Fitchburg Today

In-Migration

Today, across the United States, people are fleeing from crowded central cities to the more spacious, peaceful outlying areas. Because of Fitchburg’s proximity to Madison, an in-migration of people from the city are flocking to Fitchburg, bringing urbanizing trends with them. People are looking for a permanent place to settle a family with a house and a two-car garage. The majority of people commute to Madison for employment. Several apartment complexes offer an alternative to homeownership.

Fitchburg has more large apartment complexes than are usually found in a township with the majority of them located in the north end of the town. Most of these apartments came after the City of Madison lifted the two year zoning freeze which had slowed down the development in the Town to about one-third of what it was expected to be during those years.

William McKee, Town Chairman during the initial years of this development, explains the reasoning behind the extensive building of apartments, “It was one of the inevitable things. The only question was would Fitchburg stay Fitchburg, or would it go the way of all the other towns around Madison. They did nothing to move into the 20th century. It (development) just moved out to the edge of the city and when developers needed to build something else, they got another block and they’d extend the sewer and water out there, and then they’d annex it to the City. These towns just evaporated. So if Fitchburg was going to remain Fitchburg, they had to do something — provide the services that people need if they’re going to live in large numbers close together.”

Ben Meek formerly owned the ten acres where Valley View apartments are today.

(picture courtesy of Fitchburg Star)
FITCHBURG TODAY

The many apartments contributed greatly to the rapid increase in town population and property valuation from 1970-76. During this time, the population more than doubled, from 4,704 in 1970 to 10,259 in 1976. Bill Stoneman, the Town assessor, states that total property values surpassed each of the cities of Middleton, Monona and Sun Prairie. In 1975 Fitchburg had the second highest property valuation of any municipality in Dane County.

There are 1500 residential houses in Fitchburg, most of which are in the 33 platted subdivisions. Country Heights and Hillside Heights were among the first developments in the Town. These areas maintain a "country" atmosphere with private wells and septic systems and natural settings undisturbed by curb and gutter. Generally, these lots are in excess of one acre as are those in the later developed Country Vineyard.

Wildwood is the largest subdivision with 187 lots. Tower Hill Park, Jamestown and Belmar each have over 100 lots. These large developments, as well as Western Hills, Westchester and Moschkau, all have sewer and water.

Most of these subdivisions were planned by developers who purchased farms for the purpose of platting. Tower Hill Park, Briarwood and Tarpleywick Hills are the only major ones developed by farmers who lived on the land for several years.

Brothers, William and Lyman McKee, in 1964, developed Tower Hill Park through MacVentures, Ltd. Tower Hill Park received its name from Lyman McKee. One day, as they tossed around various names, Lyman suggested Tower Hill for the adjacent WIBA towers.

Father and son, Phil and Mike Barry, developed Briarwood in 1966 and named it for the overgrown woods and briar patches.

Another family, the Seymour Johnsons, developed Tarpleywick Hills in 1967. Johnson bought the farm in 1923 from Professor Taylor, founder of the University of Wisconsin Agricultural Economics Department. Taylor named it "Tarpley" after a friend and "wick" meaning "place" in old English. Later, Seymour's son, Robert, added "Hills".

Farmers and urban dwellers all benefit from the progressive road program advanced by John Fluckiger, town chairman from 1938 to 1964. He was instrumental in developing a county road aid program to help share in the cost of black topping. Fitchburg was the first township in Dane County to have all their roads black topped to full width and for many years has had the reputation for the "best town roads" anywhere. His leadership is still highly respected by all who knew him.
As the subdevelopments grew, Fitchburg established Ordinance 71-29 in 1972 requiring a subdivider to dedicate “sufficient area to meet the proportionate park, recreation and general open space needs generated by the development of the subdivision.”

PARKS

1. Rimrock Park — .4 acres. Site is presently undeveloped.
2. Clayton Park — .5 acres. Contains playground equipment.
3. Greenfield Park — 11.5 acres. Transferred to the Town by Frank Kowing in 1952 and development started in 1962. Contains shelter, picnic tables, barbeque grills, basketball court, volleyball court, horseshoe court, baseball diamonds, and restrooms. Also has playground equipment such as sandbox, slide, swing sets, jungle gym and merry-go-round.

