

New Glarus Vision

In 2023 New Glarus is:

An immigrant community that continues to enable its residents, recent and established, to live and work according to their best sense of what is right for them, personally and collectively.

A community committed to deepening cooperative action with the Village of New Glarus in provision of services.

A community growing in quality of life at the same pace as growth in population.

A community that makes effective, positive use of its proximity to the vital urban area of Madison, Wisconsin.

A community that has transitioned from a commodity production economy to a value added economy.

A community that focuses higher density growth in the vicinity of the existing village.

A community that values its natural, social, and cultural environment in its actions, plans, policies, and regulations.

A community that values and sustains some of its agricultural heritage.

Let me unpack these vision concepts as a means of placing some items on our table for discussion.

An immigrant community that continues to enable its residents, recent and established, to live and work according to their best sense of what is right for them, personally and collectively.

During its entire history, New Glarus, Town and Village, has benefited from the energy, skill, and spirit of those who have come to live here. No less than the earliest settlers who came from different countries, a different continent and cultures, the newest among us are here because of a desire to establish a lifestyle that meets their understanding of what they need. No less than the earliest settlers, the newest among us bring a depth of commitment to the community they have entered. There are no natives here. We are all immigrants from immigrant stock and with a, likely, emigrant future, as the economic necessity of physical relocation for many of us plays out over time because of job, profession, education, or age.

The pride of place is not solely based upon where one is from, or where one currently resides, but upon what one has accomplished with what he or she has found here. This is our common experience and our common future. It is worthy of our best effort to nurture it.

With that immigrant energy has come a circumstance in which the Town of New Glarus has developed the highest median housing value, the highest median household income, and the highest average adult educational attainment of all of the towns in Green Co. Each of our community sectors, economic, civic, scholastic, and religious has been enriched as a result.

With new people have come new challenges and opportunities. Patterns of interaction between town and village have changed. Centers of economic activity and support have changed. Our planning decisions regarding how to address these changes, challenges and opportunities will set a trend toward determining our ongoing perception of quality of life.

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Immigrants to this area from Glarus, Switzerland, linked town and village by a network of familial, ethnic, language, religious, and economic ties. Those who lived in the country were often blood kin to those in the village.

The intermarriage of the descendants of the immigrants forged additional bonds that extended beyond the legal boundaries of the Town of New Glarus.

The Village lived and grew to service the economic vitality of the surrounding farms. The farms generated the commodities that the industries of the village required. The region functioned as an economic unit. Ties through church and school provided additional community cohesion.

Changes in the agricultural economy have shattered that natural cohesion. The Village has ceased to be the economic center for agriculture, neither servicing the farms¹ needs nor providing the major market for commodities. That observation is true for the majority of non Ag residents as well. The major points of interconnection that remain between Town and Village are the churches and the schools. The cohesion of knowing all or nearly all of your neighbors has disappeared.

If cooperation is to be maintained and promoted, it will have to be intentional rather than assumed. This intentionality must be driven both by economic necessity and by a desire for a rational, regional strategy to respond to the developing metro area which now dominates our local economy.

That means that at least the Towns of Exeter, and York in Green Co. and Primrose and Montrose in Dane Co. as well as the Villages of Belleville and Monticello must be drawn into conversation and concerted action as well. We are, collectively, in the position relative to Madison today that Oregon,

Sun Prairie, Sauk Center, and Verona were, perhaps 20 years ago. If this is to be fruitful, it must be a process of communication and sharing between equals not a process of dictation or litigation between adversaries. Other Town/Village interactions in our region have demonstrated the chaos, which ensues when two municipalities of unequal statutory power but equal responsibility for the welfare of their respective residents clash over issues of boundary, jurisdiction, and service.

Shared facilities, across town and village boundaries, currently exist for provision of fire protection and education. Conversation is underway regarding the potential of shared library facilities. Very preliminary conversations regarding common office space, common staff, and common equipment have been held at the personal level between leaders of Town of New Glarus and Village of New Glarus governments. Conversations regarding conservation areas and parks need to be initiated. We have a start.

That start must be buttressed by a continuing commitment to think and plan regionally, rather than parochially, beyond the mere provision of services. New Glarus Village has now, with Valle Tell, been introduced to the very same exurban residential development phenomenon that the surrounding towns have dealt with for the last two decades and continue to experience. With Valle Tell fully built out and annexed, the Town of Exeter becomes part of a potential extraterritorial zone for the Village of New Glarus. Precedents and communication patterns set between Town of New Glarus and Village of New Glarus will color that relationship both prior to and during implementation of such outreach by the Village.

