date comprehensive plan	26	36%
No comprehensive plan	5	7%
<i>Total</i>	<i>72</i>	<i>100%</i>

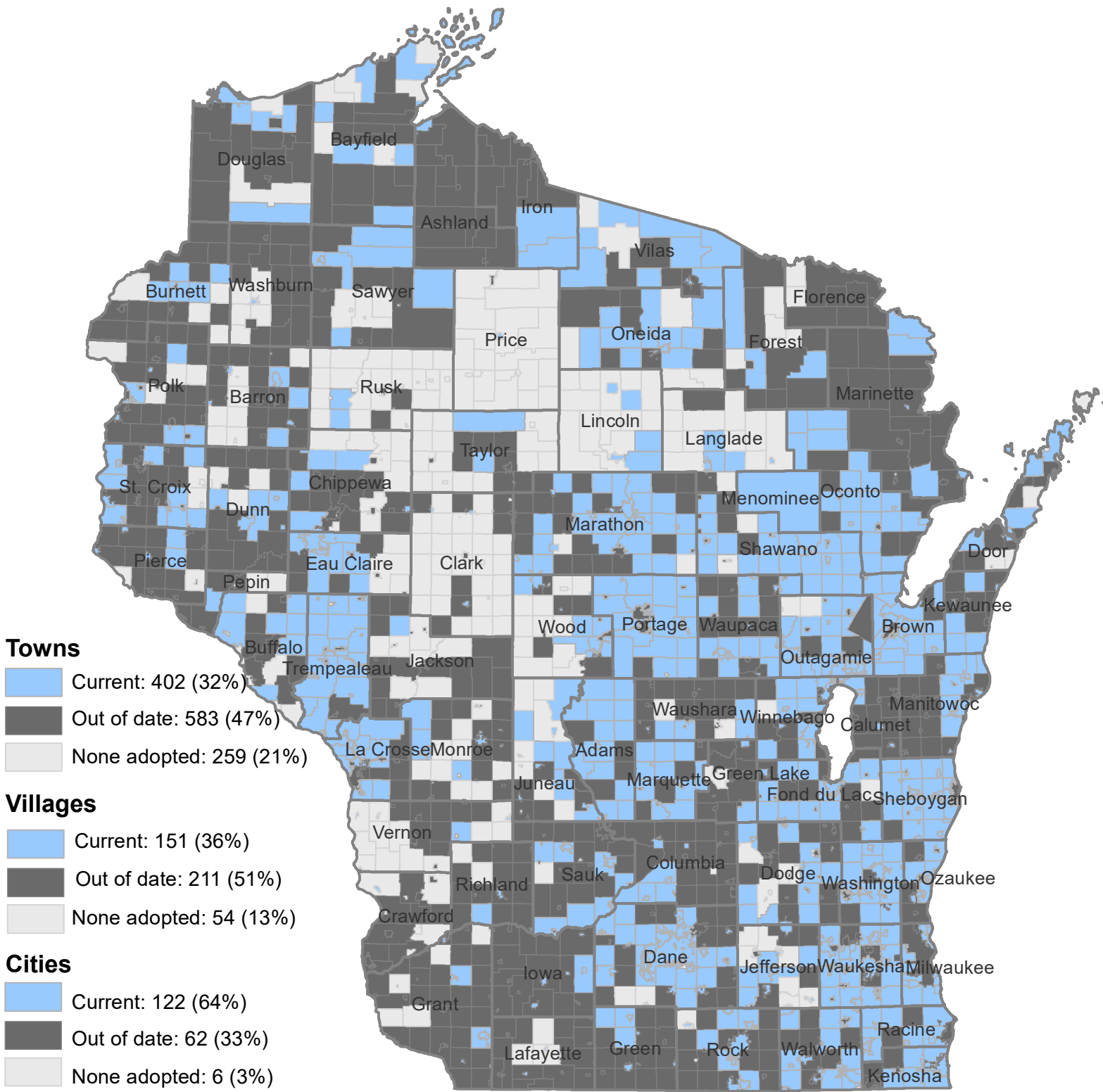
(All) Towns, Cities, Villages, and Counties

Current comprehensive plan	716	37%
Out of date comprehensive plan	882	46%
No comprehensive plan	324	17%
<i>Total</i>	<i>1922</i>	<i>100%</i>