(picture courtesy of Fitchburg Star)
Children crossing the Greenfield Park Bridge. The Jaycees helped build this bridge.
Dunn's Marsh


7. Tower Hill Park — 6 acres. The McKee brothers provided part of this park in 1968. The remainder was purchased by Town. Development began in 1970. Has playground equipment, shelter, restrooms and baseball diamonds.


11. McGaw Park — 63.7 acres. Purchased by Town from Sam McGaw estate.

Children playing on Wildwood Park equipment.

13. Camp Badger — 5 acres. Originally one of Fitchburg's district schools. Also used as shooting range by State Militia from 1910-16. Purchased from Verona Area Public Schools in 1974 and established as park and place for community events.

Dawley Park
Camp Badger Community Center


GORMAN WAYSIDE

Amidst tall oaks on a quiet little knoll stands a vivid memorial to the Fitchburg men who gave their lives in the armed forces of America.

After the death of Robert Schley, only son of Niles and Hazel Schley, in the Viet Nam war, the members of the Fitchburg Club wanted to honor his memory and chose a memorial for all of Fitchburg's fallen heroes. Chief Harry Whitehorse was commissioned to work on a sculpture which took three years to complete.

The soldier, his bare head bowed, dressed only in fatigues and boots, is kneeling on one knee, bracing himself with his rifle. It shows his weariness from the strain of battle, his sorrow and grief for lost friends and the futility of war.

BUSINESS

As Fitchburg develops, old and new businesses thrive. In 1976 there are 184 businesses.

Ancestors of Phil and Michael Barry were not only pioneers in Fitchburg, but also in the Wisconsin horse industry. They produced five generations of horsemen beginning in 1870 and thus have the marked distinction of being the oldest operating business in the Town. Garrett Barry, (son of pioneer, Michael), and his son, George, specialized in breeding and training Percheron and Belgian work horses and also registered some of the first saddle horses in the American Saddle Horse Breeders Association, founded in 1891.

With the mechanization of farming, the tractor replaced workhorses. The University of Wisconsin then provided the next Barry horsemen, Phil and Mike, with a research use for their horses and from this they have built up a good saddlebred herd, many of them champions.

Bowman Farm Dairy was established in 1914. As the story goes, one day as Duane Bowman was ready to ride his bicycle from the farm to Madison High School, his father, C. Harlan Bowman, said, "Son, stop off at the Board of Health on your way, get a license and see if we can't peddle some of this extra milk." After the establishment of the Bowman dairy, it grew from 26 acres of owned land to 700 acres of property, 435 acres owned and 265 rented and with 440 cattle. This operation ran successfully for sixty-four years. It was sold to Decker, Inc. who still use the Bowman Farm Dairy name.

Schmidt Nursery was established in 1921. It is combined with a "Winter Garden," a grocery store.
Blaney Seed Farms started in 1932. Edwin Blaney describes the beginnings: "Professor Andrew Wright was in the Certification Department (from the school of Agriculture at the University of Wisconsin) and he said to me, 'If you want to grow seed corn, you should grow hybrid corn this coming spring. We are going to release the first seed. You might not sell it all, but keep it for two or three years and sell it each year.' We didn't have much seed from one acre, and it sold mostly to county agents and surrounding areas." Blaney's business gradually expanded to an operation of over six thousand acres. His son, Richard, is now the manager of the largest business in Fitchburg in terms of people employed and property value.

Sprague-Dawley, Inc. started in Fitchburg in 1938 and raises rats for experimental purposes. It operated as a private business venture until it was sold to Mogul Corporation in 1968.

A nationally known research laboratory on Fish Hatchery Road is Fitchburg Research Park headed by Dr. Johan Bjorksten. He established his plant in 1948 and added the Vitamore Corporation in 1975. Bjorksten recently publicized important findings at a news conference of the American Chemical Society at San Francisco. Through research, he found that two molecules become "hooked" during the aging process and that certain enzymes can dissolve this 'hook-up' thereby reversing the aging process and enabling an average life expectancy to be 800 years.

