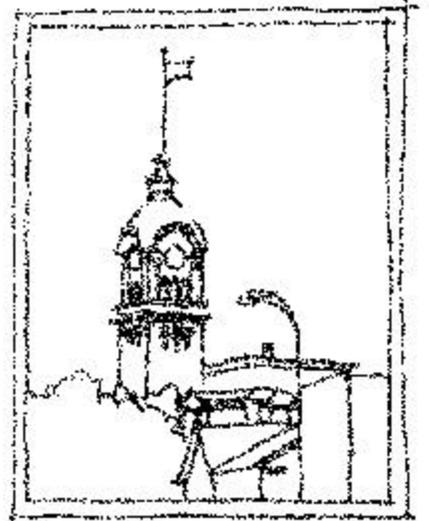


# Town Land Use Plan Town of Merrill

Lincoln County, Wisconsin



Adopted by Town Board:  
May 14, 2001

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## **Town of Merrill Land Use Plan Acknowledgements**

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## I. Purpose of Town Land Use Plan

The *Town of Merrill Land Use Plan* will allow the Town to guide future land development in a way that maintains the character of the community, protects natural resources, provides for efficient service delivery, supplies the desired range of economic opportunities, and balances private property rights with community interests.

More specifically, the *Town Land Use Plan* provides recommendations for how lands within the Town should be used over the next 20 years, based on the Town's vision, goals, and objectives. These recommendations may form the basis for new or updated implementation tools, such as zoning and subdivision ordinances. The recommendations should also be used as a basis for day-to-day development decisions, such as rezonings, conditional use permits, subdivisions, and parkland acquisitions. After adoption, the Town should occasionally consider logical amendments to the *Plan* based on changes in conditions or new information.

Following adoption by the Town Board, this *Land Use Plan* is also intended to be a component of the *Lincoln County Comprehensive Plan*. This dual adoption is important because, under State law, the Town and County share planning, zoning, and land division review authority. Both jurisdictions should be "reading from the same playbook" to ensure consistent, predictable, and desirable decision-making.

The City of Merrill's 1996 *Comprehensive Plan* will have an impact on Town planning. The City's plan includes recommendations within its statutorily defined extraterritorial jurisdiction, which extends 1½ miles from the current city limits into the Town. State law requires that any county plan must include all city-adopted plans "without change," and that a city's plan "shall control in unincorporated territory in a county affected thereby" (see S. 59.69(3) of Wisconsin Statutes).

## II. Background Information

The following is a summary of background information pertinent to land use planning in the Town. More detailed information and maps may be found in *Lincoln County Comprehensive Plan, Volume I: Inventory and Analysis Report* (November 2000).

### A. Location

The Town of Merrill is located in the southcentral portion of Lincoln County. The Town is approximately 53.4 square miles in area. The Town is located directly north of the City of Merrill, approximately 11 miles south of Tomahawk, and roughly 20 miles north of Wausau. Merrill abuts the Towns of Rock Falls, Harding, Scott, Pine River, Schley, and Birch.

### B. Growth Trends

The Town of Merrill historically contained a mix of farming and forestry uses. The alignment of Highway 51 through the center of the Town and close proximity to the City of Merrill have prompted significant growth. While some of this growth along the Highway 51 corridor has been commercial, most development in other locations (particularly near water bodies) has been residential. Between 1990 and 2000, the Town's population increased from 2,716 to 2,979—a 9.7% increase. Merrill is the most populated Town in Lincoln County.

### C. Summary of Significant Natural Resources

The Town has a diverse natural landscape. Southern portions of the Town are a mixture of open lands, wetlands, farmland, and woodlands. Northern portions are primarily forested, with areas of steep topography and small glacial lakes. The Wisconsin River forms a portion of the western boundary of the Town. The Prairie River, a major tributary to the Wisconsin,

runs generally east to west through the Town. The recent removal of the Ward Dam has restored natural flows to the Prairie. The State's Natural Heritage Inventory program suggests the presence of rare plant or animal species in along sections of the Prairie River and other environmentally sensitive areas. In general, sensitive natural areas within the Town are associated with (a) wetlands and floodplains along the Prairie River and its tributaries, (b) large areas of marshland adjacent to and northwest of Pesabic Lake, and (c) steep slopes near the northern edge of the Town.

