



# VILLAGE OF WINNEBAGO

## MEMORANDUM

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**Prepared By:** Joseph Dienberg, Village Administrator  
**To:** Village Board of Trustees  
**Date:** November 5, 2025  
**Subject:** Comprehensive Plan/UDO RFP Discussion

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### **Background**

In March 2025, the Village adopted its first-ever Strategic Plan, which identified updating the Comprehensive Plan and Unified Development Ordinance (UDO) as short-term priorities.

Following adoption, Northern Illinois University’s Center for Governmental Studies (NIU-CGS) reached out to the Village regarding its capacity to assist with comprehensive planning. NIU-CGS provides these services in-house and indicated that, for UDO updates, they regularly partner with an outside consultant. To better understand the scope of work involved, staff received preliminary proposals from NIU-CGS (Comprehensive Plan) and Sightline Planning & Zoning (UDO update).

The purpose of this memorandum is to outline the next steps toward updating two foundational planning and land use tools for the Village of Winnebago, a Comprehensive Plan and a Unified Development Ordinance (UDO), and to recommend that the Village issue a Request for Proposals (RFP) to ensure a competitive, transparent selection process. This document explains what each of these tools is, why both are essential to Winnebago’s future, why a consultant-led approach is recommended, and what the structure of a future RFP should look like.

### **The Role of a Comprehensive Plan**

A Comprehensive Plan is a long-range policy document that articulates a community’s shared vision for how it should grow and develop over the next 15 to 20 years. It serves as a roadmap for decisions made by the Village Board, Plan Commission, and staff, guiding everything from land use and infrastructure investments to housing, transportation, economic development, and environmental stewardship. Whereas a strategic plan,

like the one the Village adopted earlier this year, is internally focused on organizational priorities, a comprehensive plan is outward-facing, shaping how Winnebago physically evolves and positioning the community to achieve its long-term goals.

Importantly, comprehensive plans do not regulate land use directly. Instead, they set the policy framework that zoning, subdivision, and other regulatory tools are designed to implement. A critical part of the plan is the future land use map, which identifies where residential, commercial, industrial, and open space uses are envisioned in the decades ahead. The plan also helps align infrastructure investments with those priorities, informs economic development strategies, and provides predictability to residents, developers, and businesses about the community's future direction.

Winnebago's current comprehensive plan was adopted in 2007. In the eighteen years since, the Village's demographics, economy, housing demand, infrastructure needs, and development pressures have changed dramatically. A plan written for the community of nearly two decades ago cannot serve as an effective guide for the opportunities and challenges we face today. Modernizing this foundational document is therefore essential for informed decision-making and strategic growth.

### **The Role of a Unified Development Ordinance**

If the comprehensive plan establishes the "what" and "why" of growth, the Unified Development Ordinance (UDO) defines the "how." A UDO is the legal framework that implements the policies and priorities identified in the comprehensive plan. It brings together zoning, subdivision, and other development regulations into a single, cohesive ordinance that governs how property is used, subdivided, and developed. Through zoning districts, development standards, review procedures, and design requirements, the UDO directly shapes the physical character and quality of the built environment.

A UDO is also one of the primary interfaces between the Village and the public. It is the document that property owners, developers, business owners, and residents consult when they want to invest in the community. A well-crafted UDO provides predictability, transparency, and fairness in the development process, while also protecting community character and ensuring compatibility between new development and existing neighborhoods.

Winnebago's current UDO was adopted in 2019 following an internal process that began around 2012. Because it was created without an updated comprehensive plan as its foundation, and because it was modeled

heavily from another community's code, the document is not fully aligned with Winnebago's own goals or conditions. It was already partially outdated at adoption, is incomplete in several areas, and contains errors and inconsistencies that complicate administration. This has resulted in inefficiencies, uncertainty, and missed opportunities in development.

### **Why an Update is Necessary Now**

The 2025–2028 Strategic Plan identified both projects as short-term priorities. The comprehensive plan is now nearly two decades old, and the UDO that implements it is already showing its limitations. Together, these documents form the backbone of how the Village manages land use, infrastructure, economic development, and community character. Without current, coherent, and coordinated planning tools, the Village risks continuing to operate reactively rather than proactively, responding to development proposals on a case-by-case basis instead of shaping the future on its own terms.

Modernizing these documents would also position Winnebago to take advantage of future opportunities. A new plan and ordinance will provide the clarity and predictability developers seek, and help attract investment in housing, commercial growth, and other future development.

### **Why a Consultant-Led Process is Recommended**

Preparing a comprehensive plan and UDO is a complex, technical process that involves not only regulatory drafting but also significant public engagement, legal analysis, and policy integration. A consultant-led process offers clear advantages. It brings in specialized expertise, ensures that the comprehensive plan and UDO are seamlessly aligned, and creates legally defensible, user-friendly documents that reflect best practices. Consultants also have the capacity to manage robust community engagement processes, facilitating workshops, surveys, and public meetings that generate broad input and community buy-in. Finally, professionally prepared documents are easier for staff, developers, and residents to navigate, reducing errors, increasing efficiency, and improving outcomes.

### **Recommended RFP Structure**

Should the Committee direct staff to proceed, we would propose issuing a Request for Proposals (RFP) structured in two phases: preparation of a comprehensive plan followed by preparation of a unified development ordinance. The scope of work would mirror the structure of professional proposals received to date, ensuring the Village receives comparable, comprehensive responses.

Staff recommends that the first phase, development of a comprehensive plan, include a kickoff and data-gathering process, a detailed analysis of existing conditions, robust community engagement, the preparation of a future land use plan and annexation strategy, and the drafting of implementation steps with priorities, timelines, and funding considerations. The second phase, preparation of the UDO, would include a complete audit of the existing ordinance, a set of recommendations for its structure and content, the drafting of a new ordinance and zoning map, and facilitation of public hearings and adoption meetings.

Consultants would be asked to submit proposals outlining their understanding of the project, their approach, their experience with similar work, the qualifications of their project team, and references from comparable municipalities. Deliverables would include the final comprehensive plan, future land use map, draft and final versions of the UDO, updated zoning maps, public engagement summaries, and all associated data and materials in both editable and publication-ready formats.

Proposals would be evaluated based on the firm's understanding of the project and approach, the qualifications and expertise of their team, the quality of their prior work, their public engagement strategies, their proposed timeline, and overall cost.

**Recommendation**

Staff is seeking feedback from the Committee of the Whole on the concept of initiating a Request for Proposals (RFP) for consultant services to develop a new Comprehensive Plan and Unified Development Ordinance for the Village of Winnebago. This effort represents a once-in-a-generation opportunity to modernize the Village's core planning documents, align them with the 2025–2028 Strategic Plan, and lay the foundation for sustainable, strategic, and well-managed growth over the next two decades.