A community growing in quality of life at the same pace as growth in population.

With the new neighbors have come some challenges. Once fully developed for agricultural production, primarily by dairy, the local hills and valleys, not only within Town of New Glarus but also within our neighboring towns, are prime sites for residential use. Commodity row crops have largely replaced dairy herds. Tension between Ag users and residential users, while mercifully still rare is likely to increase as farm size increases and as rural residential use generates additional commuter traffic.

The tradition of each land owner choosing to do with his or her ground what seems best has come under challenge from government, in regard to agricultural practices, conservation of soils and water, and from those who redevelop for non Ag uses. With the rise in land values driven by the availability of alternative uses, Ag use is in competition with many other uses for a limited land base. All too often, farmers are at a significant competitive disadvantage in acquisition of additional land for Ag use.

Those who see quality of life measured in open spaces, rustic lanes, and clear vistas, hilltop to hilltop, broken only by the odd silo and the herds fed from them experience a sense of loss. Those who have found reasonably priced new homes, or trophy homes, in a rural setting are thrilled. The potential for conflict and reactivity is clear.

Secondarily, suburban and urban transplants to a rural setting often do look to village amenities for the satisfaction of many of their needs. Facilities such as libraries, parks, playing fields, and pools routinely available in a more urbanized setting without regard to jurisdiction have been traditionally funded here by New Glarus Village generated taxes and have not been part of the mix for Town expenditures. Review and evaluation of such existing amenities and the need for additional amenities in the future must be undertaken jointly with the village. Some form of shared ownership and operation between town and village may prove desirable in keeping with our current experience of shared fire district and school.

Shared facilities and services also come under pressure. On the one hand, more students make it more likely that a local district can maintain an independent existence supporting the identity of the community in which it is placed. On the other hand, a larger school population brings with it additional expenditures. Since the school is the single largest consumer of tax revenue for both town and village, care is required in management of expansion, particularly in concert with economic development efforts such as TID and use value assessment for Ag and forest lands which impact total tax base.

Third, it is in the long-term interest of the residents of the Town of New Glarus to foster and support the maintenance of a core retail capability in the Village. Those businesses can survive and thrive only in a setting with a critical mass of consumers. Our area is ripe for the introduction of a "big box,"² precisely because of the decay of the core service retail in favor of tourism oriented goods.

A community that makes effective, positive use of its proximity to the vital urban area of Madison, Wisconsin.

A bedroom community is a very different form of community than an integrated agricultural community. At one level it is to the advantage of an area to be able to generate the bulk of its income in businesses and industries elsewhere. That comes at the cost of the loss of the village as the economic center of the area. Having a major city within 30 minutes commute means that one easily can access every advantage of that city. It also means that persons living in that city can access every attraction available in New Glarus Village and Town. Efforts on the part of the Village, the local Chamber, various civic groups, and private individuals to maintain and enhance the Swiss ethnicity of our region are part of the attractiveness of our area. However, those efforts alone will not be sufficient as a long-term strategy.

A community that has transitioned from a commodity production economy to a value added economy.

Commodity based economies around the world are at an economic and strategic disadvantage to value added economies. If the Town of New Glarus is to maintain a reasonable agricultural industry within it, locally value added processes will be required to dampen the inevitable swings in commodity price. This will require shifts in forms of Ag use, particularly since much of the land area of the Town of New Glarus is less suitable for row crop use than for various forms of animal husbandry. As the Carey family has demonstrated with the New Glarus Brewery, locally identified products that are well promoted and well done can be quite successful. New Glarus Foods is another example. The village is to be commended for maintaining an awareness of the necessity of developing a local market. The recent experience with the cheese factory that did not come to fruition should not discourage joint efforts toward developing a local capability to use local product.

Towns have recently been made aware that TIF districts for promotion of ag, forest, and recreation developments may soon be available. That offers the potential for shared planning for industrial applications and possible shared ownership with New Glarus Village. Care must be taken in that process not to develop merely low-income labor forms of employment. We are already witnessing the importation of low cost labor from other communities for some of our local employers. Wages and salaries earned elsewhere and spent here are a major benefit. Wages and salaries paid out by local employers that do not get spent here are a net loss, particularly if generated from TID type facilities.

A community that focuses higher density growth in the vicinity of the existing village.

