City of Merrill
Comprehensive Plan
2017

City of Merrill

Mayor
William R. Bialecki

Common Council
Mary Ball

John Burgener

Pete Lokemoen

Tim Meehean

Rob Norton

Kandy Peterson

Paul Russell

Ryan Schwartzman

Administrator
David Johnson

Plan Commission
William Bialecki, Chairperson

David Johnson, City Administrator, Ex-Officio

Tim Meehan, Alderman

Rod Akey, Public Works Director/City Engineer, Ex-Officio

Thomas Hayden, City Attorney, Ex-Officio

Mike Willman, Chairperson, Parks and Recreation

Ken Maule

Robert Reimann

Melissa Schroeder

Ralph Sturm

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North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission

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Chapter One
Background and Demographics

Background

The City of Merrill is located in southern Lincoln County and is located at the confluence of the Wisconsin and Prairie Rivers. The rivers divide the city into three distinct areas, one is south of the Wisconsin River, while the other two areas are north of the Wisconsin River, and are east or west of the Prairie River. Merrill is the county seat and has a 2014 estimated population of 9,575, which is about 33 percent of the total county population. The city encompasses about 5,000 acres.

Merrill is located along USH 51 which runs north to south through Lincoln County. Twenty miles north on USH 51 is Tomahawk and 15 miles south is the City of Wausau, Marathon County. All three cities are also located along the Wisconsin River corridor.

See the planning area map.

Plan Overview

The comprehensive plan is a local government's guide to community physical, social, and economic development. Comprehensive plans are not land use regulations in themselves; instead, they provide a rational basis for local land use decisions with a twenty-year vision for future planning and community decisions.

This plan replaces the previous plan adopted in 2007.

Planning Context

Planning and zoning has been a function of local units of government for over 50 years in Wisconsin. Existing authority for planning is provided in state statutes, including §. 59, 60, 61 and 62.

Over the years almost every city, village and county has developed various plans, from land use plans, to master plans to development plans. The comprehensive planning law (§.66.1001) requires all jurisdictions within the state that exercise control over land-use to prepare a comprehensive plan by 2010. It lays out the nine required elements of the plan and requires a public participation process. Jurisdictions that do not have a comprehensive plan in place by the deadline may not engage in actions that impact land-use. The statute outlines the requirements that must be satisfied, specifically for those that utilize the State grant program to develop their plan.

Previous Plans

All planning efforts need to examine relevant previous plans about the community and the surrounding county and region. Those plans are discussed below:

The City of Merrill

Strategic Plan 2014-2019

In 2014, the City of Merrill completed the city government's first ever strategic plan. The strategic plan includes a SOAR (Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, and Results) analysis, the pronouncement of core values for city government, the development (and formal Council approval) of both city government vision and mission statements, the identification and prioritization of strategic issues, a review of city services (information provided by department hears), the creation of a vision statement for the community, the identification of strategies and action steps to address the chosen strategic issues, and additional action planning.

The vision statement: "We, the employees and officials of the City of Merrill, envision superior services while being open, responsible, and transparent to the public".

The mission statement: "The mission of the City of Merrill government is to provide high quality services in an innovative, consistent, and efficient manner".

Community vision statement: "Merrill, embracing our diverse heritage while working toward a brighter future".

Comprehensive Plans

A variety of comprehensive and land use plans have been developed for the City. These are identified below:

Comprehensive Plan, 2007

The 2007 plan was the first comprehensive plan in accordance with Wisconsin Comprehensive Planning law. The plan included the nine required elements. These are: Issues and Opportunities, Natural Resources, Housing, Utilities and Community Facilities, Transportation, Economic Development, Land Use, Intergovernmental Cooperation, and Implementation. The 2007 plan also established 30 overall goals.

Comprehensive Plan, 1997

Although this plan is titled a comprehensive plan, it was adopted prior to the 1999 Comprehensive Planning Law, and does not discuss many of the now required components. The plan includes four basic sections covering some general goals, objective and polices, land use plan, transportation plan, and implementation.

Comprehensive Plan, 1982

This plan was also titled a comprehensive plan and incorporates economic development, public services, community development, in addition to land use and transportation. The plan includes thirteen sections, however much of this plan is outdated.

Lincoln County

A variety of plans have been developed at the county level and those that relate will be discussed in later chapters, such as the Outdoor Recreation Plan, the Land & Water Conservation Plan and the All Hazard Mitigation Plan.

Lincoln County Comprehensive Plan, 2000

The county plan was the first county plan adopted under the new 1999 Comprehensive Planning Law. This document covers all of the towns in the county and covers all nine of the required elements. The plan is made up of two basic sections: Inventory and Analysis and Plan Recommendations. Each town also has their own Town Land Use Plan as part of the county plan. The County Comprehensive Plan was amended in 2003.

The Region

The City is included in the North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (NCWRPC) area. The NCWRPC is one of nine regional planning commissions in the State of Wisconsin. The North Central region includes ten counties, loosely following the upper Wisconsin River Valley. The NCWRPC is a voluntary association of governments tasked with the mission of providing planning assistance to the communities throughout the Region.

Regional Livability Plan, 2015

The Regional Livability Plan (RLP), adopted by the North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission in 2015, is an update and expansion to the Regional Comprehensive Plan: A Framework for the Future, 2002-2020. The RLP is an advisory document focusing on four specific elements; housing, economic development, transportation, and land use.

The RLP includes individual stand-alone documents for each of the four elements, and a regional demographics assessment, bringing attention to key livability issues. The RLP incorporates the HUD livability principles, which include more transportation choices, promoting equitable & affordable housing, enhance economic competitiveness, support existing communities; coordinate polices & leverage investment, and value communities & neighborhoods. The RLP introduces goals that can create a more livable and sustainable region addressing regional, state, and national trends.

Demographics

Socio-economic information and projections are important to understanding what has occurred within a community. Below we look at total population, age distribution, households, educational levels, employment and income levels. Data is presented for 1990, 2000, 2010 and 2013, if available.

Population

In 2013, 9,575 people lived in the city of Merrill, a 2.9 percent decrease since 1990. In comparison, the county experienced a 6.1 percent increase in population over

Table 1: Population

Minor Civil Division	1990	2000	2010	2013	1990-2013 Net Change	1990-2013 % Change
City of Merrill	9,860	10,146	9,661	9,575	-285	-2.9%
Town of Merrill	2,716	2,979	2,980	2,971	255	9.4%
Town of Pine River	1,552	1,877	1,869	1,950	398	25.6%
Town of Scott	1,210	1,287	1,432	1,439	229	18.9%
Lincoln County	26,993	29,641	28,743	28,650	1,657	6.1%
State of Wisconsin	4,891,769	5,363,675	5,686,986	5,706,871	815,102	16.7%

Source: U.S. Census

the same time period. Population in the city and county increased between 1990 and 2000, but decreased steadily over the last 13 years. The city lost 571 residents between 2000 and 2013.

Table 1 displays total population for the city, each local unit of government (minor civil division) surrounding the city, the county, and the state. The city is the only municipality to lose population over the past 23 years. The Town of Pine River experienced the largest increase in population, adding 398 people since 1990, a 25.6 percent increase in population. Since 2010, the city of Merrill, the Town of Merrill, and Lincoln County all lost population.

Population Projections

The City of Merrill's population is projected to increase over the next 15 years (2015-2030) before decreasing to 8,990 by 2040, see **Table 2**. Populations in the Merrill area are projected to peak between 2030 and 2035. All municipalities and the County project a decrease in population between 2035 and 2040. However, the State of Wisconsin projects a steady increase in population over the next 25 years. Only the City of Merrill is projected to have a population in 2040 that is less than their 2013 population (9,575).

Age Distribution

The North Central Region experienced a 3.9 percent decrease in people aged 17 and under between 2000 and 2010. The State of Wisconsin experienced a similar decrease in population aged 17 and under, decreasing 2 percent over the same time period. Following the regional and state trends, the City of Merrill experienced a significant decrease in population aged 17 and under. Between 2000 and 2010, population aged 17 and under in the City of Merrill decreased 10 percent. Between 2010 and 2013, the 17 and under population in the City of Merrill decreased an additional 11 percent. As a result, the percentage of population under 17 was roughly 21 percent of the total population in 2013, a 4 percent decrease from 2000.

Lincoln County's 17 and under population decreased 21 percent between 2000 and 2013, five percent over the past 3 years, see **Table 3**. Only the Town of Scott increased their population under 17 over the 13 year period. The Town of Scott experienced an 11.1 percent increase between 2000 and 2013. The Town of Pine River and the Town of Scott both experienced an increase in persons less than 17 years of age between 2010 and 2013. In comparison, the City of Merrill's 17 and under population decreased 256 people and Lincoln County's population decreased 344 people in the last 3 years. All towns had population increases over the last 23 years, so this means that fewer families who are moving into the surrounding towns are having children, or they are having fewer children.

Between 2000 and 2010, the percentage of the region's population over the age of 65 increased 1.7 percentage points from 15.2 percent in 2000 to 16.9 percent in 2010. Lincoln County and the State of Wisconsin's population over the age of 65 increased 8.6 points and 10.6 points respectively between 2000 and 2010.

Table 2: Population Projections

Minor Civil Division	2015	2020	2025	2030	2035	2040
City of Merrill	9,345	9,460	9,625	9,690	9,500	8,990
Town of Merrill	2,920	3,015	3,135	3,215	3,215	3,105
Town of Pine River	1,840	1,910	1,990	2,060	2,070	2,010
Town of Scott	1,425	1,510	1,605	1,685	1,720	1,695
Lincoln County	28,415	29,170	30,100	30,750	30,580	29,355
State of Wisconsin	5,783,015	6,005,080	6,203,850	6,375,910	6,476,270	6,491,635

Source: WI DOA

Table 3: Persons 17 Years of Age and Younger

Minor Civil Division	1990	2000	2010	2013	2000-2013 Net Change	2000-2013 % Change
City of Merrill	2,482	2,563	2,311	2,055	-508	-19.8%
Town of Merrill	813	774	631	614	-160	-20.7%
Town of Pine River	467	506	387	393	-113	-22.3%
Town of Scott	353	325	334	361	36	11.1%
Lincoln County	7,271	7,541	6,302	5,958	-1,583	-21.0%
State of Wisconsin	1,288,982	1,368,756	1,339,492	1,325,144	-43,612	-3.2%

Source: U.S. Census

The surrounding towns experienced a significantly higher growth in persons aged 65 years and older. Between 2000 and 2010, the Town of Merrill's population over 65 years of age increased 39.5 percent, see **Table 4**. The Town of Pine River and Town of Scott increased their 65 and over population 60.2 percent and 31.3 percent respectively. However, the City of Merrill decreased their 65 and over population 6.2 percent during the 10 year period from 1,999 to 1,876, a 123 person reduction. The City decreased their population over 65 an additional 4.6 percent (93 persons) between 2010 and 2013. As a result, 18.6 percent of the total population in the City of Merrill was comprised of people over the age of 65 in 2013, a one percent decrease from 2000.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the baby boom generation (1946-1964) will move entirely into the 65 years and older age group by 2030. It is estimated that there are roughly 76 million "baby boomers" in the United States. Regional projections show the region's population aged 65 to 84 will increase at a rate of 78.9 percent between 2010 and 2030, and the population aged 85 and over will increase 49.1 percent over the 20 year time period. This increase in population over the age of 65 will have a tremendous impact on communities. Programs and services including housing, transportation, and healthcare will need to be increased and modified to address the change in population.

Between 2000 and 2013, the City of Merrill decreased its total population by 571 people. During the same time period, the combined decrease in population under 17 and over 65 years of age was 724 people. This indicates that the City increased its population between the ages of 18 and 64.

Households

A household includes all the people who occupy a housing unit as their usual place of residence. The city trend of declining household size reflects the national trend of fewer people living within the same household. Smaller household sizes results in more households for the same population. The two largest demographic groups, Baby Boomers (76 million people) and their children, Generation Y or Millennials (79.8 million people), have a considerable impact on household sizes and the increase in households. Millennials are defined as people born between 1977 and 1995. All Millennials are now over the age of 18, many of which are moving into their own housing units.

The combination of Baby Boomers becoming empty nesters (one or two person households), and Millennials become new households, has increased the total number of households. This phenomenon helps explain how the City of Merrill decreased its population 2.9 percent between 1990 and 2013, but increased the number of households by 11.1 percent. All surrounding Towns, the County, and the State increased population over the 23 year period, but increased households at a much faster pace, see **Table 5**.

Decreasing household size is a trend that is likely to continue through the next twenty years. The number of households within the city has grown by 436 over the past 23 years. Between 2000 and 2010 the number of households in the City of Merrill declined by 8 households. Between 2010 and 2013, the City increased the number of households by

Table 4: Persons 65 Years of Age and Older

Minor Civil Division	1990	2000	2010	2013	2000-2013 Net Change	2000-2013 % Change
City of Merrill	1,912	1,999	1,876	1,783	-216	-10.8%
Town of Merrill	280	324	452	482	158	48.8%
Town of Pine River	149	171	274	259	88	51.5%
Town of Scott	118	131	172	151	20	15.3%
Lincoln County	4,375	4,852	5,269	5,393	541	11.2%
State of Wisconsin	651,221	702,553	777,314	802,253	99,700	14.2%

Source: U.S. Census

Table 5: Total Households

Minor Civil Division	1990	2000	2010	2013	2000-2013 Net Change	2000-2013 % Change
City of Merrill	3,919	4,183	4,175	4,355	436	11.1%
Town of Merrill	954	1,125	1,204	1,239	285	29.9%
Town of Pine River	519	673	754	807	288	55.5%
Town of Scott	399	458	537	578	179	44.9%
Lincoln County	10,159	11,721	12,094	12,513	2,354	23.2%
State of Wisconsin	1,822,118	2,084,544	2,279,768	2,288,332	466,214	25.6%

Source: U.S. Census

180. During that same time period, the City decreased total population by 86 people.

However, the City of Merrill has experienced a slower growth in households compared to the surrounding Towns, the County, and the State. Total households in the State increased 25.6 percent over the past 23 years. All Towns and the County increased households at a higher rate than the State. Lincoln County increased the number of households by 23.2 percent between 2000 and 2013. The surrounding Towns all exceeded the City of Merrill's household growth of 11.1 percent by at least 18 points over the 13 year period.

Educational levels

Educational attainment improved overall between 1990 and 2013. The number of high school graduates over the age of 25 increased 1,142 people in the city from 4,503 people in 1990 to 5,645 people in 2000, a 25.4 percent increase. All of the surrounding towns had higher percentage increases during the time period, see **Table 6**. The Town of Merrill increased by 57.1 percent, the Town of Pine River increased by 88.5 percent, and the Town of Scott increased by 75.6 percent.

The number of persons 25 and older with four or more years of college decreased 3.8 percent in the city between 1990 and 2013. After increasing 157 people between 1990 and 2000, the number of persons over 25 who have completed four or more years of college decreased by 188 people between 2000 and 2013. In comparison, all of the surrounding towns increased the number of persons over 25 who have completed four or more years of college significantly since 1990.

The Town of Merrill experienced a 107.9 percent increase, the Town of Pine River a 319 percent increase, and the Town of Scott a 476.9 percent increase over the time period. The smaller population size, smaller total number of people over 25 with four or more years in college in 1990, and higher population growth overall has an impact the higher percent change. Lincoln County increased the number of persons who have completed four or more years of college by 1,113 people, a 58.5 percent increase since 1990, see **Table 7**.

Merrill's educational attainment is also proportionally lower than the surrounding towns, the County, and the State. The proportion of residents 25 and older with a high school education is 84%, while all of the Towns and the State are over 90%. The same comparison holds true for residents 25 and older with a bachelor's degree or higher, with 11.9 percent of Merrill compared to 15 percent or higher for the surrounding Towns and the State. Well-paying jobs with living wages increasingly require more education and skill to obtain, including the kind of manufacturing employment that has been a large part of Merrill. This suggests that Merrill is struggling to attract and retain an educated workforce, which can create difficulties for employers needed to fill positions.

Employment

In 2013, there were 4,600 residents employed in the city, 126 fewer employed residents than in 2000, a 2.7 percent decrease. See **Table 8**. The Town of Merrill and Lincoln County experienced similar employment trends. The Town

Table 6: Persons 25 and Over Who Have Completed Four Years of High School or More

Minor Civil Division	1990	2000	2013	1990-2013 Net Change	1990-2013 % Change	Proportion Of 25 and Older
City of Merrill	4,503	5,382	5,645	1,142	25.4%	84.3%
Town of Merrill	1,302	1,692	2,046	744	57.1%	93.3%
Town of Pine River	705	1,056	1,329	624	88.5%	91.0%
Town of Scott	512	682	899	387	75.6%	91.4%
Lincoln County	12,483	16,414	18,385	5,902	47.3%	88.4%
State of Wisconsin	2,432,154	2,957,461	3,464,173	1,032,019.00	42.4%	90.4%

Source: U.S. Census

Table 7: Persons 25 and Over Who Have Completed Four Years of College or More

Minor Civil Division	1990	2000	2013	1990-2013 Net Change	1990-2013 % Change	Proportion Of 25 and Older
City of Merrill	825	982	794	-31	-3.8%	11.9%
Town of Merrill	189	292	393	204	107.9%	17.9%
Town of Pine River	79	172	332	253	320.3%	22.7%
Town of Scott	26	92	149	123	473.1%	15.1%
Lincoln County	1,903	2,732	3,020	1,117	58.7%	14.5%
State of Wisconsin	548,970	779,273	1,026,728	477,758	87.0%	26.8%

Source: U.S. Census

of Merrill decreased employment 2.1 percent and Lincoln County decreased employment 3.8 percent between 2000 and 2013 after increasing employment between 1990 and 2010. The Town of Pine River and the Town of Scott increased employment between 2000 and 2013 by 15.1 percent and 5.7 percent respectively. Employment within the State of Wisconsin has increased steadily since 1990, with a majority of the increase in employment occurring between 1990 and 2000 (14.6%).

Merrill has a lower proportion of its residents employed than the surrounding towns and the State of Wisconsin, but higher than Lincoln County.

Income levels

Median Household Income and Per Capita Income are the two major indicators of income. The city's median household income rose about 61 percent between 1990 and 2013 to $38,813, compared to a 94.7 percent increase at the county level, and a 78 percent increase at the state level.

Overall, the City of Merrill's median household income increased $14,739 over the 23 year period. The surrounding town's median household income increased significantly faster. The Town of Merrill's median household income increased $38,309, a 137.6 percent increase, see **Table 9**. The Town of Pine River's median income increased $34,937, a 121.7 percent increase and the Town of Scott's median income increased $34,434, a 118 percent increase. As a result, the City of Merrill's median income is $24,812 less than the next lowest median income, the Town of Scott ($63,625). The City of Merrill's median household income is $10,208 less than Lincoln County's median income.

The city's per capita income increased by approximately 85 percent between 1990 and 2013, compared to the county at 108.6 percent, and the state increase of 107.3 percent, see **Table 10**. Note that these changes have not been adjusted

Table 8: Total Employed Persons (16 and Over)

Minor Civil Division	1990	2000	2013	1990-2013 Net Change	1990-2013 % Change	Proportion Of Population
City of Merrill	4,520	4,726	4,600	80	1.8%	58.9%
Town of Merrill	1,380	1,583	1,549	169	12.2%	63.0%
Town of Pine River	800	1,018	1,172	372	46.5%	72.2%
Town of Scott	620	778	822	202	32.6%	72.2%
Lincoln County	12,363	14,530	13,982	1619	13.1%	59.2%
State of Wisconsin	2,386,439	2,734,925	2,839,636	453,197	19.0%	62.6%

Source: U.S. Census

Table 9: Median Household Income

Minor Civil Division	1990	2000	2013	1990-2013 % Change	1990-2013 Net Change
City of Merrill	$24,074	$33,098	$38,813	$14,739	61.2%
Town of Merrill	$27,847	$48,875	$66,156	$38,309	137.6%
Town of Pine River	$28,696	$47,723	$63,633	$34,937	121.7%
Town of Scott	$29,191	$50,441	$63,625	$34,434	118.0%
Lincoln County	$25,175	$39,120	$49,021	$23,846	94.7%
State of Wisconsin	$29,442	$43,791	$52,413	$22,971	78.0%

Source: U.S. Census

Table 10: Per Capita Income*

Minor Civil Division	1990	2000	2013	1990-2013 % Change	1990-2013 Net Change
City of Merrill	$11,758	$17,429	$21,772	$10,014	85.2%
Town of Merrill	$11,322	$18,677	$27,481	$16,159	142.7%
Town of Pine River	$11,322	$18,449	$31,441	$20,119	177.7%
Town of Scott	$12,151	$19,759	$28,531	$16,380	134.8%
Lincoln County	$11,828	$17,940	$24,669	$12,841	108.6%
State of Wisconsin	$13,276	$21,271	$27,523	$14,247	107.3%

** Adjusted for Inflation. Source: U.S. Census*

for inflation. The City of Merrill's per capita income increased just over $10,000 over the 23 year period. The Town of Pine River experienced the highest per capita income growth, increasing $20,119 over the same time period. Overall, the City of Merrill had the smallest increase in per capita income resulting in the lowest per capita income in 2013.

The smaller average household sizes in the City of Merrill help explain some of the gap in median household incomes between the city and the surrounding townships. The City of Merrill does have a smaller per capita income, but the smaller average household size and low median household income would indicate that there are more one person households and/or one earner households in the City of Merrill than in the surrounding townships.

Race

In 2013, nearly 96 percent of the city residents were White. The largest minority group identified was Black race, 2 percent of the population. Following Black was Asian & Pacific Islander and Other Race. Other Race includes citizens who identify themselves as two or more races. Hispanic origin is not considered a race, but it is identified in the U.S. Census. About 2 percent of the population lists Hispanic backgrounds. In 1990, over 99 percent listed their race as White, although there has been percentage changes over the decade, these represent very small numbers of persons. Merrill mirrors the race distribution of the county. Overall, about 17 percent of the state's population is categorized as minority (non-white). In comparison, 5.1 percent of the City of Merrill's population is categorized as minority and only 3.3 percent of the County's population is categorized as minority.

A residential street in Merrill.

Public Participation

The city adopted a Public Participation Plan for the planning process. A copy of the plan can be found in the attachments at the end of the plan.

Community Survey

A survey was conducted in 2016 to facilitate public input on items related to the comprehensive plan for the City of Merrill. A summary of responses can be found in Attachment D. The survey was open to anyone, but most respondents (87%) were residents of the City. Most non-residents indicated that they either live in one of the surrounding towns and shop or work in Merrill, or that they grew up in Merrill but live elsewhere now. It was not a random sample so cannot be considered representative of all residents in Merrill. Respondents to the survey were more likely than the population of Merrill to be male, between 25 and 54 years old, employed full time, and own their residence. Additionally, 58% of respondents had children at home, while only 29% of Merrill households have related children in the household. These demographic characteristics of respondents are important to be mindful of while interpreting the results of the survey.

Over half of respondents live in Merrill primarily because they were raised or have a family nearby. Around 19% are here because they have a good job here, while 17% feel stuck here. The strong familial connection to Merrill may be something that quality of life improvements can strengthen by further encouraging young professionals that grew up in Merrill, but left to pursue education to return.

Most respondents believe the quality of life in Merrill is good or average, while a sizeable minority (17%) believes it is poor. 49% think Merrill is attractive, 63% think public property is well maintained while only 27% think private property is well maintained. A large portion, 76% of respondents believe the preservation of historic buildings is important. Some comments stated Merrill should prioritize saving and rehabilitating historic buildings over demolishing them. Many respondents wanted growth in employment and more shopping and leisure activities, but one of the most frequently cited positive attributes of Merrill was the small town atmosphere. The city must be careful in pursuing its growth to maintain that quality that many current residents like.

Most services that are provided directly by a local government were rated highly, such as police, fire service, EMS, and parks and recreation. Private sector professional services (bank, insurance, dentist, etc.) were also rated highly, while shopping, employment, efforts to revitalize downtown and downtown Merrill were rated negatively.

70% of the survey respondents were employed full time, and

60% of the respondents work in Merrill, but many comments suggested there is a need for more jobs in Merrill. When respondents selected most important issues out of a variety of options, attracting large regional employers, maintaining a good school system, and retention and expansion of local employers were the three most selected. Other important options were developing the downtown and riverfront, and expanding shopping opportunities. “More industry and manufacturing,” “be a business friendly community,” and “taxes are too high” were the most identified issues facing economic development in Merrill.

The top three priorities of respondents related to transportation infrastructure were to maintain existing roads, improve the safety/traffic calming of existing roads, and to improve and develop trails. 74% of respondents would like to bike or walk more, and motorist behavior was the most frequently cited barrier to bicycling or walking more frequently, followed by poor road and sidewalk surfaces and sidewalks, paths, and bike lanes do not connect to destinations. This suggests that designing roads and adding treatments to influence motorist behavior could have a large influence on bicycling and walking, and the separation provided by bicycle lanes, paths and sidewalks is important. A majority of respondents support using public funds to improve the safety of bicycling and walking, and expand river access and trails. There were many individual comments left about specific roads or intersections that need improvements or cause issues for respondents that are included in the full summary of the survey.

A majority (58%) support using public funds to maintain Merrill transit service, despite over 70% of respondents saying they are not likely to use the bus service regardless of any improvements made to the service. The two most frequently selected improvements that would make it more likely for respondents to use Merrill transit service are if the bus operated on weekends and the bus operated longer weekday hours.

About half of respondents are engaged or very engaged in local government. The two most common barriers are that respondents don’t think anyone will listen to them, and they have too many other commitments. There were concerns regarding city government in the comments, many regarding the availability of information to the public, the responsiveness of leaders, and openness of committees to the community. Some responses also suggested that City leaders are not open to change.

These results indicate that there are both positive assets and features of Merrill that can be further developed and areas that need improvement but may be more difficult or costly to address. Outdoor recreation and the natural environment are existing assets that are underutilized. If developed into quality recreational amenities they can be used to attract people and businesses to the City and enhance the quality of life for existing residents. There is a large amount of support for improving access to the rivers in Merrill. Improving access to outdoor recreational and natural amenities and infrastructure for bicycling and walking in Merrill will likely enhance the small town feeling that many survey respondents like about Merrill.

Industry along the Wisconsin River.

Vehicle and Pedestrian infrastructure.

Other improvements that respondents cited often revolve around the local economy, including the availability and quality of jobs and shopping/entertainment options. Improving these can be more complex and require more initial investment, but can pay off by improving the opportunities and wages of current residents, closing off leakages where money leaves the local economy, and attracting new workers to Merrill. These improvements include supporting entrepreneurial and start-up businesses, working with existing employers to address issues related to retention and expansion, attracting new employers looking

to relocate, training to fill open positions for local employers, and pursuing other strategies to attract the labor needed.

A community survey was also completed in 2013, and although the questions were different, the results say very similar things about the City of Merrill and the residents' vision for the future. Some significant results that were not obtained by the 2016 community survey include specific reasons why residents of Merrill leave for shopping and entertainment, and the amount they estimate they spend on shopping and entertainment outside of Merrill in a month.

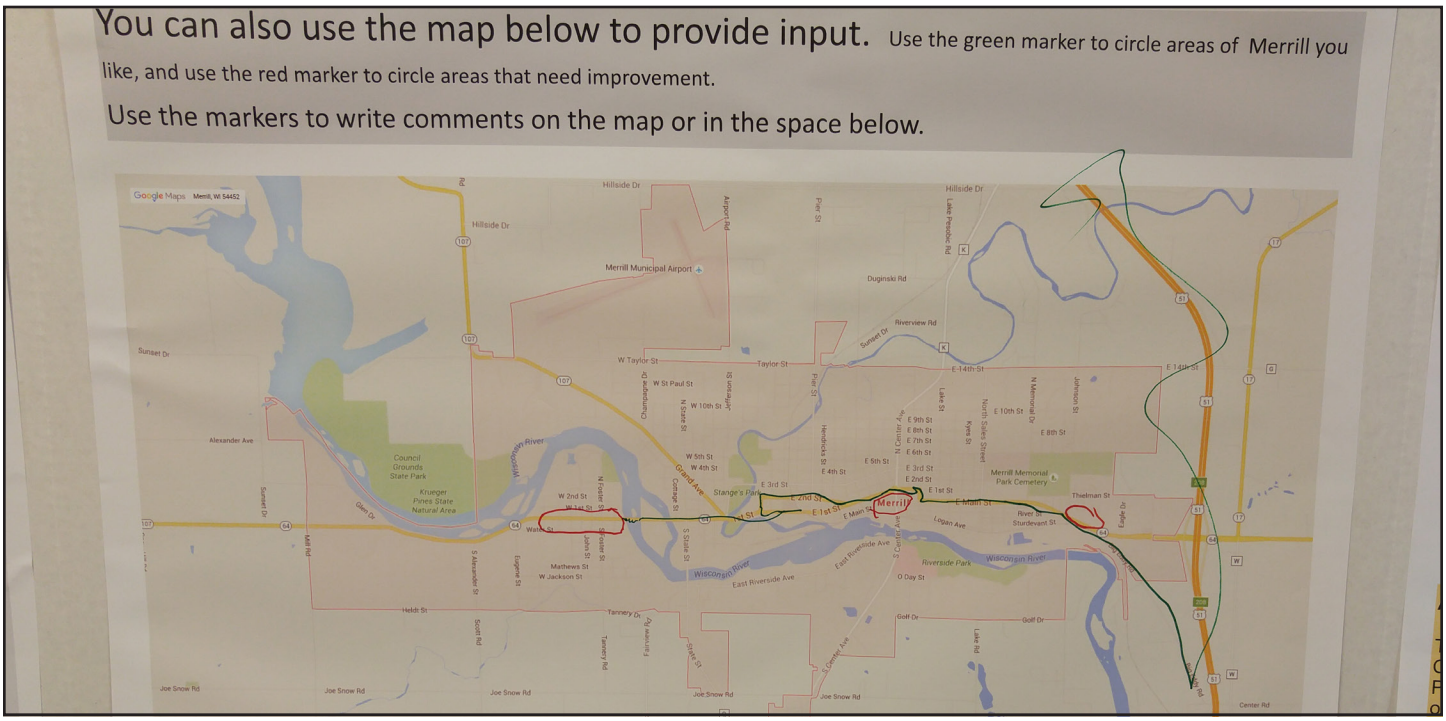
Public Meetings

Public meetings where NCWRPC staff presented draft chapters to the Merrill Plan Commission were held several times throughout the planning process. In general, NCWRPC staff held a meeting about every other month to present two draft chapters of the new plan, and then encourage discussion about the chapters. These meetings were part of the monthly Merrill Plan Commission meetings held in the evening at City Hall, were open to the public and were noticed using the standard public notice methods for Merrill Plan Commission meetings.