The Natural Resources Conservation Service classifies some of the soils within the Town as "prime farmland," with a good portion being prime only where drained. There are larger blocks of wooded areas in the northeastern and northwestern portions of the Town. These include County-owned forest lands, most of which are near the Town's northeast corner. The *Lincoln County Forest Comprehensive Land Use Plan* identifies these areas as appropriate for multiple recreation, timber removal, and wildlife habitat uses.

#### D. Existing Land Use

Providing an accurate depiction of the Town's *existing* land use pattern is an early step in planning for a desired *future* land use pattern. Map 1 presents the existing (Year 2000) land use within the Town, divided into several land use designations.

A majority of the Town remains in open space uses. There are areas of land being farmed throughout the Town, but there are few remaining large blocks of farmland. Much of the remaining open land is wooded, but these areas too are somewhat fragmented, particularly in the southern parts of the Town.

Most developed lands within the Town are used for single family residences. Subdivisions are concentrated on lands north of the City limits, in the Wisconsin River/Highway 107 corridor, and near Pesabic Lake and southern portions of the Prairie River. Areas of highway-oriented commercial development are mainly located along the "old" Highway 51 corridor (existing Highway K), particularly near the Highway C intersection. Some of these sites are aging and at least partially vacated. The largest commercial area in the vicinity is near the Highway 51/64/17 interchange, but this area is mainly within the current City limits.

#### E. Existing Transportation System

The Town is well connected to the region through the existing roadway network. The four-lane U.S. Highway (USH) 51 "freeway" runs north-south through the center of the Town, with an interchange at County Highway (CTH) K. Existing at grade access points at Pier Street/Lincoln Drive and North Star Road will be converted to grade separated crossings as part of the USH 51 upgrade (i.e. access to USH 51 will be eliminated). Between 1992 and 1998, traffic volumes increased by between 40% and 55% along USH 51—to about 13,000 cars per day through the Town of Merrill. State Highway (STH) 17 also runs through the southeastern sections of the Town from 51/64/17 interchange. STH 107 and CTHs K, C, and Pier Street ("old K") serve as collector roads, with STH 107 extending all the way to Tomahawk along the Wisconsin River. Local roads managed by the Town complement this major road network. There are no Wisconsin River crossings in the Town.

The Wisconsin Central Limited railroad runs through the center of the Town. The Merrill Municipal Airport is located just south of the Town (large "Institutional" area on Map 1).

**INSERT MAP 1: EXISTING LAND USE**

#### F. Existing Utilities, Community Facilities, Parks, Historic and Cultural Resources

The Town Hall is located near the geographic center of the Town, along CTH K just south of CTH C. The Town does not own or operate any public parkland. The 503 acre Council Grounds State Park is a major recreational resource in the extreme southwest corner of the Town. The State also owns and operates a 174 acre public hunting and fishing ground where the Spring Creek meets the Prairie River, in the northeast part of the Town.

The Town does not provide public sanitary sewer or water services. The City of Merrill is authorized to provide these services within its State-defined Urban (Sewer) Service Area—an area where the City expects urban growth to occur within the next 20 years (see Map 2). The City's current policy is to not extend sewer or water services beyond its corporate limits. A City-proposed wellhead protection area extends into the southeast corner of the town, in the area where STH 17 and USH 51 converge.

The Lincoln County Landfill is located on 170 acres in the northeast corner of the Town (see "Institutional" area on Map 1). The 1984 *Lincoln County Solid Waste Management Plan* recommends the siting of a new landfill either in the Town of Bradley or near the southeast corner of the Town of Merrill, although this recommendation may be reconsidered. The closed City of Merrill landfill is located on land east of CTH K and south of Merrill Town Hall Road.

