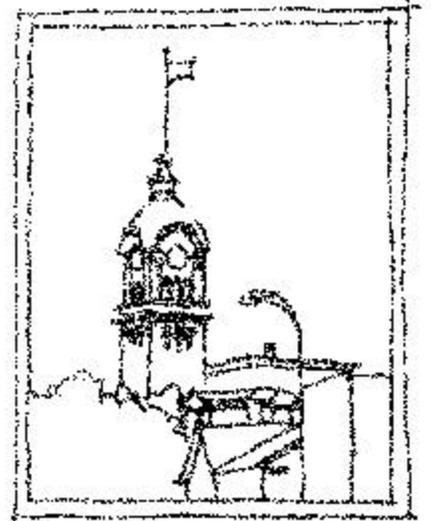


Town Land Use Plan
Town of Harding
Lincoln County, Wisconsin



Adopted by the Town Board:
March 26, 2001

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I. Purpose of Town Land Use Plan

The *Town of Harding Land Use Plan* is intended to guide Harding's future development in a way that maintains the community's rural "northwoods" character, protects its unique natural resources, provides for an efficient delivery of services, and balances private property rights with community interests. The *Town Land Use Plan* contains background information, maps, goals and objectives, and implementation strategies.

More specifically, the *Plan* recommends how lands within Harding should be used (e.g., forest, agriculture, residential) over the next 20 years, based on public input and the Town's vision, goals, and objectives. These recommendations may form the basis for new or updated tools to implement the *Plan*, 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 changing 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.

II. Background Information

The following is a summary of background information pertinent to land use planning in the Town of Harding. 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 Harding—encompassing 72 square miles—is located in the southwestern quadrant of Lincoln County. From its center, the Town is located approximately 15 miles northwest of Merrill and 20 miles southwest of Tomahawk. There are no cities, villages, or unincorporated "hamlets" in or bordering the Town. The Town of Harding abuts the Towns of Tomahawk, Corning, Scott, Merrill and Rock Falls within Lincoln County.

B. Growth Trends

The Town experienced minor population growth during the 1990s. Harding added 51 new residents to its population during the decade, growing from 283 full-time residents in 1990 to an estimated 334 in 2000. The number of housing units in Harding increased from 202 in 1990 to an estimated 240 in 1999. According to 1990 census data, nearly half (48%) of all housing units in Harding were classified as "seasonal" homes.

C. Summary of Significant Natural Resources

The Town of Harding is predominately forested. Most of the forestland in the Town's northern portion is contained in the Lincoln County Forest system. Major waterways include the Wisconsin River and Lake Alexander (formed behind Alexander Dam) along the southeastern edge of Town, the New Wood River in the central portion of Town, and the North Branch of the Copper River. Other waterways include Averill and Kelly Creeks in the north and McGinnis, Wolf and Garrison Creeks in the south. Most of the Town's sensitive natural areas, including wetlands and floodplains, are associated with the New Wood River and its tributaries, the large wetland area on the northern edge (known locally as Budinga Bog), and the large cranberry bog on the southern edge of Town. The State's Natural Heritage Inventory program suggests the presence of rare plant or animal species in several of these sensitive natural areas.

The Natural Resources Conservation Service classifies most of the land within the Town as “prime farmland”, with a good portion being prime only where drained. This classification is somewhat deceiving, however, because most of the soils within the central and northern portions of the Town are not drained.

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 vast majority of the Town remains in open space uses. The northern two-thirds of Harding is forested, swampy and sparsely settled. Commercial forest product companies and the County own large tracts of forestland in this part of Harding. The southeastern portion contains small blocks of agricultural land and scattered areas of unused open land.

Most of the Town’s developed lands are located in southeastern Harding along the Wisconsin River and are used for single family residences. In other areas of Town, residential development is lined along County Highway E, Burma Road, West End Drive, and Cranberry Trail. There is no commercial development in the community.

E. Existing Transportation System

The southern part of Town is fairly well connected to the region through the existing roadway network. County Trunk Highway (CTH) E connects most of Harding’s residential development to the City of Merrill. CTH M runs through the southeastern part of Town and provides access south to the Town of Corning. Local roads managed by the Town complement this major road network, including Burma Road, Wangen Drive, West End Drive, Forks Road, and Cranberry Trail. Camp Avenue and New Wood Road provide access to the northern portions of Harding.

Tesch Road is the only designated Rustic Road in Lincoln County. The four-mile road begins and ends on CTH E in the southeast part of Town. The Rustic Road program is designed to preserve what remains of Wisconsin’s scenic, lightly traveled roads. The program generally discourages intensive land development along designated roadways.