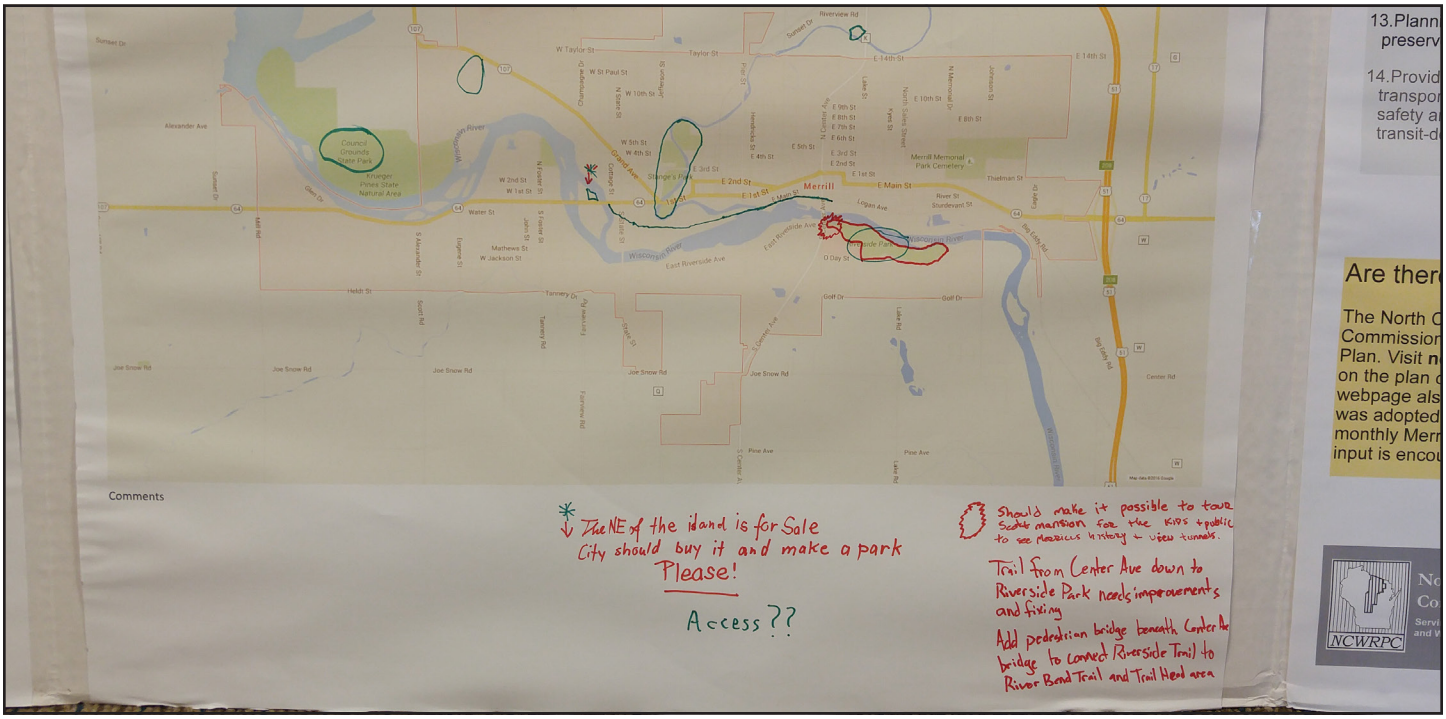
Downtown Merrill.

Other

Posters with information about the Comprehensive Plan and the Community Survey were placed at the T.B. Scott Free Library and the lobby of City Hall. These posters provided an opportunity for people to circle areas of Merrill on a map and leave comments or suggestions. The results of these pop-up public comments are shown on the following page. Information was posted on the City website and distributed through the Foto News, as well as various Facebook pages (e.g. The Merrill Fire Department and Police.) Emails about public meetings occurring after the close of the survey were sent to anyone that provided contact information during the survey.



Public Comments, Poster 1.



Public Comments, Poster 2.

Chapter Two
Natural, Agricultural, and Cultural Resources

This chapter reviews the City's natural environment and resources, including surface water, floodplains, wetlands, groundwater, forests, agricultural resources, and cultural resources. These are the resources on which the City is built.

Previous Studies

A variety of plans are reviewed as they relate to natural, agricultural, and cultural resources. These plans provide a starting point for the planning process.

Merrill Comprehensive Plan, 2007

Natural resources were addressed in the previous plan. An inventory of the existing resources and a listing of various goals and objectives were developed. Much of that information is incorporated in this chapter.

Merrill Wellhead Protection Plan, 1996

This plan focuses on preventing contaminants from entering the area of land around the public water supply. It identifies locations of the wells, surrounding land uses, and recharge areas. The plan also incorporates the groundwater recharge direction of flow, potential contamination sources within ½ mile radii of each well site, public education and conservation programs, and contains a management plan for addressing potential sources of contamination in the delineated well head protection areas.

All five of Merrill's municipal wells and two alternative well sites were incorporated. Two of the city's wells are on the far west side of the city, and the other three wells, as well as two potential sites, are located on the far east side of the city. According to the plan, the east side aquifer has untapped capacity for at least one more well.

Merrill Sewer Service Area Plan, 1996

The purpose of this plan is to develop a twenty-year sanitary sewer service boundary for the Merrill urban area. The urban sanitary sewer service area boundary identifies the geographic land area within which sanitary sewer service could be made available by the year 2016 through a cost-effective, environmentally acceptable manner. In addition to delineating an urban sewer service boundary, the Sewer Service Area Plan provides a framework for future planning at each individual municipal level. The goals and policies developed throughout this planning process will also be applicable and useful in the development of local policy direction with respect to land use decisions within these communities. The plan was amended in 2015 but is due for an update.

Merrill Intensive Survey Report Architectural and Historical Survey Project, 1992

The purpose of this project was to identify buildings, sites, or structures within Merrill's city limits that are potentially eligible for the National Register of Historic Places, either individually or as part of a historic district. About 125 structures of historic significance were identified. The majority of these are located in the following (proposed) historic districts:

- Center Avenue District
- West Main Street Residential District
- West Main Street Commercial District
- East Main Street Residential District
- East Third Street Residential District

Merrill Parks & Recreation Plan, 2013

The outdoor recreation plan develops a 5-year plan to meet the current and future recreational needs of residents. The plan inventories the City's numerous parks and other recreational facilities, examines population growth and patterns, and proposes additional recreational needs. Adoption of this plan allows for continued eligibility for financial assistance from the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LAWCON), the Stewardship Fund, and many other federal and state funding programs.

Natural Resource Issues

Maintaining environmental standards while continuing growth. Stormwater runoff may threaten the listing of local water bodies as exceptional resources. Cities, construction sites, & farms all have runoff management rules that are set by the state as minimum standards that should be tightened locally to maintain exceptional water quality.

Maintain and Improve Water Quality. Currently, two water bodies do not meet standards, and 3 water bodies are listed as exceptional water bodies.

Contaminated Sites & Redevelopment. There are contaminated sites in the city, which is no surprise since all communities with commercial, industrial or agricultural development have the potential for groundwater contamination, soil spills, and surface water contamination. Many of these sites are along the river and if remediated provide very beneficial redevelopment opportunities.

Recreational Connections. There are numerous recreational opportunities in the city and in the immediate area, such as Council Grounds State Park and the Wisconsin and Prairie Rivers. Providing connections to these amenities both through motorized and non-motorized trails helps to enhance the quality of life in the community.

Invasive Species. Diseases and pests such as Emerald Ash Borer and Oak Wilt have the potential to devastate municipal forests and street trees, as well as trees on private property. Other invasive species can out-compete native species and reduce wildlife habitat. While Emerald Ash Borer has not yet been found in Lincoln County, it has been found in nearby counties, including Wood, Portage and Oneida.

Lincoln County Comprehensive Plan, 2012

The Lincoln County Comprehensive Plan addresses natural, agricultural, and cultural resources for Lincoln County. The goal of the Natural, Cultural and Agricultural resources section is to manage and develop for current and future generations the rich yet finite agricultural, natural and cultural resources which are the cornerstone of Lincoln County's economic vitality and cultural heritage.

Lincoln County Land & Water Resource Management Plan, 2010

The 2010 Land & Water Resource Management Plan identifies two primary goals. These are:

- Protect and improve surface water and groundwater quality; &
- Conserve and protect productive agricultural land, forestland, and other sensitive natural areas.

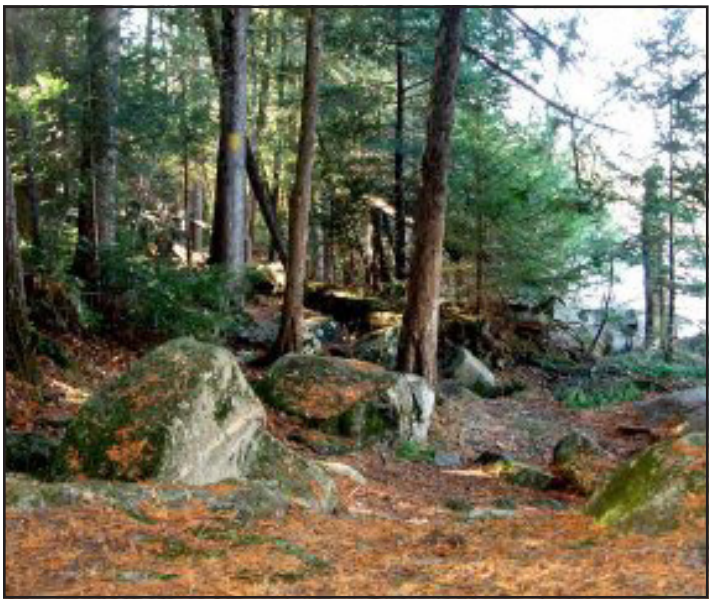
Lincoln County Outdoor Recreation Plan, 2012

The primary purpose of this recreation plan is to provide continued direction in meeting the current and future recreational needs of the County. This plan provides and inventory and analysis of existing outdoor recreational facilities, and provides recommendations to meet identified needs. Specific park and forest parcel improvement lists exist within the plan.

The City of Merrill has its own outdoor recreation plan, but one recommendation for Merrill was also listed in the county plan - general concern about snowmobile trail routes exists. A comprehensive review of snowmobile trails within the City may show a need to develop permanent trail corridors. A review of snowmobile and ATV trails was performed by Merrill in response to this recommendation

Lincoln County Farmland Preservation Plan

The County is currently preparing a Farmland Preservation Plan which focuses on preserving agricultural production capacity, farmland, soil and water resources, and rural character in Lincoln County. The plan identifies issues and concerns in farming practices, sets goals and policies to preserve agriculture, and identifies actions to achieve the set goals. It also sets criteria for farmland preservation areas and non-farmland preservation areas. This plan will identify preservation areas in the towns surrounding the city.



The Ice Age Trail runs near Merrill.

Physical Landscape

All plans must consider the natural environment in which a community exists. Understanding the physical landscape is critical to the growth of a community. Natural constraints and environmental issues need to be identified to plan properly. Additionally, the physical landscape can provide great opportunities in the forms of recreation, natural scenery, and wildlife, all of which enhance the quality of life of a community and improve the ability to attract and retain people and employers.

Topography

Merrill is located in the Northern Highland physiographic region of Wisconsin. The city is about 1,300 feet above sea level. The landscape has only a few lakes and undrained depressions. This is an area of relatively flat outwash plains in the major river valleys that meander through broad swells of moraine upland where bedrock is close to the surface. Slopes are mostly long and smooth.

Soils

Area soils are related to the physical geography, climate, and vegetation. By reviewing the soil maps and other information, it is possible to determine the best uses for a particular area. See the 1996 Natural Resource Conservation Service Soil Survey of Lincoln County for more information. Generally, the soils in the city have few limitations for buildings with basements. An overview of the various soil types are displayed on the Soils Map.

Human activity also affects soil formation by altering and accelerating natural soil processes. Clearing, burning, cultivating, and urbanization can affect soil structure, porosity, and content of nutrients, thereby altering the soils.

Climate

Winters are very cold, and summers are short and fairly warm. The short frost-free period in summer limits the production of crops to forage, small grain, and adapted vegetables. Precipitation is fairly well distributed throughout the year, reaching a peak in summer. Snow covers the ground during much of the period from late fall through early spring. The soils occasionally freeze to a depth of several feet when very cold temperatures occur before the ground is appreciably covered with snow. The soils usually freeze to a depth ranging from the top few inches to about one foot.

Water Resources

A major component of the natural environment is water. This section of the plan overviews surface water, wetlands, floodplains, and groundwater.

Winter provides many recreational opportunities.

The Dam on the Wisconsin River.

Surface Water

The Wisconsin and Prairie Rivers flow through the heart of Merrill. The Wisconsin River travels from the northwest area of the city east to the furthest eastern area of the city and turns south. The Prairie River flows from the northeast and joins the Wisconsin River in the middle of downtown.

Lincoln County is located in the Upper Wisconsin River drainage basin. Within the county there are thirteen watersheds. The Prairie River watershed drains land within the Merrill city limits north of the Wisconsin River, and the Devil Creek watershed drains most land within the city limits south of the Wisconsin River. Both of these watersheds drain into the Wisconsin River.

Exceptional resource waters are defined by the WDNR as a stream or lake that has excellent water quality, high recreational and aesthetic value, and high quality

fishing, but may be impacted by point source pollution or have the potential for future discharge from a small sewered community.

Three area water bodies are listed as exceptional resource waters. These are: the Prairie River, sections of the North Branch Prairie River, and Silver Creek.

Two area water bodies are listed as not meeting the standards set under the U.S. Clean Water Act, Section 303(d), these are Pesabic Lake and the Wisconsin River as it leaves the city limits. Pesabic Lake has mercury contamination, which has caused a fish consumption advisory to be issued by the WDNR. The Wisconsin River also has a fish consumption advisory on it due to of mercury and PCB contamination.

Wetlands

Wetlands perform many indispensable roles in the proper function of the hydrologic cycle and local ecological systems. Wetlands assist in hazard mitigation by acting as water storage devices in times of high water. Like sponges, wetlands are able to absorb excess water and release it back into the watershed slowly, preventing flooding and minimizing flood damage. As more impermeable surfaces are developed, this excess capacity for water runoff storage becomes increasingly important.

Wetland plants and soils have the capacity to store and filter pollutants ranging from pesticides to animal wastes. Calm wetland waters, with their flat surface and flow characteristics, allow particles of toxins and nutrients to settle out of the water column. Plants take up certain nutrients from the water. Other substances can be stored or transformed to a less toxic state within wetlands. As a result, our lakes, rivers and streams are cleaner and our drinking water is safer.

Don Manthei Recreational and Wetland Area.

Wetlands that filter or store sediments or nutrients for extended periods may undergo fundamental changes. Sediments will eventually fill in wetlands and nutrients will eventually modify the vegetation. Such changes may result in the loss of this function over time. Eradication of wetlands can occur through the use of fill material. This can destroy the hydrological function of the site and open the area to improper development. The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has promulgated minimum standards for managing wetlands.

Wetlands to the north and west of Merrill are considered the source of water for two of the city's five municipal wells. The Wellhead Protection Plan states that the volume of water needed by the city cannot be met by the aquifer tapped on the west side of the city alone, so any expansion of well capacity will be sought in the eastern well field aquifer.

Floodplains

A floodplain is generally defined as land where there is a one percent chance of flooding in any year (also known as the 100-year floodplain). The primary value of floodplains is their role in natural flood control. Flood plains represent areas where excess water can be accommodated whether through drainage by streams or through storage by wetlands and other natural detention/retention areas. Specific areas that will be inundated will depend upon the amount of water, the distance and speed that water travels, and the topography of the area. If uninterrupted by development, the areas shown on a map as floodplains should be able to handle a severe (regional) flood, i.e. those that have a probability of occurring once every one hundred years.

There is a value in preserving and protecting these natural flood control areas from encroachment. First, by preventing development in the floodplain, the cost of building dikes, levies, or other man-made flood control devices will be saved. Second, for each structure that is constructed in a flood-prone area, that flood-prone area expands, potentially subjecting other structures originally built outside the delineated flood hazard area to the risk of flooding. Each new structure (or modification to existing) placed in the flood plain puts more life and property in danger.

Counties, cities, and villages are required to adopt reasonable and effective floodplain zoning ordinances. Floodplain zoning is designed to protect individuals, private property, and public investments from flood damage. These regulations prohibit development in the floodway, the most dangerous flood area.

In order to participate in the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) National Flood Insurance Program, the County, City of Merrill, and City of Tomahawk have completed a Flood Insurance Study and a Flood Insurance Rate Map (FIRM) that encompasses Lincoln

County. This FIRM delineates the "A" Zones including the floodway and flood fringe which are those areas inundated by the 100-year flood within the County.

Floodplains occur along the Wisconsin River where levees are in poor condition. Flooding has occurred during periods of exceptionally heavy rainfall. Currently, there are no repetitive loss structures, those with multiple flood insurance claims, in Lincoln County.

Groundwater

The groundwater in the Merrill area meets municipal, industrial, and rural needs. Well water is available at various depths, depending on the topography, the distance above permanent stream levels, and the character of the underlying aquifer. All of the wells are relatively shallow, gravel packed, screened and terminate in the glacial drift. The productive areas of the drift consist of sand and gravel underlain by granite bedrock. This productive layer varies significantly in thickness from place to place in the city. The municipal wells are located over ancient valleys in the granite bedrock, therefore the sand and gravel deposited by glaciers in these valleys is the source of the well's supply.

Overall, groundwater quality is good. Local differences in quality are the result of the composition, solubility, and surface area of the soil and rock through which the water moves and the length of time that the water is in contact with these materials.

The 1996 Wellhead Protection Plan for the city has maps delineating 5-years worth of groundwater flow toward municipal wells. The content of dissolved solids in the ground water is relatively low throughout the county. In many areas of the county, the soils have very porous layers that are poor filters for domestic waste and agricultural chemicals. The impact of development, agriculture, and gravel pits may cause deterioration of the groundwater quality in these areas.

The City has established Wellhead Protection Area overlay zoning to better control land uses that may contaminate the municipal water supply. Wellhead protection programs involve five components:

1. Delineation of a zone of contribution for a five-year time of travel;
2. An inventory of all potential contamination sources within that zone;
3. Education and conservation programs;
4. A management plan; and
5. A contingency plan for toxic spills and well contamination.

Land use activities with a history of creating groundwater problems can then be limited or closely monitored within the zone of contribution with overlay zoning.

Woodlands

Significant tracts of woodland exist within the planning area. These forested areas are primarily associated with streams, and wetlands. Forest cover provides many vital functions, which are diverse in nature; forested lands provide for recreational opportunities, scenic beauty, water infiltration, wildlife habitat as well as protection of sensitive environmental areas. Regulation of the removal of woodland plant material is desirable to protect scenic beauty, to control erosion, and to reduce effluent and nutrient flows into surface waters.

From the NCWRPC GIS Inventory, about 1,035 acres of woodland exist in the City of Merrill, which is about 20 percent of land area within the city. Tree cover is essential, especially for erosion control and to reduce effluent and nutrient flows into surface water bodies and courses.

Merrill has been a Tree City USA member since 1987. Trees add value to land for property owners, help cool buildings and neighborhoods, break the cold winds to lower heating costs, increase stormwater infiltration to reduce runoff, and provide food for wildlife. The Wisconsin DNR maintains records on the largest trees (Champion Trees) in the state to encourage the appreciation of Wisconsin's forests and trees. The City of Merrill has two Champion Trees, both of which are located in Stange's Park: Balsam Poplar (Populus balsamifera), Rank #2 and Balsam Poplar (Populus balsamifera), Rank #3. Many of the Champion Tree records are quite old and out of date. Some records are incomplete. Some trees listed may now be gone or have lost branches and leaders, so they may no longer be champions.

Rare Species & Natural Communities

The City of Merrill and nearby towns contain 25 sections with occurrences of aquatic and terrestrial plants, animals, and/or natural communities of endangered status as identified in the Wisconsin Natural Heritage Inventory. Each section identified may have several different species or just one species.

- Sixteen contiguous sections with aquatic occurrences exist along the east side of Merrill that are mainly associated with the Prairie and Wisconsin Rivers. Three of those sections are within the city.
- Eight contiguous sections with aquatic occurrences exist west of Merrill from the Wisconsin River. Most likely these aquatic species are related to the Copper River.
- One section with both aquatic and terrestrial occurrences exists within Council Grounds State Park.

Krueger Pines is State Natural Area #20, located in Council Grounds State Park. According to the DNR, Krueger Pines

features an old-growth northern dry-mesic forest dominated by an even-aged stand of white pine, some as large as two feet in diameter. Red pine is also present along with paper birch, big-tooth aspen, white oak, and black oak. Beaked hazelnut, American hazelnut, downy arrowwood, and blackberries comprise the brushy understory. Characteristic groundlayer species are large-leaved aster, wild sarsaparilla, Canada mayflower, American starflower, partridgeberry, shinleaf, and bracken fern. Canopy birds include eastern wood pewee, red-breasted nuthatch, brown creeper, red-eyed vireo, blackburnian and pine warblers, and scarlet tanager. The site was historically an old council or gathering area for Chippewa Indians. Krueger Pines is owned by the DNR and was designated a State Natural Area in 1953.

As an exceptional resource water that is now restored to its free flowing state, the Prairie River may now contain more aquatic plants and animals because light penetrates to the waterbed, which allows plants to grow that provide food and shelter for animals. This area currently contains occurrences of aquatic species listed as either: rare, threatened, or endangered in the Natural Heritage Inventory.

The additional land recovered from removing the Ward Paper Company dam may increase terrestrial species that city residents can passively enjoy on the newly created paths. Educational opportunities may be enhanced if schools take advantage of this new natural resource in their study plans.

Wisconsin's biodiversity goals are to identify, protect and manage native plants, animals, and natural communities from the very common to critically endangered for present and future generations. Knowledge, appreciation, and stewardship of Wisconsin's native species and ecosystems are critical to their survival and greater benefit to society. Some original vegetation types for the City of Merrill and surrounding areas were hemlock, sugar maple, yellow birch, white pine, and red pine, which came from a map of Finley's Original Vegetation.

Environmental Contamination

Land with known environmental concerns are listed on the following databases:

- Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources – Bureau For Remediation and Redevelopment Tracking System (BRRTS);
- Wisconsin Department of Commerce – Brownfield Location Information System; and
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency – EPA Enviromapper.

Contaminated sites originate when a property is used for such activities as a gas station, industrial processing facility, a landfill, or other industrial process.

According to BRRTS there are 9 contaminated sites that are currently open cases in the City of Merrill. Eight sites have soil contamination, six have groundwater contamination, one has surface water contamination, one has co-co contamination, and one site has off-site and direct contact contamination.

Every permit holding site shown on the EPA Enviromapper database transfers, creates, or uses substances that may cause pollution if not handled properly. The City of Merrill wastewater treatment facility is the only water discharger in the Enviromapper database.

Agriculture

The City of Merrill does not have any active farms or agricultural lands. Areas surrounding the city have vast areas of open space and agricultural lands.

Town of Merrill

According to the Town Land Use Plan, Town of Merrill, 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.

Town of Pine River

According to the Town Land Use Plan, Town of Pine River, a vast majority of the Town remains open space. There are large areas of land being farmed throughout the Town, but particularly in its southern and northwestern sections (including Christmas tree farms).

Town of Scott

According to the Town Land Use Plan, Town of Scott, a vast majority of the Town remains open space. There are large areas of land being farmed in all parts of the Town. Most of the developed lands within the Town are used for single family residences. Subdivisions and smaller clusters of lots are concentrated along portions Joe Snow Road, near the Wisconsin River on the eastern edge of the Town, and adjacent to the City.

Recreational Resources

The Merrill area park and recreation system consists of 15 parks on approximately 1,110 acres of parkland and special use areas under the control of the city, and about 35 acres managed by the county, and school district. Descriptions of each park and their amenities are located in the City of Merrill Parks and Recreation Plan. Wisconsin's Constitution also maintains all navigable waters as public resources,

meaning that bodies of water can serve as important recreational resources.

Council Grounds State Park is about 500 acres located along the Wisconsin River, adjacent to the northwest side of Merrill. A campground with modern rest rooms, swimming beach, picnic areas, shelter house and a physical fitness trail are some of the park's amenities. Parks and recreation are discussed further in Chapter 6 of the plan.

Historic Structures

There are a number of structures in the City of Merrill that are listed on the National Register of Historical Places. The Lincoln County Courthouse (ca. 1902), Merrill City Hall (ca.1888-1889), Merrill Post Office (ca. 1915), First Street Bridge (ca. 1904), and the T.B. Scott Free Library (ca. 1911) are individual buildings listed on the national registry. The Center Avenue Historical District (ca. 1855-1930) is a residential housing cluster also on the register. Following is a brief community history.

Community History

Native Americans inhabited the Merrill area for thousands of years, but left little permanent record, except for some burial grounds along the rivers. Beginning in 1836, when Wisconsin became a territory, the United States government actively began to acquire title to all Wisconsin lands. By 1848, most lands in Wisconsin had been acquired by the U.S. government. Reservations were created by 1854, providing the Chippewa lands at Red Cliff, Bad River, Lac du Flambeau, and Lac Court Oreilles.

Merrill's modern history began in 1847 when a Scotsman named Andrew Warren came to the area to construct a dam on the Wisconsin River downstream of the Prairie River

The Skate Park.

The Smith Recreation Center.

The Bierman Family Aquatic Center.

Concept illustration for a new pocket park in Merrill.

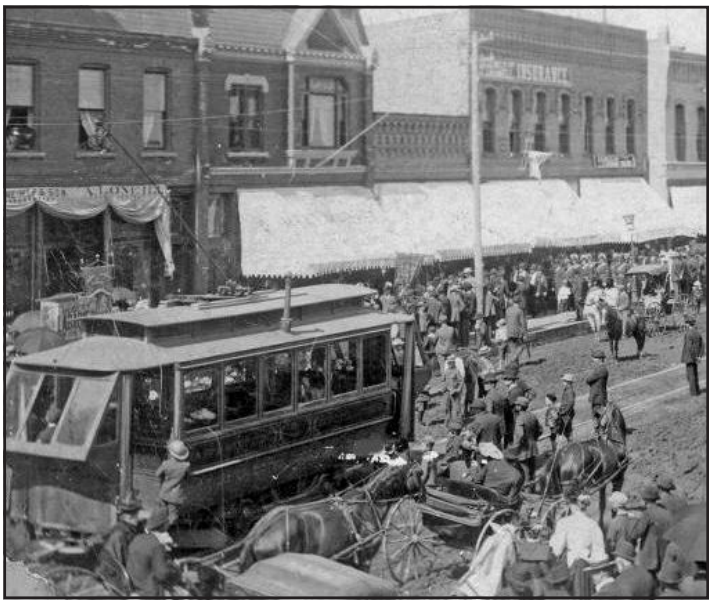
near what is today known as Mill Street. A small settlement sprang up around the dam and sawmill, which was first named “Jenny Bull Falls”, later shortened to “Jenny”.

In 1881, the City’s name was changed to “Merrill”, after S.S. Merrill, the general manager of the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul railroad, which served the community at the time. The city was incorporated in 1883, and lumberman T.B. Scott was elected the city’s first mayor. As the county government came, and settlers continued to move to the area, major lumber industries were beginning to dictate the geographic development of the town, through the most advantageous river locations for their mills. The first City Hall was constructed in 1889, the same year Merrill received electrical service. Other public amenities which came to Merrill during these years was telephone service (1881), a police department (1883), a city waterworks (1887), an organized fire department (1887), a hospital (1892), and a public library (1891).

As the supply of pine timber depleted, Merrill needed to find ways of diversifying their economy to support the lifestyle that the lumber boom years had given them. A wide variety of new industries were introduced to Merrill in the next several decades. Despite the demise of the lumber industry in northern Wisconsin, these were times of civic growth for Merrill, with the construction of the new Lincoln County Courthouse in 1902, the establishment of a county teacher’s training school, and a hospital, as well as a number of elementary schools around the city.

As Merrill advanced into the twentieth century, industrial diversification continued, as well as commercial and residential development. Merrill has a long history of educational, cultural, recreational, religious, and governmental pride and excellence.

Historic photo of logging in Merrill.



Historic photo of downtown Merrill.

Goals, Objectives, & Policies

The following Goals, Objectives, and Policies will help guide the City of Merrill to better protect and utilize the natural, agricultural and cultural resources within the planning area.

Natural Resources Goal 1: Maintain a safe and clean natural environment for residents.

Objective 1: Require enforcement of existing regulations in environmentally sensitive areas.

Objective 2: Conserve and enhance the presence of the city's distinctive natural amenities by recognizing the special attractiveness of the city's natural landscapes and open spaces.

Objective 3: Development adjacent to rivers, lakes, streams, and wetlands needs to be carefully planned in order to not negatively impact these areas.

Objective 4: Consider amending ordinances to encourage or require native landscaping.

Objective 5: Identify potential view corridors that should be protected, particularly around high value natural areas and gateways to the City.

Policy 1: Identify key natural resources.

Policy 2: Communicate with residents regarding regulations.

Policy 3: Maintain water levels and preserve surrounding natural areas.

Policy 4: Identify and protect the public open spaces and wildlife habitats from development to preserve the City's scenic areas.

Policy 5: Work with Lincoln County on informational programs and brochures regarding natural resources to educate and inform the public.

Policy 6: Encourage a buffer area around delineated wetlands, with no buildings.

Policy 7: Work to ensure enforcement of floodplain zoning, conservancy zoning and shoreland zoning ordinances to protect water quality.

Policy 8: Monitor the spread of Emerald Ash Borer and other diseases or pests to determine if action is needed to protect the trees in Merrill.

Policy 9: Use native landscaping on city property and projects.

Natural Resources Goal 2: Future non-metallic mining sites will not negatively impact the planning area (3 mile area surrounding the city) or its residents.

Objective 1: Work with Lincoln County to identify and map all existing and possible mining sites.

Objective 2: Incompatible uses with mining will not develop adjacent to one another.

Objective 3: Prevent mining operations from degrading and harming important view corridors, the natural environment and rural characteristics.

Policy 1: Use the Lincoln County mining location maps when deciding land use issues.

Policy 2: Steer incompatible uses away from identified mining sites.

Natural Resources Goal 3: Maintain the area's diverse wildlife habitat.

Objective 1: Protect the City's areas of threatened and endangered species.

Objective 2: Create and maintain connections (corridors) between wildlife habitat areas.

Policy 1: Support the preservation of key habit areas and large undeveloped contiguous natural areas.

Policy 2: Support neighboring jurisdiction's wildlife preservation plans.

Policy 3: Incorporate natural resource areas in plans for parks and open spaces.

Policy 4: Promote native species landscaping.

Policy 5: Work with federal, state and county agencies to seek funding for habitat protection.

Agricultural Resources Goal: Provide for the future viability of the agricultural resources within the planning area (3 miles surrounding the city) until a time it can be converted to a higher best use.

Objective 1: Encourage efforts to keep agricultural uses in and adjacent to the City until a time that these lands can be converted to a higher best use.

Objective 2: Use extraterritorial subdivision and zoning to provide for an orderly changeover of agricultural land to other uses.

Objective 3: Buffer non-farming uses from agricultural lands in order to lower the number of possible nuisance complaints (by City residents) regarding these agricultural lands.

Objective 4: Cooperate with the Towns of Merrill, Pine River, and Scott on all land development within the planning area to limit locating incompatible land uses adjacent to one another.

Objective 5: Maximize existing vacant land and infill opportunities within the city before annexing and developing surrounding prime agricultural land.

Policy 1: Develop an Official Map detailing future plats within the city and its planning area (Extraterritorial Plat Authority area).

Policy 2: Coordinate with the county and surrounding towns in the development of a Farmland Preservation Plan.

Policy 3: Work with the towns to develop boundary agreements in areas that are not prime agricultural land.

Cultural Resources Goal: The City's historic, archeological and cultural locations and structures will remain preserved for the City residents.

Objective 1: Preserve buildings (churches, historic homes and buildings), structures (out buildings, bridges, etc.) and other landscape features (cemeteries, fence lines, etc.) that are the City's cultural history.

Objective 2: Promote public art and performing arts throughout the community.

Policy 1: Identify and preserve the locations of these historic sites.