No properties are listed on the National or State Register of Historic Places. There are no known cemeteries or Native American burial sites in the Town. A comprehensive survey of historic or archeological resources has not been conducted.

### III. Results of Public Participation Exercises

To guide the planning process, the Town Board appointed a Town Land Use Committee. That Committee led and participated in a number of participation exercises to ensure that this *Plan* is based on Town residents' vision. These exercises are summarized in the following paragraphs.

#### A. Town Vision Setting Workshop

A town vision setting workshop was held in May 2000 to understand key issues and obtain participants' vision for the future. Twenty-two Town of Merrill residents attended.

Many participants stressed their desire to attain greater public participation in Town government, promote high quality employment opportunities, and encourage controlled growth. Additionally, sentiments to preserve water quality and natural resources, promote tourism, and to maintain high quality schools were also expressed.

When asked to describe the Town's strengths, common responses included good schools, abundant natural resources, and the Town's strategic location along Highway 51 and close to urban areas. When asked to describe weaknesses, common responses included the Town's lack of industrial development, problems with Town topography, and lack of pleasing vistas.

#### B. Visual Preference Exercise

In Summer 2000, the Committee completed a visual preference exercise to capture the Town's defining character as seen from the eyes of residents. Committee members photographed the "special places" that capture this character. These photographs suggest places that Committee members wish to preserve or see more of in the future. Members also photographed places that they felt hurt the character and appearance of the Town.

Of the 58 photos taken in the Town of Merrill, 50 of them were of “good” or “special” places. These photos can be grouped into four main categories:

1. *Residential scenes, such as new subdivisions, well-maintained homes, and new residential streets.* Most of the residential photographs were taken along Highway 107 near the Wisconsin River and along the shores of Pesabic Lake.



2. *Small businesses, particularly agricultural- or transport-related businesses along “old” Highway 51, such as nurseries, trailer sales, and trucking businesses.*
3. *Natural and recreation areas, especially views of the Wisconsin River from Highway 107, the Prairie River Bottom, Pesabic Lake, and Council Grounds State Park.*





4. *Agriculture-related images from scattered sites throughout the Town, such as farm buildings, pastures, crop fields, and strawberry patches along Highway 107.*



Photos of places that Committee members felt hurt the character of the Town included landfills near Highway K; the area where the Ward Dam was removed; over-developed shorelands, especially along the Wisconsin River and Pesabic Lake; underused property; and cluttered residential lots.

#### C. Town Open House

In April 2001, the Town Land Use Committee held an open house to allow the public to review and comment on the draft plan.

#### D. Summary of Participation Efforts

Several common themes emerged from the participation exercises, including the following:

- Desire to promote citizen involvement in Town government.
- Interest in creating industrial job opportunities and tax base.
- Support for controlled growth, particularly residential development.
- Desire to maintain high quality schools.
- Interest in encouraging tourism and recreational opportunities in the Town.
- Support for natural resource and water quality enhancement and preservation.
- Desire to limit and monitor development along waterways.

#### IV. Planning Framework

##### A. Town Vision Statement

A community vision statement is an expression of the direction the Town wishes to head over the next 20 years and beyond. In Summer 2000, the Town Land Use Committee developed the following vision statement:

**In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the Town of Merrill will provide its citizens with the best quality of life possible. This will be accomplished by promoting industrial, residential, and recreational growth, while retaining the Town's rural character. We will also strive to maintain affordable taxes and promote citizen involvement in town government. Through these efforts and by balancing the Town's needs with the needs of the citizens, we will carry the Town of Merrill forward and maintain its strength and vitality.**

##### B. Town Goals and Objectives

The development of goals and objectives is an important step in the planning process because these statements represent the basic values of the community. Goals are broad statements that express general preferences for the long-term development of the community. Objectives are more specific than goals and are usually attainable through implementation activities, described later in this *Plan*. The following goals and objectives emerge from the Town's vision statement and public participation results.

