# SEWER SERVICE AREA PLANNING

# BY THE NUMBERS

If you were to walk through our front door today, you would be in for a surprise. After roughly twelve years in the City-County Building, CARPC is moving to a new location at 100 State Street. The stacks of old maps and reports all around our office cover over a half century of planning. Sifting through these documents has been quite the history lesson.

As it turns out a number of milestones are aligning for our office and for planning this year:

- October marks 15 years since dissolution of the Dane County Regional Planning Commission (DCRPC) after 36 years in existence.
- The *Regional Land Use and Transportation Plan* is approaching its 2020 planning horizon. We are hard at work on its replacement.
- Urban Service Area (USA) planning turns 40 and Sewer Service Area (SSA) planning turns 50!

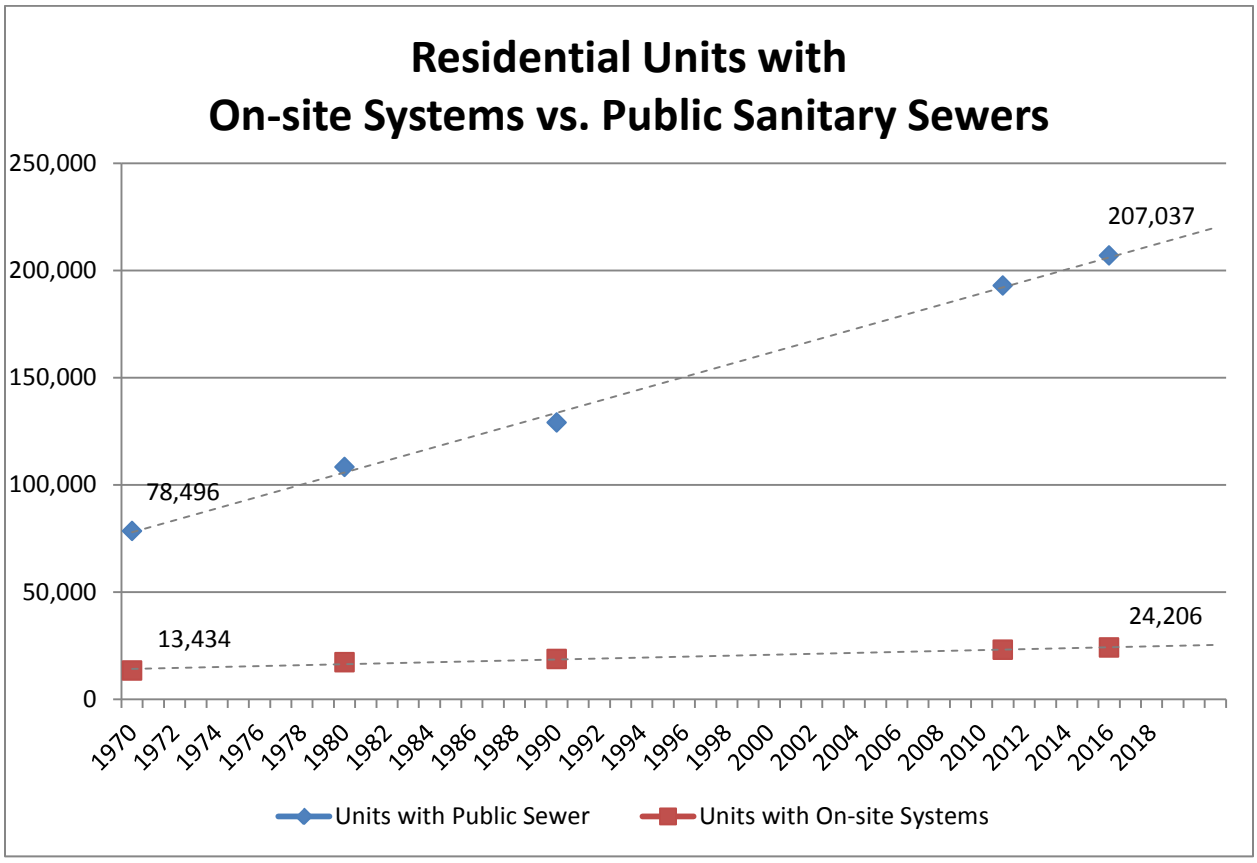
Much of what transpires in the realm of water quality planning is a direct result of the Clean Water Act (CWA) of 1972. But planning with water quality in mind—specifically SSA planning—actually predates the CWA in Dane County. SSA planning began in earnest in 1969, the year after the formation of the DCRPC. Delineating SSAs was one of the very first actions taken by the DCRPC. The 1970s were very busy. 1979 saw the completion of the first *Water Quality Plan* under the CWA and the creation of "Urban" and "Limited" Service Areas by the DCRPC. The idea of a "Regional Planning Framework" was also born during the 1970s.