Comprehensive Plan Currency



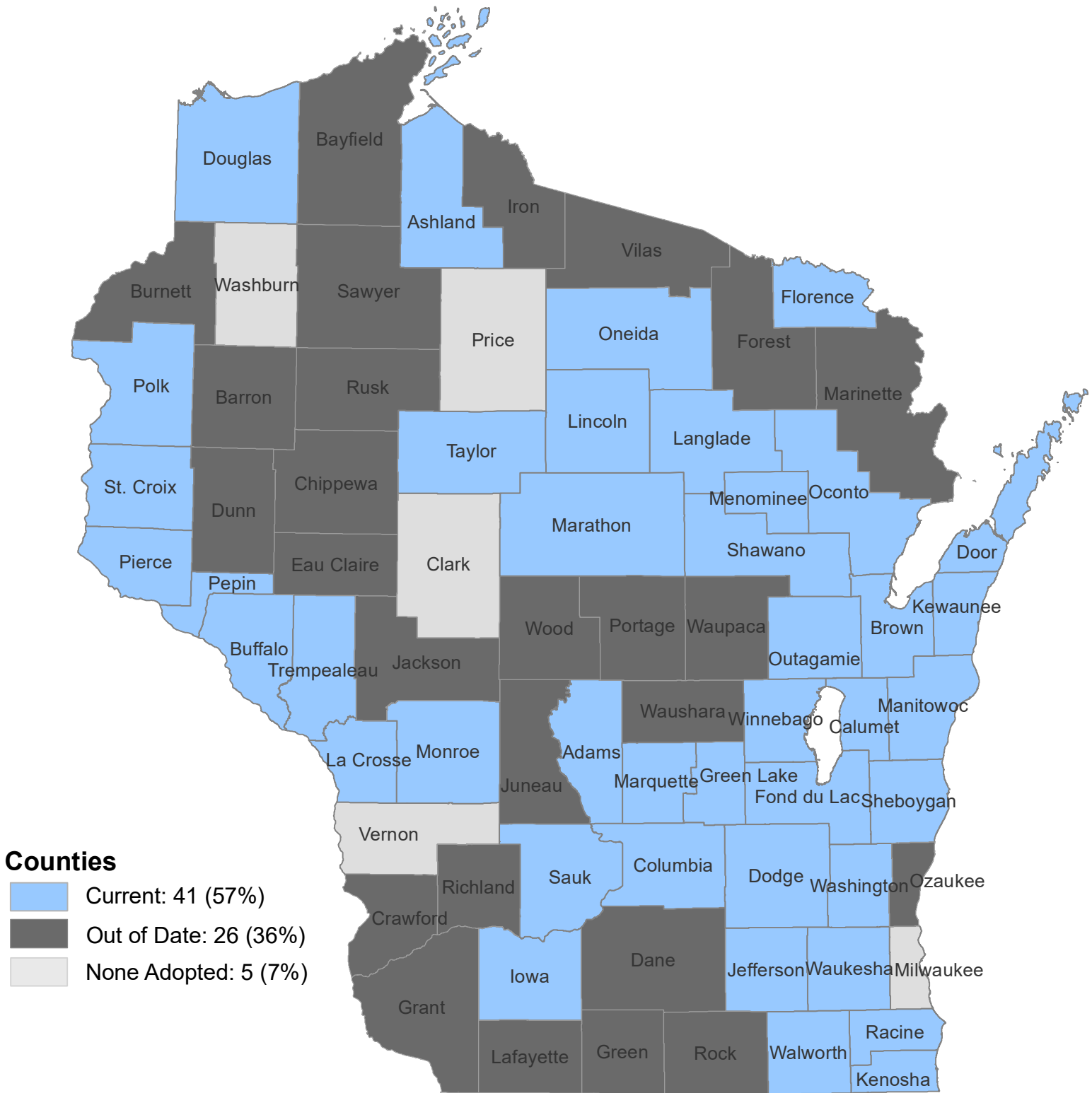
Comprehensive Plan Status by Municipality



Wisconsin's Comprehensive Planning Law (s. 66.1001) states that comprehensive plans "shall be updated no less than once every ten years." For the purposes of this inventory, it is assumed that a plan was updated, if it was adopted or amended within the last 10 years. It does not matter how small or large the amendment was. The plan must also be adopted by ordinance according to s.66.1001(4). An update or amendment was not counted if reported to be adopted by motion or resolution. Those seeking the most current data may consult the Comp Plan and Land Regs Inventory spreadsheet, which continues to be updated.