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

The Town Hall is located along CTH E near the intersection of West End Drive in southeastern Harding. There are currently no Town- or County-owned parks within Harding (not counting the expansive County Forest lands). The Bill Cross Rapids Wildlife Area encompasses state-owned land along the Wisconsin River in the southeastern part of Town. The Ice Age Trail runs through the center of Harding. The County’s snowmobile trail network includes a north-south segment through Town. The Town does not provide public sanitary sewer or water services. The nearest medical care facility, library and post office is located in Merrill. There are no properties in Harding listed on the National or State Register of Historic Places. An historically significant one-room schoolhouse (Copper School) is located along Tesch Road. A comprehensive survey of historic or archeological resources has not been conducted in Harding.

MAP 1: EXISTING LAND USE

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. Key Planning Issues Exercise

In Spring 2000, the Committee participated in a preliminary exercise to identify key planning issues in Harding, which included the following:

- *Land Use:* A minimum lot size of five acres is desired for all new residential development. There are conflicts between agricultural, residential and recreational land uses. The Town currently has a subdivision ordinance and a mobile home park ordinance. The Town should limit residential growth, especially in undeveloped areas.
- *Community Character:* The Town is composed of rural, low-density land uses. Recent home development on small parcels in wooded areas has diminished the Town's rural character. Some properties need to be cleaned up and properly maintained.
- *Pace of Development:* The pace of growth in Harding is slow, but satisfying to Town residents. Growth in and around the City of Merrill has led to increased residential development in the Town of Harding.
- *Housing:* The Town does not want rural subdivisions. New residential development should be located near existing residential development, but not along the Wisconsin River. Seasonal residents occupy nearly half of the Town's housing stock. Maintenance and rehabilitation of older homes is important. The current mix of housing is adequate.
- *Economic Development:* Satisfied with current economic mix. Cranberry production area is aesthetically pleasing. The old Town dump might be an environmentally contaminated site.
- *Transportation:* The intersection of Tesch Road and Gravel Pit Road is dangerous. Tesch Road is the only Rustic Road designation in Lincoln County. The County does most of the road maintenance work for Harding.
- *Intergovernmental Issues:* Fire protection service in Harding is provided by the Town of Corning volunteer fire department. Good relationships with surrounding Towns and County.
- *Environment:* Preserve the Town's forestlands, wetlands, rivers and public hunting grounds. Encourage preservation of lands owned by Wisconsin Public Service Corp. as natural wildlife habitat, not a park.
- *Community Services and Facilities:* Town does not have a park and does not need a park. Some residential properties in Harding have failing septic systems. Existing community space is adequate and serves the Town's current needs.

B. Town Vision Setting Workshop

A Town vision setting workshop was held on May 18, 2000 to understand key issues in Harding and obtain participants' vision for the future. Ten Harding residents attended this workshop.

Many participants stressed their desire to develop and maintain a meaningful comprehensive planning process, facilitate good relations between neighbors, and preserve Harding's rural character and natural beauty. When asked to describe the Town's strengths, common responses included good relationships among town residents, a good educational system, and the Town's quality natural resources. When asked to describe weaknesses, common responses

included conflicts between permanent and seasonal residents, limited financial resources, and the Town's low population density.

C. 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 49 photos taken in Harding, 41 of them were of "good" or "special" places. These photos can be grouped into three main categories:

1. *Natural and Recreational Area Images*: Several photos depicted Harding's natural and recreational areas, including a segment of the Ice Age Trail that runs through Town, hiking trails and old railroad corridors, wetlands, the New Wood River, and the Wisconsin River shoreline (shown below).



2. *Rural Residential Development Images*: There were several photos of Harding's rural residential development, especially homesites that were neatly landscaped and blended into the landscape.



3. *Agricultural Landscape Images*: Many agricultural-related photographs showed farm buildings, pastures, crop fields, and cranberry bogs.



D. Community Survey

To learn resident perceptions on existing conditions in Harding, and attitudes on how the community should grow in the future, 374 surveys were mailed to all home and business addresses in Harding. The Town received 143 completed surveys, representing a 38% return rate.

1. General Survey Results

In general, Harding residents are satisfied with their community and optimistic about its future. Residents value Harding's rural character. Survey respondents indicated that Harding's rural character could be preserved by maintaining the Town's existing pattern of rural land uses and by paying special attention to the pace and quality of new development. Survey respondents were evenly split when asked if the Town should encourage new development.