There are several other large companies such as Central Soya, a feed manufacturer; CERTCO, a grocery distribution plant; General Beer & General Beverage, a beer and liquor warehouse and Rein, Schultz & Dahl, an asphalt hot mix plant. In the same general location of County Trunk P.D. and Verona Road are Placon Plastic Corporation, Lumberman's, Inc., Roscoe's Tavern (now named Monkey Shines), Wingra Stone & Redi Mix, E. Z. Gregory, Inc., Harder Paper Company, Oak Industries, Inc., Nicolet Instrument, Badger Automatic Distributors and Bowman Plaza.

There are three grocery stores, one filling station, one barber shop, three restaurants, one veterinary clinic, two dentists, two laundromats, one dry cleaner, four upholsterers, three garden nurseries, five kennels, several truckers, two lawn services, one motel, two antique dealers and several small businesses operated from homes.

The Town also has Bavaria Sausages, Jo Dot Ceramics, Pre-Hung Doors, Inc., Paul's Power Center and Schwinn Cyclery, Bryant Clamp Factory, Hammersley Stone, Hammersley Construction and Fitchburg Construction.
There are three financial institutions — Affiliated Bank of Jamestown, United Bank of Madison and First Federal Savings and Loan.

The *Fitchburg Star*, the community weekly newspaper, was started in January, 1975, by Henry W. Schroeder and Butler C. Delaney, co-publishers of the *Verona Press* and the *Oregon Observer* and has continued to provide weekly coverage of town government meetings, social events, features of interest in the community and general news. The paper filled a need for accurate, thorough coverage of Fitchburg events, and reporter Linda Thomson has become a familiar figure at Town functions.

Two unique schools are both on Fish Hatchery Road. Woodland Montessori School offers a new approach to learning for children ages 2½ to twelve. Orchard Hill provides a home for the mentally retarded along with special education.

This recent urbanizing trend of housing developments and new businesses brings mixed reactions among Fitchburg's people.
Businessman Duane Bowman notes the advantages of the Town's proximity to Madison: "This particular area, in my humble opinion, has many advantages to people who want to locate near the City of Madison. We have found over the years that it is the most accessible location to the City, central, east and west. This is perhaps why the apartment complexes have grown, convenient shopping centers have come into the area, and why many homes are being bought and sold. These are things, in my opinion, which have enhanced Fitchburg."

However, farmer and co-manager of Barry Stables, Phil Barry, expresses another opinion: "Fitchburg today has no resemblance to the Fitchburg that used to be. The northern half of the Town is nothing but a bunch of apartments. People who just moved into the Town are trying to run it. The old time farm people haven't got one thing to say about what's going on with the farms anymore. It used to be the farmers that ran the town."

FARMING

Although Fitchburg residents have differing opinions about the urbanization of the Town, there is no doubt that fertile farmland is being bought and used for commercial and residential development.

(picture courtesy of Bicentennial Committee)

Through the country fence posts, Madison looms in the distance.
Fitchburg's Fertile Farmland

(picture courtesy of Bicentennial Committee)

(picture courtesy of Bicentennial Committee)

(picture courtesy of Bicentennial Committee)
Fitchburg’s proximity to Madison raises land values and many farmers find it nearly impossible to pay the high taxes. Farmers eventually sell their land for attractive prices from real estate developers.

According to the records of Wisconsin Statistical Reporting Service, since 1959, the Town of Fitchburg declined steadily in numbers of farmers and dairy cattle. Fitchburg had 107 active farmers in 1959 compared with 58 in 1975; dairy cows numbered 2,937 in 1959 while there were 1,701 in 1975. To illustrate the trend of agriculture in Fitchburg, statistics are shown below:

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1959</th>
<th>1966</th>
<th>1975</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Farm Population</td>
<td>579</td>
<td>577</td>
<td>278</td>
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<tr>
<td>Farms</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>58</td>
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<tr>
<td>Farms with dairy</td>
<td>85*</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>32</td>
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<tr>
<td>Acres**</td>
<td>20,524</td>
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<td>795</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wheat</td>
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<td>Canning Peas</td>
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<td>516</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweet Corn</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>2,937</td>
<td>2,611</td>
<td>1,701</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brood Sows</td>
<td>630</td>
<td>496</td>
<td>323</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheep</td>
<td>319</td>
<td>342</td>
<td>288</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*estimated

**This includes all acreage operated by farmers whose headquarters are in Fitchburg and include lands which they operate outside of the Town.