Comprehensive Plan Status by County



Wisconsin's Comprehensive Planning Law (s. 66.1001) states that comprehensive plans "shall be updated no less than once every ten years." For the purposes of this inventory, it is assumed that a plan was updated, if it was adopted or amended within the last 10 years. It does not matter how small or large the amendment was. The plan must also be adopted by ordinance according to s.66.1001(4). An update or amendment was not counted if reported to be adopted by motion or resolution. Those seeking the most current data may consult the Comp Plan and Land Regs Inventory spreadsheet, which continues to be updated.



THE CONSISTENCY REQUIREMENT

Comprehensive plans are not regulations in and of themselves; instead, land regulations are a means of implementing comprehensive plans. According to the Comprehensive Planning Law, **if a local government enacts or amends the below zoning, subdivision, and official mapping ordinances, those changes must be consistent with a comprehensive plan.** The law defines “consistent with” to mean “furthers or does not contradict the objectives, goals, and policies contained in the comprehensive plan.”

Zoning Ordinances

- City or village zoning ordinances enacted or amended under s. [62.23\(7\)](#).
- County zoning ordinances enacted or amended under s. [59.69](#).
- Town zoning ordinances enacted or amended under s. [60.61](#) or [60.62](#).
- Shorelands or wetlands in shorelands zoning ordinances enacted or amended under s. [59.692](#), [61.351](#), [61.353](#), [62.231](#), or [62.233](#).

Subdivision (Land Division) Ordinances

- Local subdivision ordinances enacted or amended under s. [236.45](#) or [236.46](#).

Official Mapping Ordinances

- Official mapping ordinances enacted or amended under s. [62.23\(6\)](#).

A limited number of other regulations and actions require consistency with a local government’s comprehensive plan. These include local government cooperative boundary agreements, tax incremental financing districts, farmland preservation plan and zoning, urban redevelopment plans, some public school facilities funded by bonds, water supply plans, and wind energy facility approval.

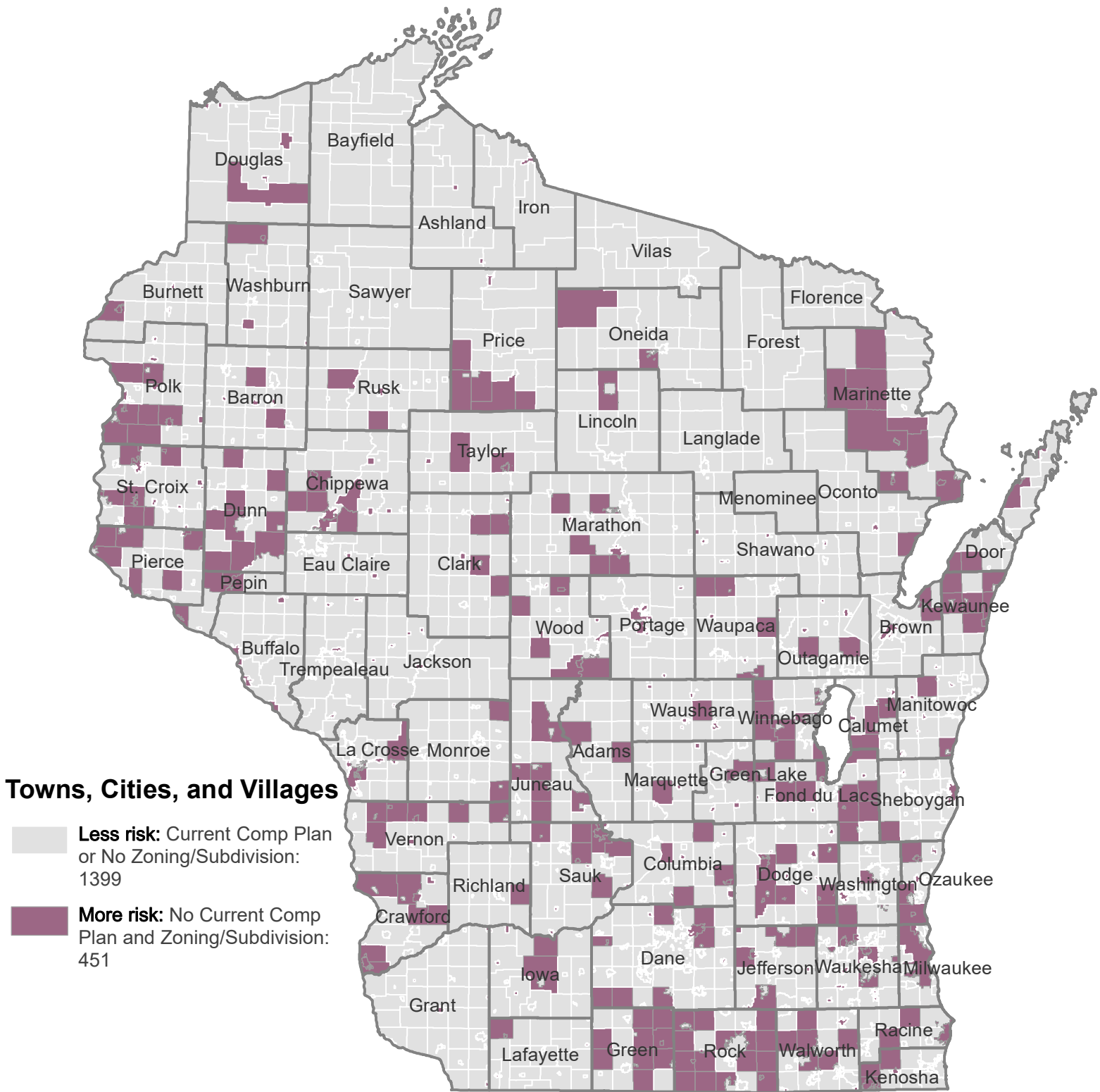
Consistency Requirement Risk: Land Regulations and No Current Comp Plan