Policy 2: Discourage the destruction of these sites and will not allow incompatible uses around them that would have negative impacts on the resource.

Policy 3: Work with federal, state and county agencies to ensure all sites are identified and properly protected.

Policy 4: Utilize festivals/celebrations to honor notable individuals and/or historic events.

Policy 5: Develop and maintain a list of all public art in the city.

Chapter Three
Housing

This chapter is organized into three sections: Background, Inventory & Trends, and Goals, Objectives and Policies. There is also an overview of programs available to help local communities to meet their housing needs.

Previous Studies

Several plans that relate to housing are relevant to housing in Merrill. These range from statewide housing plans to architectural and history surveys.

City of Merrill Comprehensive Plan, 2007

The 2007 Comprehensive Plan for Merrill included an inventory of existing housing in Merrill and goals for the future, with supporting objectives and policies. The three goals identified were: Provide an adequate supply of affordable housing for individuals of all income levels throughout the community; Encourage compact housing development patterns, where appropriate; Encourage the production of new units and the rehabilitation of existing units, including the development of large family units and elderly housing with accompanying support services; and Promote access to housing throughout the community for all citizens.

City of Merrill, Intensive Architectural & History Survey Project

This 1992 Architecture and History Report identify Merrill's major historic properties within those historic contexts. Residential, Commercial & Industrial, Governmental, & Church Architectures are described within the historical context of when each structure was built. Only objects, buildings, sites, and structures that are potentially eligible for the National Register of Historic Places are listed and described in this report.

Lincoln County Comprehensive Plan

Lincoln County's Comprehensive Plan was most recently updated in 2012, and contains a Housing element with data and an inventory of existing housing. This plan also includes a housing plan for the County with 3 main goals, including: Promote collaboration amongst housing agencies located throughout the county and use those strong ties to free up the exchange of housing information; Improve older homes to increase affordable housing and so especially the aging can remain in them; and develop much more specialized senior housing.

Regional Livability Plan: Housing Assessment

The Housing Assessment of the Regional Livability Plan was one of the four key assessments identifying issues and opportunities for livability in North Central Wisconsin. Housing is a crucial component of livability. The type of housing and the costs of various housing options were researched and analyzed. The assessment studied the availability and affordability of housing and introduced the impact higher density housing developments can have on traffic levels. Housing options in close proximity to employment opportunities has a significant impact on the workforce's ability to get to and from work efficiently and effectively. Proximity also expands the workforce shed allowing more citizens access to more employment opportunities.

Understanding the type of housing units, their age and value, and the tenure of the housing stock can provide valuable insight into a community and the demands that will face the community in the future. The assessment introduces the need to build smaller housing units to attract a younger demographic to the region while accommodating an aging populations need and desire for small housing units with less maintenance such as; condos, townhomes, and units incorporating universal design standards. Connecting people's homes to their places of work, schools, and shopping opportunities is a primary function of a transportation system. This report looks at the existing housing stock, factors that affect current residents and trends that are likely to determine the future of housing in the Region.

The housing goal for the Regional Livability Plan is: Promote a variety of safe and affordable housing options that meet the needs of all community members. The housing goal includes 3 objectives and 20 recommendations

Wisconsin State Consolidated Housing Plan

The Consolidated Housing Plan is required by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) in the application process required of the State in accessing formula program funds of Small Cities Community Development Block Grants (CDBG), HOME Investment Partnerships, Emergency Shelter Grants, and Housing Opportunities for Persons with HIV/AIDS. "The Consolidated Plan provides the framework for a planning process used by States and localities to identify housing, homeless, community, and economic development needs and resources, and to tailor a strategic plan for meeting those needs." This is how the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) describes the Consolidated Plan, which consists of a 5-year strategic plan, annual action plans, and annual performance reports. The Plan must be updated annually.

The Consolidated Plan, in assessing housing needs, looks at a number of different factors that are significant components of the housing picture. Housing affordability is a primary consideration. According to federal guidelines a family should not have to spend more than thirty percent of its income on housing. Using this standard "…households in the low-income range have great difficulty finding adequate housing within their means and that accommodates their needs…"

Inventory & Trends

Existing Housing Stock

In 2013, the City of Merrill contained a total of 4,741 housing units, compared to 4,045 in 1990 and 4,397 in 2000 as listed in **Table 11**. The City added 696 housing units between 1990 and 2013, which represents an increase of about 17.2 percent. The State and County increased housing units by 27.7 percent and 26.3 percent respectively over that same period. The surrounding towns grew at even higher percentages. Taken together, the three towns added a total of 839 housing units, a 41.4 percent growth over the 23 year period.

About 7.8 percent of all housing units in the City were built after 2000. **Table 12** lists about 9.8 percent of the housing units were built in the previous decade from 1990 to 1999. The most were constructed prior to 1939, when about 33.5 percent of all housing units were built. Overall, about 58 percent of the existing housing stock is at least 55 years old (built before 1960).

Table 11: Total Housing Units

Minor Civil Division	1990	2000	2010	2013	1990-2013 % Change	1990-2013 Net Change
City of Merrill	4,045	4,397	4,619	4,741	17.2%	696
Town of Merrill	1,037	1,210	1,355	1,385	33.6%	348
Town of Pine River	566	724	822	880	55.5%	314
Town of Scott	423	488	572	600	41.8%	177
Lincoln County	13,256	14,681	16,784	16,743	26.3%	3,487
State of Wisconsin	2,055,774	2,321,144	2,624,358	2,626,142	27.7%	570,368

Source: U.S. Census

Table 12: Year Structure Built, 2013

Year	Merrill	Merrill %	Lincoln Co. %	Wisconsin %
2010 or later	30	0.6%	0.6%	0.4%
2000 to 2009	339	7.2%	12.0%	12.9%
1990 to 1999	466	9.8%	15.7%	14.0%
1980 to 1989	316	6.7%	10.8%	9.8%
1970 to 1979	575	12.1%	15.9%	14.9%
1960 to 1969	262	5.5%	7.7%	9.8%
1950 to 1959	732	15.4%	10.1%	11.3%
1940 to 1949	431	9.1%	7.3%	6.0%
1939 or earlier	1,590	33.5%	19.9%	20.9%

Source: U.S. Census

Housing Issues

Affordability. The affordability of housing, both to rent and to own, is a key component of livability. In 2013, 19.1 percent of Merrill households reported incomes below $15,000 per year, and about 31.5 percent of city households have incomes below $25,000. Roughly 16.4 percent of all city residents were living in poverty in 2013. For many of these people this poses a difficulty in paying for decent, safe, and sanitary housing. When a household pays more than 30 percent its income on housing costs, it is considered to be house burdened. Burdened households have less income to spend on other essentials, such as transportation and groceries. Roughly 20.3 percent of homeowners were house burdened, while 46.4 percent of renters were house burdened in 2013.

Although, housing prices rose across Lincoln County, they rose faster in the surrounding towns. The median home value rose by 125.5 percent in Merrill from 1990 to 2013. However, the median value of a home in Merrill is almost half the median home value in the towns of Merrill, Pine River, and Scott. The median gross rent in the City of Merrill also increased 103.5 percent between 1990 and 2013. On average, renters pay $296 more per month in 2013 than they did in 1990.

Appearance & Maintenance. The condition of housing stock is important to examine as part of the needs assessment of the city. Broken concrete driveways, shifting porches, siding in poor repair all show to various extents how well maintained the housing is within a community. Analyzing which housing units need rehabilitation and which units are beyond repair will show how much effort is needed by individuals and by government to promote restoration of such units.

Sometimes the age of homes is used as a measure of condition, but many older homes may have been remodeled and kept in good repair. Over 58 percent of the housing units in the City of Merrill were constructed prior to 1960. Age alone is not a good measure of housing condition. Combining housing age and assessed value for individual units may indicate a percentage of older homes that have not been maintained.

A community may want to do a visual assessment of housing conditions. Windshield Surveys entail a person driving or walking through the community and evaluating each housing unit based upon visual appearance. The advantages of using a Windshield Survey are that it does not intrude upon the occupant and is relatively quick and inexpensive.

Elderly/Retiree Housing Needs. Persons over the age of 65 decreased 10.8 percent in the City of Merrill between 2000 and 2013. The surrounding Towns, especially Merrill (48.8%) and Pine River (51.5%), all experienced an increase in this demographic. Lincoln County and the State of Wisconsin also experienced considerable increases in people over the age of 65 during this time period.

It can become a challenge to perform the basic tasks of maintaining a household as people age. The use of "Universal Design" can help accommodate the needs of an older population, allowing them to age in place. "Aging in place" is the phrase used to describe how a person is able to remain in their home as they age. "Universal Design" involves designing products and spaces for use by the widest range of people possible.

Housing options located in proximity to the downtown area provides easy access to key amenities. National trends indicate that the Baby Boomer generation is interested in smaller homes in closer proximity to the central business district, or downtown, of a community. Multifamily housing options featuring universal design marketed towards this generation will help accommodate those over the age of 65 and allow them to continue to live in the City well beyond their working years.

Subsidized/Special-needs Housing. In 2010, the City of Merrill's federally assisted affordable rental housing stock included 220 subsidized housing units; this is one unit for every forty four people. In 2010, 77 units were financed through the Low Income Housing Tax Credit program (LIHTC), 140 through the Section 8 program, 40 through the RD 515 program, and 102 through public housing. In Merrill, there are four affordable housing properties and scattered sites providing rental assistance; Jenny Towers, Park Place, Westgate Apartments, and Woodbines Apartments. Jenny Towers is the largest housing property assisting 110 units through Section 8 and eight units through the RD 515 program.

The City of Merrill Housing Authority provides affordable housing for qualified low income individuals and families. The Housing Authority manages the City's four properties and reviews all applications. Westgate Apartments, Woodbine Apartments and scattered sites require at least one child under the age of 18 residing in the household more than 50 percent of the time and do not work with Section 8 vouchers.

As a comparison, housing in Lincoln County has been built more evenly over the decades. About 12.6 percent of housing units were constructed after 2000. The decades of the 70's, 80's, and 90's saw the building of about 11 to 16 percent in each decade of existing housing stock. The remaining 37.3 percent of housing was built before 1960, 20.7 percentage points less than the City of Merrill.

Lower taxes and land value in the surrounding towns have attracted new home development. Many people who work in Merrill who are interested in building a home choose the neighboring towns due to these reduced costs. Easy accessibility and access to the City of Merrill from the surrounding townships makes this possible. With an older and lower valued housing stock, new home owners are unable to maximize their housing value in the City and therefore elect to build in the surrounding towns.

Table 13 shows that single-family detached units dominate about two-thirds of all housing unit types in Merrill, as in the state and to a greater degree the county. Duplexes and 4-unit or fewer multi-family buildings represent about 12.6 percent of all housing in the city. The number of units in buildings with two to four units decreased 6.2 percentage points over the past 13 years. Meanwhile larger buildings of 10 or more units increased the total number of units in such buildings from 383 units in 2000 to 667 units in 2013, accounting for over 14 percent of the housing stock. Over 33 percent of the housing units in the City of Merrill are multifamily housing. A number of the larger 1-unit detached and attached homes have been modified into multifamily units, especially in close proximity to the downtown area. This trend has decreased the number of 1 unit structures and has slightly increased the number of multi-unit structures in the City over the past 20 years.

Compared to the County, the City of Merrill has a high number of 10 or more unit structures, almost 10 percentage points more than the County. Lincoln County's housing stock is predominately one unit homes- detached, making up 79.3 percent of the housing stock. The percentage of housing stock in all other categories is less than Merrill. Only 12.6 percent of the housing units in the county are multifamily units.

Table 13: Type of Structure

	City of Merrill		City of Merrill Percentages		Lincoln County Percentages	Wisconsin Percentages
	2000	2013	2000	2013	2013	2013
1-unit detached	2,811	3,028	64%	63.9%	79.3%	66.5%
1-unit attached	42	26	1%	0.5%	0.5%	4.4%
2 to 4 units	827	599	19%	12.6%	5.5%	10.4%
5 to 9 units	161	300	4%	6.3%	2.4%	4.9%
10 or more units	383	667	9%	14.1%	4.7%	10.0%
Mobile home, trailer, or other	174	121	4%	2.6%	7.6%	3.7%

Source: U.S. Census

Single family residential buildings.

Multifamily Residential building.

Table 14: Median Value for Specified Owner-Occupied Housing Units

Minor Civil Division	1990	2000	2013	1990-2013 % Change	1990-2013 Net Change
City of Merrill	$38,400	$76,100	$86,600	125.5%	$48,200
Town of Merrill	$54,400	$101,100	$154,300	183.6%	$99,900
Town of Pine River	$49,800	$103,600	$163,500	228.3%	$113,700
Town of Scott	$46,700	$98,100	$154,000	229.8%	$107,300
Lincoln County	$42,700	$86,500	$129,100	202.3%	$86,400
State of Wisconsin	$62,100	$112,200	$167,100	169.1%	$105,000

Source: U.S. Census

Table 15: Median Gross Rent

Minor Civil Division	1990	2000	2013	1990-2013 % Change	1990-2013 Net Change
City of Merrill	$286	$430	$582	103.5%	$296
Town of Merrill	$320	$468	$517	61.6%	$197
Town of Pine River	$352	$456	$685	94.6%	$333
Town of Scott	$358	$469	$671	87.4%	$313
Lincoln County	$297	$433	$600	102.0%	$303
State of Wisconsin	$399	$540	$759	90.2%	$360

Source: U.S. Census

The City of Merrill's housing stock is in line with the State of Wisconsin. Over 25 percent of the housing stock in the State is multifamily and single family-detached units make up 66.5 percent of the housing stock.

National trends indicate that multifamily housing options near key amenities and activities are attractive to millennials and retirees. The ability to easily walk to healthcare offices, restaurants, grocery centers, and other services fits the lifestyle of a wide variety of people.

Value Characteristics

Median values of single-family houses, and duplexes in the City of Merrill were $86,600 in 2010, an increase of roughly $10,000 from 2000, see **Table 14**. Surrounding towns, the county, and state all had median housing values over $150,000 in 2010 and experienced an increase in value of at least $42,600 over the thirteen year period. Between 1990 and 2013, the median value of housing units increased 125.5 percent, drastically lower than the surrounding towns, county, and state. During the same time period, the county's home values increased 202.3 percent and the state increased 169.1 percent. The Town of Scott experienced the highest increase (229.8%) and the Town of Pine River has the highest net change ($113,700) over the 23 year period. Median home value in the City of Merrill has historically been lower than the surrounding towns, county, and the state, and although it has increased in value, the value is increasing at a considerably slower pace.

Median gross rents throughout Lincoln County from 1990 to 2013 were lower than the state as a whole, see **Table 15**. Median rent in the City of Merrill increased 103.5 percent from $286 a month in1990 to $582 a month in 2013. In 2013, median gross rent in the City of Merrill was roughly $100 a month lower than the surrounding towns of Pine River and Scott, $18 a month lower than the county, and $177 lower than the state. The Town of Merrill has the lowest 2013 median gross rent at $517 a month. Over the past 13 years, rent in the City of Merrill increased $152 a month. Only the Town of Merrill had a lower net income increase at $49 more per month.

Table 16 Percent of Total Households that Spent 30% or more of Household Income on Housing, 2013

	Owners in 2013	Renters in 2013
City of Merrill	20%	46%
Lincoln County	23%	42%
Wisconsin	27%	46%

Source: U.S. Census

The most commonly applied standard for housing affordability is spending no more than thirty percent of income on housing. **Table 16** shows that as of the year 2013 in the City of Merrill 20 percent of households spend more than 30 percent of their household income on housing, while throughout the county about 23 percent of households spent more than 30 percent of their household income on housing, and 27 percent of households statewide did the same. A much higher percentage of renters spend more than 30 percent of their income on rent compared to home

owners. In the City of Merrill, over 46 percent of renters spend greater than 30 percent of their income on housing, compared to 20 percent of home owners.

Occupancy Characteristics

The percentage of housing units that are owner occupied decreased 6 percentage points between 2000 and 2013. Roughly 59 percent of occupied housing units in the City of Merrill were owner occupied in 2013, down from 65 percent in 2000, see **Table 17**. After increasing the number of owner occupied units between 1990 and 2000, the City experienced a decrease of 154 owner occupied units between 2000 and 2013. In comparison, the surrounding towns, county, and state all increased the total number of owner occupied units between 1990 and 2013 at the same rate, or faster than the increase in total housing units. The percentage of housing units that were owner occupied in Lincoln County (77%) and the State (68%) has remained the same since 2000.

Roughly 41 percent of all occupied housing units in the City of Merrill were renter occupied in 2013, up from 34 percent in 2000, see **Table 18**. Overall, the City of Merrill increased the number of rental occupied housing units 35 percent over the 23 year period. Over the same time the county (23%) and the state (32%) held the number of housing units steady.

National trends show that renting is becoming more common, especially by young professionals between the ages of 20 and 29. Young professionals coming out of college are burdened with college loans, low paying entry jobs, and do not see home ownership as an investment due to the housing collapse during the 2000s. Many do not qualify for mortgage loans. Some young professionals also enjoy the flexibility of renting and the ability to move in a month's notice should a better employment opportunity present itself. The City of Merrill should continue to see an increase in rental demand as more Millennials enter the workforce.

Almost 100 percent of the housing units in the City of Merrill are year round residences. Only 0.5 percent of all housing units in the City of Merrill were seasonal units in 2010, up 0.2 percentage points from 1990. The Town of Scott (10 units) was the only municipality with fewer seasonal units than the City of Merrill (21 units) in 2010, see **Table 19**. In comparison, 7.5 percent of the State's 2.5 million housing units and 22.3 percent of the County's 16,743 housing units were seasonal units in 2010. The Town of Merrill had the most seasonal units (107) in 2010 and experienced the largest net increase since 1990, increasing 48 units, 81.4 percent

Demand Characteristics

Over the 23 year period, 1990 to 2013 the city's median age increased from 34.5 to 41.3 years old, see **Table 20**. During the same time period, the median age for the county climbed to 45.3 years old and the state's median age has gone up to 38.7 years of age. In comparison to the surrounding towns and county, the City of Merrill has the lowest median age.

Table 17: Owner Occupied Units

Minor Civil Division	1990	2000	2010	2013	1990-2013 % Change	1990-2013 Net Change
City of Merrill	2,602	2,732	2,575	2,578	-0.9%	-24
Town of Merrill	855	1,035	1,095	1,151	34.6%	296
Town of Pine River	459	601	688	755	64.5%	296
Town of Scott	345	417	483	514	49.0%	169
Lincoln County	7,751	9,162	9,318	9,646	24.4%	1895
State of Wisconsin	1,215,350	1,426,361	1,551,558	1,558,846	28.3%	343,496

Source: U.S. Census

Table 18: Renter Occupied Units

Minor Civil Division	1990	2000	2010	2013	1990-2013 % Change	1990-2013 Net Change
City of Merrill	1,317	1,451	1,600	1,777	34.9%	460
Town of Merrill	99	90	109	88	-11.1%	-11
Town of Pine River	60	72	66	52	-13.3%	-8
Town of Scott	54	41	54	64	18.5%	10
Lincoln County	2,408	2,559	2,776	2,867	19.1%	459
State of Wisconsin	606,768	658,183	728,210	729,486	20.2%	122,718

Source: U.S. Census

Table 19: Seasonal Units

Minor Civil Division	1990	2000	2013	1990-2013 % Change	1990-2013 Net Change
City of Merrill	12	19	21	75.0%	9
Town of Merrill	59	48	107	81.4%	48
Town of Pine River	25	26	37	48.0%	12
Town of Scott	14	9	10	-28.6%	-4
Lincoln County	2,521	1,949	3,736	48.2%	1,215
State of Wisconsin	150,601	142,313	193,046	28.2%	42,445

Source: U.S. Census

The median age in the City of Merrill is likely to increase over the next 15 year. In 2011, the first of the Baby Boomers reached what used to be known as the retirement age of 65. It is estimated that there are over 77 million Baby Boomers in the United States comprising 20 percent of the nation's population. And for the next 18 years, Baby Boomers will be turning 65 at a rate of about 10,000 a day. As a result, over 20 percent of the nation's population will be over the age of 65 in 2029. In addition, with the advancement in medical technology and care, people are living longer lives which will contribute to the increase in the median age of communities.

The demand of an additional 696 housing units between 1990 and 2013 is likely due to the increase in total households over the time period. Total households increased by 822 over the 23 year period, see **Table 21**. The 21.0 percent growth in households is 3.8 percentage points higher than the increase in housing units. The net increase in households in the City of Merrill was more than double the increase in the surrounding towns. However, the surrounding towns all increased households at a higher rate. The Town of Pine River experienced the highest rate of growth at 69.6 percent. The City of Merrill is the only municipality that increased households over the 23 year period at a slower rate than the state and county. As a result, the percentage of the county's households located in the City of Merrill decreased from 38.6 percent in 1990 to 28.3 percent in 2013. The decrease in the percentage of the county's households located in the City of Merrill indicates that the majority of growth the county is experiencing is taking place outside of the central City of Merrill.

The Wisconsin Department of Administration projects a 3.4 percent increase in households between 2015 and 2040 in the City of Merrill. Lincoln County is expected to increase households three times as fast over the same time period. Projections show that the City of Merrill will have a total

Table 20: Median Age

Minor Civil Division	1990	2000	2010	2013	1990-2013 % Change	1990-2013 Net Change
City of Merrill	34.5	37.3	40.4	41.3	19.7%	6.8
Town of Merrill	32.8	38.7	45.5	46.7	42.4%	13.9
Town of Pine River	31.8	37.0	46.0	46.6	46.5%	14.8
Town of Scott	32.5	37.3	42.6	42.1	29.5%	9.6
Lincoln County	34.9	38.9	44.7	45.3	29.8%	10.4
State of Wisconsin	32.9	36.0	38.5	38.7	17.6%	5.8

Source: U.S. Census

Table 21: Total Households

Minor Civil Division	1990	2000	2010	2013	1990-2013 % Change	1990-2013 Net Change
City of Merrill	3,919	4,183	4,175	4,741	822	21.0%
Town of Merrill	954	1,125	1,204	1,385	431	45.2%
Town of Pine River	519	673	754	880	361	69.6%
Town of Scott	399	458	537	578	179	44.9%
Lincoln County	10,159	11,721	12,094	16,743	6584	64.8%
State of Wisconsin	1,822,118	2,084,544	2,279,768	2,626,142	804024	44.1%

Source: U.S. Census

Table 22: Household Projections

Minor Civil Division	2015	2020	2025	2030	2035	2040
City of Merrill	4,180	4,321	4,472	4,566	4,527	4,324
Town of Merrill	1,217	1,285	1,360	1,418	1,439	1,408
Town of Pine River	766	813	862	907	925	911
Town of Scott	551	597	646	690	715	714
Lincoln County	12,329	12,922	13,557	14,046	14,126	13,693
State of Wisconsin	2,371,815	2,491,982	2,600,538	2,697,884	2,764,498	2,790,322

Source: WI DOA

of 4,324 households in 2040, 144 more households than in 2015. WI DOA projections indicate the City's population will decrease 355 people over the same time period, a 3.8 percent decline, see **Table22**. These projections support the trend of a decrease in average household sizes due to fewer people living within the same household. All municipalities, the County, and the State project a larger increase in households than population over the next 25 years.

The decrease in population aged 17 and under in Merrill, partially due to the transition to the 18 and over cohort during the decade, has a direct impact on the increase in households. The increase in total households combined with a decrease in population indicates that the sizes of households are decreasing. The City of Merrill declined persons per household by .18 persons between 1990 and 2013, see **Table 23**. Over the 23 year period, the City of Merrill has had a smaller average household size than the County, State, and the surrounding towns. In 2013, the City of Merrill had an average household size of 2.28, roughly 0.05 less than the County and 0.27 less than the State.

The City of Merrill is projected to decrease their average household size an additional 0.17 over the next 25 years, see **Table 24**. The projected median household size in the City of Merrill in 2040 is 2.01. Lincoln County is also projected to decrease median household size over the 25 year period, decreasing from 2.26 in 2015 to 2.08 in 2040. A variety of national trends help explain the projected decrease in average household sizes. Roughly 20 percent of the nation's population is turning 65 over the next 19 years. The children of this generation are reaching adulthood and are moving out into their own homes. What was a household of four people is now split into two, possibly three households with 2 or fewer people per household. The children of Baby Boomers, many of which are Millennials, are the largest living generation in terms of population. Much of this generation has not yet reached the point in their lives where they are

Table 23: Average Household Size

Minor Civil Division	1990	2000	2010	2013	1990-2013 Net Change
City of Merrill	2.46	2.34	2.25	2.28	-0.18
Town of Merrill	2.85	2.65	2.47	2.45	-0.40
Town of Pine River	2.99	2.79	2.48	2.43	-0.56
Town of Scott	3.03	2.81	2.67	2.57	-0.46
Lincoln County	2.60	2.46	2.33	2.32	-0.28
State of Wisconsin	2.61	2.50	2.43	2.55	-0.06

Source: U.S. Census

Table 24: Average Household Size Projections

Minor Civil Division	2015	2020	2025	2030	2035	2040
City of Merrill	2.18	2.14	2.10	2.07	2.03	2.01
Town of Merrill	2.40	2.34	2.30	2.26	2.23	2.20
Town of Pine River	2.40	2.35	2.31	2.27	2.24	2.21
Town of Scott	2.59	2.53	2.48	2.44	2.41	2.37
Lincoln County	2.26	2.21	2.17	2.14	2.11	2.08
State of Wisconsin	2.38	2.35	2.32	2.30	2.28	2.26

Source: WI DOA

Table 25: Population Projections

Minor Civil Division	2015	2020	2025	2030	2035	2040
City of Merrill	9,345	9,460	9,625	9,690	9,500	8,990
Town of Merrill	2,920	3,015	3,135	3,215	3,215	3,105
Town of Pine River	1,840	1,910	1,990	2,060	2,070	2,010
Town of Scott	1,425	1,510	1,605	1,685	1,720	1,695
Lincoln County	28,415	29,170	30,100	30,750	30,580	29,355
State of Wisconsin	5,783,015	6,005,080	6,203,850	6,375,910	6,476,270	6,491,635

Source: WI DOA

starting families and having children, and trends show that more people are choosing to start families in their late 30's and early 40's. The delay in starting families and having children will continue to drive the average household size to 2 people per household in the future. This trend also helps explain the increase in median age.

The Wisconsin Department of Administration (DOA) prepares population projections for the state and local units. Based on DOA projections, see **Table 25**, Merrill will lose 355 residents from the year 2015 to 2040, a decline of 3.8 percent. During the same time period the county is projected to gain over 940 new residents, an increase of 3.3 percent. Surrounding towns are projected to gain about 545 residents through the year 2025 but start declining after 2035, following Merrill. Growth in the City of Merrill and Lincoln County are significantly lower than the projected growth in the State. The State of Wisconsin is projected to increase its population by 708,620 people, an increase of 12.3 percent. Only the Town of Scott (18.9%) is projected to increase population at a higher rate than the state. Based on household projections prepared by the Wisconsin DOA, the City of Merrill will grow by roughly 145 households between 2015 and 2040. In 2013 the City had approximately 4,741 housing units, so if it is assumed the number of vacant units remains constant, an additional 145 housing units will be needed.

The City of Merrill's zoning code should be evaluated to ensure the older housing can be improved to meet modern living requirements and preferences. This potentially includes reducing minimum lot sizes, setbacks, and yard requirements and allowing or encouraging more variety of housing types such as bungalow courts and attached single family homes. If zoning prevents existing lots from being redeveloped or homes improved, it can incentivize disinvestment in properties and increase blight. Many people prefer to live in traditional neighborhoods like the City of Merrill's established areas, but also want modern housing amenities.

A variety of housing related programs are available in Appendix B.

Goals, Objectives & Policies

The following Goals, Objectives, and Policies will help guide the City of Merrill to ensure housing to all people within the planning area.

Goal 1: Supply an affordable mixture of housing options that meet the needs of all community members.

Objective 1: Decrease the percentage of renters spending greater than 30 percent of household income.

Objective 2: Decrease the percent growth of median rent to State levels.

Objective 3: Increase the percentage of multifamily (2 or more units) and attached single-family housing units.

Objective 4: Increase the percentage of housing options that accommodate low/moderate income people, disabled, and physically limited citizens.

Policy 1: Work with developers to provide mixed-income, market rate housing developments and a broad range of housing choices (apartments, townhomes, and condominiums).

Policy 2: Work with developers on funding mechanisms and programs to help make developments affordable and profitable.

Policy 3: Promote the construction of multifamily housing units, specifically close to the central business district.

Policy 4: Eliminate and redevelop blighted properties and units.

Policy 5: Develop a homestead program or low interest loan program to assist and encourage home owners improving their housing units in targeted areas.

Policy 6: Encourage "universal design" in all new units and modifications allowing a wide range of tenants and owners, especially near business districts and important services.

Policy 7: Promote "universal design" apartments near healthcare facilities and daily amenities.

Goal 2: Improve the housing stock, developing new housing that is in walking distance to food and entertainment options, to accommodate and attract new households.

Objective 1: Increase the percentage of renter occupied housing units with 2-3 bedrooms.

Objective 2: Identify target locations and develop a long range development plan for individual neighborhoods.

Objective 3: Develop assistance/improvement programs for low income homeowners to make property improvements.

Objective 4: Evaluate the zoning code in relation to its effect on older housing and the development/ redevelopment potential of existing lots.

Policy 1: Eliminate and redevelop distressed/blighted housing units and lots.

Policy 2: Promote the construction of smaller housing units and multifamily units in close proximity to the central business area.

Policy 3: Work with the County to acquire delinquent tax properties for redevelopment opportunities.

Policy 4: Create developer incentives to encourage multifamily housing options and new developments (e.g. reduced permit fees and review times, increased density and building height, etc.).

Policy 5: Develop a homestead program in targeted areas to promote investment in distressed neighborhoods.

Policy 6: Develop a neighborhood housing TIF in blighted areas incentivizing redevelopment.

Policy 7: Ensure all vacant lots conform to the city's building code.

Policy 8: Aggressively enforce building inspection violations, enforce repairs, and document repeat offenders.

Policy 9: Increase developable land by exploring and implementing annexation agreements where feasible.

Goal 3: Eliminate dilapidated and tax delinquent housing units, especially in downtown areas, maximizing property values.

Objective 1: Reduce tax delinquent properties in the City.

Objective 2: Reduce blighted residential property.

Objective 3: Increase median housing values to Lincoln County levels.

Policy 1: Aggressively market vacant lots for redevelopment or improve them for public benefit with features such as pocket parks or rain gardens to improve nearby property values.

Policy 2: Work with County to collect property taxes from all land owners and tighten up the foreclosure process on delinquent properties.

Policy 3: Create an aggressive redevelopment plan on non-paying/ delinquent properties.

Policy 4: Strictly enforce building codes and violations and ensure housing units are safe.

Policy 5: Continue to apply for CDBG grants for income eligible home owners wishing to repair homes.

Policy 6: Develop a neighborhood housing Tax Incremental Financing program in blighted areas incentivizing redevelopment.

Policy 7: Apply for grants to help purchase, redevelop, and fund residential property projects.

Single family residential home.

Chapter Four
Utilities and Community Facilities

This fourth chapter follows the same three-section format as previous chapters, starting with a background, followed by an inventory & trends, and finally the goals, objectives and policies section.

Utilities and community facilities, provided by either public or private entities, are critical for community development. Utilities include electrical service, natural gas, broadband/internet access, telephone, and cable communications. Community facilities include local governmental buildings, libraries, educational institutions, parks, maintenance and storage facilities, and services including police and fire protection, medical, municipal water and wastewater.