STATE INSTITUTIONS

Fitchburg has an unusually large amount of state owned property. The University of Wisconsin purchased land in Fitchburg in 1940 from Nellie Grady. Nellie was the daughter of an early settler, Frank Matthew Grady, who settled in 1865. The University uses this land as part of the Arboretum. The Grady Tract contains Grady Prairie with oak openings and the Grady pines, red, white and jack.
In 1876 the State of Wisconsin purchased the pioneer Comstock farm along the Nine Springs in Fitchburg for establishment as a fish hatchery paying $35 an acre for the original forty. James Nevin was named the first superintendent in 1882 and was instrumental in developing it and other fish hatcheries across the State. The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources maintains this three hundred acre tract in Fitchburg.

The State Board of Control, in 1928, received permission from Governor Zimmerman to purchase a farm facility for prison residents. This was the Theodore Bosben farm (the former A. O. Fox Woodside farm). The purpose of the farm, according to Gerald Navis, superintendent, is to provide a meaningful work base for the residents and food for six area state institutions. The farm contains 600 acres with 210 milk cows, 450 hogs and 2400 chickens.

The warden of the entire Wisconsin camp system, James Mathews, is stationed at the Oregon Prison Farm. In 1953 he became the first warden of the minimum security correctional camp system. Both Mathews and Navis are firm believers in the therapeutic benefits of farm work, recreation and socializing among the residents. They incorporate these activities as integral parts of the prison programs in their effort to help residents adapt to the society they will face upon their release.

(picture courtesy of State Historical Society of Wisconsin)
The State Prison Farm

In 1928, 405 acres of the A. O. Fox farm was purchased by the Wisconsin Board of Control as the site for the Industrial School for Girls. This site contains hilly, wooded sections and small pond which provided outdoor activities for the girls. The school was closed in 1976.

Oakwood Correctional Camp, formerly Oregon Girl's School. 13 buildings presently stand empty.
by order of Governor Patrick Lucey after extensive controversy. Currently, Oakwood Correctional Camp, houses transferred prison inmates nearing their release.

PUBLIC SAFETY

Police Chief, Terry Askey, was hired in 1971 to organize a full time POLICE DEPARTMENT. Until this time, one man worked on an on-call basis. The Department has a detective, a sergeant and six patrolmen as well as an Animal Control Officer. The police station is located on West Lacy Road in the Safety Building. A new communication system was installed with federal funding for the equipment and installation. They also have a Time Systems Control Center Teletype machine and are among the 220 facilities in the State hooked up to the system. The Department operates three squads, two station wagons as ambulances/patrol vehicles and one unmarked squad.

On February 24, 1976, Fitchburg had its first bank robbery at the Affiliated Bank of Jamestown. After a nine minute high speed chase along dangerously slippery roads, the criminals were forced off the road and apprehended by Fitchburg Police Chief Askey.
Linda Hagar operates the TIME teletype system while Police Chief Terry Askey sits at the controls of the new communications system. Police dispatcher, David Burkeland, reads information to Hagar.

Fitchburg Police Department – 1976
Detective Bill Roberts, Mike Klien, Tom Cluder, Dave Burkeland, Chief Terry Askey, Larry Marquardt, Sue Diener, Louis Eifert, Barbara Blair, Norman Danielson, and Linda Hagar. (Missing Sgt. Gordon Walling)

Fitchburg formed a FIRE DEPARTMENT in 1969 in conjunction with the Towns of Madison, Oregon and Verona. In May, 1971, an ordinance was passed by the Town Board of Fitchburg to form its own Fire Department and appointed Herman Pfund as the Fire Chief. Also appointed at that time were Stan McGaw and Matt White as assistant chiefs.

The Fire Department operates with all volunteers, the Chief, an assistant chief, five captains, five lieutenants and twenty-six firemen.
Fred Carlson and Matt White work hard at a house fire in January 1976.