Approximately one quarter (479) of local governments have adopted a zoning or subdivision ordinance and do **not have a current comprehensive plan in place (218 towns, 168 villages, 65 cities, and 28 counties).**

If any of these local governments wants to update their zoning or subdivision regulations, they must first update their comprehensive plans. Other local governments may also run afoul of the [consistency requirement](#) if they make changes to or enact official maps, shoreland zoning, or zoning of wetlands in shoreland areas.

The map on the following page depicts local governments with a general zoning or subdivision ordinance and no current comprehensive plan, which might put them at more risk for violation of the Comprehensive Planning Law’s consistency requirement.

Consistency Requirement Risk by Municipality



The Comprehensive Planning Law (s. 66.1001) requires consistency to changes in zoning and subdivision ordinances, among other actions and regulations, with a comprehensive plan. The law also requires the plan to be updated at least every 10 years. Zoning refers to general zoning adopted under s.62.23(7), 60.61, or 60.62. Subdivision refers to land division ordinances adopted under s. 236.45. Please email comp.planning@wisconsin.gov with any corrections.



ZONING

Zoning regulates what land uses are permitted in specific locations. The vast majority of incorporated municipalities (cities and villages) and most counties exercise general zoning. A small minority of towns exercise their own municipal (town) zoning. Most have adopted county zoning.

County zoning in towns is often described as a partnership between county and town, because towns have the authority to approve or disapprove amendments to a county zoning ordinance. Because this town authority appears in s. 59.69, if towns wish to exercise this authority, they will need to do so consistent with a comprehensive plan. One option for a town may be to adopt the county plan.

Some counties have unique situations in which it is unclear what the town and county zoning relationship is. For example, on the [Wood County website](#), it claims that all 22 towns are covered by a general zoning ordinance adopted in 1934, while 10 of those towns also have municipal zoning. Clark County likewise has a forestry zoning ordinance from the 1930s that may be exercised under the general county zoning statute, s. 59.69. Pepin County has a couple of ordinances, Chapter 19 [Mississippi River Bluffland Zoning Code](#) and Chapter 28 [Great River Road Preservation Zoning Code](#), possibly authorized under s. 59.69, but it is not clear. The county also has towns that have adopted municipal zoning ordinances.

Consistent with previous inventory efforts, this inventory does not include the Wood, Clark, or Pepin County ordinances as general county zoning ordinances. Under Wisconsin Law, a town area can either have general zoning exercised by the county, the town, or no general zoning (see [Wisconsin Land Use & Planning Law, 2022](#) edition). The town cannot have both county and municipal general zoning at the same time. The courts may need to sort out potentially conflicting or overlapping county and town zoning ordinances for these counties in the future.