Previous Studies

A variety of plans were reviewed as they relate to utilities and community facilities. These plans provide a starting point for the planning process.

City of Merrill Comprehensive Plan, 2007

The 2007 Comprehensive Plan includes a Utilities and Community Facilities Chapter. The chapter focuses on issues ranging from water and public safety to parks and dams and levees. The chapter inventories the utilities and community facilities located in the City of Merrill. The chapter does not include a list of issues concerning utilities and community facilities. The utilities and community facilities goal identified in the 2007 comprehensive plan is "Promote an effective and efficient supply of utilities, facilities, and services that meet the needs and expectations of residents."

City of Merrill Sewer Service Area Plan, 1996-2016

The purpose of this plan is to develop a twenty-year sanitary sewer service boundary for the Merrill urban area. The urban sanitary sewer service area boundary identifies the geographic land area within which sanitary sewer service could be made available by the year 2016 through a cost-effective, environmentally acceptable manner. In addition to delineating an urban sewer service boundary, the Sewer Service Area Plan provides a framework for future planning at each individual municipal level. The goals and policies developed throughout this planning process will also be applicable and useful in the development of local policy direction with respect to land use decisions within these communities.

The SSA plan was amended in 2015 and should be updated. The Sewer Service Area Plan serves the following overall purposes:

1. It established the geographic boundaries for possible sanitary sewer service to the year 2016.
2. It provides a technical basis to anticipate future needs for wastewater collection and centralized treatment facilities for the palling area;
3. It establishes an institutional structure for reviewing boundary and plan amendments and for approving sewer extensions and expansions of sewage treatment plants;
4. It serves as a guide for community officials as they make land development decisions within their respective communities;
5. It identifies areas to be protected from development by designating them as environmentally sensitive areas. Such areas will control and direct the growth of communities in order to protect environmental, social, and economic concerns; and
6. The plan will become a component of the Wisconsin River Basin Water Quality Management Plan.

City of Merrill Wellhead Protection Plan, 1996

This plan focuses on preventing contaminants from entering the area of land around the public water supply. It identifies well locations, surrounding land uses, and recharge areas. The plan also incorporates recharge direction of flow, potential contamination sources within ½ mile radii of each

well site, public education and conservation programs, and contains a management plan for addressing potential sources of contamination in the delineated well head protection areas.

All five of Merrill's municipal wells and two alternative well sites were incorporated. Two of the city's wells are on the far west side of the city, and the other three wells, as well as two potential sites, are located on the far east side of the city. According to the plan, the east side aquifer has untapped capacity for at least one more well.

The Composite Groundwater Recharge Area map is located in attachments.

City of Merrill Outdoor Recreation Plan, 2013-2018

In February of 2013, Merrill Parks and Recreation Commission contracted with University of Wisconsin-Extension and North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission to update their outdoor recreation plan. The plan includes a background of Merrill including existing land use, demographics, and economic development in relation to outdoor recreation. The plan also identifies all existing trails, parks, conservancy areas, and services in the City and identifies on-going and future outdoor recreation projects. The plan ultimately identifies a number of recommendations and capital improvements to achieve 7 goals created by key community stakeholders.

Lincoln County Comprehensive Plan, 2012-2021

The plan covers utilities and community facilities development in both the inventory and plan recommendation sections. The County plan identifies all municipal facilities and services in the City of Merrill, City of Tomahawk, and briefly identifies the facilities and services in the Towns of Corning, Russell, and Pine River. The County Comprehensive Plan also discusses County owned Facilities and Services including: Courthouse and Administrative Buildings, Fairgrounds (since sold to the City of Merrill), Law Enforcement, Library Service, Medical Facilities, Post Offices, and Park and Recreation facilities. The County plan specifically lists the goals and objectives in the City of Merrill Comprehensive Plan for both Utilities and Community Facilities and the Fire and Police Departments.

Lincoln County All Hazard Mitigation Plan, 2012

This plan's primary purpose is to identify how to prevent injury and property damage from natural hazards. Understanding how the natural environment works is a first step in mitigating natural disasters. The plan shows how the natural environment and the built environment are in conflict, and how to mitigate that conflict (e.g. Development in a floodplain is at risk of damage caused by flooding). Dam breaks and the low probability for occurring, but high damage potential are listed in the Mitigation Plan, along with floodplain damage possibilities in Merrill. Hazards covered in the plan include flooding, tornadoes, temperature extremes, wildfire, and others. The plan maintains County eligibility for federal mitigation grants.

Lincoln County Outdoor Recreation Plan, 2012-2016

This plan assesses the existing recreation system in Lincoln County, identifies recreation needs based on public input, reviews past plans for coordination, sets forth goals and objectives to be used as guidelines in formulating outdoor recreation improvements, and establishes recommendations for improving the recreation system over the five year period. Submission of the plan to the Wisconsin DNR establishes eligibility for the County and local units of government for a variety of Federal and State Aids.

10-Year Transmission System Assessment, 2015

This 2015 – 2025 report by American Transmission Company summarizes proposed additions and expansions to the electric transmission system to ensure electric system reliability. Lincoln County is one of 19 Counties that are included in zone 1 and is located in the northern portion. Key performance issues in the northern portion of the zone include voltage and thermal limitations. The most severe limitations occur during peak and off-peak periods. Peak electricity demand typically occurs during the summer months. There are currently no transmission projects occurring in the Merrill or Lincoln County area.

Council Grounds

Inventory & Trends

Utilities and community facilities provided by the City of Merrill or by other public or private entities are inventoried and evaluated as to their present condition and adequacy to meet the current and future needs of the City. Many of the major facilities are identified on **Map 3**, the Utilities or Community Facilities Map.

Water

Drinking Water

The City's water system consists of wells, storage, treatment, and distribution facilities.

Water Supply

The water is supplied by 5 groundwater wells. The City of Merrill has a wellhead protection plan in place to prevent contamination of the water supply.

Storage

The city has 2 water towers that provide 400,000 gallons of storage. They are located at 4th & East Streets and at Champagne & Taylor Streets.

Treatment

Chemicals are added into the distribution system at each well. Caustic soda is added for pH control, Hydrofluosilicic acid is Fluoride, poly-orthophosphate is added to sequester iron and control concentrations of manganese, lead & copper. The treatment facility was upgraded in 2012 to better remove manganese.

Distribution System

The City's water distribution system serves most of the City. The City has approximately 575 fire hydrants. The Merrill Water Utility policy is to upgrade water mains in conjunction with street construction projects.

Merrill Water Tower.

Waste Water

The City of Merrill Wastewater Treatment Plant is located at 605 Sturdevant St was last upgraded in 1992. The plant has an average design flow of 1.10 million gallons per day (MGD) and a maximum capacity of 3.06 MGD. During a typical year, the plant has an average flow of about 1.10 MGD.

Most of the City is currently served by a sanitary sewer collection system, shown on the Sanitary Sewer Map. Most of the system is comprised of eight-inch diameter clay pipes, which were constructed and laid over 50 years ago. Newer subdivision areas within the City have sewers made of PVC plastic. Pipes are upgraded with road reconstructions.

Storm Water

The majority of Merrill is currently served by the City's concrete pipe storm sewer system. The City of Merrill is a member of the North Central Wisconsin Stormwater Coalition. The coalition is working to address stormwater issues in North Central Wisconsin. Stormwater is water that accumulates on land as a result of storms and can include runoff from urban areas such as roads and roofs.

Public Works

Street Department

The City's street department garage is located at 315 E 1st Street, houses the vehicles and equipment to perform the maintenance of the local road system, storm sewers and waste & recycling removal. The local road network is discussed in the transportation chapter.

Solid Waste and Recycling Facility

The City of Merrill operates a weekly curbside pick-up of solid waste, recycling, and yard-waste for both business and residents. Waste is collected and shipped to a processor. Unlimited amounts of recyclables are accepted from all households and all businesses. Garbage pick-up is limited based on the intensity of the land use. Private waste haulers are also available for larger waste disposal needs. Large pickups are arranged on a case-by-case basis.

The City of Merrill has a single stream recycling system. Residents and businesses can place all recyclable items together in a single stream container. Acceptable items include: aluminum, glass, plastics, scrap metal, tin and steel cans, and all paper products.

Yard waste is composted and sold to the public for their use. Grass, leaves/needles, tree trimmings and brush under ¾ inch diameter are the types of yard waste accepted.

Public Safety

Police Department

Three departments provide police protection in the City.

The Merrill Police Department Administration consists of the Chief of Police, Captain, Administrative Assistant, and two Clerk/ Transcriptionists. The Merrill Police Department is a full time around the clock service. It is located in City Hall.

Merrill, along with the rest of the County, is served by enhanced 911 emergency response system that is operated by the County. As of January 1, 2006 all 911 cellular calls are located within 50 to 300 meters from the actual location. The police department's jurisdiction includes the City of Merrill, and through a mutual aid agreement, the surrounding towns of Merrill, Pine River, and Scott.

The Lincoln County Sheriff's Department, located in Merrill, provides service to all the towns and the cities in Lincoln County. The department also staffs the 911 dispatch center. The Lincoln County Jail is located in Merrill.

The Wisconsin State Patrol, located in Wausau, has statewide jurisdiction on all public roads but operates mainly on State and U.S. highways as a matter of general practice to enforce traffic and criminal laws, & help motorists in need. They also help local law enforcement by reconstructing traffic accidents; inspecting trucks, school buses and ambulances; and helping local agencies with natural disasters and civil disturbances.

Merrill Police K-9 Unit.

Fire Department / Emergency Medical Services

The fire departments of Merrill, Corning, & Pine River provide fire protection to the greater Merrill area. Emergency Medical Services (EMS) is provided to the southern half of Lincoln County by the Merrill Fire Department at level: EMT-Paramedic, the highest level possible. As of February 2006, Paramedic coverage was expanded to 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

City of Merrill

The City maintains one fire station. The station is located at 110 Pier Street Merrill, WI. The fire department has full-time cross trained Firefighter/Paramedics. This flexibility is paramount for the Fire Department staff to handle all fire rescue and medical emergencies within the coverage area.

The department covers all fire and rescue emergencies for the City of Merrill, along with the Towns of Merrill, Scott, and Rock Falls. The department provides full time ambulance service protection to the southern half of Lincoln County, which includes the City of Merrill and the surrounding 9 Towns.

A variety of equipment is used by the department for land and water based emergency response and rescue operations. The department is equipped to handle some hazmat and spill containment operations, rural and urban fires, surface water rescues, wildfires, and forest rescues. Some equipment is jointly owned with other jurisdictions.

Merrill currently has an Insurance Services Offices (ISO) fire insurance rating of two (2) for everything within the fire district. ISO's fire protection insurance is rated on a scale of one to ten, with one representing the best protection and 10 representing an essentially unprotected community.

Volunteer fire departments exist in the Towns of Corning and Pine River.

Merrill Fire Department Station.

Town of Corning

The Town of Corning fire hall is located 6 miles west of Merrill. The department maintains a variety of equipment, including an engine and two tankers.

The Town of Corning has an ISO insurance rating of eight (8) for its fire protection service. The Department has mutual aid agreements with: the Towns of Hamburg, Maine, Taylor County Fire Association (Medford, Rib Lake) the City of Merrill, & the WDNR.

Town of Pine River

The Town of Pine River Volunteer Fire Department is located 5 miles east of Merrill on STH 64. The department maintains a variety of equipment for rural fires and wildfires.

The Town of Pine River has not been rated since its fire department was activated in January 1, 2006. The Department has mutual aid agreements with some adjoining towns and the WDNR.

Medical Facilities

Good Samaritan Hospital, affiliated with Ministry Health Care, is located at 601 South Center Avenue. The 73-bed, primary care facility has been part of the community since 1926. A wide variety of inpatient and out-patient services are provided; including Emergency, Intensive Care, Obstetrics, Surgery, Rehab Services, Outpatient Care, Extended Care, and Hospice.

Marshfield Clinic Merrill Center is located next to Good Samaritan Health Care Center. Merrill Center staff provides outreach to Good Samaritan Hospital and offers services in family practice, cardiology, diabetic education, endocrinology, general surgery, nutrition services, obstetrics and gynecology, oncology, urology, foreign travel counseling and urgent care.

Aspirus Merrill Clinic is located at 3333 E. Main Street within blocks of USH 51. Services include primary care, family practice, walk-in, oncology, laboratory, imaging services, and regular specialty care.

The City of Merrill also includes dental offices, eye care, chiropractors, sports/foot/rehabilitation, and drug abuse/ addiction care.

Nursing Home

Pine Crest Nursing Home, located at 2100 East Sixth Street, is a 180-bed skilled nursing facility owned by Lincoln County and in operation since the 1950's. The facility consists of two main nursing units and one 20-bed specialized care wing. Part of the building was constructed in 1976 with an addition being completed in 1993. They also have a hospice program administrated by Aspirus Wausau Hospital.

Pine Crest is primarily a geriatric facility and most of their residents are from Lincoln County. Less than 8% of their residents are under the age of 75 and more the 62% are over the age of 85. Slightly more the 92% of the residents require skilled nursing care and just less than 8% require intermediate nursing care. Pine Crest employs 180 full and part-time employees. The City of Merrill has one Nursing Home, two Group Homes, and three Assisted Living Facilities.

Good Samaritan Hospital.

Day Care Facilities

The most recent data from Wisconsin Department of Children and Families identifies there are 10 regulated day care facilities in the city.

Educational Facilities

Public Schools

The City and surrounding area is served by the Merrill Area School District. The district includes a total of eight schools with a student population (2014-2015) of 3,363 students. The district employs approximately 366 staff members, including 227 professionally certified teachers. Of these 366 employees, 127 have received master's degrees and most have additional education credits. The average tenure in the Merrill School District is 12 years. Average class sizes are 13.72 students in elementary school, 13.97 in middle school and 16.22 in high school.

The eight public schools located in the Merrill area are:

- Bridges Virtual Academy K4-12
- Jefferson Elementary KG-5
- Kate Goodrich Elementary KG-5
- Pine River School Young Learners KG-5
- Washington Elementary KG-5
- Prairie River Middle School 6-8
- Merrill High School 9-12

Elementary enrollment (K-5) was 1,263, Middle School

Merrill High School.

enrollment was 563, and High School enrollment was 882. Enrollment in the Bridges Virtual Academy was 610 for 2015-2016.

Schools, Transportation and Health

The location of a school is very important for promoting the health of Merrill's children. In 1969, 41% of children lived within one mile of school, and 48% of children usually walked or bicycled to school. In 2009 31% of children lived within one mile of school, but only 13% usually walked or bicycled to school. As motor vehicle traffic increases, parents feel that it is unsafe for children to walk or bicycle, sustaining a cycle of increasing rates of driving to school. These trends have important implications for childhood obesity, academic performance, and long-term health. Research has shown children who get physical activity are more alert and perform better in school.

The US Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) conducted surveys to identify barriers for children walking to school, and 61.5% of parents identified with distance to school, and 30.4% identified traffic-related danger. Most of the schools in the Merrill School District are in highly walkable locations. In order to combat this it is vitally important for the City of Merrill to participate in any school location expansion, or closure decisions, as well as provide appropriate infrastructure to ensure safe walking and bicycling between residential areas and schools.

Parochial Schools

There are four parochial schools that serve the area:

- NTC Christian Academy (3K-12), located at N2519 CTH K in the Town of Merrill.
- St. Francis Xavier Grade School (4K-8), located at 1708 E 10th Street.
- St. John's Lutheran School (3K-8), located at 1104 E 3rd Street.
- Trinity Lutheran School (5K-8), located at 611 W Main Street.

The total combined enrollment in these schools is about 500 students.

Higher Education:

The City of Merrill is located in the Northcentral Technical College (NTC) District. The NTC Wausau campus is 15 miles from Merrill. NTC's Public Safety Center of Excellence is located in Merrill at 1603 Champagne Street. The 37 acre site is a comprehensive training complex serving both NTC program students and those seeking continuing education training. Training courses offered include law enforcement, emergency medical services, fire/rescue, emergency management, and general education.

The University of Wisconsin – Marathon County, a two-year college, is located 17 miles from Merrill in Wausau. There are also private institutions located in Wausau. UW - Stevens Point is about 50 miles to the south.

Parks

Merrill has been known as the "City of Parks" due to the numerous parks located in and near the city. The Merrill area park and recreation system consists of approximately 1,200 total acres of parkland and special use areas under the management of the City, County, and School District. The City owns about 1,110 of the 1,200 acres of parkland. The parks system includes a full range of developed facilities including community parks, neighborhood parks, mini-parks, dog parks, linear park, special use areas located throughout the City, a community forest wildlife area north of Council Grounds State Park, and Council Grounds State Park (500 acres of additional park land) just west of Merrill. Overall, 14 parks make up the park system.

One of the largest parks, the Merrill Area Recreation

Complex (MARC), is a 95 acre recreation complex. The complex includes 3 adult softball/ baseball fields, 4 youth softball/ baseball fields, 4 soccer fields, 2 sand volleyball courts, one outdoor hockey rink, a 1.2 mile walking trail, playground equipment, picnic shelter, and an outdoor concession building. The complex also includes the Smith Center and houses an indoor ice skating rink, a multi-purpose community room, a 17,000 foot convention area during non-ice months, and a concession kitchen. A two acre fenced dog park and an aquatic center were both recently added to the MARC.

A linear park, the River Bend Trail, was established by a partnership with the River District Development Foundation, which raised almost $1 million dollars to purchase and develop over 1.25 miles of old railroad corridor from Canadian National. Paving was completed in 2015. The trail features paved walking/biking/hiking trails, the renovated Nicklaus Bridge over the confluence of the Prairie and Wisconsin Rivers, scenic rest areas with benches, interpretative education panels, wayfinding signs, fishing and wildlife viewing opportunities, and access to the beautiful Wisconsin River that hasn't been possible for over 100 years.

All 16 area parks are shown on **Map 3**. Detailed information about the parks can be found in the City of Merrill Outdoor Recreation Plan, 2013-2018.

Energy

The electrical service in the City of Merrill is provided by the Wisconsin Public Service Corporation.

There are two dams located in Merrill on the Wisconsin River, both of which produce electrical power.

The Alexander Dam, located west of Council Grounds State Park, is owned by Wisconsin Public Service Corporation. Generation capacity is 4,200 kW, which serves a population of about 8,000 (based on average annual residential electrical use of 3 mwh per person).

The Merrill Dam, located two blocks west of Center St., is owned by Wisconsin Public Service Corporation. Generation capacity is 2,340 kW, and 2,036 people are served by this dam (based on average annual residential electrical use of 3 mwh per person).

Other electrical needs in Merrill are served by the electrical transmission system. Generating capacity comes from various sources throughout the American Transmission Company (ATC) network of Wisconsin and the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, and from other states that the network is connected to.

Natural gas service in the City of Merrill is provided by Wisconsin Public Service Corporation.

Bridge on the Riverbend Trail.

Telecommunications and Technology

The importance of technology and telecommunications for connecting people, businesses and government has grown more important in recent years, and is expected to continue into the future as the information economy and knowledge based jobs continue to grow. Technology has the potential to promote citizen involvement in the community and to increase social connectivity. Technology such as broadband internet access has become vital to businesses and employees alike for tasks such as seeking and applying for jobs, connecting with clients and customers, commerce, and improving the efficiency and cost of manufacturing products.

Technology has also brought about innovations that have the potential to change the urban environment and the services that are often provided within and by cities. Examples of these changes include what has become known as the sharing economy, driverless vehicles, and smartphones.

Telephone service in the City of Merrill is provided by Verizon/Frontier. This service features digital switches and is linked to a fiber optics & digital microwave network. The City has reserved some space on a tower at the public works facility for future City wireless communications.

Cable service is provided by Charter Communications.

Wired broadband Internet service is provided both by Charter Communications, which has advertised download speeds of between 100 Mbps and 1,000 Mbps, and Frontier Communications with advertised download speeds of between 3 Mbps and 10 Mbps.

Various cellular telecommunication service providers have coverage in the City and outlying area. Cellular communication and mobile internet are an increasingly important part of daily life and business, with nearly two-thirds of Americans owning a smartphone in 2014, and

nearly 19% of Americans relying on a smartphone for internet access. Seven percent of smartphone owners are "smartphone-dependent," meaning they do not have home broadband service and have limited alternatives for accessing the internet.

Dams & Levees

There are two dams and five levees located in Merrill on the Wisconsin River. No dam breaks have been identified within Lincoln County. Therefore, there is no historic frequency upon which to base a future probability, other than to say that the probability of a dam failure is very low. The Lincoln County All Hazard Mitigation Plan, 2012, provides greater detail about all natural hazards and dam failures.

Flood events in Lincoln County have caused substantial property and infrastructure damage in the past and have the potential to cause future damage since a significant number of structures still exist in the floodplain. Opening the Alexander Dam gates during a heavy rain so the dam does not fail could cause a flood event in the City of Merrill.

The five levees are located on the north bank of the Wisconsin River throughout the city. There is no levee failure inundation area for these levees. The WDNR has not classified these levees, which are listed as having 5-foot heights and no hazard rating was assigned.

It is unclear how well the earthen levees in Merrill will work in a flood event, because no mention of them existed in the year 2004 Emergency Action Plan for the Alexander Dam that includes the inundation area map.

The Alexander Dam, located west of Council Grounds State Park, is owned by Wisconsin Public Service Corporation. The WDNR has classified this dam as large (40 feet high) and assigned a high hazard rating, meaning that a failure would most probably result in the loss of life.

The Merrill Dam, located two blocks west of Center St., is owned by Wisconsin Public Service Corporation. There is no dam failure inundation area for this dam. The WDNR has classified this dam as large (20 feet high) and assigned a low hazard rating, meaning that a failure would result in only minimal property damage and the loss of life is unlikely.

Other Government Facilities

City Hall

Merrill City Hall is located at 1004 East First Street. City Hall contains the administrative offices of most city departments and the police station. Part of the west end of the building was constructed in 1926 for Church Mutual Insurance. The west end was added on to in 1950, and then the 2nd floor was added in 1954. The east end was added in 1963. The building became City Hall in 1978, and the police department was added in 1994.

Merrill City Hall.

T.B. Scott Library.

Library

The T.B. Scott Library is a member of the Wisconsin Valley Library Service (WVLS) and is also a member of V-Cat, a shared information system administered by WVLS that provides local library users with direct access to over one million items in the collections of the twenty-two system members. Additionally, access to library materials from throughout the state and nation is available via the statewide interlibrary loan network. The T. B. Scott Library earned the Wisconsin Library Association's Library of the Year award in 1977 and again in 2002, one of the few state libraries to achieve this honor.

The library was established with a bequest from Thomas B. Scott upon his death in October of 1886. The library is currently located at 106 West First Street, a building designed in the Prairie School architectural style that was funded by a grant from the Andrew Carnegie Foundation. A number of additions have increased the size of the facility to 27,000 square feet.

According to the 2014 annual report, the library's total circulation was roughly 224,955 materials. The library registered 135,236 visits, 16,876 computer users, and 16,172 Wi-Fi users in 2014. The library also has a 3D printer available for use at no charge. The library offers a full range of programs and services for youths and adults.

The library provides a valuable service to the community, improving self-education opportunities and life-long learning, as well as provided community space for children and adults to gather, hold events, and recreate. The library can also serve as an important business incubator through public internet access and technology such as the 3D printer.

Merrill Festival Grounds

In 2015, the City of Merrill acquired the fairgrounds from Lincoln County and renamed it the Festival Grounds. The property is 25 acres on the northeast side of Merrill. Located on the land are four main buildings, a grandstand and three restrooms. Other buildings are owned by a separate Fair Board or by various community organizations. Part of the purchase of the fairgrounds includes up to $1.2 million from the County for improvements. The $1.2 million comes from an insurance payment for the fairgrounds' grandstand after it was damaged in a storm and razed in 2012.

Other public buildings and facilities in the city include the County Courthouse and the County Senior Center.

Goal, Objectives, & Policies

Goal: Promote an effective and efficient supply of utilities, facilities and services that meet the needs and expectations of residents

Objective 1: Coordinate community facilities and utility systems development and use with land use, transportation, and natural resource planning.

Objective 2: Direct intensive land development to areas where a full array of utilities, community facilities, and public services are available.

Objective 3: Provide the appropriate level of community services and administrative facilities and practices, while striving for a low tax levy.

Objective 4: Protect public and environmental health through proper waste disposal.

Objective 5: Provide quality and accessible parks and recreational facilities, areas, and services for all residents, including persons with disabilities and the elderly.

Objective 6: Protect the lives, property, and rights of all residents through law enforcement and fire services.

Objective 7: Support high quality educational opportunities for all residents.

Objective 8: Provide public access to government information, and enable citizen participation through online discussions.

Objective 9: Promote access to affordable broadband service.

Policy 1: Encourage compact and well-planned urban development areas, so that community facilities and services (e.g., school bus routes, snow removal, police patrol) can be provided in a cost-effective manner.

Policy 2: Promote and continue joint service agreements as a means to consolidate and coordinate services among the City, County, and Towns to achieve better services and/or cost savings.

Policy 3: Promote long-range sanitary sewer system planning to accommodate projected growth and development.

Policy 4: Assure a high-quality and abundant supply of water.

Policy 5: Follow the recommendations of the City's Outdoor Recreation Plan and update that plan to correspond with the recommendations of this Plan.

Policy 6: Help coordinate and support local emergency services and facilities (e.g., police, fire, rescue/EMS) through adequate funding, training, facilities, and equipment.

Policy 7: Study long-term space needs for City administrative and departmental functions (e.g., jail, EMS, human services), and address facility needs based on further discussions. Maybe explore joint facilities with the County.

Policy 8: Support strategies for enhancing telecommunication capabilities.

Policy 9: Support recycling by residents to reduce solid waste disposal.

Policy 10: Encourage the provision of new and improved services and facilities geared to the elderly.

Policy 11: Coordinate with the school district for future facilities locations and land needs.

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Chapter Five
Transportation

This chapter is designed to guide the future development of the various modes of transportation, including automobiles, transit, active transportation (such as bicycling and walking), railroads, air transportation, and trucking. The transportation network exists to provide mobility and access to people, goods and services locally, regionally, and nationally, and is essential for commerce and recreation. However, it is important to recognize, plan for, and mitigate the negative impacts of the transportation system on people, adjacent land uses, and the environment. These impacts include noise and light pollution, localized air pollution, health problems, crashes, greenhouse gas emissions, and polluted storm water runoff, among other impacts.

Previous Studies

A variety of plans were reviewed as they relate to transportation in the Merrill area. These plans provide a starting point for the planning process.

City of Merrill Comprehensive Plan, 2007

This plan focuses extensively on both land use and transportation. The transportation section includes recommendations for the following:

- Inventory and trends of the transportation network;
- Street system characteristics, classifications, and traffic counts;
- A list of transportation issues;
- Recommended transportation system improvements.

Merrill Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan, 2015

The 2015 plan assessed the bikeability and walkability of the City of Merrill. An inventory of bicycling conditions and sidewalks, bicycle and pedestrian crashes with vehicles, and bicycle and pedestrian use areas are documented in the plan. Locations of potential bicycle routes and recommendations for roadway improvements were developed, along with safety programing recommendations.

State Highway 64/Pine Ridge Avenue Access Safety Study, 2013

This study analyzed proposed development along STH 64 near USH 51 and the traffic and safety impact potential of the proposed development. The study focused on the intersection of STH 64 and Pine Ridge Avenue but included the segment of STH 64 between Memorial Drive and the USH 51 interchange. The study also provided traffic forecasts with and without the proposed development. The study provided specific recommendations for road treatments for motorists, bicycles and pedestrians within the study area.

Lincoln County Comprehensive Plan, 2012

The transportation chapter of the Lincoln County Comprehensive Plan focuses on maintaining and developing the transportation system to keep Lincoln County attractive to businesses and residents. This chapter discusses roads, bicycle and pedestrian transportation, snowmobile and ATV use, public transportation, airports, and freight. This chapter also discusses the connection of land use to transportation.

Lincoln County Locally Developed, Coordinated Public Transit – Human Services Transportation Plan, 2014-2018

The purpose of this plan is to assess transit services focused on elderly and disabled users, identify gaps in service, create strategies to address the gaps, and prioritize the implementation of those strategies. The plan is designed to have broad input into the entire planning process and must be updated every five years. Some gaps identified include limited evening and weekend services, underserved employment needs, and a lack of rural and intercity services. Other issues identified include decreasing funding while ridership is increasing and accessibility issues.

Strategies to address these gaps include expanding coordination between agencies and providers, and developing an intercity pilot program between Merrill and Tomahawk.

North Central Wisconsin Regional Bicycle Facilities Network Plan, 2003

The North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (NCWRPC) created this plan to guide the development of bicycle facilities in north central Wisconsin. The vision of this plan is to increase the mobility of people within the Region by making bicycling a more viable and attractive transportation choice. The plan will strengthen the rural character of the County by connecting natural and cultural resource destinations and by connecting communities, which also will have positive economic development from tourism.

The plan contains route selections from the Lincoln scenic bike and auto tour that includes STH 107, which had good bicycle suitability, and STH 17, which was not so well suited to bicycling and should be a candidate for bicycling improvements, such as an expanded paved shoulder. This plan is currently being updated.

North Central Wisconsin Regional Livability Plan

The Regional Livability Plan addresses four components of a livable region. Goals related to transportation are:

- Goal 6: Provide and improve transportation access to people of all ages and abilities to ensure lifelong mobility and accessibility.
- Goal 7: Fund the maintenance and expansion of the transportation system.
- Goal 8: Enhance the regional economy by supporting airports and freight rail.

Connections 2030

Connections 2030 is a 25-year statewide multi-modal transportation plan that is policy-based. The policies are tied to "tiers" of potential financing levels. One set of policy recommendations will focus on priorities that can be accomplished under current funding levels. Another will identify policy priorities that can be achieved if funding levels increase. Finally, WisDOT also identifies identify critical priorities that we must maintain if funding were to decrease over the planning horizon of the plan.

State Trails Network Plan

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) created this plan in 2001, to identify a statewide network of trails and to provide guidance to the DNR for land acquisition and development. Many existing trails are developed and operated in partnership with counties. By agreement the DNR acquires the corridor and the county government(s) develop, operate, and maintain the trail.

Segment 18, from Tomahawk to Wisconsin Dells, would extend from the Bearskin/Hiawatha Trail, south through Merrill, ending in Wausau. There it would connect with another trail and extend further south to Wisconsin Dells.

Inventory & Trends

This section of the plan reviews local roads, bike & pedestrian trails, the airport, rail service, and transit. There is no water transportation service. These together form the transportation system within the city and connect the city to the larger state transportation system.

Transportation Issues

The Plan Commission identified a variety of issues related to transportation as listed below:

- The city is considering extending Pine Ridge Ave north to CTH G and south to Big Eddy Rd.
- The connectivity of safe, separated bicycle and pedestrian facilities needs improvement.
- Physical barriers such as rivers concentrate traffic at a few chokepoints throughout the City.
- There have been discussions of connecting Taylor Street to CTH G and Business USH 51 in the future to create a northern east – west corridor in the city.
- Hazardous materials are transported by truck and by rail through the city.
- Trains block traffic by the industrial district east of Center Ave. along the Wisconsin River.
- Snowmobile trails can be inconsistent from year to year and lack access to local businesses.
- A multi-use trail should connect Prairie River Park to Stange Park.
- There have been discussions of connecting Joe Snow Road, Golf Drive and Center Road to create a southern east – west corridor.
- Additional issues relate to aging infrastructure and the funding limitations, high-speed areas, overall flow of traffic, funding the transit system, and lack of intra-city transit service.
- An aging population will change the demands of the transportation system, especially as older adults are no longer able to drive and rely on proximity and transportation services for mobility.