#### **Goal 1: Encourage economic development to expand Town's job and tax base**

##### *Objectives:*

1. Prepare an industrial development marketing strategy and partner with other entities interested in industrial development
2. Cooperate on the siting of a modern business park near Highway 51 with Lincoln County and the City of Merrill
3. Encourage the redevelopment of aging commercial/industrial sites near the Highway K and C intersection
4. Where public utilities are not available, allow businesses without significant water or waste disposal needs
5. Promote businesses run by local entrepreneurs, with assistance from the University of Wisconsin and technical colleges
6. Promote high-quality site design, building design, signage, and landscaping for all new nonresidential developments
7. Allow home-based businesses where there is no impact on surrounding homes
8. Promote tourism by capitalizing on the Town's assets, including Council Grounds State Park and Highway 51

**Goal 2: Encourage managed growth in a way that protects rural character**

*Objectives:*

1. Attain a balance of agricultural, residential, recreational, commercial, and industrial uses in the Town
2. Propose a land use pattern that directs intensive new development to areas that are well-served with roads and other public facilities, and away from environmental corridors and forest lands
3. Encourage new development in locations, forms, and densities which support the preservation of rural character
4. Create and cooperate on new and updated zoning and subdivision regulations to support implementation of this *Plan*.
5. Preserve and provide adequate recreational space to serve Town residents
6. Encourage and participate in intergovernmental cooperation efforts and achieve shared goals among the Town, County, City of Merrill, and adjoining towns

**Goal 3: Preserve sensitive natural features and resources**

*Objectives:*

1. Protect environmentally sensitive areas, including but not limited to the Prairie River bottom, marshes, waterfronts, and areas of steep slope
2. Preserve sensitive waterfront areas by providing and restoring natural buffers, allowing only low-density development that is set back from the shoreline, and acquiring or supporting acquisition of certain waterfront lands
3. Ensure the adequate and safe disposal of sewage to protect ground water quality
4. Support and participate in state and county efforts to restore the Prairie River

**Goal 4: Encourage participation in the Town planning and decision-making process**

*Objectives:*

1. Strengthen communication between Town government and Town residents
2. Promote Town meetings and events through better advertising
3. Attempt to increase resident participation through techniques such as committee appointments
4. Work to strengthen “civics” curriculum in schools

**V. Land Use Plan Map and Description**

This part of the *Town of Merrill Land Use Plan* presents the planned land use map, intended to guide growth and development decisions over the next 20 years. Map 2 presents desired *future* land uses for different properties within the Town.

A. Land Use Plan Map Designations

The land use designations shown in Map 2 are designed to reflect both desired land *use* and development *character*. These planned use designations have been divided into three general categories: rural/environmental, residential, and nonresidential. A complete description of the categories and specific designations is provided as Attachment A. (Not all the designations described in Attachment A have been used in Map 2.) To achieve the desired future uses reflected by the planned land use designations, in many cases revised or new zoning districts will have to be created and mapped after this planning process is complete.

In general, differences between the three general *categories* of land use (e.g., between “rural/environmental” and “residential”) are intended to be greater than differences between the multiple *designations* within each category (e.g., between “rural lands” and “agriculture”). As such, following initial adoption of this *Town Land Use Plan*, the Town and County should

not require a formal *Plan* amendment before acting on a development proposal which suggests a change in land use designation within the same category (e.g., when a land owner proposes to remove land from the “private forest” designation to the “rural lands” designation.) In contrast, the Town and County should require a formal *Plan* amendment before acting on a development proposal which suggests a change in land use designation that would also change the category (e.g., from “rural/environmental” to “residential”). Such changes lead to more significant shifts in land use policy and development impacts.

## B. Description of Land Use Plan Map

Map 2 recommends a mixed future land use pattern for the Town over the next 20 years. The plan anticipates that roughly the southern one-third of the Town will continue to develop with a mix of uses. Residential development is proposed for areas along the Highway 107/Wisconsin River corridor, between the current City of Merrill limits and Pesabic Lake, and near the intersection of Highways C and K. Planned commercial and industrial development would be focused near Highway 51, south of Highway C/North Star Road. The Plan suggests that the northern two-thirds of the Town should remain mostly rural, including forest lands and very low density development. Highway 51 will become much less accessible to these areas when existing access points at Lincoln Drive and North Star Road are closed. The following paragraphs describe the locations and recommendations for each of the major land use designations shown in Map 2.