This section, table, and map refer to general zoning, exercised under s. 59.69 (counties), s. 62.23(7) (cities, villages, and towns with village powers), and s. 60.61 or 60.62 (towns). Special purpose zoning ordinances exercised under different statutes are not included in this section, such as for airport, farmland, floodplain, shoreland, and wetlands in shorelands.

The following table and map display inventory results for general zoning regulations.

General Zoning

Towns

Municipal Zoning	245	20%
County Zoning	746	60%
No Zoning	253	20%
<i>Total</i>	<i>1244</i>	<i>100%</i>

Cities

Municipal Zoning	186	98%
No Zoning	4	2%
<i>Total</i>	<i>190</i>	<i>100%</i>

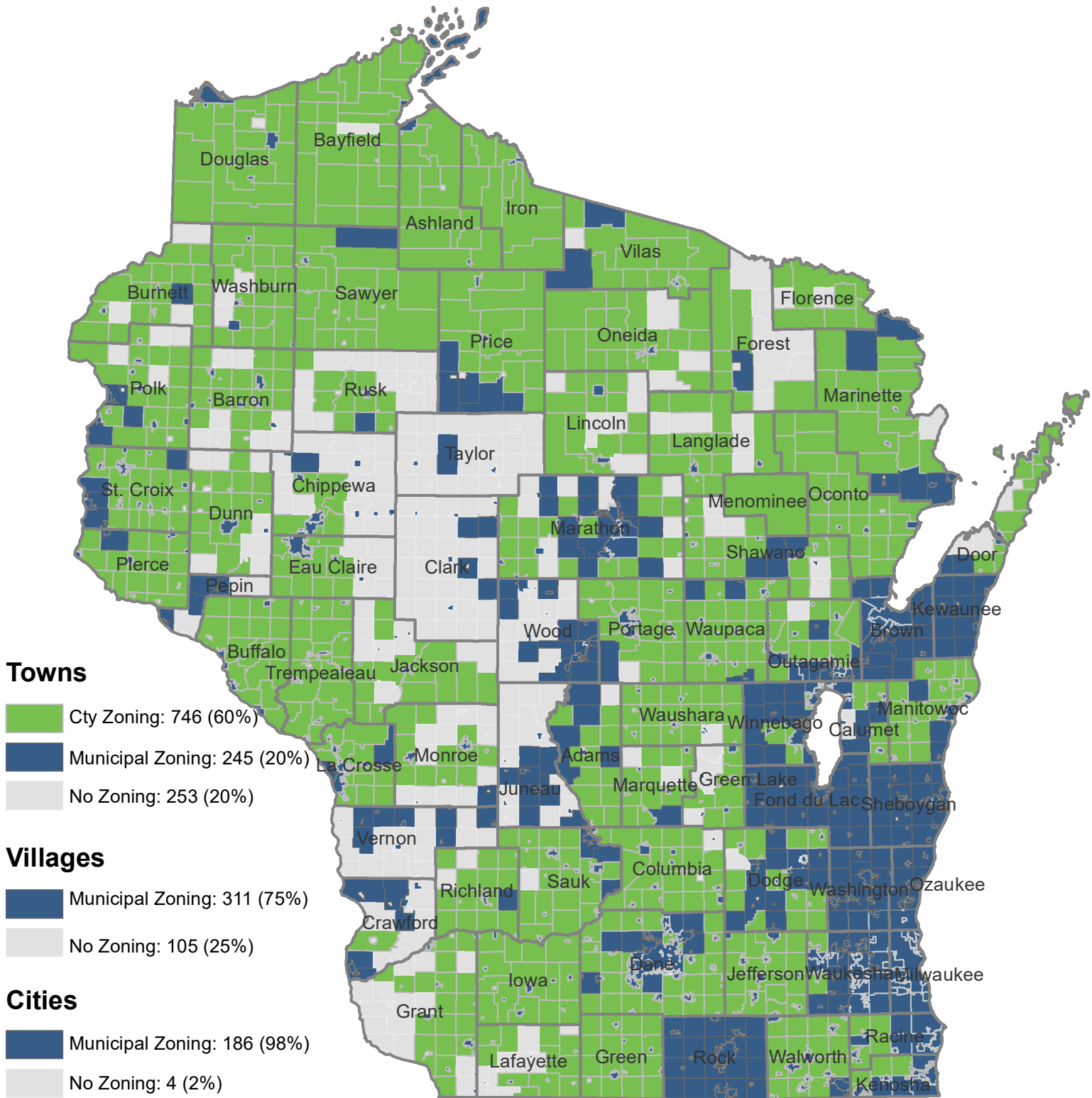
Villages

Municipal Zoning	311	75%
No Zoning	105	25%
<i>Total</i>	<i>416</i>	<i>100%</i>

Counties

County Zoning	57	79%
No Zoning	15	21%
<i>Total</i>	<i>72</i>	<i>100%</i>

General Zoning by Municipality



Cities, villages, and towns adopt general zoning ordinances under s. 62.23(7), 60.61 or 60.62. Counties and towns adopt county general zoning under s. 59.69. Those seeking the most current data may consult the [Comp Plan and Land Regs Inventory spreadsheet](#), which continues to be updated. They may also visit the local government website or contact the [clerk](#) for information on its comp plan and land regulations. Please email comp.planning@wisconsin.gov with any corrections.



Zoning of Shorelands or Wetlands in Shorelands

The Comprehensive Planning Law’s consistency requirement also includes “shorelands or wetlands in shorelands zoning ordinances enacted or amended under s. 59.692, 61.351, 61.353, 62.231, or 62.233.” **Except for Milwaukee County, all counties exercise shoreland zoning under s. 59.692.** If a county does not adopt a sufficient shoreland zoning ordinance, the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is required to adopt an ordinance for the county. Milwaukee County is not required to have shoreland zoning because it does not have any unincorporated areas. For shoreland areas annexed or incorporated in recent decades, s. 61.353 and 62.233 require cities and villages to continue shoreland zoning with certain provisions.