Fire Department Building
Fitchburg Fire Department

(picture courtesy of Fitchburg Star)

Front row from left to right: Jerry Richardson, Don Ryan, Pat Fitzpatrick, Chief Herman Pfund, Gordon Priegel, Tom Harrison, Bob Doeringsfeld, Dave Esch, John Zimmerman, Dave Scheel.


The Department is organized into five companies: Co. 1 — Pumper Unit, Co. 2 — Pumper Unit, Co. 3 — Tanker Unit, Co. 4 — Grass Unit and Co. 5 — Reserve Unit.

ORGANIZATIONS

A 4-H CLUB during the 1950’s and 1960’s was the Stoner Rockets led by Otis Onsrud. In 1961 another group formed a club led by Betty Radtke and the name, Fitchburg Fireflies, was suggested by Mary Kinney.

Cindy Johnson explains that Muriel Stoneman is the current Fireflies leader of over forty boys and girls. The following families are represented: Anderson, Blaney, Fahey, Forsberg, Gervasi, Greene, Holland, Jablonic, Johnson, Janssen, Jones, Kinney, Lawler, Meiss, McGibbon, McKeown, McKinley, Nichols, Noyce, Onsrud, Rhode, Richardson, Ryan, Ryder, Schultz, Skrum, Stoneman, Sutfin, Symdon, Walch and Wooldrige.
The Fitchburg Fireflies Officers:
Back row left to right: Phyllis McGibbon, Kelly Meiss.
Front row left to right: Beth Ryder, Cindy Johnson, Eddie Kinney.

Fitchburg Fireflies pose after cleaning up Fitchburg.
Back row left to right: Tracy LaReau, Joan Jansson, Tiffany Anderson,
Michelle Walsh, Betty Anderson, Rhonda Knipfer.
Kneeling: Doug Muench, Mike Steckling, Jenifer Anderson, Doug Jansson.
Another 4-H Club in the Town is the Nine Springs Off-Springs which started in September, 1975. Most of the beginning members had belonged to the Happy Hustlers by Lake Waubesa.

"We like to keep it a family thing", says their leader, Mr. Laverne Forest. Currently, there are ten members from seven families mainly from the northeast side of Fitchburg. They include the Petorschns, Wirths, Koeppls, Bings, Nelsons, Forests and Kanelis. The Ron Keebones are assistants.

Some of their undertakings for 1976 were making a Fitchburg Bicentennial calendar with pictures they later used as a basis for a bicentennial play which they presented several times.

Mary Dunn describes an adult organization in the Town, the FITCHBURG CLUB. "The Fitchburg Club was incorporated in November, 1967 after some interested residents formed a permanent club for the purpose of creating, developing, promoting and supporting cultural, civic and social activities in the Town. The names of the seven directors at the time of its origin were: Lawrence Rowley, President; Bernard Killian, Vice President; Mrs. J. Vincent Dunn, Secretary; Mrs.

(picture courtesy of Fitchburg Star)

Nine Springs Off-Springs cast for the Bicentennial skits of Fitchburg.
Back row left to right: Kathy Bing, Kirby Nelson, Jackie Koepppl, Holly Nelson, Angie Peterson.
Front: Janice Werth, Tim Peterson, Jill Werth, Kelly Koepppl, Patrick Koepppl.
The Nine Springs and Waubesa 4-H groups look over the 1976 Calendar they created.
Left to right: Pat Koeppel, Judy Koeppel, Mike Kanel, Carry Forest, Janet Kiche, Kelly Koeppel, Eleanor Krehl, and Debbie Krause.

Fitchburg Club members, aided by the Jaycees, sponsored a Christmas party in 1975. Decorating the tree are Hazel Schley, Niles Schley, Pete Taylor, Sherri Sherman, Pete Rusch, Jayne Schrank and Jack Sherman. Santa is Jim Lippert.
Two leprechauns, Vin and Mary Dunn, enjoy the annual St. Patrick’s Day dance sponsored by the Fitchburg Club.

(picture courtesy of Fitchburg Star)

Jessie Nelson, Treasurer, and Thomas Gorman, Ernie Novaro and Leo Richardson. The activities are numerous: sponsoring baby sitter clinics, soft ball leagues, junior bowling teams, dances and the promotion of the July celebration. The Fitchburg Club Newsletter ran from 1967 to 1971.”