Local Roads

Local roads (streets) create the primary transportation system. These roads allow people and goods to move within the city and provide connections to the county, state and federal road networks. **Map 4** shows the transportation network in Merrill.

The City of Merrill's principal arterials include STH 64, USH 51, and CTH K north of STH 64. STH 64 is the major east-west corridor in the city and is one of three roads in the city that crosses the Wisconsin River. Minor arterials in the City are STH 107 spanning from the Prairie River to the northwest border of the city, CTH G, CTH K south of STH 64, CTH Q south of STH 107, and parts of 9th St, 3rd St, Main St, Memorial Drive, and Taylor Street. Collectors are numerous and include Riverside Dr., O'Day St, Sales St, and parts of 6th, Mill, Parlor, Court, & Jackson Streets.

The City of Merrill road network consists of roughly 7.70 miles of state highways, 6.85 miles of county highways, and about 71.10 miles of local roads.

Annual average daily traffic counts (AADT) are measured and calculated by the Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT) for 23 areas in the city, see **Table 26**. Monitoring these counts provides a way to gauge how traffic volume is changing in Merrill. Congestion levels, pavement quality, bridge conditions, and safety are some considerations used by WisDOT to determine what state highways need improvements within existing funding levels.

Most of Merrill's local road network is a well-connected grid system, which makes navigation simpler and encourages alternative forms of transportation, such as bicycling and walking, through easy access and numerous alternatives to busy arterial streets. This system also provides more options for emergency service access, such as police and fire. While grid systems often have more road surface than other types of systems, their efficiency reduces the distance travelled and movements necessary, reducing wear and tear on the road system, and allow for narrower roads due to the availability of alternative routes to avoid congestion.

The City's road network is maintained by the Street Department. The City uses a five-year Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) to plan for short term future road projects. Road projects are prioritized based on a number of factors, which should include necessary utility repairs or maintenance, road surface condition, volume of traffic, and importance as a bicycle or pedestrian connection, and the need for safety improvements.

The Lincoln County Highway Department prepares its own roadway management plan that identifies projects on county highways. Annual road improvement plans are created and submitted to the County Board for approval.

Road Classification

Principal Arterials: serve interstate and interregional trips. These routes generally serve urban areas with 5,000 people or more.

Minor Arterials: accommodate interregional and county-to-county traffic, often in conjunction with principal arterials.

Major Collectors: provide service to moderate sized communities and other county-level traffic.

Minor Collectors: take traffic from local roads and provide links to all remaining portions of smaller communities and connect to other higher function roads listed above.

Local Roads: provide direct access to residential, commercial, and industrial developments.

WisDOT prepares six-year highway improvement programs by region that identify projects for Interstate highways, U.S. highways, and state highways.

Interchange Analysis

There are two interchanges that have major implications on the overall development of the city. These are both on Highway 51, one at State Highway 64 and the other at County Highway K.

Table 27 provides an overview of the interchange characteristics. Traffic counts, soil suitability for residential and commercial development, and existing land use are identified. The County Highway K interchange is still mostly undeveloped, and intense development exists on one-fourth of the available land near the Highway 64 interchange.

Road Diets

Road Diets can be inexpensive solutions to improve traffic flow and safety for motorists, bicycles and pedestrians on four-lane roads. Road diets have also been shown to reduce vehicle speeds on roads where speeds are a problem.

A road diet usually consists of restriping a four lane undivided arterial to three lanes, one travel lane in each direction and a center left turn lane. The space made available can often be used to stripe bicycle lanes or provide on street parking. It also allows the placement of median islands in the center left turn lane at crosswalks, decreasing crossing distance and enhancing safety for pedestrians, especially those with mobility challenges. Other configurations may be warranted based on the needs, available space and geometry of a specific road.

STH 64 and CTH K in Merrill are potential candidates for road diets. This is recommended in the Merrill Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan and the STH 64/ Pine Ridge Avenue Access

Table 26: Annual Average Daily Traffic at Recorded Sites in Merrill

Site	1974	1980	1983	1989	1995	1998	2001	2004	2007	2010	2013
1A	980	940	1080	1710	1500	2000	1900	1900	---	1700	---
2	1560	3270	3260	2420	3600	4700	5900	5000	3200	3500	3200
3B	3170	3300	3430	4110	5600	4600	5500	4200	2900	3500	3400
4	2210	1730	1800	3140	4000	4200	3600	2500	---	2100	---
5C	900	950	1140	1500	2400	2700	3700	2300	2100	2200	1900
6	1130	2650	3130	4010	6400	5400	4500	3800	---	3500	---
7	850	1420	1470	1500	2900	3400	2800	2900	3700	1900	1700
8	3920	---	---	---	3800	4600	4600	4900	6200	4600	3200
9	10750	10860	14130	12560	13400	10500	12800	12800	8400	9700	8000
10	210	380	690	1010	1900	2400	2000	2000	1900	1800	---
11	950	3430	3560	3150	5500	3800	5600	4100	3000	3500	2800
12	1040	2220	2450	2160	4000	5800	4200	3700	2100	2500	2000
13	720	1460	1090	1460	2600	2100	2100	2200	1400	1400	1100
14	210	1150	1620	1760	2400	2200	2500	2300	1600	1800	---
15D	7770	5980	5000	4870	5700	5800	5300	5300	4900	4900	5800
16	8060	7710	8150	8160	10100	8100	7700	6900	---	7600	6000
17	2800	2780	4060	4790	4400	5300	6700	4800	---	---	3800
18	7630	5590	7050	8820	10400	10200	10100	8000	9100	9200	7800
19	5530	10650	7770	11180	16600	19000	15500	11500	9800	13400	9400
20	1260	640	660	1160	1400	1400	940	1200	---	1200	---
21	680	---	1950	2940	4600	4500	5600	5500	4200	3800	3400
22	220	---	1240	1060	1600	1400	1600	1700	---	1600	---
23E	2100	5610	6030	---	11200	11400	9500	10200	---	---	8900

--- = No count available. Source: Wisconsin Highway Traffic Volume, WI DOA and NCWRPC

The Letter after the Site # designates that site as a community entrance.

Site 1A: STH 107, West Entrance to Merrill at Hillside Dr.
Site 2: STH 107,between Champagne and Superior Streets.
Site 3B: STHs 64/107 (Main St), West Entrance to Merrill between Foster and Eugene Streets.
Site 4: Foster St, just south of STHs 64/107 (Main St).
Site 5C: CTH Q, South Entrance between Spring Rd and Emmerich St.
Site 6: CTH Q (State St), between the Wisconsin River and STH 64/107 (Main St).
Site 7: State St, between Main St and Grand Ave.
Site 8: Grand Ave, just west of the Prairie River.
Site 9: E 1st St, just east of the Prairie River.
Site 10: Taylor St, just east of Airport Rd.
Site 11: Pier St, just north of E 9th St.
Site 12: Pier St, just south of E 9th St.
Site 13: E 9th St, just east of Pier St.
Site 14: E 9th St, just west of CTH K.
Site 15D: CTH K, North Entrance to Merrill north of the Prairie River.
Site 16: CTH K, just south of CTH G.
Site 17: CTH G, just east of CTH K.
Site 18: CTH K, just north of the Wisconsin River.
Site 19: Main St (STH 64), just west of Sales St.
Site 20: Sales St, just north of Main St. (STH 64).
Site 21: Memorial Dr, just north of Main St. (STH 64).
Site 22: Memorial Dr, just south of CTH G.
Site 23E: Main St (STH 64), East Entrance to Merrill just west of Pine Ridge Ave.

Table 27: Highway 51 Interchange Analysis

Interchange	CTH K	STH 64
Interchange Type	Diamond	Diamond
Transportation Access	Complete highway access. Bus. 51 starts here and travels south into Merrill.	Complete highway access. CTH W and STH 17 both are one block to the east.
Freeway Average Annual Daily Traffic Counts (AADT)	North of Interchange 2004 - 13,180 2007 - 11,200 2010 - 10,300 2013 - 11,100 South of Interchange 2004 - 13,100 2007 - 13,800 2010 - 10,600 2013 - 12,900	North of Interchange 2004 - 13,100 2007 - 13,800 2010 - 10,600 2013 - 12,900 South of Interchange 2004 - 18,200 2007 - 17,700 2010 - 15,700 2013 - 14,100
Hwy K or Hwy 64 Average Annual Daily Traffic Counts (AADT) 2004	Southwest of Interchange 2004 - 3,400 2007 - 3,400 2010 - 3,500 2013 - 3,700 Northeast of Interchange 2004 - 18,200 2007 - 17,700	West of Interchange 2004 - 10,200 2013 - 8,900 East of Interchange 2004 - 9,200 2007 - 7,700 2010 - 7,600 2013 - 7,700
NE area by interchange	Agricultural land with less than 10% trees.	Agricultural land with 50% covered by trees.
NW area by interchange	50% forested wetlands, 40% forestland with less than 10% of total cleared.	Fully developed with strip mall, single use commercial, former big box retail in use as office space, and large surface parking lot.
SE area by interchange	50% Forestland & 50% agricultural land. Some development that appears to be light industrial.	Agricultural land, no trees. Single fast food building
SW area by interchange	Agricultural land with less than 20% trees.	Big box retail.
Visibility from freeway	Ramps are raised to meet crossroad. Poor visibility of northwest area. Good visibility of all three other areas.	Ramps are raised to meet crossroad. Good visibility of all four areas.
Environmentally Sensitive Areas	Pesabic Lake just west of railroad tracks and interchange. Large forested wetland north of CTH K.	Nearest environmentally sensitive land is on the northeast corner of STH 64 and STH 17.
Soil Suitability for Dwelling w/ Basement	South & east of CTH K are somewhat limited by depth to water table zone 7 feet down. North and west of CTH K are very limited by depth to water table 7 feet down.	Most of the land south of STH 86 is very limited to development because of depth to water table 7 feet down. Most of the land to the north is slightly limited based upon depth to water table.
Soil Suitability for 2 Story Commercial Buildings	Steep slopes (6-35%) very much limit development on 40% of the land.	Most land around this interchange is suitable or slightly limited by depth to water table.
Development Opportunities & Limitations	The steep slopes may be cut down to fill in the lower spots to reduce the steep slopes that limit development.	

Source: NCWRPC, WI DOT

Safety Study. Research has shown that road diets do not decrease the Level of Service (LOS) of arterial roads, until peak traffic volumes exceed 1,750 vehicles per hour. They also showed that this can be mitigated through signal timing optimization. Recommendations for the upper limit of a road diet range from 15,000 to 23,000 vehicles per day (VPD). The highest counts in Merrill are 9,800 VPD on a segment of STH 64.

The following image shows an example of what a road diet on Highway 64 could look like, using rough measurements from an aerial photo on one section of the road. The width of the road has enough space for all modes of transportation, and the wide outside bicycle lanes also provide space for right turning traffic. Having a single travel lane in each direction with separate lanes for right and left turning traffic could improve traffic flow on Highway 64 compared to the current 4-lane configuration.

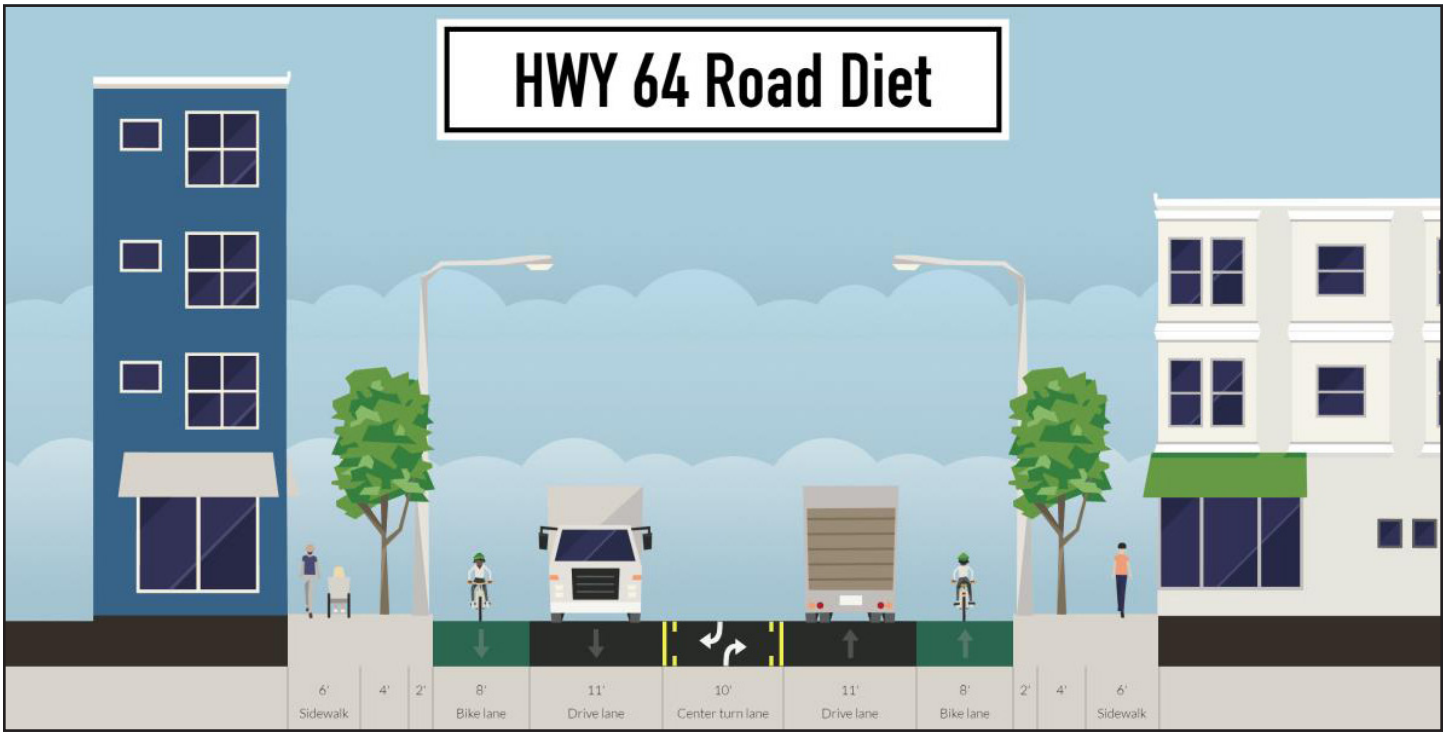
Signs for pedestrian safety downtown Merrill.

Bicycle & Pedestrian Transportation

Both bike and pedestrian facilities are important for the residents of the city. Many people rely on alternative transportation due to mobility challenges or the inability to purchase and maintain an automobile, while others choose alternative modes for health, convenience, environmental, or other personal reasons. Providing the appropriate infrastructure will help keep those with no alternative safe and convenient, while encouraging others that would like to bicycle or walk for transportation.

Bicycle facilities consist of a wide range of infrastructure ranging from low traffic neighborhood streets to separate multi-use paths, from bicycle sensitive traffic signals to traffic lights that simply detect stopped bicyclists. Facilities also include destination amenities such as secure bicycle parking, showers and lockers. Multi-use trails are often used for recreational activity but if planned correctly they can provide important transportation connections for work, shopping, and recreational trips.

Everyone is a pedestrian at some point in their trip, whether they are walking to their car, bus stop, or make the entire journey on foot. Pedestrian facilities are designed to improve the safety of pedestrians and reduce conflicts between the various road users. These include sidewalks, crosswalks, paved shoulders, traffic signals, street lighting, median islands, terraces, multi-use paths, and other treatments. These types of facilities are especially important for at-risk populations, including children, the elderly, and those with physical disabilities.



Source: Streetmix.net

All roads except USH 51 are available for bicycle travel. However, characteristics such as road design, travel speeds, bicycle facilities, amount of traffic, and amount of truck traffic influence whether bicyclists feel comfortable or safe on a road. While lower traffic levels make most local roads suitable for bicycling, arterial and collector roads are important to connect bicyclists to their destinations and to provide faster, more direct routes.

According to the Wisconsin Department of Transportation, very few of the arterial roads in Merrill are rated as suitable for bicyclists; most are rated either moderately suitable or undesirable. Five out of the six major bridges crossing the Wisconsin River and the Prairie River in Merrill are rated as moderately suitable or undesirable. STH 64 is rated as undesirable or moderate condition from USH 51 to California Street in the west. CTHs G and K are rated moderate condition or undesirable throughout the City. CTH Q is rated either best or moderate condition throughout the City. STH 107 has a small portion of moderate condition between State Street and Prospect Street, but the remainder heading northwest is rated as best condition.

These ratings indicate that major bicycle connections for using a bicycle for transportation in Merrill are missing which can make bicycling unsafe for those that have no alternative and undesirable for those who do have an alternative. Most of the bicycle and pedestrian crashes that occurred between 2005 and 2012 in Merrill occurred along arterials that are rated moderate or undesirable condition, with the majority occurring around STH 64.

The City of Merrill does not allow bicycles on sidewalks, unless bicyclists are in the learning stage or are closely supervised by an adult. However, in low density areas with few intersections or curb-cuts, sidewalks can provide an alternative to riding on busy arterial streets and connections to existing shared use paths. The City of Merrill should reevaluate the prohibition of riding on sidewalks in some areas of the City, and remove the prohibition where riding on the sidewalk does not present hazards related to turning motorists or pedestrians.

Bicycle parking and other destination amenities are important components of bicycle transportation infrastructure. Secure bicycle parking is a very important component of the bicycle transportation network and reduces concerns about bicycle theft, while other destination amenities such as showers and lockers can improve the convenience of bicycling.

Sidewalks make up the primary component of the pedestrian network. Sidewalks exist in most residential areas and throughout the downtown. Issues of most concern to pedestrians are missing sidewalk sections, broken or uneven sections, and unsafe intersections. Roads that do not have sidewalks may not provide areas to walk outside of the traffic lanes. These are less desirable for most pedestrians since there is no separation between moving vehicles and the pedestrian. Important improvements to the pedestrian network including providing adequate signal time to cross, high visibility yield signs (can include flashing signs, especially at midblock crossings), providing space to reduce crossing distances (including curb extensions and median islands), and using different paving material or height of pavement at the crosswalks. All roads except USH 51 are available for pedestrian travel.

The River Bend Trail is apaved walking/biking/hiking trail located along the Wisconsin River in Merrill's downtown. There rae scenic rest areas with benches, interpretive education panels, wayfinding signs, fishing and wildlife viewing opportunities, and access to the River.

The City of Merrill recently adopted the City of Merrill Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan 2015. The recommendations and action steps of the Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan should be implemented in concert with the comprehensive plan, therefore the City of Merrill Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan 2015 is considered to be part of this plan. The Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan also includes a bicycle suitability map.

Airport

Merrill has a general utility airport, which is located on the northwest side of the city. A general utility airport is intended to serve most small general aviation single and twin-engine aircraft with a maximum takeoff weight of 12,500 pounds or less. These aircraft typically seat from two to six people and are commonly used for business and some charter flying as well as a wide variety of activities including recreational flying, training, and crop dusting.

The Merrill Municipal Airport (RRL) has two asphalt runways, one is 5,100 feet and the other is 2,997 feet in length. Currently there are about 30 airplanes and 8 ultralights based at the airport. Aircraft operations average 51 per day between September 2013 and September 2014. This includes both takeoffs and landings. It is approximately 48% transient general aviation, 48% local general aviation, 4% air taxi and less than 1% military.

A new terminal was completed early in 2015 to support the growth of aviation in Merrill and to handle the global commerce needs of businesses in the region. Future projects include rehabilitating pavement in the hangar area, reconstructing the crosswind runway, possible taxiway constructions, and general aviation development area expansion.

The nearest commercial air service is the Rhinelander/ Oneida County Airport (RHI) in Rhinelander and the Central Wisconsin Airport (CWA) in Mosinee.

Also located in the city is a heliport. The Good Samaritan Health Center maintains an asphalt heliport in their parking lot.

Rail

Wisconsin Central Railroad, a subsidiary of Canadian National, has tracks that enter the City on the southeast side from Wausau, and exit on the north side heading toward Tomahawk. This branch extends to a mainline that connects to the Fox Cities, the Twin Cities, Duluth, and others such as Milwaukee and Chicago. The tracks follow the Wisconsin River and diverge where a spur is located at the confluence of the Prairie and Wisconsin Rivers. The tracks west of the spur are abandoned.

Nationally, rail traffic is expected to increase through 2040. Local rail conditions will depend greatly on decisions made by rail companies, the location of businesses that ship by rail and the freight decisions of local businesses. Growth of rail traffic could require an increase in safety measures. Maintaining the rail service to the area may contribute to attracting rail based businesses and reduce the freight transported by trucks over the highway system, reducing the road maintenance needs. The rail system can create hazardous conditions at road crossings, especially for bicycles and wheelchairs that can get wheel stuck in between the tracks. These issues can be mitigated through intersection and crossing design. See below for an example.

Bus/Transit

Transit service is vital for a healthy urban community for numerous reasons. It is often the only form of transportation for low income, senior and disabled community members, proving essential to access employment and other goods and services. Transit reduces congestion and road maintenance costs by reducing the number of private automobiles on the road. The benefits of these services accrue not only to those using the transit system, but to everyone within the community, in the form of shorter travel times, higher overall incomes, reduced unemployment and higher social mobility, and reduced air pollution. However, the convenience of a transit system greatly affects whether choice riders will choose to take public transit. It is generally found that people are willing to walk up to ½ mile to reach a rail stop and up to ¼ mile to reach a bus stop. Additionally, long trip times or unreliable service can push choice riders to other modes and inconvenience or even make steady employment impossible for those that have no other choice.

The Merrill Transit System operates Merrill-Go-Round transit service, a demand-response system that serves a 12 square mile area of the City of Merrill and operates from 7:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday, except on Holidays. Riders schedule service by calling at least an hour before the trip, and buses run once an hour. Daily ridership is about 275 passenger trips. Ridership increased

Merrill-Go-Round bus service.

between 2006 and 2008, but declined between 2008 and 2009 during the Great Recession. The door-to-door service provided by Merrill-Go-Round means everyone is within walking distance of the transit service, but the one hour headways and the lack of night time and weekend service reduces the flexibility for riders that work hours outside of the normal workday.

Transit systems can and should be integrated with bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure, as most riders begin and end their transit trip as a bicyclist or pedestrian. Providing exterior bicycle racks on buses can greatly increase the mobility of transit riders. The pedestrian infrastructure network must provide accessibility where riders board and alight, which in this case is at the origin and destination of any transit rider.

With continuous challenges related to federal and state funding for public transportation, it is vitally important for the City of Merrill to continue to provide funding support for transit service to mitigate further service reductions and fare increases. The City also needs to consider transit whenever it is making decisions related to transportation and land use, as the efficiency and effectiveness of a transit system is directly affected by land use patterns and transportation investments. Improving land use decisions will reduce the costs to operate the transit system as well as encourage more people to use the system, which reduces the need for additional funding.

Promoting a better mix of uses and increasing density, especially for destinations (commercial and industrial areas) can reduce the stops and travel time needed for the transit system. Concentrating major employment centers into a few select districts would cluster destinations together. Increasing the allowable density could be achieved by reducing surface parking requirements and allowing buildings to take up a larger proportion of the lot area, which will concentrate more destinations within a smaller area of land, reducing the travel distance for transit. These

land use patterns will also encourage bicycle and pedestrian transportation, reduce trip distances for motorists, and better utilize parking.

Transportation Facilities for Disabled

Para-transit is a specialized transit service to serve elderly and disabled persons who require more accessible vehicles and flexible routing. Providers of this service are usually existing municipal transit operators, taxi companies, and private companies with buses and vans. Merrill Go Round has accessible buses with accommodations for wheelchairs, and there are some other accessible transit services provided by Lincoln County Social Services and volunteer drivers. The Pine Crest nursing home provides some transit services for the elderly. It is common for transit services to require registration to prove a disability. This practice can provide additional barriers and reduce the effectiveness for people with disabilities, especially people that are temporarily disabled. The impacts of this practice should be strongly considered against the potential for fraud when planning for transit for people with disabilities.

Transportation and Land Use

The interrelationship between land use and transportation makes it necessary for the development of each to be planned with the other. Types, intensities and patterns of land uses influence the traffic on roadways, the demand for transit, and the feasibility of active transportation. Intensely developed land often generates high volumes of traffic, yet if it is developed densely while encouraging alternative transportation, traffic increases can be mitigated. If this traffic is not planned for, safety can be seriously impaired for both local and through traffic flows. On the other hand, transportation infrastructure and investments influence the development intensity, desirability, and accessibility of adjacent land, affecting the potential uses.

Traffic generated and attracted by any new land use can increase congestion on the roadway system. Even without creating new access points, changes in land uses can alter the capacity of the roadway. The new business may generate more vehicle traffic. An uncontrolled number of driveways tends to affect highways by increasing the amount of turning traffic into and out from these attached driveways, therefore impairing safety and impeding traffic movements.

Changing Transportation Systems

New technologies including electric vehicles (EVs), plug-in hybrids, and autonomous (driverless) vehicles have been rapidly advancing and growing in popularity. Experts predict that vehicles will have limited autonomy in 5-10 years and be highly automated within 10-20 years, well within the horizon of this plan. It will be necessary for Merrill to be aware of the changes needed to adapt to these systems and accommodate the shifts in how people get around. Additionally, funding constraints at the local, state, and federal levels of government for transportation suggest that priority should be given to safety and equity enhancements and maintenance of the existing road network, rather than capacity expansions.

Goal, Objectives & Policies

Goal 1: Provide an integrated, efficient, balanced, equitable and economical transportation system that provides mobility, convenience, and safety and that meets the needs of all citizens, including young, elderly, transit-dependent and disabled citizens. This includes providing choices in the mode of transportation (car, transit, bicycle, walking, etc.), easy transfer between modes, and accessible, safe, and convenient opportunities for those without the use of a motor vehicle.

Objective 1: Improve pedestrian, bicycle, and transit access to community activity centers such as schools, parks, shopping areas, employment centers, public buildings, medical facilities, and elderly housing.

Objective 2: Utilize river corridors for multi-use trail development.

Objective 3: Evaluate the City of Merrill codes, including subdivision and zoning codes, for transportation impacts of land use requirements, such as excessive parking requirements, intensity, density, connectivity, and block length requirements.

Objective 4: Implement recommendations in the Merrill Bike and Pedestrian Plan 2015.

Objective 5: Provide appropriate bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure on arterial and collector roads, based on volume and speed of traffic and the connectivity value of the road.

Objective 6: Work with WisDOT to control access onto Highways 51, 64 & 107 to preserve capacity and movement of traffic. Encourage WisDOT to commission/fund highway corridor plans for these highways to address corridor development, intersection deficiencies, sight distances and turning movements.

Objective 7: Evaluate four-lane roads for potential road diets using Federal Highway Administration guidelines, and apply road diets to suitable roads.

Objective 8: Develop Airport Land Use Ordinance under Wisconsin Statutes sections 114.135 and 114.136 to protect the public investment in the Merrill Airport.

Objective 9: Evaluate areas where speeding is a concern and implement measures, such as traffic calming, to address safety concerns.

Objective 10: Evaluate areas where bicycling on the sidewalk should be allowed.

Objective 11: Reduce travel lane widths to 10 feet wherever practical (including minor arterials and principle arterials less than 45mph), to reduce speeding, improve safety, reduce maintenance costs and increase the available space for bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure and terraces.

Policy 1: Encourage a well-connected, grid-like street pattern in new development.

Policy 2: Plan for extension of major arterials and other roads as necessary to complete connections, provide for appropriate routes for trucks and emergency vehicles and serve planned development areas.

Policy 3: Consider future road locations, extensions or connections when reviewing development plans and proposals.

Policy 4: Use the official map to plan an interconnected road network and reserve space prior to development occurring.

Policy 5: Include appropriate bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure on all arterial and collector roads when undergoing resurfacing or reconstruction.

Policy 6: Direct land uses that generate heavy traffic to roads that have been constructed for such use.

Policy 7: Encourage traditional neighborhood designs (TND) and cluster development as a means to support a range of transportation choices and control traffic impacts.

Policy 8: Enhance local transit service and support the transit system through both funding and land use decisions.

Policy 9: Consider bicycle and pedestrian accessibility when selecting sites for new public facilities such as schools, parks, libraries and community centers.

Policy 10: Carefully consider and require bicycle and pedestrian access and parking during site plan review.

Policy 11: Work with rail service providers and users to address facility or service issues in order to maintain safe and efficient rail operations in the City.

Policy 12: Require through access of streets in new developments to allow connections to future roads in future developments.

Policy 13: Prioritize maintenance and safety enhancements of existing roads over capacity expansions and new roads.

Chapter Six
Economic Development

This chapter examines the components of economic development in Merrill. The chapter reviews previous studies related to economic development and the current economy. Local, county, regional, and state economic development programs are identified. Economic development issues, recommendations, and implementation strategies will also be discussed.

Previous Studies

Merrill Comprehensive Plan, 2007

The comprehensive plan key economic development issues including: Change of Downtown, Growth new the "51" Interchange, Loss of High Paying Manufacturing Jobs, Income Levels, Commuting Patterns, Labor Force Skills, Lack of Industrial Sites, Scattered Industrial Development, Revitalization and Beautification, Recreation and Tourism, and Local Tax Climate. The plan provides statistics on the economic sectors, labor force, educational levels, and income levels for both the city of Merrill and Lincoln County. The plan includes a city-wide strategy, a downtown strategy, and an interchange strategy. The city wide strategy has four goals, seven objectives, and 25 policies. The downtown strategy includes one goal, two objectives, and 13 policies. The interchange strategy includes one goal, two objectives, and six policies.

City of Merrill Strategic Plan, 2014-2019

In July 2014 the City of Merrill contracted with the University of Wisconsin Extension Lincoln County to develop a five year strategic plan. The plan includes a SOAR (strengths, opportunities, aspirations, results) analysis, the pronouncement of core values of city government, the development (and formal Council Approval) of both city government vision and mission statements, the identification and prioritization of strategic issues, a review of city services (information provided by department heads), the creation of a vision statement for the community, the identification of strategies and action steps to address the chosen strategic issues, and additional action planning. Strategic Issues 1 and 4 directly relate to economic development.

How can Merrill's city government help grow the city's tax base? Strategies to these issues include: Make it easier for people to start or expand a business within the city, Find ways to promote job creation and diversity, and ensuring that when the city tears down something old, the make certain that it is replace with something better. The city is to become more aggressive on eliminating blight and will prioritize projects based on their potential for a solid return on investment. There are seven strategies to achieve this objective and several action items for each strategy.

How does Merrill city government create and implement strategic economic development and redevelopment? Part of addressing this strategic issue will be creating and then ranking a list of potential projects based on a number of criteria. The city needs to continue its work to become even more nimble when economic development opportunities that perhaps were unforeseen arise. There are 4 specific strategies to achieve this objective and a variety of action items.

City of Merrill Downtown Vision Plan

This plan aims to renew and re-energize the downtown in order to produce a greater benefit for the City of Merrill by addressing blight and outlining the investments necessary for the four districts within the Downtown. The plan overviews the value of Merrill's downtown and the business/market environment, and identifies gaps. The plan overviews fundamentals of revitalization and makes recommendations and estimates costs for three levels of investment including "small scale," "impact level," and "transformative change." Recommendations are specific to each downtown district and include investments such as streetscape improvements, lighting, landscaping and signage, parking, community events and activities, and commercial and residential rehabilitation, development and

redevelopment.