According to s. 61.351 and s. 62.231, cities and villages with wetlands of 5 acres or greater in shoreland areas are also required to zone for them. If a city or village does not adopt the required shoreland-wetland ordinance, the DNR must adopt an ordinance for the respective village or city. However, the DNR does not identify which cities and villages have wetlands of 5 acres or greater in shoreland areas. Instead, local governments must use the DNR’s [Surface Water Data Viewer](#) to identify wetlands. Compliance with these statutes is uncertain and DNR has not adopted a shoreland-wetland ordinance for any city or village.

SUBDIVISION (LAND DIVISION)

Subdivision ordinances are used to regulate the division of land parcels into smaller parcels for sale and development. Therefore, subdivision ordinances are sometimes titled “land division.” Subdivision regulations are not to be confused with subdivision covenants or homeowners association rules. Most incorporated municipalities and counties have adopted subdivision ordinances under s. 236.45 or 236.46, while most towns have not.

Zoning and subdivision regulations can overlap. For instance, both zoning and subdivision regulations can address issues of lot size. However, the requirements and procedures for regulating subdivisions under the Wisconsin statutes are very different from the statutory requirements for zoning. For example, towns do not need county approval to adopt subdivision regulations. Likewise, counties do not need town approval for county subdivision regulations.

Subdivision regulations at various levels of local government can also overlap. For example, a single parcel may be subject to a county, town, and city’s extraterritorial plat review via each entity’s own subdivision ordinance. In which case, the most restrictive rules control. A developer or property owner often relies on a licensed surveyor to navigate the complexity of individual and perhaps overlapping subdivision regulations.

The following table and map display inventory results for subdivision regulations.