### 1. Agriculture

Very few areas of productive agricultural use remain in the Town. Most of the areas that do remain are scattered and/or in logical locations for development. Only a few larger blocks of farmland are specifically proposed for the *Agriculture* planning district. New housing should be limited within this planning district to a density of one home per 35 acres owned to prevent incompatibilities with agricultural operations (e.g., noise, dust, smells, and traffic). New housing that does occur should be located in woodlots, at the edges of fields, and on non-productive lands (see design examples in Attachment A). Compatible small non-farm businesses should also be allowed to provide supplemental income opportunities.

### 2. Rural Lands

The *Rural Lands* designation has been mapped throughout the Town, over areas generally exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics: areas of open lands not appropriate for more intensive development, certain tracts of farmland, along parts of the Prairie River corridor, adjacent to other environmentally sensitive areas and active forest lands, and within parts of the City’s extraterritorial jurisdiction. In addition to open space uses such as farming, new development in *Rural Lands* areas should generally be limited to housing at a density not exceeding one home per 20 acres owned. This *Plan* supports the clustering of these homes on smaller lots—rather than 20+ acre lots—per the density and design recommendations in Attachment A.

As allowed by State law, the City of Merrill’s 1996 *Comprehensive Plan* recommends that all lands within its 1½ mile “extraterritorial jurisdiction” should remain in rural or parks and open space uses, with a maximum development density of one house per 35 acres owned. Much of this extraterritorial jurisdiction also falls within the Merrill Urban Service Area, as described in the “Urban Transition” subsection below. To reflect the City plan recommendations, Map 2 shows most lands within the City’s extraterritorial jurisdiction (but outside the Merrill Urban Service Area) within the *Rural Lands* designation.

**INSERT MAP 2: PLANNED LAND USE**

### 3. Public Forest/Private Forest

The *Public Forest* designation has been mapped over County-owned forest lands. The *Private Forest* designation has been mapped over privately-held lands that are currently:

- used for forestry and zoned for forestry, or
- used for forestry, not currently zoned for forestry, but enrolled in State Forest Crop Land or Managed Forest Land programs, or
- used for forestry, not currently zoned for forestry, not enrolled in State Forest Crop Land or Managed Forest Land programs, but owned by a commercial forest products company.

In very limited situations, certain inaccessible forested lands not fitting within the above categories were also included in the *Private Forest* category. Mapped forest lands are generally concentrated in northeastern sections of the Town, with a smaller area adjacent to the Town of Rock Falls on the west side. Year-round housing is not recommended for these areas due to impacts associated with forestry activities.

### 4. Environmental Corridors

*Environmental Corridors* are mapped over Wisconsin DNR-identified wetlands and FEMA-designated floodplains (both subject to county zoning), slopes of 15 percent or greater, and soils with a majority hydric content (i.e. soils formed under wetland-type conditions). These lands are focused along undeveloped portions of the Wisconsin River, the Prairie River and its tributaries, the large marsh west of Pesabic Lake, and wetlands and steep slopes in the forested northeast part of the Town. New development should generally be discouraged in these areas to protect environmental resources, prevent property damage, and preserve wildlife habitat.

### 5. Urban Transition

The *Urban Transition* district is planned over lands within the State-recognized Merrill Urban (Sewer) Service Area, north of the current City limits. Within the Town, over 1,800 acres of land have been mapped within the Urban Service Area, including the Highway 51/K interchange and several existing rural subdivisions.

This is the area where the City expects it may grow and/or provide municipal utilities to over the next 20 years. Additional rural development should be limited in these areas. More intensive development is planned to take place in these areas when sewer and water services become available. The City's current policy is to not extend municipal sewer and water services outside of the city limits. The Town should work with the City on an agreement concerning municipal services, boundaries, and revenue sharing to increase the Town's role in the future urban development of this area.