An active Fitchburg JAYCEES Club was organized in 1969. Its original officers were: Richard Charles, President; Rhody Close, Vice President; Joey Schrank, State Director; John Connolly, Secretary-

Jaycee paper drive.
Left to right: an unknown donor and girl, Henry Geitz, Renate Geitz, A. C. Hildebrandt, and Dean Rugotska.
Ken Reigle and Donn Tolley paint "Welcome to Fitchburg" signs.

Treasurer; Tom Gray, Director and Jim Stellhorn, Director. Jerry Healy, a Tower Hill Park resident, was instrumental in developing what has become a leading chapter among the some 250 current Jaycee chapters in the State.
Sand box fill. Joe Duesler, Pete Rusch, Pete Taylor, and Mike Calmes.

Easter party sponsored by the Jaycees.

Hunter Safety program sponsored by the Jaycees.
The primary concern of the 1969 Jaycees was to begin the development of a Fitchburg area parks system. Initial responsibility for parks programs belonged to Dick Charles, John Jackson, Marv Patrick, Steve Tadevich, Jerry Healy and Dick Hugo. Their major projects were the development of a comprehensive parks system, social programs for community activity and community service.

The JAYCETTES were organized April 19, 1971 with eighteen members. Patty Schrank was the first president. Since that time the Jaycettes have been active in community projects — sponsoring the Red Cross bloodmobile, awarding students scholarships and donating funds toward park equipment. Their annual Christmas party is a progressive dinner party for 50.

The FIREMEN’S WIVES organized in 1972 as a social organization. Judy Fitzpatrick, 1976 president, notes that Alice McGaw was instrumental in instituting this group. The first officers were: Judy Noyce, President; Lois Esch, Vice President and Marilyn Priegel, Secretary-Treasurer. Activities include garage sales, Christmas parties for the children of the firemen, Christmas cookie exchange and an annual banquet. In 1976 the wives offered a first aid course for members of the community, sewed a patch for the Dane County Bicentennial quilt and sold concessions, as in past years, at the July Fitchburg celebration.

Jaycettes for 1976-77 — The Fitchburg Jaycettes, and the Jaycees, installed new officers and provided exceptionally dedicated members with special recognition awards at their anniversary dinner. The Jaycettes here are: Barbara Herreid, Treasurer; Kathy Martin, Secretary; Linda Rusch, State Director; Margaret-Ann Reigle, Vice President; Mary Rugotska, President; and Rose Tolley, past President.
The Jaycettes sponsor the Babysitting Clinic. (picture courtesy of Fitchburg Star)

Front row left to right: Mark Ludlum, Jane Schrank, Shari Doering, Sheri Sherman, Michelle Walsh, Debby Cissell, Susan Bowman.

2nd row: Cary Forest, Paul Fahey, Russell Ludlum, Jodi Noyce, Robin Maloney, Mary Sue Hunt, Traci Lawler, Diane Merry, Heather Holland.


Hostess of the GOLDEN AGERS Club, Mary Dunn, relates the history of the organization, "The Club was formed in March, 1970 when a group of thirty residents met with the Board of Directors of The

Firemen's wives display their Bicentennial quilt. Left to right: Dorothy Ryan, Sue Harrison, Leann Nichols, Marilyn Priegle, Garnett Richardson, Lois Esch. Seated are Judy Fitzpatrick and Judy Noyce.
Fitchburg Club for a social afternoon. It went so well that they continued to meet with expenses shared by both groups. Since December of 1971, the Golden Agers became independent and self-supporting and run the club themselves.”

They meet the second Tuesday of each month at the Town Hall for an afternoon of cards followed by a luncheon or potluck. Ed Flemming is the oldest member — 98 years old.

Julia Fluckiger and Paul Fisher

John Batker, Reuben Paulson, and Mrs. Paulson.

Mrs. Walter Batker, Mrs. George Evert, Mrs. Leo Lacy, Virgil Franz.