2. Desired Types of New Residential Development

Respondents were asked to indicate whether they approve or disapprove of various types of new residential development in the Town. A majority of the respondents approved of single family and seasonal home development, and did not approve of rental and multi-family housing development. A majority of survey respondents agreed that new development should follow general design standards to preserve the natural beauty of Harding. A majority of survey respondents also agreed that large blocks of forestland should be preserved.

E. Summary of Participation Efforts

Several common themes emerged from the Town of Harding's participation exercises, including the following:

- Strong desire to maintain the Town's rural character and natural beauty.
- Desire to develop and sustain a meaningful land use planning process.
- A need to improve communications between Town government and Town residents.
- Support for the preservation of Harding's natural resources, particularly its waterfront areas and forestlands.
- Interest in creating a Town identity.

- Desire to retain all existing County Forest lands and managed forest cropland.
- Desire to locate new residential development along existing roadways and limiting this development along waterfronts and in natural areas.
- Support for agricultural land preservation.
- Strong support for design standards for new development.
- Strong support for local ordinances dealing with junk and clutter in yards.

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 for Harding:

“The Town of Harding will strive to maintain its natural character while responding to the rights of its diverse citizens. We will plan for development in wise and orderly manner while preserving and enhancing our unique natural resources and wildlife habitat. Ongoing communication and dialog with our citizens is paramount.”

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: Preserve the Town’s natural features and rural character

Objectives:

1. Establish regulations to control land use and development.
2. Encourage new development in locations, forms, and densities which support the preservation of rural character.
3. Encourage new development along existing Town and County roads.
4. Support farmland preservation programs.
5. Continue communication between the Town and the Wisconsin Public Service Corporation to resolve issues related to access and recreational use on WPS lands.
6. Protect the Town’s environmentally sensitive areas.
7. Manage the pace of growth.

Goal 2: Promote ongoing public involvement in Town planning and administration

Objectives:

1. Enhance communications between Town residents and Town government on issues related to land use planning and administration.
2. Periodically review the Town’s land use *plan* and refine as needed.
3. Encourage public input in the Town planning and *plan* implementation process.
4. Continue the Town newsletter.
5. Identify and resolve issues between permanent and seasonal residents.

Goal 3: Promote the Town’s unique identity

Objectives:

1. Construct a neighborhood “welcome” sign in the Lake Alexander area.
2. Construct a Town “welcome” sign on County Highway E.

3. Encourage tourism-related development that compliments Harding's "northwoods" character.
4. Work with the County on ensuring proper maintenance of private property.

V. Land Use Plan Map and Description

This part of the *Town of Harding 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 land use pattern in Harding, new or revised zoning districts will have to be created and mapped after the land use 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

In general, Map 2 recommends the continuation of a rural land use pattern in Harding, focused on preserving the Town's unique environmental features, protecting large blocks of public and private forestlands in the central and northern part of Town, and maintaining farming on prime agricultural lands in the southeastern part of Town. Map 2 shows more intensive development directed away from these resources and into areas with existing development and infrastructure. These include small pockets of residential development along Town and County roads in southeastern Harding. In total, the amount of land designated for residential development far exceeds the anticipated land use demand within the Town over the next 20 years.

The following paragraphs describe the locations and recommendations for each of the major land use designations shown in Map 2.

1. Agriculture

The *Agriculture* planning district has been mapped over blocks of farmland underlain by prime soils and in active farm use. Small areas of planned *Agriculture* uses are shown in southeastern Harding. The Town should promote continued agricultural operations in these areas. Compatible small non-farm businesses should also be allowed to provide supplemental income opportunities. New housing should be limited in these areas to a density of one home per 35 acres owned to prevent incompatibilities with agricultural operations (e.g., noise, dust, smells, and traffic). If new housing development occurs in this

Agriculture area, it should be located in woodlots, at the edges of fields, and on non-productive lands (see design examples in Attachment A).

2. Rural Lands

The *Rural Lands* designation has been mapped throughout southeastern Harding, over areas generally exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics: privately owned woodlands not currently zoned for forestry or enrolled in the State Forest Crop Land or Managed Forest Land programs; open lands not being farmed; isolated tracts of marginal farmland; “buffer” areas between planned residential development and certain planned agricultural areas; and lands adjacent to other environmentally sensitive areas.

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 presented in Attachment A.

3. Private Forest

The *Private Forest* designation was 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. *Private Forest* lands are generally concentrated in central and northern portions of Harding. Year-round housing is not recommended for these areas due to impacts associated with forestry activities.