City of Merrill Westside Renewal Plan

This plan was completed alongside the Merrill Downtown Vision Plan to improve the economic condition of the Westside, considered the area extending along West Main Street straddling the Wisconsin and Prairie Rivers. The plan inventories prior investments land use, jobs, and population and the condition of residential and commercial structures in the area. The plan makes recommendations and estimates costs for three levels of investment including "small scale," "impact level," and "transformative change." These recommendations include investments such as streetscape improvements, public street furniture and art, bicycle and automobile parking, and commercial and residential rehabilitation, development and redevelopment.

Lincoln County Comprehensive Plan, 2012-2021

The county plan includes statistics and information on the county's economy and specific goals, objectives and recommendations. Analysis includes general economic conditions of Lincoln County (existing conditions) such as: unemployment trends, industry sector job growth trends, survey results on economic concerns of county residents, and average annual wages by industry. The plan also includes the discussion and identification of economic development initiatives such as the county's revolving loan fund. The plan discusses TIF district utilization, and environmentally contaminated sites in Merrill and includes a total of six economic development goals, with the sixth and final goal focusing on education. There are a variety of objectives and proposed action items to achieve each goal as well as the identification of organizations/ agencies involved. Finally, the E.D. section includes a list of business development agencies and programs available to help economic development in the county.

Labor Market Conditions in Lincoln County, 2004

This study examines the existing and anticipated demand for labor in Lincoln County. Data for the study was drawn from questionnaires to 42 employers in the first quarter of 2004.

The study examines the existing and anticipated growing much in the next year or so. Many employers continue to report that they are having difficulty recruiting qualified workers, and attribute it to the fact that applicants lack the necessary skills for the jobs that were available. The largest vacancies are expected for assemblers, processors, and laborers.

Almost all employers report that they provide on-going training and skill development in their firm. They are most likely to offer job specific skills. On average, employers provided formal training to approximately 25 percent of their workforce.

Many employers report difficulty in retaining workers. The employee turnover rate was 13 percent in 2003, which is about average for the state. Most of the vacancies are due to resignations. A growing number of firms in the region report they have laid-off workers in the last 12 months. Almost one-half of Lincoln County employers have laid-off workers, with only about 90 percent of the workers being recalled. Employers estimate the cost of providing benefits will continue to increase substantially, such as health insurance and retirement packages.

Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), 2012

Lincoln County is one of ten counties included in the North Central Wisconsin Economic Development District as designated by the U.S. Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration (EDA). The North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (NCWRPC) is the

Economic Development Issues

In 2014, the city of Merrill and its leadership developed a strategic plan. During that process, several issues dealing with economic development were identified. Those issues are listed below:

- Rising costs of providing public services while the city's tax base is declining or stagnate.
- Economic development, including the creation of such amenities like the River Bend Trail, and job creation are important elements in the attempt to strengthen the tax base.
- Increasing and maintaining the optimal city population is key to increasing the tax base.
- City government workforce recruitment and retention. What can the city offer to keep high quality employees?
- Developing the Route 51 corridor and County G areas requires better dialogue with the surrounding townships.
- The city has areas of blight that must be addressed to increase their ability to attract and retain both businesses and workers.
- The city is facing an aging population which will affect the workforce.

agency responsible for maintaining that federal designation. As a part of maintain that designation, the NCWRPC annually prepares a CEDS report. The report summarizes and assesses economic development activities of the past year and presents new and modified program strategies for the upcoming year.

Much like the County Comprehensive Plan, the CEDS report focuses on issues and opportunities on a regional level. The plan discusses regional trends in labor force, income, education attainment, and employment by industry sector.

Regional Livability Plan, 2015

North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission's Regional Livability Plan (RLP) was adopted in 2015 as an update to their Regional Comprehensive Plan. The RLP includes an Economic Development Assessment identifying the issues and opportunities in the region. The RLP focuses on specific economic development issues affecting the region's livability. The plan discusses the projected shortage in labor force, the need for employment opportunities providing living wages, and broadband issues. The plan also discusses how transportation, housing, economic development, and land use affect livability in the region. The RLP provides goals, objectives, and strategies to increase livability in the region that are to be used by counties and municipalities while updating their long term strategies. Many of the goals and objectives are specifically applicable to Merrill as the metro area in the region with a central business district.

Inventory & Trends

The City of Merrill comprises a major portion of the Lincoln County economy. Over half of the jobs in Lincoln County are located in the City of Merrill. This section includes statistical information for the City of Merrill and Lincoln County.

Employment by Sector

The economy is made up of 20 basic economic sectors. They are: Crop and Animal Production; Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction; Utilities; Construction; Manufacturing; Wholesale Trade; Retail Trade; Transportation and Warehousing; Information; Finance and Insurance; Real Estate and Rental Leasing; Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services; Management of Companies and Enterprises; Administrative and Support of Waste Management Remediation Services; Educational Services; Health Care and Social Assistance; Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation; Accommodation and Food Services; Other Services; and Government.

Total employment represents the number of jobs filled in the City of Merrill. Employment includes residents of Merrill who are employed in the city and employees who live outside of the city and commute into the city for work. Employment by sector for all employed Merrill residents, both those who work in the city and those who work outside of the city, is discussed in the Background and Demographics Chapter.

Employment in the city of Merrill accounts for roughly 66 percent of all employment in the County over the past 5 years, total employment in the City of Merrill increased 1 percent from 7,907 in 2010 to 7,982 in 2015, see **Table 28**. The largest percent increases in employment were in Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services (49%), Wholesale Trade (42%), and Crop and Animal Production (36%). The top three employment sectors based on total employment in the City of Merrill were Manufacturing (1,638), Government (1,518) and Finance and Insurance (961). However, employment in Manufacturing and Government decreased by 35 jobs and 106 jobs respectively during the five year period. During the same time period, employment in the Finance and Insurance sector increased by 104 jobs, the largest increase in total jobs. The top three employment sectors represent roughly 52 percent of the total employment in the city. Overall, half of the sectors experienced positive growth over the 5 year period. The largest net decreases in employment were in Government (-7% or 106 jobs), Retail Trade (-13% or 111 jobs), and (Manufacturing (-2% or 74 jobs), and Other Services (-21% or 74 jobs).

In comparison, employment over the past 5 years in Lincoln County increased 4 percent from 11,600 in 2010 to 12,057 in 2015. In most sectors, growth in the City of Merrill was comparable with sector growth in Lincoln County. Manufacturing (2,726 jobs), Government (1,819 jobs) and Retail Trade (1,298 jobs) are the three largest sectors. Together, the three sectors account for roughly 48 percent of all employment. Manufacturing and Crop and Animal Production experienced the largest net employment growth over the 5 year period, increasing by 196 jobs and 137 jobs respectively. Crop and Animal Production also experienced the largest percent growth over the time period, 42 percent. Overall, 12 of the 20 sectors experienced positive growth over the 5 year period.

NAICS 11: Crop and Animal Production:

Between 2010 and 2015 this sector increased 36 percent in the City of Merrill. In comparison, County employment in this sector increased 42 percent over the 5 year period. Just fewer than 140 people are employed in this sector in the City and 462 people are employed in the county. The Crop and Animal Production sector accounts for just two percent of total employment in the city.

NAICS 21: Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction:

Employment in this sector is minimal in both the city and county. Only 17 people were employed in this sector in 2015, a net increase of 1 person over the past five years. A total of 29 people were employed in this sector in 2015 in the county, an increase of 1 person over the past five years.

Table 28: Employment by Sector

NAICS	Industry	City of Merrill			Lincoln County		
		2010	2015	% Change	2010	2015	% Change
11	Crop and Animal Production	101	138	36%	325	462	42%
21	Mining, Quarrying,and Oil and Gas Extraction	16	17	5%	28	29	5%
22	Utilities	34	23	-31%	41	33	-21%
23	Construction	238	266	12%	571	645	13%
31	Manufacturing	1,674	1,638	-2%	2,530	2,726	8%
42	Wholesale Trade	226	321	42%	296	406	37%
44	Retail Trade	879	768	-13%	1,321	1,298	-2%
48	Transportation and Warehousing	352	370	5%	459	466	1%
51	Information	71	65	-9%	102	85	-16%
52	Finance and Insurance	857	961	12%	938	1,049	12%
53	Real Estate and Rental Leasing	46	38	-18%	58	49	-15%
54	Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	100	79	-21%	141	108	-23%
55	Management of Companies and Enterprises	132	179	35%	132	179	35%
56	Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services	122	182	49%	157	218	39%
61	Educational Services	21	21	0%	37	41	11%
62	Health Care and Social Assistance	499	543	9%	973	1,019	5%
71	Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	75	74	-1%	130	139	7%
72	Accomomodation and Food Services	486	503	3%	836	824	-1%
81	Other Services	353	279	-21%	600	461	-23%
90	Government	1,624	1,518	-7%	1,925	1,819	-5%
	Total	7,907	7,982	1%	11,600	12,057	4%

Source: EMSI

Total employment in this sector accounts for 0.2 percent of total employment in both the city and county.

NAICS 22: Utilities

Employment in this sector decreased 31 percent in the city and 21 percent in the county over the past 5 years. Only 23 people were employed in this sector in the city in 2015, an 11 person decrease from 2010. Total employment in this sector in the county was 33 in 2015. This sector accounts for less than 0.3 percent of all employment in the city and the county.

NAICS 23: Construction

Between 2010 and 2015, employment in this sector increased 12 percent in the city of Merrill from 238 in 2010 to 266 in 2015. The 12 percent increase in the city was in line with the county's 13 percent increase over the 5 year period. Employment in this sector accounts for 3 percent of all employment in the city and 5 percent of all employment in the county.

NAICS 31: Manufacturing

Manufacturing is the largest sector in the city and the county. In 2015, manufacturing employed 1,638 people in the city, a decrease of 35 people from 2010. Employment in this sector increased 8 percent in the county from 2,530 in 2010 to 2,726 in 2015. Employment in this sector accounts for 21 percent of all employment in the city and 23 percent of all employment in the county.

NAICS 42: Wholesale Trade

Between 2010 and 2015 this sector increased 42 percent in the city and 37 percent in the county. Total employment in this sector in 2015 was 21 people in the city and 406 people in the county accounting for 4 percent of all employment in the city and 3 percent of all employment in the county.

NAICS 44: Retail Trade

Retail Trade is the fourth largest sector in the city and the third largest sector in the county. Between 2010 and 2015, this sector decreased 13 percent in the city and 2 percent in the county. In 2015, 768 people were employed in this sector in the city and roughly 1,300 in the county. Employment in this sector accounts for 10 percent of all employment in Merrill and 11 percent of all employment in the county.

NAICS 48: Transportation and Warehousing

Employment in this sector increased 5 percent in the city and 1 percent in the county between 2010 and 2015. In 2015, employment in this sector accounted for 5 percent of total employment in the city and 4 percent in the county.

NAICS 51: Information

Employment in this sector decreased over the past 5 years in the city and county, roughly 9 percent and 16 percent respectively. Employment in this sector accounts for just 1 percent of total employment in both the city and the county. The information sector is one of the lowest employment sectors in both the city and county employing just 65 people and 85 people respectively.

NAICS 52: Finance and Insurance

Accounting for 12 percent of all employment, the Finance and Insurance sector is the 3rd largest sector in the city employing 961 people in 2015. Employment in this sector increased 12 percent in both the city and county over the past 5 years. Over 1,000 people are employed in this sector in the county accounting for 9 percent off all employment.

NAICS 53: Real Estate and Rental Leasing

Employment in this sector decreased 18 percent from 46 in 2010 to 38 in 2015. One of the city's smallest employment sectors, Real Estate and Leasing accounts for 0.5 percent of total employment in the city. In comparison, county employment in this sector decreased 15 percent and accounts for 0.4 percent of total employment in the county.

NAICS 54: Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services

Employment in this sector decreased 21 percent in the city over the past 5 years and decreased 23 percent in the county. In 2015, 79 people were employed in this sector in the city of Merrill accounting for 1 percent of the city's employment. Similar to the city, this sector accounts for 1 percent of the county's employment with 108 people employed.

NAICS 55: Management of Companies and Enterprises

Employment in this sector increased 35 percent in the city from 132 in 2010 to 179 in 2015. All county employment in this sector is located in the city. This sector accounted for roughly 2 percent of all employment in the city and 1 percent of employment in county in 2015.

NAICS 56: Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services

Employment in this sector increased 49 percent in the city and 39 percent in the county over the past 5 years. In 2015, city employment in this sector was 182 people accounting for 2 percent of the total employment. Employment in the county in this sector was 218 people in 2015 accounting for 2 percent of the total employment.

NAICS 61: Educational Services

This sector employed 21 people in the city in 2015, the same as it did in 2010. This sector accounted for 0.3 percent of the total employment; the second smallest percentage of employment in the city. County employment in this sector increased 11 percent over the 5 year period, from 37 people in 2010 to 41 in 2015.

NAICS 62: Health Care and Social Assistance

This sector is the fifth largest sector in the city the county employing 543 people in the city and 1,019 people in the county in 2015. Employment in this sector increased 9 percent in the city and 5 percent in the county between 2010 and 2015. This sector accounts for 7 percent of the total employment in the city and 8 percent of the total employment in the county.

NAICS 71: Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation

This sector experienced a 1 percent decrease in employment in the city and a 7 percent increase in employment in the county. Between 2010 and 2015, employment decreased by just one person in the city and increased by 9 people in the county. In 2015, employment in this sector accounted for 1 percent of all employment in the city and 1 percent of all employment in the county.

NAICS 72: Accommodation and Food Services

This sector increased employment by 3 percent over the 5 year period in the city, from 486 people in 2010 to 503 in 2015. The sector accounts for 6 percent of the total employment in the city. County employment in this sector decreased 1 percent during the same timeframe. In 2015, there were 824 jobs in this sector accounting for 7 percent of the total employment.

NAICS 81: Other Services

This sector decreased employment by 21 percent in the city and 23 percent in the county between 2010 and 2015. Total employment in this sector equaled 279 people in 2015 for the city and 461 people in the county. Overall, roughly 4 percent of total employment was in this sector for both the city and county in 2015.

NAICS 90: Government

This sector was the 2nd largest sector in the city and in the county in 2015. However, between 2010 and 2015, employment in this sector decreased 7 percent in the city and 5 percent in the county. In 2015, employment in this sector employed 1,518 people in the city and 1,819 people in the county accounting for 19 percent of the city's total employment and 15 percent of the county's total employment.

Location Quotient

Location quotient (LQ) is a valuable way of quantifying how concentrated a particular industry is in a region as compared to the nation. It can reveal what makes a particular region "unique" in comparison to the national average. An industry with an LQ over 1.00 is considered to be an export industry, which is important because they bring money into the

region, rather than simply circulating money that is already in the region.

LQ=(ei/et)/(Ei/Et)

Where:

- e_i = regional (county or city) employment in an industry in a specific year
- e_t = total regional (county or city) employment in a specific year
- E_i = national employment in an industry in a specific year
- E_t = total national employment in a specific year

Table 29 displays the LQ's for all of the economic sectors in 2015. Compared to the nation, the city of Merrill has 7 export industries; Crop and Animal Production, Manufacturing, Wholesale Trade, Transportation and Warehousing, Finance and Insurance, Management of Companies and Enterprises, and Government. The Finance and Insurance industry and Manufacturing industry have the highest concentration of employment compared to the nation. Employment in the Finance and Insurance industry is 3.01 times more concentrated in the city than it is nationally and employment in the Manufacturing industry is 2.55 times more concentrated than it is nationally.

Lincoln County has five export industries in comparison to the nation, they are: Crop and Animal Production, Manufacturing, Transportation and Warehousing, Finance and Insurance, and Management of Companies and Enterprises. With an LQ of 3.15, Crop and Animal Production has the highest concentration of employment in the county compared to the nation, followed by Manufacturing with an LQ of 2.81, see **Display 1**.

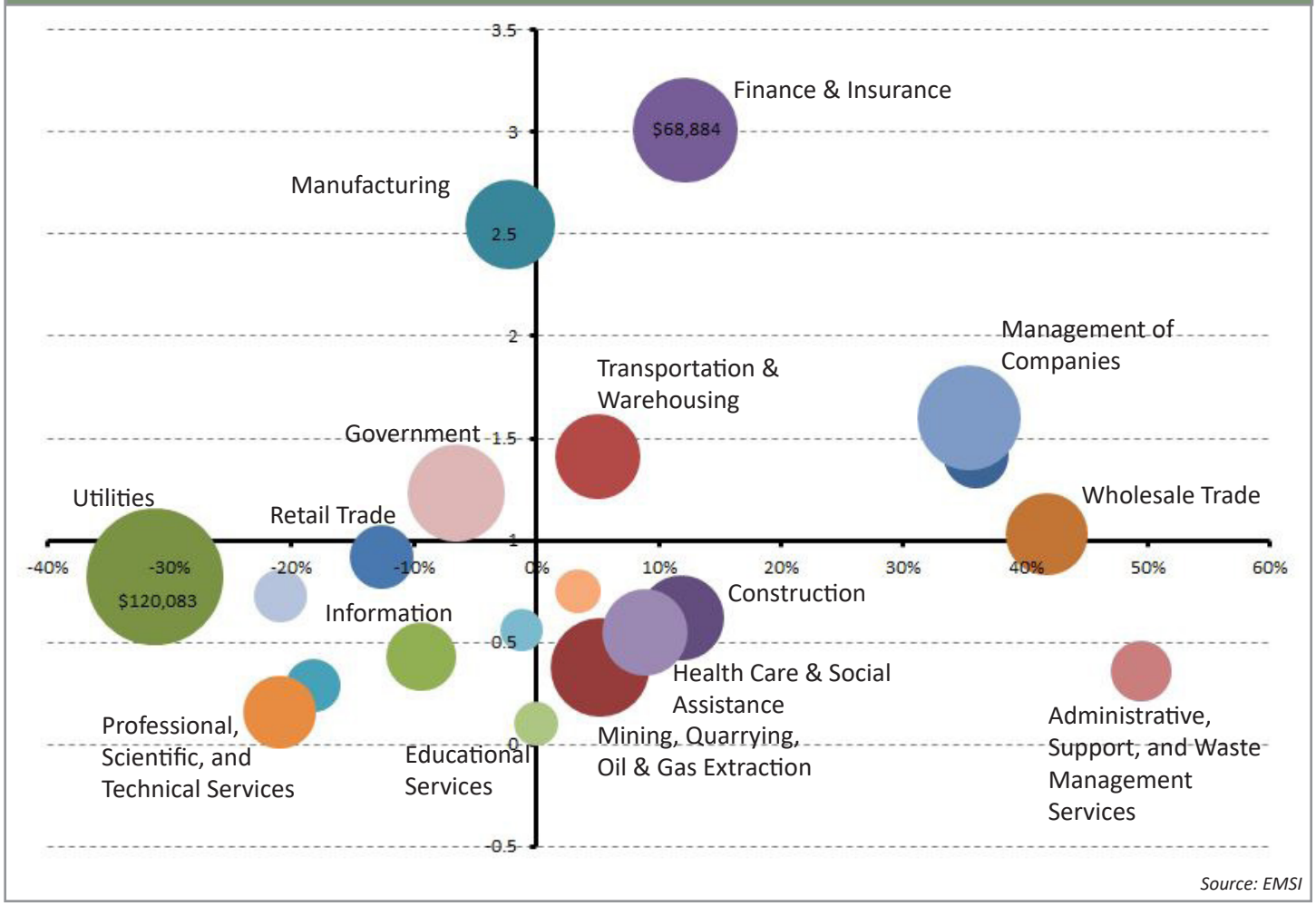
Location Quotients are augmented by two other pieces of information: size of an industry in terms of jobs, and percent change in LQ over a given time period. A high LQ industry with a small number of jobs may be an export-oriented industry, but is not vital to the region's economy. A large high-LQ industry with a declining LQ over time, however, is endangering the regional economy. Location Quotient Analysis analyzes a regions location quotient, the change in location quotient over a period of time, and total employment in each industry identifying the region's driver, emerging, mature, and trouble economies. Total annual earnings are also considered ensuring that the focus on job attraction and creation is in the industries that provide the best salary opportunities. The average total earnings in 2015 in the city of Merrill were $46,752 and $46,165 in Lincoln County.

Table 29: Location Quotient, 2015

NAICS	Economic Sector	City of Merrill	Lincoln County
11	Crop and Animal Production	1.42	3.15
21	Mining, Quarrying,and Oil and Gas Extraction	0.38	0.44
22	Utilities	0.82	0.76
23	Construction	0.62	1.00
31	Manufacturing	2.55	2.81
42	Wholesale Trade	1.03	0.87
44	Retail Trade	0.92	1.03
48	Transportation and Warehousing	1.41	1.18
51	Information	0.43	0.38
52	Finance and Insurance	3.01	2.18
53	Real Estate and Rental Leasing	0.29	0.25
54	Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	0.16	0.14
55	Management of Companies and Enterprises	1.6	1.06
56	Administrative and Support of Waste Management and Remediation Services	0.36	0.29
61	Educational Services	0.1	0.13
62	Health Care and Social Assistance	0.55	0.68
71	Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	0.56	0.70
72	Accomomodation and Food Services	0.75	0.81
81	Other Services	0.73	0.80
90	Government	1.23	0.97

Source: EMSI

Display 1: Location Quotient Bubble Chart



Source: EMSI

An industry sector in the upper right quadrant is more concentrated in the City than average, and also is increasing their employment over the time period. These industries are "standouts" or drivers that distinguish the City economy and are doing so more every year—and they are especially important if they employ a high number of people. Driver industries are those that play a key role in the economic vitality of a region by supply quality, often high paying jobs while also supporting job growth in other industries. These industries function as the primary engines for economic growth and stability because they export products and services and import vital dollars. Those dollars than circulate in the economy and support other local industries and jobs.

The lower right quadrant contains industries which are not yet as concentrated in the region as they are at the national level, but are increasing their employment over the time period. If they continue this trend, they will eventually move across the horizontal axis into the upper right-hand quadrant. We might call them "pre-emergent" industries, having the potential to contribute more to the region's economic base.

The upper left quadrant contains industries that are maturing, that is are more concentrated in the City than average, but decreased employment over the time period. If a mid-size or large industry is in this quadrant, it is an important warning that the City is losing a major part of its export base and should form planning and investment priorities accordingly. If the City does not bolster these industries or replace them with other export industries, it will likely enter a general recession.

The lower left quadrant contains industries that are considered troubled industries. These industries have low employment, are less concentrated in the City than average, and experienced a decline in employment over the time period. Industries here could be warning signs that the City needs to attract more businesses in those industries in order to maintain an economy that is sufficiently diversified and resilient in comparison to the national economy.

Driver Industries

The city of Merrill has five driver sectors based on the location quotient analysis; Crop and Animal Production, Wholesale Trade, Transportation and Warehousing, Finance and Insurance, and Management of Companies and Enterprises. These industries all have an LQ greater than 1.00, experienced an increase in employment between 2010 and 2015, and employ a high number of people. Combine,

these industries account for 30 percent of all employment in the city. The Management of Companies and Enterprises Industry and the Finance and Insurance Industry both offer significant annual earnings, $69,289 a year and $68,884, respectively. The remaining three industries all have annual earnings below the average earnings of $46,752.

The driver sectors in Lincoln County include: Crop and Animal Production, Construction, Manufacturing, Transportation and Warehousing; Finance and Insurance, and Management of Companies and Enterprises. All six of these industries employ a high number of workers. The Management of Companies and Enterprises has the highest annual earnings of the six industries at $69,289, followed by Finance and Insurance ($67,366), Manufacturing ($60,156), Construction ($46,417), Transportation and Warehousing ($45,599) and Crop and Animal Production ($26,472).

Emerging Industries

The city of Merrill has five emerging sectors: Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction; Construction; Administrative, Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services; Healthcare and Social Assistance; and Accommodation and Food Services. These industries all have LQ's below 1.00, but have experienced an increase in employment between 2010 and 2015. Together, the three industries account for roughly 18 percent of the employment. Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction ($61,855) and Healthcare and Social Assistance ($47,080) both have earnings higher than the city's average. Healthcare and Social Services is the city's top emerging industry increasing employment 9 percent to 543 people in 2015.

Lincoln County has six emerging economies: Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction; Wholesale Trade; Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services; Educational Services; Healthcare and Social Assistance; and Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation. Healthcare and Social Services is the county's top emerging economy employing over 1,000 people and offering earnings of $43,966 per year. Accommodation and Food Services employ 503 people, but offers the 2nd lowest earnings compared to all other industries, $13,086 per year.

Maturing Industries

The city of Merrill has two maturing sectors: Manufacturing, and Government. These industries all have LQ's above 1.00, but have experienced a decrease in employment between 2010 and 2015. Employment in these three industries is significant, accounting for 40 percent of all employment in the city. Manufacturing is the largest employer in the city and offers annual earnings of $50,717. Government accounts for the 2nd most employment and offers annual earnings of $60,467.

Lincoln County has one maturing sector: Retail Trade. The

Large office entrance.

Retail Trade Industry employs the 3rd most people, 1,298 people. However, the annual wages in the Retail Industry is $26,057, well below the average annual earnings of $46,165 for the county.

Troubled Industries

The city of Merrill has seven troubled sectors: Utilities; Retail Trade, Information; Real Estate and Rental Leasing; Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services; Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation; and Other Services. These industries have an LQ under 1.00 and have experienced a decrease in employment between 2010 and 2015. These seven industries account for 17 percent of the employment in the city of Merrill. Retail (10%) and Other Services (4%) account for the most employment. All other industries account for one percent or less of all employment. Only one industry, Utilities ($120,083), offers annual earnings higher than the city's average.

Lincoln County also has seven troubled sectors: Utilities; Information; Real Estate and Rental Leasing; Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services; Accommodations and Food Services; Other Services, and Government. These seven industries account for roughly 28 percent of all employment in the county. Government (15%) and Accommodations and Food Services (7%) accounts for the majority of employment. All other industries account for 4 percent or less of all employment. Two of the industries, Utilities and Government provide an annual earning wage higher than the county's average.

Labor Force

The labor force is the number of people, sixteen and over, employed or looking to be employed in an area. Those persons over sixteen who are students, homemakers, retired, institutionalized, or unable/unwilling to seek employment are not considered part of the labor force. The number of people in the labor force divided by the total

Table 30: Labor Force Indicators

		Labor Force	Employed	Unemployed	Unemployment Rate	Participation Rate
City of Merrill	2000	5,082	4,726	**356**	**7.0%**	**64.2%**
	2013	5,113	4,600	513	10.0%	65.5%
	Net Change	31	-126	157	3.0%	2.3%
	% Change	0.6%	-2.7	44.1	42.9%	2.0%
Lincoln County	2000	15,346	14,530	816	5.3%	66.1%
	2013	15,152	13,982	1,164	7.7%	64.2%
	Net Change	-194	-548	348	2.4%	-1.9%
	% Change	-1.3%	-3.8%	42.6%	45.3%	-2.9%
Wisconsin	2000	2,872,104	2,734,925	134,311	4.7%	69.1%
	2013	3,082,381	2,839,636	239,464	7.8%	67.9%
	Net Change	210,277	104,711	105,153	3.1%	-1.2%
	% Change	7.3%	3.8%	78.3%	66.0%	-1.7%

Source: U.S. Census

population over 16 years of age makes up the participation rate. In 2013, the total population 16 years and over in the City of Merrill was 7,807 people and the labor force totaled 5,113 people; a participation rate of 65.5 percent.

Although the number of people over the age of 16 decreased 103 people between 2000 and 2013, the labor force in Merrill increased 0.6 percent to 5,113 people, see **Table 30**. The increase in labor force is primarily due to a 2.3 percentage point increase in the participation rate, meaning more people over the age of 16 were looking for employment. While there were more people looking for work, the total persons employed decreased 2.7 percent, resulting in a 3.0 percent increase in the unemployment rate. The unemployment rate increased from 7.0 percent in 2000 to 10 percent in 2013. According to the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development, the unemployment rate in 2014 decreased to 5.6 percent.

The labor force in Lincoln County decreased 1.3 percent as participation rates decreased 1.9 percent. With less people in the labor force, total number of people employed also decreased 3.8 percent over the 13 year period, resulting in a 2.4 percent increase in the unemployment rate. The unemployment rate in 2013 was 7.7 percent. According to the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development, the unemployment rate in 2014 decreased to 6.5 percent.

The labor force in the State or Wisconsin increased 7.3 percent while participation rates decreased 1.7 percent. The number of people employed increased 3.8 percent, resulting in a 3.1 percent increase in the unemployment rate. The unemployment rate in 2013 was 7.8 percent. According to the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development, the unemployment rate in 2014 decreased to 5.5 percent.

Overall, the city of Merrill had the highest unemployment rate compared to the county and state.

Educational Levels

Education and training is critical to maintaining productivity in the city of Merrill and Lincoln County. The vocational-technical education system and the training available are of particular importance. As business and industry continues to grow and change, the demand for highly trained and skilled labor grows too. State, Regional, County, and Local organizations provide a variety of initiatives to develop the workforce through education, training, and cooperative ventures with business and industry. Worker training programs are very important as the locational mismatch between worker skills and available jobs continues to widen.

Employment and training services for dislocated workers are primarily delivered through “Job centers”. There is a job enter in the city of Merrill. These centers are one-stop resources for employers to meet their workforce needs and job seekers to get the career planning, job placement, and training services they need to obtain jobs.

Partnerships between local businesses, governments, and educational institutions are very useful in developing the Regional economy. Institutions such as UW-Stevens Point, UW-Lincoln County, Nicolet College, and Northcentral Technical College (NTC) often direct the programs to the training needs of local workers and businesses. Organizations such as the North Central Wisconsin Workforce Development Board are important to this process as well.

As identified in the Issues and Opportunities section of this plan, about 84.3 percent of persons 25 and older are high school graduates. About 11.9 percent hold a bachelor’s degree. A high school diploma used to be sufficient to start in entry level positions, Today, most jobs paying a living wage require at the very least a technical degree

Display 2: Workforce Migration

Source: U.S. Census, On The Map

or certificate from a local technical college. In 2010, 40.7 percent had just a high school diploma and 31.7 percent of the population over 25 had some college or an associate's degree. The gap in education will weaken the city's ability to support base employment sectors like the manufacturing, healthcare, and finance and insurance and will weaken the city's ability to attract and support knowledge based higher paying occupations.

Labor Shed

A laborshed is defined as the area or region from which an employment center draws its commuting workers. In 2013, only 1,797 of the 5,553 jobs in the city of Merrill were filled by people who also live in Merrill, see **Display 2**. On a daily basis, roughly 3,756 people traveled into the city of Merrill for work. In contrast, 3,007 employed city residents leave the city for work on a daily basis. Overall, the city has a positive net migration of 749 workers. While the city of Merrill may have a talented workforce, it is clear that the laborshed is much larger than the geographic boundaries of the city.

In-migration

Employees commuting into the city for work commute in from all over the state. Over 3,200 people who work in the city of Merrill live outside of the city limits, see **Table 31**. The largest percentage of workers migrating into the city for work comes from the Wausau metro area. The municipalities of Wausau (5.1%), Weston (1.3%), Kronenwetter (0.8%), Rothschild (0.6%), and Rib Mountain (0.7%), account for 8.5 percent of the destinations workers commute from for work on a daily basis. Of the top ten destinations that workers commute from for work, half are located in the Wausau metro region.