Map 2 reflects, under the cross-hatch pattern marking *Urban Transition* areas, the City of Merrill's land use recommendations for these areas. Portions of the City's Urban Service Area within the Town that are away from Highway 51 are recommended to develop with residential uses. Portions close to Highway 51 are proposed to develop with business park uses (colored as *Planned Industrial* on Map 2) or other mixed nonresidential uses (colored as *Crossroads Mixed Use*).

## 6. Residential

*Rural Single Family Residential* areas are planned for homes at a density of between one residence per 30,000 square feet (about 2/3 acre lots) and one residence per 20 acres. However, to both provide for adequate lands for private wastewater disposal and avoid wasteful use of these lands, this *Plan* recommends lot sizes of between 1½ and 5 acres in these areas. Planned *Rural Single Family Residential* areas may be served by individual well and septic systems or by approved group systems. Areas recommended for significant amounts of this type of development include:

- *Highway 107/Wisconsin River Corridor*: Some additional residential development is planned to build off of and connect existing residential developments in this corridor. This area is home to existing small subdivisions, away from the City's influence, well served by roadways, close to the amenity of the river, and has relatively good soils for development. The principles of "conservation neighborhood design" should be used for new developments in this area, providing an interconnected local road and trail network, using natural stormwater management techniques, protecting river shoreline areas, and providing space for neighborhood parks and Wisconsin River access.. In addition, new lots should back onto Highway 107 wherever possible, and landscape bufferyards should be required along this highway frontage.
- *"Town Center" Neighborhood*: A second larger neighborhood is planned near the existing Town Hall and commercial area along Highway C, just east of Highway K. This area also contains scattered areas of existing residential development, and is accessible to both Merrill and Wausau. New residential development should provide an interconnected local road network. Development of more housing in this area may prompt interest in new commercial development and redevelopment on nearby lands. Commercial development and extraction uses should be buffered from residences through a combination of landscaping, berming, and distance. Per State rules, no new houses (wells) should be built within 1,200 feet of the closed City landfill, as indicated by the larger blue *Institutional* land shown on Map 2.
- *Smaller Neighborhoods*. Several smaller *Rural Single Family Residential* areas are planned mainly in areas where there are already groups of homes. However, some of these areas are underlain with poor soils for on-site waste disposal systems, which may impact their ability to support more houses.

## 7. Nonresidential Development

Map 2 identifies the following areas, all near Highway 51, as appropriate for additional nonresidential development:

- *"Town Center" Neighborhood*: This area includes lands on "old 51," just south of Highway C. This area has a potential future as a central gathering place for the Town, but would require significant reinvestment. The Town could acquire the area behind the existing Town Hall for community park/event space. Lands around the existing Town Hall are shown on Map 2 as appropriate for *Crossroads Mixed Use* development. This could include a mixture of small-scale retail, service, office, and residential uses. Many properties in the *Planned Business* area shown in this vicinity are in need of redevelopment. Given past uses, some of these properties may be in need of environmental clean-up before reuse.
- *Highway 51/K Interchange Area*: This area includes lands identified as appropriate for *Crossroads Mixed Use* development within the Merrill Urban Service Area. These lands would be appropriate for a mixture of commercial service, office, and industrial uses served by public utilities. Commercial service uses could serve the

traveling public. Just north of this planned *Crossroads Mixed Use* district is an area recommended for *Planned Industrial* development. If this land develops without public utilities, low-impact warehousing, contracting, small transportation, and agriculture-support industries would be appropriate. The Town should emphasize high quality building, site, and landscaping design for this highly visible area.

- *Highway G Area*: This area is located within the Urban Service Area, adjacent to the City. It would be appropriate for a business/office/light industrial park served by public utilities.