George Evert, Kate Fahey
LOCAL GOVERNMENT

As the Town urbanizes, the local government changes. William McKee was Town Chairman during the important transitionary years in Fitchburg (1965-1975). He describes the Board’s position during these years.

Fitchburg Elected Officials — 1939
Assessor — John Kivlin, Supervisor — George Barry, Chairman, John Fluckiger — Supervisor — Ralph Hammersley, Clerk — Joe Caine.

Fitchburg Elected Officials — 1975
Outgoing town chairman William McKee surrounded by four of the five members on the first five person board. Jack Jallings, Doug Morrissette, McKee, John Koeppel, Leo Lacy. Missing was Don McGaw.

"In the early 1950's it became apparent that the Town government needed to provide leadership for the transition from an agricultural area to an urban one. I believe the first step in that direction was in 1954 with the purchase of a truck for free rubbish removal.

Other towns with developments failed to provide urban services and eventually it became necessary for the central city to annex their property. This resulted in a severe loss to the Towns of Madison, Blooming Grove, Burke, Westport and Middleton.

As it became necessary to provide other services, we started streetline marking, road markings, and center divisions which no other towns were providing. We installed streetlights, named streets and put up signs.

Soon we found we were growing at such a rate that it was necessary to provide sewer and water. This had been provided by corporations that built some apartments in the northwest corner of the Town. They obtained a government grant for financing sewer and water services.
In 1963, it became apparent that we needed some office or central facility for the township. The old town hall building was used mainly for elections. A new town hall and much needed garage space was built in 1964 and at that time it didn’t seem possible that the 40 x 80 building would ever be in full use.

[picture courtesy of Fitchburg Star]


The second sewer and water connection entered the Town about May, 1964 through the McKee property, with the bulk of the expense paid by the McKee family.

With the influx of new citizens, it became necessary to have some fire and police protection beyond the Justice of the Peace and Constable. Al Joyner was hired as a part time policeman using his own car in patrolling the Town. A few years later we purchased a car.

In 1966, Belmar, a large residential plat with sewer and water, brought considerable numbers of additional residents. Because this
plat was located on sandy ground and the streets ran up and down the
hills, there was a great deal of erosion. Board members McKee, McGaw
and Lacy made the decision that future subdivisions must have sewer
and water services and concrete curb and gutters.

The 1970 Legislature made some changes in the laws permitting
towns over a certain population to have a larger town board on the
basis of more work to be done. In 1973 Fitchburg voted to elect a five
man board to handle this extra work. In general, the idea was great but
I'm not too sure it has worked out exactly as planned.

Whenever the Town went to Dane County Planning or the City
of Madison, which has jurisdiction for approval of plats within three
miles of their borders, there would be little consideration given to the
ideas of the Fitchburg Town Board. The reason for this was ‘you don’t
have any planning’. So a Planning Commission was appointed in the
early 1970’s on the basis of one person representing each area of the
Town — northeast, northwest, central, southeast and southwest. They
met on a regular basis to decide on planning and to discuss plats, etc.

A Town ordinance states that new plats must provide land for
parks and open space. The Park Commission was created to advise the
Board as to what a locality wants in their park and what facilities they
would like.

The Planning Commission provided a master plan for Fitchburg
and an engineer was hired on an advisory basis to provide the
Planning and Park Commissions with information they needed to
accomplish their job.

The strengths and weaknesses of town government are the same
as strengths and weaknesses of any government. It depends upon
whether these elected officials are willing to accept the responsibility to
which they are elected, to make decisions they were elected to make,
stand by their decisions and implement them. It is not the purpose of
any government, or its elected officials, to shift responsibility which
they have assumed to people who are appointed, who are not
responsible to the elector and who usually represent special interests.”

The Fitchburg Town Board is aided in its service to the Town by
three appointed commissions: Planning, Parks and Utility
Commissions.

Original members of the Planning Commission appointed in
1969 were: Lee Holthaus, Chairman; Karl Bing, Secretary; Robert
Purcell; Stan Gefke; Clayton Wolfe; William McKee, Town Board
Representative and Al D’Onofrio, Town Engineer.
According to former Planning Commission member, Ronald Kneebone, “The original members hired a planning firm to develop a ‘Comprehensive Development Plan’ for the Town of Fitchburg. The completed plan was presented to the Planning Commission in April, 1970 by the consultant, Midwest Planning and Research, Inc. The plan was very general in scope; it did, however, provide information on good planning principles and served as a test for the Commission.