Table 31: People Who Work in Merrill, Live In - 2013

Location	Count	Share
City of Merrill	1919	33%
City of Wausau	300	5.1%
City of Tomahawk	121	2.1%
Village of Weston	76	1.3%
Antigo	54	0.9%
Kronenwetter	48	0.8%
Marshfield	47	0.8%
Rib Mountain	38	0.7%
Rothschild	33	0.6%
Athens	22	0.4%
All Other Locations	3,154	54.4%

Source: U.S. Census On The Map

Table 32: People Who Live in Merrill, Work In - 2013

Location	Count	Share
City of Merrill	1919	37.2%
City of Wausau	664	12.9%
Village of Weston	113	2.2%
Marshfield	100	1.9%
Madison	88	1.7%
Tomahawk	72	1.4%
Appleton	70	1.4%
Eau Claire	70	1.4%
Rib Mountain	66	1.3%
Schofield	66	1.3%
All Other Locations	1,787	37.3%

Source: U.S. Census On The Map

Out-migration

City residents commuting outside of the city for work travel all over the state of Wisconsin. Similar to in-migration patterns, a majority of the residents commuting out of the city commute to employment opportunities in the Wausau metro area. Over 17.7 percent of the residents migrating out of the city for work commute to the Wausau metro area, see **Table 32**. A number of workers also travel significant distances with 1.9 percent traveling to Marshfield, 1.4 percent to Appleton, 1.4 percent to Eau Claire, and 1.7 percent traveling to Madison for work on a daily basis.

Employment Projections

Industry Projections

According to Economic Modeling Specialist International (EMSI), the number of jobs in the city of Merrill is expected to increase 5 percent, or 409 jobs, between 2015 and 2025, see **Table 33**. The total number of jobs in the city of Merrill is projected to be 8,391 in 2025. The Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services and Utilities Industries are expected to experience the largest increases, 51 percent and 43 percent respectively. The Government Industry will continue to employ the most people in the city (1,504). The Finance and Insurance Industry is projected to account for the second most jobs in the city of Merrill, surpassing Manufacturing. Manufacturing is projected to lose 379 jobs over the 10 year period while the Insurance and Finance Industry is projected to add 310 jobs. The Healthcare and Social Assistance Industry is projected to increase employment opportunities by 23 percent, to 666 jobs in 2015. The projected increase in population aged 65 and over, as a result of the baby boomer generation entering this age cohort (as discussed in the Issues and Opportunities Section) would further support the projected increase and need for healthcare positions. Overall, only 6 of the 20 industries are projected to decrease the number of job opportunities in the city of Merrill over the next ten years.

The number of jobs in Lincoln County is also projected to increase 9 percent, or 894 jobs, over the next 10 years. The total number of jobs in Lincoln County is projected to be 12,951 in 2025. The Utilities Industry is projected to

Table 33: Employment by Sector Projections

NAICS	Industry	City of Merrill			Lincoln County		
		2015	2025	% Change	2015	2025	% Change
11	Crop and Animal Production	138	152	11%	462	510	10%
21	Mining, Quarrying,and Oil and Gas Extraction	17	22	32%	29	38	32%
22	Utilities	23	33	43%	33	50	53%
23	Construction	266	313	17%	645	791	23%
31	Manufacturing	1,638	1,259	-23%	2,726	2,552	-6%
42	Wholesale Trade	321	386	20%	406	507	25%
44	Retail Trade	768	775	1%	1,298	1,377	6%
48	Transportation and Warehousing	370	437	18%	466	541	16%
51	Information	65	58	-11%	85	80	-6%
52	Finance and Insurance	961	1,271	32%	1,049	1,355	29%
53	Real Estate and Rental Leasing	38	46	20%	49	52	4%
54	Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	79	68	-14%	108	94	-13%
55	Management of Companies and Enterprises	179	210	17%	179	210	17%
56	Administrative and Support of Waste Management and Remediation Services	182	276	51%	218	315	45%
61	Educational Services	21	27	30%	41	55	35%
62	Health Care and Social Assistance	543	666	23%	1,019	1,192	17%
71	Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	74	73	-1%	139	140	0%
72	Accomomodation and Food Services	503	544	8%	824	853	4%
81	Other Services	279	272	-3%	461	444	-4%
90	Government	1,518	1,504	-1%	1,819	1,796	-1%
	Total	7,982	8,391	5.1%	12,057	12,951	7%

Source: EMSI

increase 53 percent over the ten year period, the largest projected increase. In alignment with the city of Merrill, the Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services, and Finance and Insurance Industries are projected to increase significantly, 45 percent and 29 percent respectively. While the Manufacturing Industry is projected to decrease employment by 6 percent (174 jobs) between 2015 and 2025, it will continue to account for the most jobs in the County (2,552), followed by Government (1,796), Retail Trade (1,377), Finance and Insurance (1,355), and the Healthcare and Social Assistance (1,192) Industries. Overall, only five of the industries are projected to decrease the number of job opportunities in Lincoln County over the next ten years.

Occupational Projections

The projected increase in the Insurance and Finance and Healthcare and Social Services Industries has a direct impact on occupational projections over the next 10 years. Healthcare Support and Business and Financial Operation Occupations are expected to experience the largest percent increases in employment opportunities, 28 percent and 25 percent respectively, see **Table 34**. Office and Administrative Support Occupations (1,390) and Production Occupations (952) are projected to continue to account for the most jobs in the city. Production Occupations are projected to decrease by 4 percent over the 10 year period, but will continue to account for the second most jobs in the city. Overall, five of the 23 occupations are projected to experience a decrease between 2015 and 2025.

Occupation projections in Lincoln County indicate that the majority of occupational growth will be in Business and Financial Operations (21%), Computer and Mathematical Occupations (21%), Legal Occupations (19%) and Healthcare Support Occupations (18%) over the next 10 years. A projected 11 percent increase in Office and Administration Support Occupations and a projected 4 percent decrease

Table 34: Occupation by Sector Projections

SOC	Occupation	City of Merrill			Lincoln County		
		2015	2025	% Change	2015	2025	% Change
11-0000	Management Occupations	405	448	10%	703	787	12%
13-0000	Business and Financial Operations Occupations	443	554	25%	549	667	21%
15-0000	Computer and Mathematical Occupations	158	193	22%	186	224	21%
17-0000	Architecture and Engineering Occupations	87	87	0%	153	163	7%
19-0000	Life, Physical, and Social Science Occupations	48	50	4%	63	67	5%
21-0000	Community and Social Service Occupations	108	106	-2%	142	141	-1%
23-0000	Legal Occupations	52	64	22%	58	69	19%
25-0000	Education, Training, and Library Occupations	392	406	3%	451	473	5%
27-0000	Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports, and Media Occupations	81	75	-8%	119	107	-10%
29-0000	Healthcare Practitioners and Technical Occupations	237	264	12%	398	432	9%
31-0000	Healthcare Support Occupations	138	176	28%	256	303	18%
33-0000	Protective Service Occupations	191	194	2%	236	241	2%
35-0000	Food Preparation and Serving Related Occupations	594	639	8%	929	957	3%
37-0000	Building and Grounds Cleaning and Maintenance Occupations	197	214	9%	300	325	9%
39-0000	Personal Care and Service Occupations	265	269	2%	440	455	3%
41-0000	Sales and Related Occupations	673	702	4%	1,037	1,121	8%
43-0000	Office and Administrative Support Occupations	1,258	1,390	10%	1,725	1,916	11%
45-0000	Farming, Fishing, and Forestry Occupations	79	75	-6%	223	219	-2%
47-0000	Construction and Extraction Occupations	303	312	3%	602	682	13%
49-0000	Installation, Maintenance, and Repair Occupations	353	397	13%	568	665	17%
51-0000	Production Occupations	1,163	952	-18%	1,875	1,791	-4%
53-0000	Transportation and Material Moving Occupations	710	781	10%	964	1,071	11%
55-0000	Military Occupations	47	44	-6%	80	75	-6%
	Total	7,982	8,391	5%	12,057	12,951	7%

Source: EMSI

in Production Occupations will result in Office and Administration Support Occupations being the top producer of jobs in the county in 2025. The total number of Office and Administrative Support jobs is projected to be 1,916 jobs in 2025, compared to 1,791 Production jobs, Sales and Related Occupations (1,121 jobs) and Transportation and Material Moving Occupations (1,071) jobs) are the only other occupations with over 1,000 jobs.

With a strong employer like Church Mutual, a projected increase in population over 65, and a continued decrease in rail service, the Business and Financial Operations Occupations, Healthcare Support Occupations, and Transportation and Material Moving Occupations should continue to see an increase in employment opportunities.

Employment Projections v. Labor Projections

As discussed in the Issues and Opportunities Section, the Department of Administration projects the population in Merrill to increase 3.0 percent between 2015 and 2025. During the same timeframe, the number of jobs in the city is projected to increase 5.1 percent. As a result, there will be 8,391 jobs in the city and only 9,625 people. Based on 2010 percentages, people under the age of 17 will account for 21.3 percent of the city population. Accounting for those not in the workforce due to age, the actual eligible labor force will be 7,575 people. The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) projects a 2022 labor force participation rate of 61.6 percent. Based on the 2022 participation rate projection, the labor force will be even smaller, roughly 4,666 people. The participation rate has the potential to be even lower as the 70 plus million baby boomers will all be over the age of 65 by 2025, many of which will be no longer be participating in the labor force. The lack of population growth will create a workforce gap of roughly 3,725 people.

In 2013, 3,913 people commuted into the city for work, but 3,233 people migrated out of the city for work. The city has a net migration positive of 680 people. With the net positive of workers migrating to the city, the city could potentially face a workforce gap of 3,045 people.

The workforce gap is a county, region, and state issue. As the state and communities struggle to attract young professionals (ages 18 to 40), the workforce gap is extended. Industries will be unable to maintain, let alone expand, without access to the necessary amount of workers who have the knowledge, skills, and abilities required to meet industry standards.

Income Levels

The City's Median Household income in 2010 was $38,813 and the Per Capita Income was $21,772. Both Median income and Per Capita incomes have risen over the last twenty years, by 61.2 percent and 85.2 percent respectively. However, both Median incomes and Per Capita incomes have lagged considerably behind the county and state growth rates.

The 2014 median hourly salary in the city of Merrill was $17.43. A full time 40 hour a week position works roughly 2,080 hour per year. Based on this number, an average annual salary for a job in the city of Merrill is $36,254 per year. The average hourly salary in the city is slightly above the average for a job in Lincoln County. On average, a full time position in the city of Merrill pays roughly $915 a year more than a job outside of the city in Lincoln County. The average hourly salaries in both the county and city are lower than the average hourly salary in the state, $3.17 per hour and $2.73 per hour respectively. Not surprising, management occupations, legal occupations, architectural and engineering occupations, computer and mathematical occupations and healthcare practitioners (doctors) and technical occupations have the highest hourly wages, all over $27 per hour. Food preparation and Serving Related Occupations have the lowest hourly salaries ranging from $9.75 in the state to $8.78 in the county. However, food preparation and serving salaries do not take into account tips typically garnered by this occupation.

The lower per capita incomes and median household incomes in the city of Merrill imply that the people living in the city typically work in lower paying occupations, like food preparation, personal care and service, and healthcare and support. According to the U.S. Census American Community Survey 2009-2013, roughly 23.7 percent of all employed residents work in sales and office occupations and 18.5 percent work in service occupations. Only 23.2 percent of all employed residents work in management, business, science, and arts occupations. While the city provides jobs above the county's median salary, those jobs seem to be filled by people commuting into the city for work more so than by people living in the city. This employment trend would help explain the low per capita and median household incomes in the city compared to the surrounding towns and the county.

Major Employers

Table 35 lists the major employers in the city of Merrill, which includes insurance, manufacturing, and healthcare companies.

Economic Development Opportunities

Future opportunities for economic development will likely involve both the redevelopment and revitalization of existing obsolete properties as well as new "green field" development on the City's edge or in areas that may be annexed in the future.

Table 35: Major Employers, Lincoln County

Name	Product/ Service
Agra Industries Inc	Iron & Steel Mills & Ferroalloy Mfg
Church Mutual Insurance Co	Insurance Agencies & Brokerages
Dave's County Market	Supermarkets & Other Grocery Stores
Hurd Windows & Doors	Metal Window & Door Mfg
Interflex	All Other Plastics Product Mfg
Lincoln Wood Products Inc	Other Millwork including Flooring
Marshfield Clinic Merrill	Offices of Physicians exc Mental Health
Merrill Manufacturing Corp	Steel Wire Drawing
Ministry Good Samaritan Hlth	General Medical & Surgical Hospitals
Northern Wire Llc	Metal Merch Whls
Pine Crest Nursing Home	Nursing Care Facilities (Skilled Nursing)
Pioneer Transportation Ltd	General Freight Trucking Local
Prairie River Middle School	Elementary & Secondary Schools
Reindl Printing Inc	Commercial Gravure Printing
Semco Windows & Doors	Other Millwork including Flooring
Semling-Menke Co	Other Millwork including Flooring
Walmart	Department Stores exc Discount
Wick Buildings	Commercial Bldg Construction

Source: WI DWD

Employment Areas & Existing Facilities

There are four major areas of employment in the city. These are the downtown, the 51/64 Interchange, along the river, and the airport industrial park.

Airport Industrial Park – The Merrill airport industrial park is a 90 acre park located on West Taylor Street. The industrial park includes municipal infrastructure including water, sewer, gas, and electric. Municipal infrastructure includes 17,000 to 500,000KW of electricity and 60 PSI of gas, and telephone, cable, internet and fiber optics provided by Charter Business Networks. Currently, only seven available acres remain split into two lots. There is no rail access at this industrial site, but the park does have direct access to highway 107. There is very little land left in the Airport Park and the city needs to begin planning to add additional park space.

Due to this situation, the City and Merrill Area Development Corporation (MADC) have begun informal discussions on possibilities of future Industrial Park locations. While nothing is officially in the works at this time, it appears that any new Industrial Park acreage would need to be annexed into the City limits.

The city has a variety of infrastructure amenities for business development, including:

- Transportation access to State Highways 51, 64, and 107, and County Highways G, K, and Q.
- A public-use airport with a 6,000 foot runway suitable for commercial and freight service. It is a classified as a Basic Utility – B Airport.
- Both natural gas and electric utilities provided by Wisconsin Public Service.
- Rail service available from Canadian National Railroad.
- Telephone, cable, Internet, and fiber optics provided by Charter Business Network.
- Water, sanitary sewer, and local roads throughout the city.

Redevelopment Areas

The City has a redevelopment authority, the boundaries of which are the same as the city boundaries. However, the downtown and riverfront is a priority. There are several old industrial uses along the riverfront that may provide opportunities for redevelopment with other uses. The City continually watches for these opportunities. However, redevelopment of the riverfront will be a long-term endeavor given potential property contamination, the need to relocate existing businesses, and consolidation of adequately sized parcels.

Generally, redevelopment areas are those that are underutilized or vacant and there is some existing infrastructure and public services in place. The focus is on the change of use to the highest and best use. Often these might be called blighted or deteriorated areas, or they might be condemned properties. These areas are efficiently redeveloped since they will utilize existing public services and infrastructure; these are referred to as redevelopment areas.

Revitalization and Beautification Areas

Revitalization differs from redevelopment since the focus is not on a reuse, but rather towards upgrading and appearance. Often, these are older or run down existing commercial areas that need additional investment to modernize and rejuvenate.

Related to revitalization is beautification. The primary entrance to the community is at the Highway 51/64. Located along this road is a variety of retail and commercial establishments, making it appear like any other exit off a major highway. The first mile sets the tone for the

Strengths, Weaknesses, Aspirations, and Results (SOAR) Analysis

In 2014, as part of the City's strategic plan, the city completed an exercise in identifying and prioritizing the most important strategic issues city government will face over the next five year. Similar to Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis, a SOAR analysis emphasizes the positive aspects of a particular organization, the best opportunities that can improve economic development in the city, identifies the preferred future and what the city desires to be known for, and identifies tangible, measureable items that will indicate when the goals and aspirations have been achieved.

The following are the results of the SOAR analysis that specifically related to economic development.

Strengths

- The city currently has good, strong, progressive leadership
- The number and diversity of services the city provides is extensive (E.g. Services are provided to citizens of various ages.)
- There is a unique public transportation system for this size of city.

Opportunities

- Become even more involved in regional efforts that will allow for the pooling of resources.
- Work more closely with the entities that promote regional efforts such as Centergy, Grow North, and North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission.
- Focus on a just a few, potentially very impactful economic development projects (Lincoln House, former Guys Shop, etc.).
- Create a marketing strategy to persuade developers, including those who live in the area, to take on the projects.
- Continue to explore multijurisdictional ways to provide services.
- Search and apply or State and Federal grants to offset equipment and perhaps other costs.
- Hold meetings with other governments to learn about their "best practices" and apply those methods if/when it makes sense.

Aspirations

- City government needs to be friendlier to businesses. Help business owners through the process of locating here or expanding. If a regulation cannot/ should not be changed, give business owners options that will help them do what they need to do.
- Aspire to be the best we can be: we should be developing and communicating best practices in government management.

Results

- City government should do all it can to recruit businesses to the area. It should be more strategic about what businesses are recruited. Specifically, there are opportunities to target insurance industry businesses because this is a regional hub for that service.
- City government should have stronger ties to the local hospital and be more active in promoting the health of the community. The hospital is a vital institution in our community and losing it would be devastating.
- "Nurture" business growth. City government should do everything it can to promote the economic health of the community by working closely with businesses that wish to expand or relocate here. Be a facilitator rather than an entity that throws up road blocks to business expansion, retention, and relocation.
- The city with the county economic development director as the point person is finalizing details that will likely bring a business incubator to Merrill.
- City government should take specific actions to attract new residents and increase the tax base.
- City government should take specific actions to help bring more family supporting jobs to Merrill. Many of these jobs can be realized by promoting industrial growth.
- City government should help find and implement ways to attract and retain young professionals.
- City government should help solve regional problems. Solving regional problems will help strengthen the city.

community to a visitor or resident. Trees and landscaping could make this area much nicer. Merrill's signs say "the City of Parks", and the city has beautiful park facilities, however, 64 westbound from Highway 51 does not capture that sentiment.

Tax Incremental Financing Districts

Eight Tax Incremental Finance Districts (TIDs) are currently open to help pay for the infrastructure needed to accommodate new enterprises. The primary criteria for use of a TID are:

- Potential cash development incentives to support economic development (i.e. tax base growth and job creation)
- Infrastructure
- Acquisition, environmental work, and demolition of "blighted", tax-delinquent buildings to facilitate resale and redevelopment
- Historical façade improvements in commercial business areas
- Environmental remediation of "Brownfield" sites coordinating with Federal and State grant/loan funding resources
- Potential new TIF owner-occupied housing roof loan program (if unable to use CDBG funding or obtain loans from financial institutions)
- To facilitate development/redevelopment of new housing options both rental and owner-occupied.

Currently, there are eight TIF districts in the City. These are:

TID No. 3 Mixed Use 9/13/2005
East side to N. Center Ave.

TID No. 4 Mixed Use 9/11/2007
N. Pine Ridge/ Thielman Street Area

TID No. 5 Mixed Use 9/11/2007
Hwy 107/ Taylor Street Area

TID No. 6 "Blighted Area" 9/12/2009
Central Downtown to Prairie River Middle School

TID No. 7 "Blighted Area" 8/11/2009
N. Central Avenue to Douglas Street Area

TID No. 8 "Blighted Area" 9/27/2011
Westside Downtown to Alexander Street

TID No. 9 "Blighted Area" 9/24/2013
Wisconsin Riverfront/ S. Center Ave. Area

TID No. 10 "Blighted Area:" 9/22/2015
Highway G – former Fox Point Area

TID No. 11 Mixed Use 5/10/2016
Hwy 107/Industrial Park

A variety of economic development programs are listed in Appendix C.

Goals, Objectives, and Policies

The following goal, objectives and policies are identified to help improve the local economy.

Goal: The City of Merrill will appeal to people and business by creating a community that is visually appealing, has an abundance of social and recreational offerings, and offers diverse economic opportunities.

Objective 1: Add new restaurants, entertainment, and retail establishments in the downtown area.

Objective 2: Create and expand area events that draw visitors to the city.

Objective 3: Attract and retain the necessary workforce to meet the demands of area businesses.

Objective 4: Redevelop and revitalize blighted properties in the downtown area.

Objective 5: Retain, expand and attract businesses in the city.

Objective 6: Increase the number of jobs paying "livable wages."

Objective 7: Increase the number of housing units in the downtown area and throughout the City.

Policy 1: Continue to invest in efforts aimed at enhancing the quality of life in the community, which is a critical element to marketing Merrill as a great place to live, work, and play.

Policy 2: Continue to make revitalization and redevelopment of downtown Merrill, the Wisconsin River waterfront, and the Highway 51 interchanges a high priority.

Policy 3: Coordinate economic development activities between the City of Merrill, surrounding communities, Lincoln County and other organizations.

Policy 4: Continue to use tax incremental financing to support economic development efforts.

Policy 5: Prepare a detailed redevelopment plan for the city to spur investment and redevelopment.

Policy 6: Prepare a business incubator feasibility study in conjunction with Lincoln County Economic Development Corporation to locate a facility in Merrill.

Policy 7: Develop consistent marketing tools, including the web site, print materials, and other media.

Policy 8: As part of a business retention program, city and economic development staff should make regular, personal visits to local businesses.

Policy 9: Continue to use Unified Development District zoning throughout the city to encourage higher density, high quality, mixed use development.

Policy 10: Implement the recommendations outlined in the Downtown and Westside Development Plans.

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Chapter Seven
Land Use

Merrill encompasses over 5,000 acres and lies at the confluence of the Wisconsin and Prairie Rivers. It is also at the crossroads of Highway 51 and 64 and serves as the county seat for Lincoln County. The city has a growing commercial base, numerous neighborhoods and is home to many parks. How land is used and how it should be used in the future is the fundamental purpose of this chapter.

Previous Plans

Several plans related to land use have been developed over the years, including the previous comprehensive plan and sewer service area plan. Previous city and county plans form the foundation for this chapter.

Comprehensive Plan, 2007

The previous plan was prepared under the state's new planning law (66.1001) and it replaced a 1997 plan. Some of the goals identified in that plan include: create an economically efficient and environmentally sustainable development pattern, revitalize business districts, enhance Merrill neighborhoods, and preserve and enhance the quality of life in the community. A major issue identified in that previous effort was the need to expand employment and tax base in the community.

Wellhead Protection Plan, 1996

This plan focuses on preventing contaminants from entering the area of land around the public water supply. It identifies existing well locations, surrounding land uses, and recharge areas. The plan also incorporates recharge direction of flow, potential contamination sources within ½ mile radii of each well site, public education and conservation programs, and contains a management plan for addressing potential sources of contamination in the delineated well head protection areas.

All of the municipal wells and two alternative well sites were incorporated. Two of the city's wells are on the far west side of the city, and the other three wells, as well as two potential sites, are located on the eastern edge of the city. According to the plan, the east side aquifer has untapped capacity for at least one more well.

Sewer Service Area Plan, 1996

The goal of the plan is to guide growth in areas where it can be efficiently served by sanitary sewer. The City desires an orderly, compact development pattern within the Sanitary Sewer Service Area and will not extend sanitary sewer lines outside its corporate boundaries nor outside the Sanitary Sewer Service Area.

In addition to delineating an urban sewer service boundary, the Sewer Service Area Plan provides a framework for future planning at each individual municipal level. The goals and policies developed throughout this planning process will also be applicable and useful in the development of local policy direction with respect to land use decisions within these communities. That plan was developed in 1996 and needs updating.

Lincoln County Comprehensive Plan, 2015

In 2001 Lincoln County adopted a comprehensive plan which was also adopted under the comprehensive planning law. The towns of Merrill, Pine River, and Scott, which surround the City of Merrill were all involved in the process. Within those plans, much of the area adjacent to the city identifies rural single family and suburban single family residential development. Depending on the location and density these uses may or may not be compatible with the city's plan. In 2011 the county updated portions of that plan. In 2015 the county merged the two plans into one "integrated" plan.

Lincoln County Farmland Preservation Plan, Underway

In 2015 the county began the process of preparing a farmland preservation plan. This type of plan identifies areas where the most productive soils for agriculture are located and further identifies those that are the most important for long-term preservation. Part of the justification of these plans is to preserve our local food production capacity.

Only areas located within towns can be identified for farmland preservation, however, some of these areas may hinder growth for the city depending on location. The plan is expected to be developed over 2016 and adopted in early 2017.

Inventory & Trends

This section describes the general existing land uses in the city, identifies future demands for land, reviews land values, and outlines a future land use plan for the city and the surrounding area. It also establishes basis goals, objectives and policies for the city related to land use and the other previous chapters.

Existing Land Use

The City of Merrill is the largest city in Lincoln County and serves as the government center of the county. The city is located on the banks of the Wisconsin and Prairie Rivers and is surrounded by the Towns of Merrill, Pine River and Scott.

The city is roughly three miles east to west and about a mile north to south. The city is surrounded by agricultural uses, scattered residential, woodlands, and open space. In general, commercial development is stretched along State Highway 64 from the Highway 51 Interchange to the west side of the city, with the newest commercial development near the Highway 51 and 64 interchange. Government uses, such as the county, city, library and schools are located along this corridor as well, including some public housing. There are numerous other publicly owned parcels scattered throughout the city, including government facilities and a variety of parks and other open spaces.

Industrial uses are concentrated near the railroad tracks on the Wisconsin River and on the northwest part of the city near the airport and industrial park. Although some scattered industrial uses remain in some neighborhoods. Residential uses dominate most of the other areas of the city.

A comprehensive planning process requires that existing land use information be inventoried. To categorize land use starts with the examination of 2015 aerial photographs and on the ground review of that information. Ten land use classifications were used to categorize information. They are: Agriculture, Commercial, Governmental, Industrial, Open Lands, Residential, Multi-Family, Transportation, Outdoor Recreation and Woodlands. Water is also reflected. See the Existing Land Use Map, **Map 5**.

Using GIS, we calculated the land area for each category. Residential uses were the most dominant (23%), followed by Woodlands (19%), and Open Lands (12%). See **Table 36**.

Land Use Supply

There are about 5,090 acres of land within the city. Of that over 600 acres are considered open lands (about half of that is part of the airport), 250 acres is agricultural and another 980 acres are wooded. Much of these three land uses are expected to transition to other uses over time. Combined these three categories amount to about 1,800 acres, however, not all of this land is suitable or desirable for development. Some types of use that require specific land, such as industrial uses, are more limited. The Airport Industrial Park is nearly full.

In addition, much of the future growth of the city will be as a result of annexation. Two areas have been identified as the major growth areas for the city. Residential development is expected to occur south of the city in the Town of Scott and Commercial and Industrial development will occur to the east in the Town of Pine River. Little urban type growth is expected north and west of the city, except for development near the "K" interchange in the Town of Merrill.

Table 36: Existing Land Use*, 2015

Land Use Type	Acres	Percent
Agriculture	256	5.0%
Commercial	306	6.0%
Governmental	311	6.1%
Industrial	309	6.0%
Multi-Family	22	0.5%
Open Lands	615	12.1%
Outdoor Recreation	325	6.4%
Residential	1,176	23.1%
Transportation	428	8.4%
Water	356	7.0%
Woodlands	986	19.4%
Total Acres*	5,090	100.0%

**These figures are derived from airphotos and generalized planning maps. Source: NCWRPC GIS*

Land Use Issues

The following are issues that have been identified during the planning process.

Redevelopment & Revitalization:

Redevelopment along the river in the downtown area has been a strong focus for the community. Many of the buildings in this area are old and underutilized. There is substantial opportunity for redevelopment in this area. There are several neighborhoods that are beginning to show signs of age and disrepair, and the traditional commercial areas have also seen some decline. Some underutilized industrial properties are scattered throughout the city as well. Many of these areas may need some assistance to revitalize.

The city has some tools including tax incremental financing to promote redevelopment and revitalization in some areas, but there are limitations with that program. A redevelopment authority (RDA) and a housing rehabilitation program also exist to further redevelopment.

Population Growth:

There is concern for the long-term for population growth in the city. Projections show a relatively stagnant population for the city. For overall growth, population growth is needed. Most new residential development in the area has occurred outside of the city, while the city's housing stock continues to age. There is a desire to have new housing construction within the city, including multi-family and single family homes to meet future market demands.

A residential sidewalk.

Surrounding Development & Annexation:

The city considers the planning area to be the area within one and one-half miles of its corporate limits. This is the same area within which the city has the authority to provide extraterritorial review of subdivision proposals.

All non-agricultural development on lands located within the adopted Merrill Sanitary Sewer Service Area shall be served with the full array of municipal services. Unsewered urban development is strongly discouraged within the Merrill Sanitary Sewer Service Area because large unsewered lots cannot be efficiently served with sanitary sewer and water, nor with other services such as storm sewer, sidewalks, high levels of police and fire service, and street maintenance. Unsewered development is also discouraged because it allows for scattered development and land speculation that often results in premature conversion of productive agricultural land. Another reason is that septic systems are generally environmentally inferior to municipal systems.

The city encourages neighboring land uses, which emphasize agricultural preservation, allowance of very limited amounts of very low-density (1 dwelling unit per 35 acres) residential development and protection of natural resources in areas outside of the Merrill Sanitary Sewer Service Area. The city also discourages the creation of unsewered subdivisions within the sanitary sewer service area.

The City strongly encourages annexations to occur prior to development to ensure that such development is consistent with City plans, zoning and subdivision design standards, and utility systems. It is expected that growth will occur around both interchanges and to the south of the city. Currently, the county encourages annexation or at least sets standards to make annexation easier in the Suburban Residential district in the county zoning ordinance. Within this district there is a cooperative joint review process of proposed projects with developers, town and county representatives and the city.

The planning area for the City of Merrill, which extends 1.5 miles around the city, adds over 19,500 acres. Nearly 80 percent of the total planning area is woodlands, agriculture, grasslands or tree plantations. Some of these areas will be where the city grows in the future.

Land Use Demand

Population and employment projections were completed in an effort to identify the demand for land in the City of Merrill. See Attachment A for detailed review of the population, housing and employment projections.

Population Projections

In 2014, the Wisconsin Department of Administration (DOA) prepared population projections for each county and community in the state. DOA projections indicate that the city will decline in population by over 160 persons by 2035, see **Table 37**.

Although the projections indicate a stagnant population, based on recent estimates and the city's goal to increase the population, there is optimism that there will be growth in the city. The projections prepared by the NCWRPC assume that the City will be successful in capturing some of the growth that the DOA is projecting for the surrounding towns of Merrill, Pine River, and Scott.

Housing Projections

As a result of the population growth there will be a need for additional housing units. Using the 2010 persons per housing unit figure and the population change we can project anticipated housing unit needs. Note this is not household projections, but rather housing units. Although official population projections would indicate little need for additional units, there are numerous market demands that indicate a need for new units, as well as the city's desire to increase the population. A modest growth 20 units per years is projected to meet these demands, which translates into 400 units over the planning period, see **Table 38**.

A residential street in Merrill.

Employment Projections

County level data is the most detailed employment data available. No state agency prepares local level employment information. Therefore, to determine employment projections an economic modeling system is used. EMSI data is provided by zip code so the information provided includes much the city and surrounding area. Nearly 1,000 jobs are expected to be added over the planning period, see **Table 39**.

Demand

Based on these projections there appears to be sufficient land to meet future needs to 2035. However, if there is a desire to increase population, more residential land area is needed, especially for larger suburban type development.