The Framework still guides regional and local planning in the greater Madison region over 40 years later through three principles:

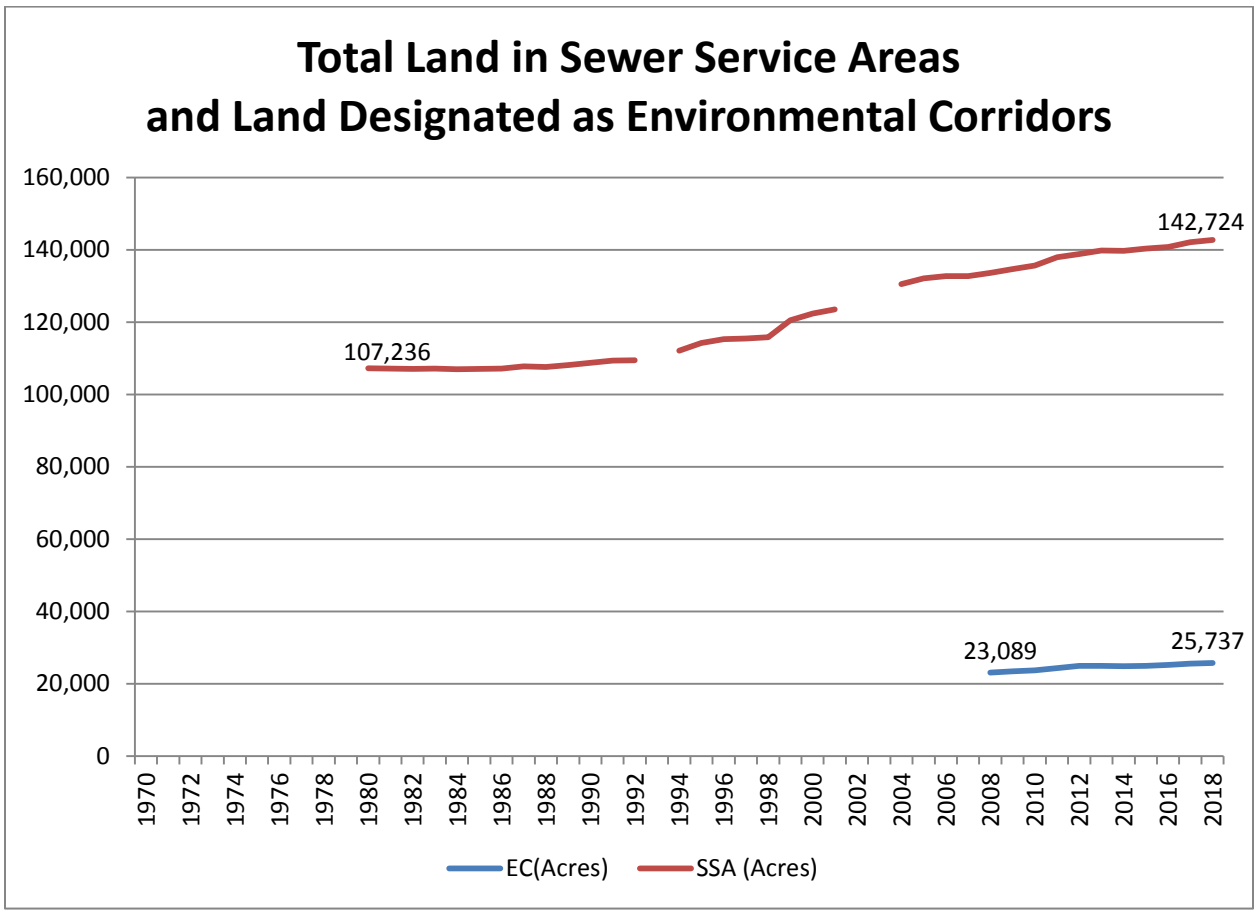
- Concentrate development in and around existing communities served by a full range of urban services
- Establish a connected network of protected environmental and open space corridors
- Establish preservation areas to protect productive agricultural land

So what has been accomplished in the 50 year history of SSA planning and by following the Regional Planning Framework?