Early in 1973, the Fitchburg Planning Commission and the Dane County Regional Planning Commission embarked on an eight month study of the future development of the Town. The project’s purpose was to identify those objectives and policies that would provide the basis for making mutually supportable land use decisions at the local and regional level. The results of this study then became the basis for the Town of Fitchburg Development Plan which was adopted in 1974. To implement this plan, the Planning Commission enacted a subdivision ordinance regulating division and subdivision of the land in the Town. These two documents provided a sound basis for the Planning Commission to make decisions consistent with the development goals for Fitchburg and have given Fitchburg a reputation for planning leadership in Dane County.”

Planning Commission
The Fitchburg Plan Commission tours Blaney Farms.
Left to right: Town Board Chairman Doug Morrissette, Leslie Katzman, Richard Blaney, Chairman Mike Maloney, Ron Kneebone, Dave Dean.
The Park Commission was established in 1970. Original members were: Michael Maloney, Chairman, Rhode Close, James Klahr, Gordon Priegel, Kenneth Reigle, William Rhode and Thomas Schmidt.

According to Gordon Priegel, the commission originated for the purpose of organizing and developing parks on land set aside for park purposes. Their duties consist of asking for state and federal funding for park equipment and planning for the development of the parks. Priegel explains that formerly local neighborhoods and the Jaycees bought equipment, shrubs and trees, installing these at neighborhood work sessions. He says it still operates that way to a certain extent while maintenance of parks is provided by Town employees under the supervision of Park Coordinator, Sue Oshman.

The Utility Commission was created by an ordinance adopted by the Town Board early in 1976. Although it had a capable utility superintendent and assistants handling the day by day operations, the Board felt it also needed the aid of a Utility Commission.

The functions of the commission include the management, supervision and control of the buildings, grounds, waterworks, sewage systems, refuse collection and all related matter for the utility district.

One of the first items demanding attention by the Commission was the need for an additional well to keep pace with the ever increasing requirements of the water utility.

The original three members appointed by the Board were John Darling, Robert Doeringsfeld and Bob Hillner. As expressed by
Darling, the first chairman, his group intends to assist the Town Board in serving the long range best interests of the majority of those dwelling in Fitchburg, but without detracting from the responsiveness of our Town government to the needs of its individual citizens.

Utility Commission
Member Robert Doringsfeld, President John Darling, Secretary Robert Hillner.

Douglas Morrissette, 1976 Town Chairman, explains his philosophy of town government and the inter-relationships of local town officials, "Town government has a unique place in not only the development but continuation of the 'home rule' concept for local people. Basically, the town chairman has the responsibility for conducting town meetings. In all other respects, he is only a voting member like the other board supervisors. He does not have veto powers nor other such discretionary powers as mayors or village presidents."

Town Employees (picture courtesy of Bicentennial Committee)
Office employees back left to right: Secretary — Hazel Schley, Clerk — Ed Lynaugh, Park Coordinator — Sue Oshman, Assessor — Bill Stoneman.
Sitting left to right: Deputy Clerk — Nedra Culp, Secretary — Bernice Presby.
Road and Utility Crews

Mr. Morrissette sums up the position of Fitchburg's Town Board in 1976, "Old in years, rich in history, young in philosophy, Fitchburg looks to the future with anticipation and optimism. Out of the past, we in Fitchburg have come a long way since the initial urban dwellers first appeared on the scene. While all has not been serene, more and more we see a sharing of experiences and background between the rural and urban dwellers. If we respect each other and try not to impose our ideals on other people, we will continue to progress without conflict."

1976 Fitchburg Town Board
Jack Jalldings, Chairman Doug Morrissette, Gordon Priegel, Leo Lacy, Lynda Lewis.
And now let us think of the Old Ones. It is they who are our true teachers. Those who have kept the wisdom accumulated over centuries will help in these troubled times. They speak our true language, and it is our instruction that when they speak, we should listen.

Indian Wisdom