4. Public Forest and Public Recreation

The *Public Forest* designation was mapped over lands currently contained in the Lincoln County Forest. In some instances, Map 2 recommends *Public Forest* designation for isolated, privately held parcels that are currently in forestry use and surrounded by the Lincoln County Forest. These parcels would be logical expansions to the County Forest system over the planning period. The ten-year *Lincoln County Forest Comprehensive Land Use Plan* designated specific areas of the forest system into “aesthetic management zones”. In the Town of Harding, the segment of CTH E that crosses or borders the County Forest is designated as “Aesthetic Management Zone B”. This zone includes areas where there is less intensive public use, such as roads used for purposes other than viewing of scenic beauty. The *plan* recommends forest management practices in this zone that provide for multiple uses (recreation, timber extraction, wildlife habitat, etc.).

The *Public Recreation* designation was mapped for lands along the Wisconsin River currently owned by the Wisconsin Public Service Corporation. This includes a large parcel along Tesch Road, and a parcel at the end of Edward Drive in the extreme southeastern corner of Harding.

5. 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). *Environmental Corridors* are not shown within the existing and planned County Forest. New development should generally be discouraged in these areas to protect the environmental

resources, prevent property damage, and preserve wildlife habitat. The large amount of Environmental Corridors in the Town is attributable to the wetlands in this region.

6. Rural Single Family Residential

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

The largest area of planned residential development is along Alexander Lake Road and Edward Drive. The principles of “conservation neighborhood design” should be encouraged for new development in this area. (For more information on “conservation neighborhood design”, see Section VI (D) below and Attachment A). This residential area should use natural stormwater management and progressive erosion control techniques.

7. Nonresidential Development Districts

Map 2 shows *General Business* development at the intersection of CTHs E and M to serve nearby residential areas. Any new business development in this area should be designed in a way that enhances the rural character of Harding, and perhaps supports surrounding farms.

MAP 2: PLANNED LAND USE

VI. Other Plan Recommendations

A. Agricultural, Natural, and Cultural Resources

- Explore the potential for participation under the State Farmland Preservation Program, which would enable farmers in planned *Agriculture* areas to receive state tax credits.
- Support the introduction and operation of agriculture-support businesses, and provide families with opportunities for small non-farm businesses to supplement farm income.
- Work with UW-Extension staff to develop farming operations that emphasize community and environmental sustainability.
- Keep intensive non-farm development away from planned *Agriculture*, *Public Forest*, and *Private Forest* areas, and locate the new homes that are built in *Agriculture* areas out of productive fields.
- Ensure that forestry personnel are actively enforcing the recommended forestry management practices within each of the designated “aesthetic management zones” as described in the *Lincoln County Forest Comprehensive Land Use Plan*.
- Encourage private landowners to participate in industrial tree farm programs to protect open space and diverse habitats.
- Preserve environmental corridors and large blocks of open lands to protect water quality, maintain connections among habitats, and provide appropriate hunting grounds.
- Conduct or require viewshed analyses before approving new developments. New development should be designed, located, and landscaped in a manner that does not detract from the rural character of the Town.
- Cooperate with the County and other communities on comprehensive survey of historic and archaeological resources in the Town, and preserve these resources.

B. Transportation

- Work with the Lincoln County Highway Department and/or Northcentral Regional Planning Commission to prepare and implement a two- to five-year Town Road Improvement Program (TRIP) to provide for the phased upgrading of Town roads.
- Plan for new roads as needed for reasons of highway access control and rural character preservation (visibility of development).
- Support access control and rural character objectives by discouraging large amounts of “side of the road” development on County highways.

C. Utilities and Community Facilities

- Support volunteer groups in ensuring quality trail development and maintenance of the Ice Age Trail.
- Continue to cooperate with the Town of Corning, or other municipal fire departments, to ensure adequate fire protection for all Harding residents.

D. Housing and Economic Development

- Work with Lincoln County to address housing, zoning, or property maintenance code violations on existing residential properties.

- Encourage developers to plan for new neighborhoods using the principles of “conservation neighborhood design,” particularly in areas with significant natural resources. 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.
- Promote neighborhood-serving retail development and allow small, low-impact nonfarm businesses on farming properties.

E. Intergovernmental Cooperation

- Provide a copy of this *Town Land Use Plan* to all surrounding local governments in Lincoln County and surrounding counties.
- 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.

F. Plan Adoption and Implementation

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

- The Town Board adopted by resolution written procedures that described the Town’s public participation process for review of this *Plan*.
- 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:

- 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.
- Consider appointing a permanent Town Planning Commission to be responsible for reviewing and recommending Town Board actions on development proposals, ordinances, and long-range planning issues, if enough of these issues arise.
- Continue publishing a “town newsletter” to inform local residents about Town and County 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*.