Subdivision Ordinances

Towns

Yes	302	24%
No	942	76%
<i>Total</i>	<i>1244</i>	<i>100%</i>

Villages

Yes	266	64%
No	150	36%
<i>Total</i>	<i>416</i>	<i>100%</i>

Cities

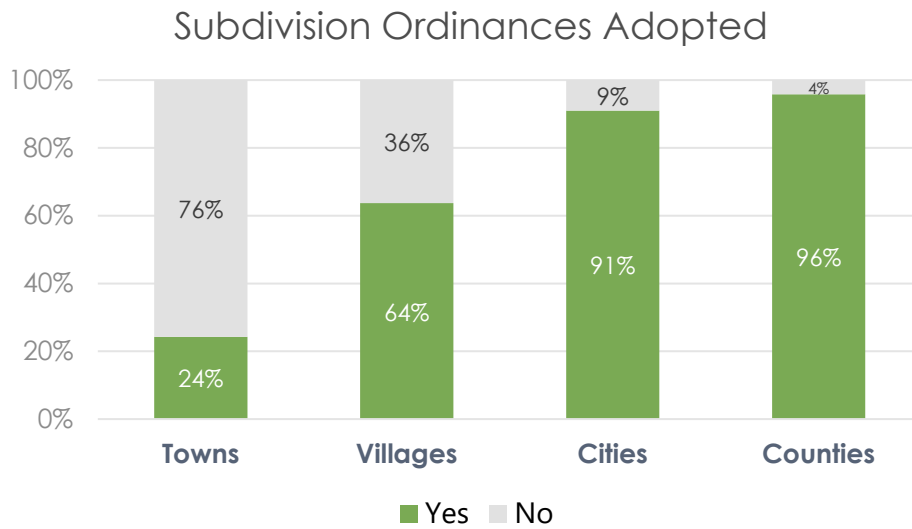
Yes	172	91%
No	18	9%
<i>Total</i>	<i>190</i>	<i>100%</i>

Counties

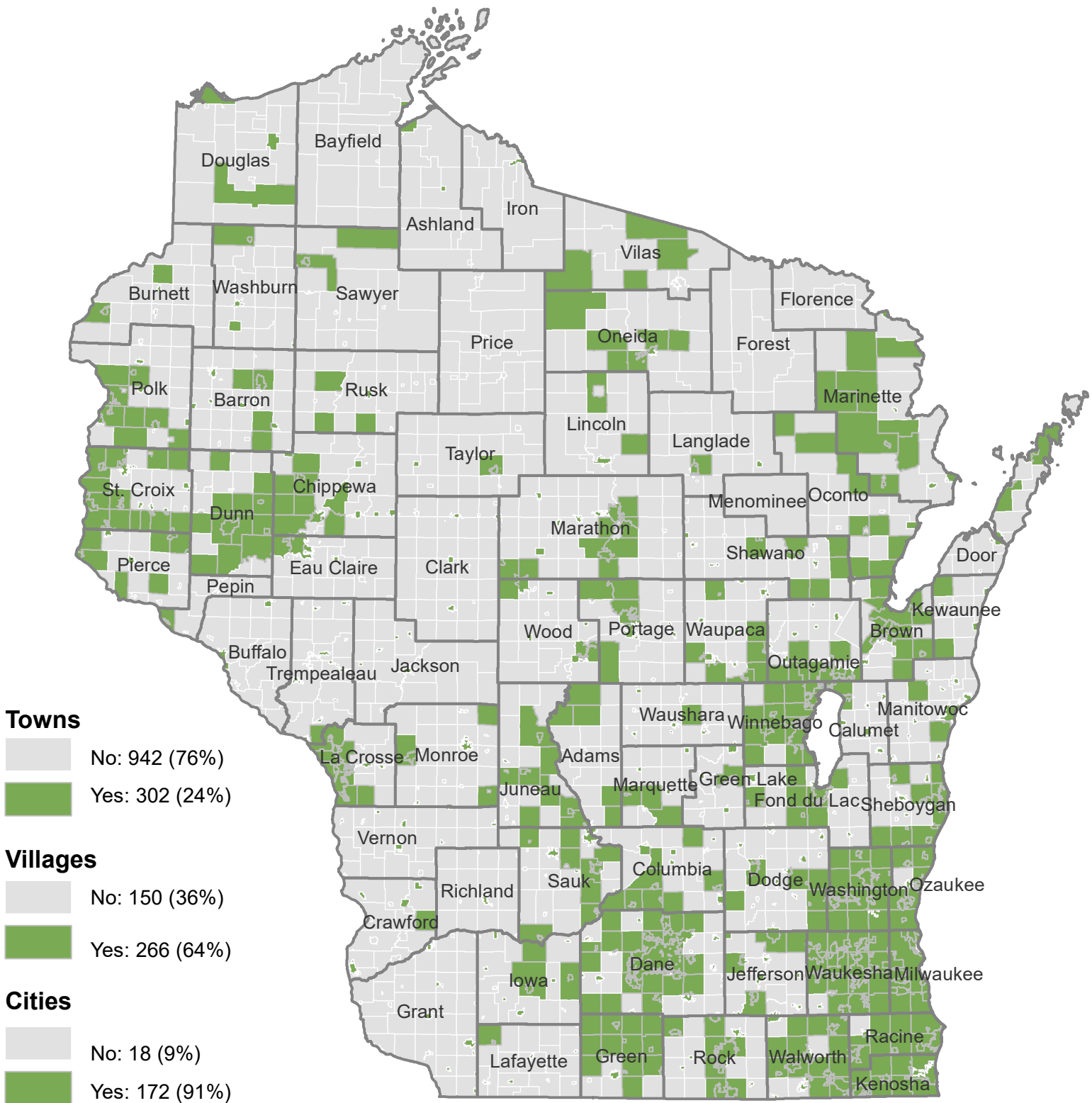
Yes	69	96%
No	3	4%
<i>Total</i>	<i>72</i>	<i>100%</i>