## VI. Other Plan Recommendations

### A. Agricultural, Natural, and Cultural Resources

- Preserve environmental corridors and large blocks of open lands to protect water quality, maintain connections among habitats, and provide appropriate hunting grounds.
- Keep intensive non-farm development away from *Agriculture*, *Public Forest*, and *Private Forest* areas, and locate new homes built in *Agriculture* areas out of productive fields.
- Support logical additions to the County Forest, with particular focus on acquiring gaps of privately owned forest land in between larger sections of the existing County system.
- Work with the County to assure that a full range of recreational and forestry uses are allowed in the County Forest.
- Encourage County Forestry personnel to enforce recommended forestry management practices within each of the designated “aesthetic management zones” described in the *Lincoln County Forest Comprehensive Land Use Plan*.
- Work with the County in preparing recommended standards for development, preservation, and restoration within the Town’s shoreland areas.
- Provide or require logical public access points to the Wisconsin River, Prairie River, and Pesabic Lake, particularly as nearby lands develop.
- Work with the County and State to support the continued restoration of the Prairie River, including fishery and natural plant species restoration and erosion control.
- Design, locate, and landscape new development in a manner that does not detract from the rural character of the Town.
- Promote the establishment of a mixed-use “town center” near the intersection of Highways K and C, to include a range of small-scale institutional, recreational, commercial, and residential uses and serve as a community gathering point.
- Cooperate with the County and other communities on a comprehensive survey of historic and archaeological resources in the Town, and preserve these resources.

### B. Transportation

- Work with the Lincoln County Highway Department to implement a two to five year Town Road Improvement Program (TRIP) to provide for the phased upgrading of Town roads.
- Consider implementing Town road impact fees for new development projects that place a burden on or require the upgrading of Town roads.
- Plan for a network of interconnected new roads in major planned development areas, for reasons of highway access control, rural character preservation (visibility of development), and the current inaccessibility of certain planned development areas. Map 2 shows conceptual local road networks for *Rural Single Family Residential* areas.

- Participate in further planning for the proposed “Highway 51 Image Corridor,” which would extend through the County. Unique guidelines for signage, development setback, tree preservation, landscaping, and building and site design may be appropriate.
- Support access control and rural character objectives by discouraging large amounts of “side of the road” development with direct access to State and County highways.
- Support County and State provision of paved, striped shoulders on Highways K and 107 to promote their use for bicycling.

#### C. Utilities and Community Facilities

- Explore the potential with the City of Merrill for joint provision of facilities and services to new development in the Highway 51/K interchange area and other key areas within the Urban Service Area.
- Stay informed and participate in decisions on the existing and any future County landfill.
- Provide new neighborhood parks within the areas planned for significant *Rural Single Family Residential* development. The Town may acquire at least some of that land through requiring parkland dedications and/or park impact fees from new subdivisions.
- Consider expanding the Town Hall site and improving that site with a range of facilities designed to serve the entire community as a central gathering/event space.
- Participate in the planning and reservation of space for an off-street bicycle and pedestrian path from Council Grounds State Park north along Highway 107.
- Work with the State and County to promote the public acquisition of additional recreational lands directly north of Council Grounds State Park and southwest of Highway 107. These lands include significant areas of wetland and natural shoreline.
- Work with the State and County to provide scenic overlooks in appropriate locations along Highway 107 and canoe access points at appropriate places along the Wisconsin River.

#### D. Housing and Economic Development

- Encourage developers to plan for new neighborhoods using the principles of “conservation neighborhood design.” These principles emphasize providing housing in proximity to parks, open spaces, and services; blending automobile convenience with the creation of safe, comfortable places to live and walk; preserving and enhancing natural systems that define, sustain, and connect neighborhoods; and promoting rural character by “hiding” development from main roads through natural topography, vegetation, and setbacks. The principles are reflected in the illustrations in Attachment A.
- Assemble a citizen committee to develop and implement an economic development strategy for the Town, taking advantage of county and state resources.
- Locate intensive business uses with significant transportation and land use impacts away from planned residential areas and environmental corridors, and close to Highway 51 and County highways.
- Work with the Lincoln County Economic Development Corporation and/or the City of Merrill on major economic development initiatives, such the siting of a modern business park near Highway G. The Town will have to be assertive in approaching these entities about the potential for shared services and revenues from such development.
- Support the development of a light industrial area within the Town on lands north of the Highway 51/K interchange. Promote high-quality, low impact warehousing, contractor, transportation-related, and agricultural-support uses in this area.