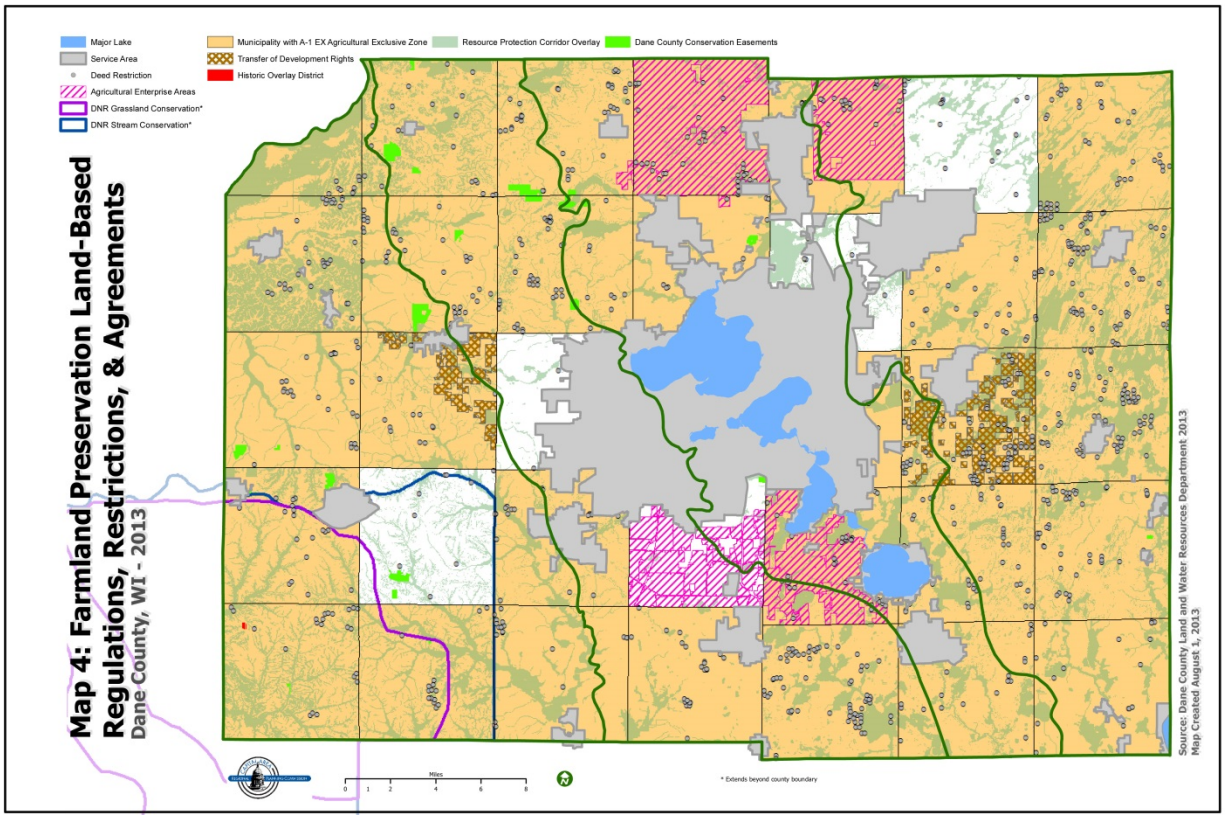
**Concentrating development in within Service Areas**—In 1970, 15% of all households were served by on-site systems (i.e. septic, outhouses, etc.), a total of over 13,000 households in Dane County. Fifty years later there are an estimated 25,000 homes with on-site systems, a 92% increase. However, those 25,000 systems account for only about 10% of all households today. In 1970 there were 78,000 households on public sewer systems. There are over 210,000 today, a 170% increase. Households on public systems have increased at almost double the rate of those on on-site systems.



**Establishing a network of Environmental Corridors—**Between 1983 and 1986, the DCRPC began mapping the first Environmental Corridors within established SSAs. CARPC continues that work today. There are currently over 1,200 contiguous corridor segments mapped in Dane County. Corridors average about 20 acres in size. The largest of them—The UW Arboretum and the Nine Springs E-way—contain over 1,200 contiguous acres each. There are almost 26,000 acres of designated Environmental Corridor in total today—that is roughly 20% of the land area within all the SSAs in Dane County. That means that one in every five acres of land in urban areas is protected from development!



**Establishing preservation areas to protect productive agricultural land**—Beginning in 1978, the DCRPC mapped agricultural land that was to be protected from development as a part of the statewide Wisconsin Farmland Preservation Program. In the original plan 23 communities adopted A1-EX, effectively prohibiting non-farm development of those lands. The original maps are hand drawn and have not been digitized, so it is difficult to accurately determine acreages of the original "Farmland Preservation Areas." However, a GIS analysis of approximate SSA boundaries indicate that around 19,000 acres of Prime agricultural land was added to SSAs between 1980 and 2019. Around two thirds of that land was ranked as "Class I," the highest quality soils for agriculture. The consolation to all of this farmland being placed into SSAs is that not all of it will be developed thanks to Environmental Corridor designation. Additionally, the proportion of Prime agricultural land in SSAs has not changed, it still constitutes about 52% of all land within urban areas. For more information on farmland loss and the steps that many communities are taking to mitigate it, please reference CARPC's publication series *Farmland Loss Mitigation*.




**Areas Protected through Various Means in Dane County**