Traditional, totally built out suburban densities for housing are not the best use of rural land. The visual quality of the landscape is altered beyond redemption. While some forms of condominium housing and cluster development reflecting localized higher densities can be part of a rural mix, generally, built out development at the lot size of about ½ acre (Current Green Co minimum rural lot size is 20,000 Square Feet.) should be conducted primarily within eventual reach of municipal sewer and water.

Future provision of that may be by orderly annexation or by purchase of service through establishment of rural sanitary districts. The current land use plan of the Town of New Glarus calls for such full build out higher density residential development within 1/2 mile of the Village boundary.

That land use plan and ordinance has been in position for five years. The process that lead up to it extends back to 1993, and earlier.

Future regulation of that type of development in proximity to the Village can and should be by mutual agreement between Village and Town on the basis of an enforceable joint planning process, the implementation of a mutually agreed upon zoning plan for Village extraterritorial area, clear demarcation of limits to annexation along rational and mutually agreed upon boundaries, and mechanisms to address the adjustment of funding agreements for joint provision of services. The Valle Tell project entailing new development both within the Village and annexation of Town land and the Proposed subdivision fronting on State 39 West of the Village in the Town have both raised issues for town and village. A joint planning process has the promise of limiting points of conflict in development of policy for the future. Preemptive action on the part of either municipality would immediately poison the process.

A community that values its natural, social, and cultural environment in its actions, plans, policies, and regulations.

Some would think of this as an invitation to a form of reactive parochial conservatism. Others might view this as an invitation to a more interventionist agenda on the part of government, locally and regionally, in land use and planning issues. Our current Town of New Glarus land use plan reflects some of the push and pull between these polarities. Our deliberations at the Town Planning Commission are spirited, some might even call them heated at times, but our mutual commitment to the long-term benefit of our region is unshaken. We expect that conversations and planning processes with the Village will also reflect both disagreement and agreement regarding what can and must be preserved and what can and must be built upon to address what is a new situation and context.

A community that values and sustains some of its agricultural heritage.

The operative word in the above statement is ³some.² As a business, agriculture needs the same components for success as any business: Access to reasonably priced labor, access to reasonably priced capital, access to markets, access to reasonably priced benefits such as health care, access to facilities and land appropriate to the scale of the operation and expandable over time to meet future needs and opportunities, and finally the ability to turn a profit.

None of these factors are within the ability of the Town of New Glarus or Village of New Glarus to control. Minor influences can be exercised in the area of availability of land for Ag use through restrictive land use planning and zoning. Conversations about how to accomplish this are a routine and vigorous part of the Town planning commission's work currently.

Currently, statutorily placed limitations in the ability of the Town to zone have worked against a true comprehensive planning process supportive of agriculture. The current land split ordinance is at best a stop-gap measure. However, it must also be candidly offered that some core disagreements regarding strategy, data, and desired outcome among members of the Town of New Glarus planning commission contributes.

A recent survey of Ag operations in the Town of New Glarus indicates that approximately twenty two percent (22%) of households residing in the Town of New Glarus conduct some form of agricultural activity. However, less than one percent (1%) of households in the Town of New Glarus generate the sole income of the household from a farm. Approximately ten percent (10%) are dual income households, where a spouse works off farm or where both spouses work off the farm in addition to generating on farm income. An additional ten percent (10%) operate ³lifestyle² farms. Because USDA classifies as a ³farm² any operation that generates \$1,000 in Ag income, we have the rather odd notion that the amount of land under cultivation is down but the number of farms is up. Fully seventy five percent (75%) of our Town of New Glarus households are residential only.

The impact on the Village of New Glarus has been the loss of local businesses: Implement dealers, the mill, and most recently, the two most visible farmsteads in New Glarus. Local Ag supporting machine and repair shops find themselves increasingly under pressure from neighboring residences and businesses or government itself. Village based traditionally Ag support businesses have had to change product lines in response. Landscape and large residential lot oriented businesses have expanded. How long a livestock transfer facility will be viable within the village is an open question. Loss of core services from businesses within the Village has meant that farmers have had a significantly greater travel burden. Large numbers of unused or under used agricultural buildings dot the township. Some form of adaptive reuse may prevent the disappearance of the local barns from our landscape, but our window of opportunity to preserve these is growing smaller, as these unused and empty facilities fall to fire or wind or rot. Certainly we cannot expect private owners to continue to maintain structures for the public view without being able to generate some means of supporting that maintenance. Just as certainly, the loss of agricultural presence within the Village of New Glarus and around it diminishes some of the visual attraction, which is presented to potential tourists.