- Promote small-scale retail and service uses and private recreational uses in designated locations near planned *Rural Single Family Residential* and *Public Recreational* areas.
- Work with the County to support and allow small locally-owned business development and home based businesses where there will be no impact on surrounding properties.
- Require the disclosure of any soil or groundwater contamination on sites before approving development proposals.

E. Administration and Intergovernmental Cooperation

- Develop a public participation strategy to encourage citizen involvement in Town planning and administration.
- Prepare and administer a Town survey to measure satisfaction with existing services.
- Prepare and distribute a semi-annual newsletter to inform residents of community news, events, and involvement opportunities.
- Provide a copy of this *Town Land Use Plan* to all surrounding local governments in Lincoln County.
- Work with the City on an intergovernmental agreement or plan to address mutual concerns for Town lands also within the City's extraterritorial jurisdiction, and possibly covering the following issues: service delivery, annexation, business park, Town development opportunities, shared revenues from new development, and road maintenance.
- Work with Lincoln County on zoning ordinance administration, day-to-day decision making (e.g., conditional use permits), and eventual updating.
- Work with surrounding towns to address any unforeseen conflicts between local plans. None are anticipated between the Town's plans and those for Scott, Harding, and Schley. However, the Towns of Rock Falls and Birch do not currently have zoning, so it is extremely difficult to project future land use in these adjacent areas.

F. Plan Adoption and Implementation

The process the Town of Merrill used to review and adopt this *Town Land Use Plan* included the following:

- Once the Town Land Use Committee was comfortable with the *Town Land Use Plan*, it forwarded a recommendation for approval to the Town Board.
- The Town then posted and published a Class 1 notice for a formal public hearing on the *Plan* held in front of the Town Board.
- Following the public hearing, the Town Board approved a resolution which (a) adopted the *Town Land Use Plan* and (b) forwarded the Plan to the County for inclusion in the *Lincoln County Comprehensive Plan*.
- The County Board will then adopt the *Town Land Use Plan* as a component of the *Lincoln County Comprehensive Plan*.
- Following County adoption of the *Lincoln County Comprehensive Plan*, the Town Board may have to adopt the complete *Lincoln County Comprehensive Plan* by ordinance to fully comply with the new State planning law.

This Plan includes many recommendations for guiding land development and preservation within the Town over the next 20 years. Some of the recommendations may be applied immediately, such as recommendations for where new subdivisions would and would not be

appropriate. Other recommendations will require subsequent Plan implementation activities, including the following:

- Adopt a Town subdivision ordinance to provide for appropriately designed development patterns, interconnected road networks, parkland dedication and park impact fees, and advancement of “conservation neighborhood design” principles.
- Consider implementing a driveway ordinance and design standards to encourage the appropriate siting of homes in areas where limited development is proposed.
- Participate to the full extent allowed by law in the County zoning process to assure that Town desires are brought forward in zoning decisions.
- Work with Lincoln County on an update of the County’s zoning ordinance to properly implement the land use recommendations of this *Plan*. Many provisions of this *Plan* cannot be implemented without a new or substantially revised zoning ordinance.
- Work with the City of Merrill on an intergovernmental agreement, and amend this *Plan* as necessary to respond to that agreement.
- Appoint a permanent Town Planning Committee to be responsible for reviewing and recommending Town Board actions on development proposals, ordinances, and long-range planning issues.
- Annually review this *Plan* to gauge progress on implementation and consider logical amendments based on changes in conditions. A more detailed review and update should be performed every five to ten years. Forward all adopted *Plan* amendments to the County for incorporation into the *Lincoln County Comprehensive Plan*.