(All) Towns, Cities, Villages, and Counties

Yes	809	42%
No	1113	58%
<i>Total</i>	<i>1922</i>	<i>100%</i>



Subdivision Ordinances by Municipality



Municipal subdivision (land division) ordinances may be adopted under s. 236.45. Subdivision ordinances may overlap (e.g., county, town, and city's extraterritorial plat review area), in which case the most restrictive ordinance controls. Those seeking the most current data may consult the [Comp Plan and Land Regs Inventory](#) spreadsheet, which continues to be updated. Please email comp.planning@wisconsin.gov with any corrections.



OFFICIAL MAPPING

An official map is referred to in s. 62.23 (6), as a map that designates planned streets, highways, historic districts, parks, railroad rights-of-way, public transit facilities, waterways, and other public facilities laid out, adopted, and established by law. This section of the statutes may be used by cities, villages, and towns with village powers. Otherwise, town official mapping is enabled under s. 60.61(2)(e).

While researching this report, it was found that **official maps are rare and becoming less used. Instead, local governments are relying on future land use maps** in their comprehensive plans to designate land for future public infrastructure and parks. Yet, **official map ordinances were searched on a sample of 100 city and village websites and located on 28% of them.** It was observed that very few towns have adopted official map ordinances. Other noteworthy findings include:

- There is less awareness of official maps relative to zoning and local subdivision ordinances. Official maps as a regulatory tool are often confused with other sorts of maps that may have an official title, such as an “official traffic map” or “official zoning map.”
- The actual maps to which official mapping ordinances reference are rarely, if ever, posted online, which makes them less likely to be observed. To view the official map, one may need to go to the “office of the Building Inspector,” for example. Modern scanners and GIS technology should enable local governments to make this sort of mapping info available online, like the host of other land information already made available online.
- Finally, official map ordinances are sometimes not obvious on the local government’s ordinances webpage. It sometimes takes digging and sifting through placeholder references to an official map (in case an official map ordinance is adopted at some point in the future), as well as references to other “official” maps. Often the official map ordinance is part of the public works chapter of the municipal code. If the municipal code is not indexed in an online platform like Municode or eCode360, it requires searching the chapters of the municipal codes by opening individual chapters as separate PDFs.

REPORT MAINTENANCE

The text of this report should be updated periodically as statutes change or as the Land Regulations and Plans Inventory data changes significantly. In contrast, the [Comp Plan and Land Regs Inventory](#) can serve as a living document and should be updated much more frequently. Feedback to this report may result in corrections to the data in the spreadsheet. Those seeking the most current data may consult the [Comp Plan and Land Regs Inventory](#) spreadsheet, which continues to be updated.

There is a statutory requirement for local governments to [notify DOA](#) about comprehensive plan adoptions or amendment adoptions. There is no requirement for local governments to notify DOA of the adoption of zoning or subdivision ordinances, but the status of whether or not a local government exercises zoning or subdivision regulations seldom changes from year to year.

One could assume that the current trend towards posting ordinances online will continue and eventually all local government comprehensive plans and land regulations will be accessible online. As new municipal ordinance webpages pop up, they should be added to the index of links in the [Comp Plan and Land Regs Inventory](#). Finding new municipal ordinance webpages could include collaborating with the Wisconsin Law Library and using web tools to automate the search process.

A future inventory effort should also consider inventorying the availability maps for zoning and comprehensive plans, namely the current and future land use maps. The inventory could also determine what format the maps are available, for example, whether it be a file geodatabase, online interactive map, or simply a posted PDF.

Please email comp.planning@wisconsin.gov or call 608.267.3369 to provide comments or corrections.

