

The background of the slide features a photograph of a church with a prominent steeple. The church has white siding and a large, arched stained-glass window. A black car is partially visible on the right side of the image. A purple semi-transparent overlay covers the entire image, and the title text is written in white over this overlay.

PART 4:

ISSUES &

OPPORTUNITIES



KEY OBSERVATIONS AND ISSUES

The following summarizes the key planning issues and observations based on the review and assessment of existing conditions in Verona, discussions with various stakeholder groups, and feedback received from the broader Verona community through online surveys and public workshops. The issues and observations described below are listed in no particular order of importance or priority.

ISSUE #1: DOWNTOWN VERONA

Verona stakeholders and residents consider the lack of a diverse business mix — with the desire for more restaurants in particular — and the need for building and public space improvements as top issues facing the downtown district. In comparison to Verona’s other shopping districts, Downtown offers retail spaces in older traditional buildings generally at lower leasing rates, which can be advantageous in attracting new business start-ups and supporting entrepreneurial activity. While new retail development has occurred in recent years, Downtown Verona’s physical footprint remains constrained along Main Street, offering limited opportunities for new commercial and mixed-use development that can enhance Downtown’s economic vitality. Key questions remain on where new growth can occur Downtown, what other private and public realm enhancements are needed to maintain and strengthen its small-town charm and identity, and what economic development efforts would be helpful and effective in diversifying the business mix.

ISSUE #2: COMMERCIAL OFFICE MARKETS

Apart from Downtown Verona, according to the market assessment, the market for additional retail

development is not substantial enough currently to support a significant expansion of the sector. With land costs high in Verona, leasing rates for retailers would also be high, discouraging local and smaller businesses from entering the market. In terms of the office-commercial market, Verona has a tight supply of office space, characterized by a low vacancy rate, particularly for buildings oriented towards build-to-suit tenants rather than as speculative developments. While larger office buildings were developed in Verona during the 2000s, their growth has slowed in recent years, mainly due to the general decline in office-only construction since the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the market has retained a positive absorption rate over the years. The lack of new office workers in Verona constrains the growth of new retail, especially daytime operating restaurants. Available land for commercial uses along the Verona Avenue corridor is also limited. Future growth in the retail and office sectors may be small and incremental in the years ahead as more land is developed for new residential and build-to-suit or small-scale office operators.

ISSUE #3: COMMUNITY FACILITIES

Existing facilities such as City Hall, the Library, and the Police and Fire departments are considered adequate and meet the needs of the Verona community. The Senior Center provides a vital space for programs and services to support the community’s growing senior population. Many residents commented on the potential need to expand the Senior Center, while others believe a new community center can help provide space for programs that serve the broader Verona community.

ISSUE #4: GROWTH AREAS

Since 2000, Verona has experienced a doubling of its population, accompanied by the construction of new residential, commercial, and industrial developments, with the latter primarily driven by the ever-expanding campus of Epic Systems Corporation, a software company. Since 2020, close to 400 building permits have been issued for various types of residential construction, ranging from single-family homes to multi-unit senior housing complexes. However, different kinds of future retail and office development, in particular, may lag in demand without additional residential “rooftops” that can support additional commercial activity. While there are infrastructure constraints, the east, southeast, and south portions of Verona are likely areas for future development, where there is already strong interest from developers and investors. Natural areas and the growing Epic Systems Corporation campus constrain potential development to the west and northwest.

ISSUE #5: HOUSING AND NEIGHBORHOODS

Verona’s housing issues reflect, for the most part, what is occurring in many Dane County communities and nationally: that the current housing supply and housing product do not meet the needs of Verona’s various household types, including housing for young families, seniors, and the workforce population. Overall, housing affordability is problematic, with the median cost of market-rate for-sale housing increasing by more than 45% over the last five years, mirroring national trends. As the Verona community plans for its growth, new residential development that offers a mix of housing options can help provide new living opportunities for a range of households. Identifying ready-to-build parcels

and forging partnerships with various for-profit and nonprofit housing developers can also serve as key action steps for adding new housing.

ISSUE #6: INFRASTRUCTURE SYSTEMS

The City of Verona currently has adequate sanitary, water, and stormwater system services within its current built footprint. However, at some point, as the City considers new development in its growth areas, new investments in infrastructure, including sewer and water line extensions, lift stations, and water towers, will be necessary. However, topography and land surface shapes in certain portions of the growth areas will impose significant costs on their placement and installation. As the City of Verona updates its 2015 Water Systems Master Plan, which will inform future capital improvement programming for infrastructure, prioritizing which growth areas should receive needed infrastructure can help provide predictability in future land use decisions and financing arrangements that help underwrite and defray the costs of infrastructure installation.

ISSUE #7: PARKS AND OPEN SPACE

Verona residents have a high level of satisfaction with their parks, park programs, and recreational amenities, and benefit from ample access to open spaces and bike trails within and adjacent to the community. However, residents still express a desire for more park spaces as well as extensions and improved connections to bike trails and pedestrian paths. When asked about what other park facilities and services are needed, Verona residents considered additional skating rinks, pickleball courts, an outdoor pool, and more practical enhancements, such as public restrooms and better trail lighting, as essential priorities. Incorporating new parks and recreational facilities in developing residential areas was also a key concern for Verona stakeholders.

ISSUE #8: TRANSPORTATION AND MOBILITY NETWORK

As with most communities, the Verona transportation network consists of streets and roads, public transit, and bike lanes and trails that facilitate the movement of people and goods within Verona and the Dane County region. And with most communities, Verona residents and stakeholders desire a complete and fully integrated system that meets local needs. The City continues to plan and implement various network enhancements proactively. However, increasing options for public transit, addressing downtown traffic and its pedestrian environment, adding new bike lanes, and calming traffic near schools and parks were the primary concerns of Verona residents. In addition, as new growth occurs in the future, building and knitting together a more comprehensive transportation network that accommodates various mobility modes while promoting safety and ease of travel will help reduce traffic and emissions, and enhance connectivity and accessibility.

ISSUE #9: URBAN DESIGN AND COMMUNITY IDENTITY

The quality of building design, streetscape, and public realm appearances was a consistent subject matter for residents and various stakeholder groups — mainly with newer residential development designs that are not in scale with Verona's more traditional Downtown district and neighborhoods. Residents value Verona's "small town" character as an asset that should be maintained in light of the growth pressures for new housing and commercial development. Just as important, residents expressed the need to better "knit" together the older, built-out portions of Verona with those that are newly developing along the community's growth areas and periphery. Verona is also fortunate to have natural features, greenways, and agricultural landscapes as part of its environs. Preserving scenic vistas and viewsheds in these areas should also be considered part of Verona's urban design policies and programs.

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