Table 37: Merrill Population Projections

	2010	2015	2020	2025	2030	2035	Net Change
DOA	9,661	9,345	9,460	9,625	9,690	9,500	**-161**
NCWRPC*	9,661	9,530	9,944	10,423	10,808	10,900	**1,239**

** Based on the average growth rate projected by the DOA for the surrounding towns. Source: WI DOA 2013, NCWRPC*

Table 38: Merrill Housing Unit Projections

	2015	2020	2025	2030	2035	Change
Units	4,595	4,695	4,795	4,895	4,995	400

Source: U.S. Census & NCWRPC

Table 39: Merrill Employment Projections

	2015	2020	2025	2030	2035	Change
Jobs	7,982	8,134	8,391	8,702	9,013	1,031

Source: EMSI 2nd Q 2014 & 2nd Q 2016.(Data reflects zip code 54452) & NCWRPC

Table 40: Merrill Equalized Property Values

Type of Property	2010	2015	% Change
Residential	257,361,200	257,635,100	0.1%
Commercial	86,081,500	106,066,600	23.2%
Manufacturing	29,645,000	32,172,100	8.5%
Agricultural	72,000	30,900	-57%
Undeveloped	66,600	87,800	31.8%
Ag. Forest	0	0	NA
Forest	0	0	NA
Other	0	0	NA
Total Value:	373,226,300	395,992,500	6.1%

Source: WI DOR, 2010 & 2015

Land Values

Overall equalized land values in the city have increased about 6 percent over the last five years; however, not all categories of land increased equally. Residential property values stayed virtually the same, while commercial and manufacturing increased by 23 and 8 percent respectively, see **Table 40**.

Redevelopment and Infill Opportunities

The river has become a focus of redevelopment efforts in the city. There still are some downtown retail areas and some of the older residential districts in the city that need to be addressed as well. There are several parcels within the city that are underutilized and could be ideal locations for redevelopment or infill development.

As new development occurs on the fringes of the community it is important that the city focus its efforts to maintain the vitality of the existing commercial and residential areas of the community. The city has an active redevelopment authority that has a goal of focusing funding in specific revitalization and redevelopment areas of the city.

Future Land Use Plan

The Future Land Use Plan Map represents the long-term land use recommendations for all lands in the city and the planning area. Although the map is advisory and does not have the authority of zoning, it is intended to reflect community desires and serve as a guide for local officials to coordinate and manage future development of the city.

The Future Land Use Plan Map builds on the previous plan efforts and the previous chapters of this plan. Using information from demographics, housing, transportation and the other chapters the future land use was developed, which represents the desired arrangement of future land uses in the year 2035. Some change is anticipated within the developed areas of the city, but the majority of change is expected along the edge of the city and in certain portions of the planning area over time.

The previous comprehensive plan utilized twelve basic land use categories. Those same categories were used in this plan as well. They are defined below:

1. **Neighborhood Residential:** Identifies areas recommended for typical single-family residential development, typically consisting of smaller lot sizes served by municipal sewer and water – a high density area.

2. **Multi-family Residential:** Identifies areas recommended for high-density multi-family residential development, to include duplexes, condos and apartments - the highest density area.

3. **Rural Residential:** Identifies areas recommended for less dense residential development, consisting of larger minimum lot sizes than the neighborhood residential category and may not have municipal sewer and water. These areas also provide a transition from more dense development to the rural countryside – a lower density area.

4. **Mixed Use Commercial:** Identifies areas recommended areas for mixed use development, where commercial is the dominant use, but residential is a common second floor type use.

5. **Commercial:** Identifies areas recommended for commercial development. This would include retail sales, personal and professional services, and offices.

6. **Industrial:** Identifies areas recommended for industrial development. This would include manufacturing, processing, and assembly facilities.

7. **Business Park:** Identifies areas recommended for office and related type development. This would include medical clinics, office buildings, and other related types activities.

8. **Interchange Development:** Identifies areas recommended for highway related commercial

development, such as convenience stores, hotels/motels, and fast food.

9. **Governmental/Public/Institutional:** Identifies areas recommended for governmental, and public/institutional facilities. The airport is included here.

10. **Transportation Corridors:** Identifies areas recommended for road network along with the recommendations for improved and safe traffic movement in the city, including rail facilities.

11. **Open Space/ Preservation:** Identifies areas recommended for open space and recreation. This would include parks and other recreational facilities. It also identifies areas recommended for preservation and protection, such as floodplains as defined by the Federal Emergency Management Agency, DNR wetlands, steep slopes, and open water. This could include endangered species habitat or other significant features.

12. **Agricultural/Forest:** Identifies area recommended for agricultural uses such as crop farming and livestock operations. Also includes wooded areas. These are transitional areas that long term will likely be considered for other uses.

Land use and zoning are similar but they are not the same. Land use categories are more general, while zoning is much more detailed. Zoning is the legal tool to regulate specific land uses. Since the land use categories are generalized it is possible that more than one zoning district would correspond to each of the categories. Timing is also a consideration for zoning. Some of the areas identified on the future land use map may not be appropriate for certain zoning for five or ten years, based on other factors, such as the extension of specific infrastructure. The goal was to produce a generalized land use plan map to guide the city's growth in the next twenty years.

Change is expected to occur near both interchanges as those lands convert to commercial type development. Some areas to the east, south and north are expected to become residential. Future business park type development is expected south of the city along Highway Q and Business 51, and to the east along the Highway 51 corridor. See the Future Land Use Plan Map, **Map 6**.

Future Land Use Planning Area

As the city grows in the future it will need to expand so it is important to monitor the area surrounding the city. The planning area extends 1.5 miles around the city, which covers about 24,500 acres. This is the area the city can exercise plat review, as outlined in state statutes.

In addition, the city has a Sewer Service Area (SSA) plan in place that establishes a boundary where new development requiring sewer can occur. The boundary of the Sewer Service Area was intended to be large enough in size to easily accommodate projected urban growth in the Merrill area over a 20-year period and provide enough excess acreage to ensure efficient operation of the urban land market. The boundary was last amended in 2015 and covers about 7,500 acres.

These two boundaries, the 1.5 mile planning boundary and the sewer service area boundary are important to monitor. Land area closest to the existing corporate limit are the most important to monitor. These are the areas most likely where annexations will take place and expand the city limits.

As discussed earlier, the city is likely to grow north into the Town of Merrill, east beyond Highway 51 in the Town of Pine River, and to the south along Business 51 into the Town of Scott. The future land use plan for the planning area indicates residential growth to the north, and to a lesser degree to the southwest of the city. Business and commercial expansion is expected to the east and south. This growth will happen slowly over time, as needed. See the Future Land Use Planning Area Map, **Map 7**.

Existing Land Use Tools

To implement the recommendations of the comprehensive plan there are some basic tools that are available to the city. These are zoning, subdivision ordinance, and official mapping.

Zoning

Zoning is a major tool used to regulate land uses and implement a comprehensive plan. The zoning ordinance regulates the use of property to advance the public health, safety, and welfare. It has been used throughout the United States and in Wisconsin since the 1920's.

A zoning ordinance creates different use zones or districts within a community. Each district has a list of permitted uses, which are uses that are desirable in a district. Each district may also contain a list of special uses, sometimes called special exceptions or conditional uses, which are allowed under certain circumstances, and require review by a local government body to be allowed. All other uses are prohibited.

Zoning regulations are adopted by local ordinance and consist of two components, a map and related text. The zoning map displays where the zoning district boundaries are, and the text describes what can be done in each type of district. The Future Land Use Plan and zoning are similar but they are not the same. Land use categories are more general, while zoning is much more detailed. Zoning is the legal tool to regulate specific land uses. Since the land use categories are generalized it is possible that more than one

zoning district would correspond to each of the categories.

Zoning should be derived from, and be consistent with, the policy recommendations adopted in the comprehensive plan. The desired land uses should "drive" the development of specific zoning ordinance provisions including district descriptions, permitted uses, conditional uses and the zoning map. This consistency has been important in upholding legal challenges in the Courts.

Following the planning process it is critical that the zoning ordinance be updated to incorporate the findings of the plan.

Land Division

Subdivision regulation relates to the way in which land is divided and made ready for development. A community can control the subdivision of land by requiring a developer to meet certain conditions in exchange for the privilege of recording a plat. While imposing conditions restricts the use of private property, the cumulative effect of land subdivision on the health, safety, and welfare of a community is so great as to justify public control of the process.

Of all the land use control devices available, subdivision regulation has probably the greatest potential. When compared with zoning, a well-administered subdivision control is more useful in achieving planning goals and its influence is far more lasting. Once land is divided into lots and streets are laid out, development patterns are set. Subdivision regulations can ensure that those development patterns are consistent with community standards. Subdivision regulations can also ensure the adequacy of existing and planned public facilities such as schools, wastewater treatment systems, water supply, to handle new growth. Finally, subdivision regulation can help ensure the creation and preservation of adequate land records.

There is some overlap between zoning and subdivision codes in terms of standards. Both ordinances, for example, can set lot sizes. Both can deal with the suitability of land for development. Implementing important plan techniques such as rural cluster development often requires use of the zoning ordinance and the subdivision ordinance.

Under Wisconsin law, the city has authority to provide extraterritorial review of subdivision requests in the surrounding towns within one and one-half mile of its corporate limits.

Official Mapping

Cities may adopt official maps. These maps, adopted by ordinance or resolution, may show existing and planned streets, highways, historic districts, parkways, parks, playgrounds, railroad rights of way, waterways and public transit facilities. The map may include a waterway only if it is included in a comprehensive surface water drainage plan. No building permit may be issued to construct or enlarge any building within the limits of these mapped areas except pursuant to conditions identified in the law.

Official maps are not used frequently because few communities plan anything but major thoroughfares and parks in detail in advance of the imminent development of a neighborhood.

Other Tools

Extraterritorial Plat Review:

Extraterritorial plat review allows the city to review, and approve or reject subdivision plats located within the extraterritorial area as long as the city has a subdivision ordinance or an official map. Statutes define the review area as the unincorporated areas within 1.5 miles of the city.

The purpose of the extraterritorial plan approval process is to help cities influence the development pattern of areas outside the city that will likely be annexed at some point. It also helps cities protect land uses near its boundaries from conflicting uses outside the city limits.

Extraterritorial Jurisdiction Zoning:

Extra-territorial zoning is tool allowed under Wisconsin Statutes. To do this, however, requires a lengthy three-step process including the creation of a joint committee consisting of representatives from the City and the Towns, which work together to adopt this tool.

This joint committee prepares a proposed plan and regulations for the extraterritorial area and submits it to the City, which may adopt it as proposed or resubmit the proposal to the joint committee for changes. In either case, the proposed regulations must receive a favorable majority vote from the joint committee before the City can adopt them.

Goal, Objectives & Policies

As in previous chapters of this plan a series of goals, objectives, and policies are identified. Some of these were brought forward from the previous comprehensive plan. These are identified to set a general direction for the City.

Goal: Create an economically efficient and environmentally sustainable development pattern.

Objective 1: Provide an adequate supply of developable land for residential, commercial, industrial, and other uses.

Objective 2: Encourage compact, mixed-use development patterns that are well served by sidewalks, bicycle routes and other non-motorized transportation facilities.

Objective 3: Promote development that has mixed housing neighborhoods that provide a range of housing types, densities and costs.

Policy 1: Utilize existing public facilities to serve new development whenever possible.

Policy 2: Periodically update the wellhead protection ordinance to protect the municipal water supply.

Policy 3: Encourage the clean up of contaminated sites that threaten public health, safety and welfare.

Policy 4: Coordinate the Sewer Service Area Plan and the Comprehensive Plan.

Policy 5: Provide safe and convenient access between neighborhoods, employment centers, schools, service centers and recreational centers.

Policy 6: Encourage a range of housing types and densities throughout the city.

Policy 7: Utilize official mapping authority within the City limits and the planning area to identify and protect a road system that serves the long-term transportation and other infrastructure needs of the community.

Policy 8: Discourage low density, unsewered urban development in the identified growth areas adjacent to the city.

Policy 9: Discourage conflicting land uses anywhere in the city or planning area.

Policy 10: Encourage collaboration between the City of Merrill and neighboring jurisdictions with regard to planning initiatives and development policies.

Chapter Eight
Intergovernmental Cooperation

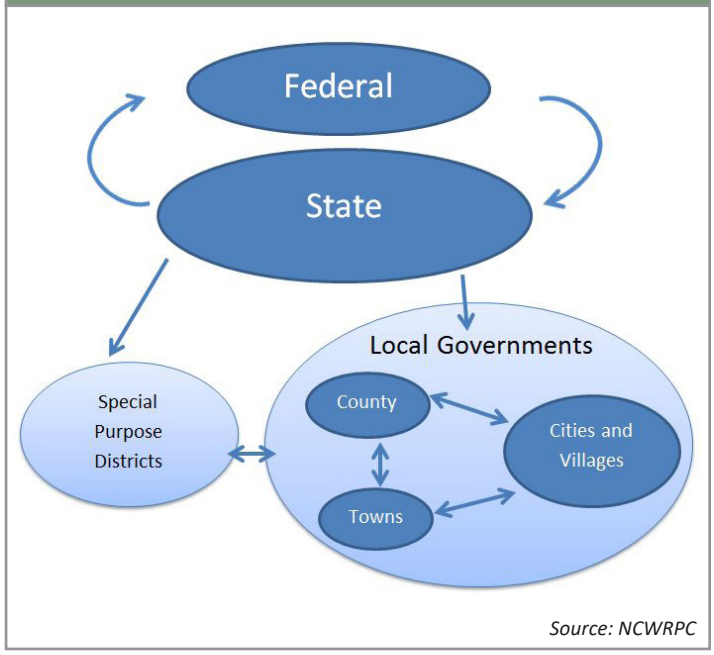
Intergovernmental Cooperation is important because many issues including economic development, housing, natural resources, and transportation cross political boundaries. Communities are interdependent for many reasons, and the effects of growth, change, and activities spill over and impact the entire region.

Typically, intergovernmental cooperation and coordination refers to any arrangement by which officials of two or more government jurisdictions coordinate plans, policies, and programs to address and resolve issues of mutual interest. It is also dependent upon a defined geographic area within which cooperation and coordination may be feasible. Intergovernmental cooperation can be as simple as communication and information sharing, or it can involve entering into formal intergovernmental agreements and sharing resources such as equipment, buildings, staff, and revenue. Wisconsin Statute s.66.30, entitled "Intergovernmental Cooperation", does enable local governments to jointly do together whatever one can do alone.

Relationships between governments can best be described as "vertical" relationships, such as between federal, state and local units (county/city/town), see **Display 3**. These relationships are relatively well established in law. Unfortunately, there is little public policy in Wisconsin law that encourages, let alone requires, horizontal governmental relationships such as town to town and municipality to county or town. The result is that towns, municipalities, and counties often act more as adversaries than as partners.

State-wide, Wisconsin has over twenty five hundred units of government and special purpose districts. Having so many governmental units allows for local representation, but also adds more players to the decision making process. As governments communicate and collaborate on issues of mutual interest, they become more aware of one another's needs and priorities. They can better anticipate problems and work to avoid them. Intergovernmental cooperation makes sense for many reasons including trust, cost savings, consistency, and ability to address regional issues. Cooperation can lead to positive experiences and results that build trust between jurisdictions. It can save money by increasing efficiency and avoiding unnecessary duplication. It can lead to consistency of goals, objectives, plans, policies, and actions of neighboring communities. Finally, by communicating and coordinating their actions and working with regional and state jurisdictions, local communities are able to address and resolve issues that are regional in nature.

Display 3: Levels of Government



Source: NCWRPC

A variety of other factors, some long-standing and some of fairly recent origin, are combining to force citizens and local governments in both urban and rural area to confer, cooperate, and in some cases, to join together in a search for better ways to deliver public services in their respective

areas. These factors include:

- Local governments financial situation;
- Opportunity to reduce costs by working together;
- Elimination of duplication of services;
- Population settlement patterns and population mobility;
- Economic and environmental interdependence; and
- High-cost, capital-intensive functions.

The major beneficiary of intergovernmental cooperation is the local resident. They may not understand, or even care about the details of a particular intergovernmental issue, but residents can appreciate their benefits, such as cost savings, provision of needed services, a healthy environment, and a strong economy. Communication and joint planning can reduce or minimize potential conflicts.

Merrill Area

The City of Merrill is located entirely within Lincoln County, and generally the City and County provide different services to residents. The City provides basic services such as police and fire, sewer and water, plowing streets, and maintaining parks and public facilities. While the County offers health, social services, the criminal justice system, and other services to all county residents including those who live in the city. Education is provided by the Merrill School District. Local higher learning is provided by the Northcentral Technical College. Cooperation between these separate levels of government can both increase efficiency and reduce the cost of providing these services to citizens.

The City of Merrill is surrounded by the Towns of Merrill, Pine River and Scott, see **Display 4**. The City has an interdependent relationship with the surrounding towns. Many workers in the City live in surrounding towns, and the development patterns and infrastructure in the Towns affect the operations of the City. Merrill has extraterritorial subdivision review within a one and a half mile area around the city and under state law has the ability to have some extraterritorial zoning authority.

Efforts should be made to maintain good working relationships with the surrounding Towns. Potential conflicts can occur when development in an adjacent town conflicts with the long term plan for the City, or when annexation of land to the City from the surrounding towns occurs. In 1999 the county led a comprehensive planning effort, which included all three of these towns. Lincoln County updated portions of the plan, but did not update individual towns. Therefore those town plans are outdated.

Merrill City Hall.

The Lincoln County Courthouse.

Existing Relationships & Agreements

Currently there are numerous relationships and several general agreements in place. The following is a summary of these cooperative efforts:

Local Government

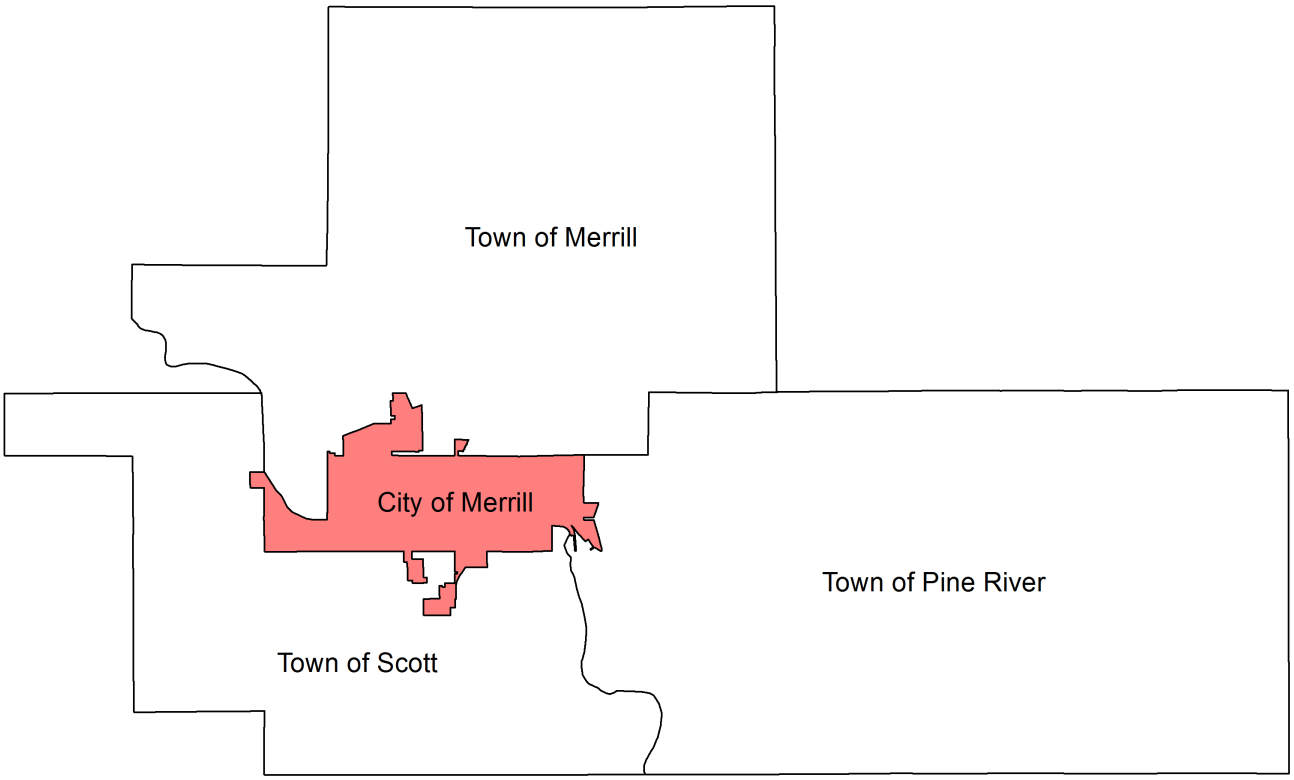
Protective Services

Ambulance, fire and law enforcement all have standing relationships. Currently, the Merrill Fire Department has contracts to provide fire service to three of the surrounding towns (Merrill, Scott, and Rock Falls). They also provide EMS service to about two-thirds of the County. The Lincoln County Sherriff's Office also provides dispatching services for the City of Merrill.

County Government

As the county seat, the city is the hub of county government. The Courthouse, Annex and a variety of other assets are located in the city. These all require on going communication

Display 4: Surrounding Municipalities



Source: NCWRPC

between the city and county to provide residents of the city and county the best service. Merrill has relationships with Lincoln County for several other services, including recycling and landfill use.

Library District

The library is operated by the City of Merrill with contributions from several area governments and organizations. The library provides a valuable service to the community, improving self-education opportunities and life-long learning, as well as provided community space for children and adults to gather, hold events, and recreate. The library can also serve as an important business incubator through public internet access and technology such as a 3D printer available for use.

Merrill Area School District

The city and the planning area are within the Merrill School District. The school district operates multiple facilities in the city. There is constant communication between the school district and the city.

Lincoln County Economic Development Corporation

The city is a financially contributing member of the Lincoln County Economic Development Corporation. This organization provides business assistance, economic development and marketing duties for the city.

North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission

The city, as a local unit of government within Lincoln County, is a member of the North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission. The NCWRPC provides assistance related to economic development, geographic information systems (GIS), intergovernmental cooperation, land use planning, and transportation to local governments within a ten-county region. The NCWRPC also prepares regional plans that address issues that cross jurisdictional and political boundaries.

State & Federal Government

As a local unit of government the city has formal relationships with the state and federal government. The city frequently works with the various state departments, such as the Department of Transportation, the Department of Natural Resources and the Department of Revenue. Meanwhile, some of the federal agencies that the city works with include the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Environmental Protection Agency. The State and Federal government also have funding assistance available for local governments for housing, community development, rural development, economic development, community arts, transportation, environmental remediation, and many other areas.

Goals, Objectives & Policies

Goal 1: Maintain a positive relationship and open communication with other government entities in the area, including surrounding towns, special districts, the county, the state, and the federal government.

Objective 1: Maintain current agreements and explore additional opportunities with adjacent communities for services, such as fire and ambulance service.

Objective 2: Work cooperatively with neighboring townships to update land use plans to guide development in the area under extra-territorial jurisdiction.

Objective 3: Encourage local officials to participate in county and state government activities and organizations.

Objective 4: Strengthen lines of communication with the county and neighboring towns regarding potential growth and annexations.

Objective 5: Develop cooperative boundary agreements by working with the county and surrounding townships.

Policy 1: Communicate with surrounding communities when proposed development is near a boundary or could have impacts on the adjacent community.

Policy 2: Work cooperatively with county and adjacent towns to jointly review and coordinate development under the City's extra-territorial zoning and subdivision review authority, and to review projects under county zoning.

Policy 3: Establish and maintain a list of contacts for adjacent towns and routinely meet to discuss common issues

Policy 4: Regularly meet with surrounding towns and Lincoln County to review service agreements and identify opportunities to improve efficiency and cost-effectiveness.

Policy 5: Reference the Future Land Use Map when reviewing extraterritorial subdivision proposals.

Goal 2: Encourage and facilitate participation by the public in government

Objective 1: Encourage regular participation and feedback from residents through surveys, informational public meetings, newsletters or other activities.

Policy 1: Continue to post and maintain meeting agendas and minutes.

Policy 2: Continue to utilize website and public access recording of public meetings to allow more residents to be involved.

Policy 3: Conduct regular community meetings and/or surveys to solicit public input on various issues and concerns affecting the City.

Policy 4: Accommodate disadvantaged and underrepresented groups by occasionally holding public meetings at locations, times, and with accommodations that are more inviting to those groups.

Chapter Nine
Implementation

Overview

The implementation chapter is intended to provide a summary of actions necessary to carry out the goals and objectives determined through the planning process. Beginning on January 1, 2010, any program or action of a local governmental unit that affects land use is required to be consistent with that local governmental unit's comprehensive plan, this includes:

- official mapping established or amended under s. 62.23;
- local subdivision regulation under s. 236.45 or 236.46;
- zoning ordinances enacted or amended under s. 62.23;
- zoning of shorelands or wetlands in shorelands under s. 59.692, 61.351 or 62.231;

Other actions that may use the comprehensive plan for general guidance include:

- annexation procedures under s. 66.0217, 66.0219, or 66.0223;
- cooperative boundary agreements entered into under s. 66.0307;
- municipal boundary agreements fixed by judgment under s. 66.0225;
- extraterritorial plat review within the City's extraterritorial plat approval jurisdiction, as is defined in s. 236.02 (5);
- an improvement of a transportation facility that is undertaken under s. 84.185;
- impact fee ordinances that are enacted or amended under s. 66.0617; land acquisition for recreational lands and parks under s. 23.09 (20);
- construction site erosion control and storm water management zoning under s. 59.693, 61.354 or 62.234; and
- any other ordinance, plan or regulation of a local governmental unit that relates to land use, except conditional use permits.

Consistency Review

There are no known inconsistencies among the planning chapters. This Plan, having been prepared as a single unit, is consistent in its parts and there is no inconsistency between them.

In the future, as plan text and map amendments occur, it is important that city staff and the plan commission conduct consistency reviews. These reviews will ensure that changes do not conflict with other sections of the plan.

Implementation Tools

Having the appropriate tools to implement the recommendations in this comprehensive plan is critical. The most common implementation tools are ordinances. In particular, the zoning ordinance and subdivision (or land division) regulations are the primary regulatory devices used to protect existing development and guide future growth and development as identified in this comprehensive plan. There are also non-regulatory approaches to implementing the comprehensive plan; including decisions about how the community will utilize its financial resources.

Zoning Ordinance and Map

Zoning is used to manage and control how land is used and developed. Zoning ordinances typically establish detailed regulations concerning how land may be developed, including setbacks, the density or intensity of development, the height and bulk of buildings and other structures, and parking requirements. The general purpose of zoning

is to minimize undesirable side effects resulting from development by segregating and/or buffering incompatible uses and by maintaining standards that ensure development will not negatively impact the community's character or environment.

The establishment of zoning districts and the zoning map indicates where development can and should be located. Zoning districts shown on the zoning map should be coordinated with the land use plan and map. While the zoning map and land use map do not need to directly match at the time the land use map is adopted, the intent is that the land use map will serve as a guide indicating how the property should eventually be zoned.

However, there may be situations where changing the zoning district boundary is in the best interest of the community. If changing the zoning would result in a conflict with the future land use map, the land use map should also be changed. However, the future land use map should only be changed if it does not accurately reflect the community's desired land use pattern.

Subdivision (Land Division) Ordinance

Subdivision regulations serve as an important function by ensuring the orderly development of unplatted and/or undeveloped land. These regulations may set forth reasonable regulations for lot sizes, road access, street design, public utilities, storm water drainage, parks and open space, and other improvements necessary to ensure that new development will be an asset.

Capital Improvement Plan (CIP)

This is an ongoing financial planning program that allows local communities to plan ahead for capital expenditures and minimize unplanned expenses. A CIP prioritizes expenditures in a way that can influence where and when development or redevelopment occurs, and can be a powerful tool in implementing the goals of the comprehensive plan.

Annual Operating Budget

The City prepares a budget each year. It is a statement of the prioritization and allocation of financial resources to achieve certain objectives over a specific time period. The budget is based on the needs of city residents, priorities set by the city council, and the related work plans identified by each department. The budget and the services provided by that budget are instrumental in achieving the goals and objectives of the plan.

Other Tools

Other tools that can implement the comprehensive plan and influence development in Merrill include: fee simple land acquisition, purchasing or acquiring easements, transfer or purchase of development rights, deed restrictions, land dedication, impact fees, utility districts and fees (such as stormwater) building permits, and other ordinances that include stormwater and erosion control requirements.

Plan Amendments & Updates

The Merrill Comprehensive Plan is intended to be a "living" document. While the plan is intended to provide a long-term framework for the community, it must also be responsive to change. As things change so should the plan. Over time it is expected that numerous things, from the economic climate to social demands will create a need for change. As such, the comprehensive plan should be reviewed periodically.

Amendments

Amendments are minor changes to the plan. Periodically, development proposals or changing circumstances within the City may trigger consideration of an amendment. Examples may include requests to change the zoning of a parcel to a use that is inconsistent with the future land use map in the Comprehensive Plan, changes recommended through a detailed planning effort conducted by the City, or a simple error in the document. The City will address these issues on an as-needed basis, rather than waiting for a scheduled review of the plan.

The following criteria should be considered when reviewing plan amendments:

- The change is consistent with the overall goals and objectives of the Comprehensive Plan.
- The change does not create an adverse impact on public facilities and services that cannot be mitigated.
- Development resulting from the change does not create an undue impact on surrounding properties. Such development should be consistent with the physical character of the surrounding neighborhood or would upgrade and improve its viability.
- The change allows a more viable transition to the planned uses on adjacent properties than the current land use.
- The change does not have a significant adverse impact on the natural environment including trees, slopes and groundwater, or the impact could be mitigated by improvements on the site or in the same vicinity.
- There is a community or regional need identified in the comprehensive plan for the proposed land use or service.
- The change corrects an error made in the original plan.

Upon Plan Commission review and resolution to make recommended changes to the plan, the City Council shall call a public hearing to allow citizens time to review and comment on the recommended plan changes. The public hearing shall be advertised using a Class I notice. Based on

public input, staff and plan commission recommendations, as well as other facts, the council will then formally act on the recommended amendment(s).

Updates

Under current law, it is required that an update of the comprehensive plan be undertaken once every ten (10) years. See State Statute 66.1001. Updates will ensure that not only the data and other information is current, but also the plan's goals, objectives, and policies reflect the desires and needs of the city. An update will also include a review of all planning maps. However, it is recommended the plan be reviewed at least once every five years. Some critical parts of the plan, such as the Future Land Use Plan Map, might warrant annual review.

It is important that all segments of the public are involved in the update process. Thus, a Public Participation Plan is required to ensure that the public is engaged in the planning process.

Comprehensive Plan Goals

Below is a review of the plan goals identified in each chapter of the Comprehensive Plan. These serve as an overall policy guide for the City of Merrill.

Chapter 2 – Natural Resources

Goal 1: Provide a safe, clean and orderly natural environment for residents.

Goal 2: Future non-metallic mining sites will not negatively impact the planning area (3 mile area surrounding the city) or its residents.

Goal 3: Maintain the area's diverse wildlife habitat.

Chapter 2 – Agricultural Resources

Goal 1: Provide for the future viability of the agricultural resources within the planning area (3 miles surrounding the city) until a time it can be converted to a higher best use.

Chapter 2 – Cultural Resources

Goal 1: The city's historic, archeological and cultural locations and structures will remain preserved for the city residents.

Chapter 3 – Housing

Goal 1: Supply an affordable mixture of housing options that meet the needs of all community members.

Goal 2: Improve the housing stock, developing new housing that is in walking distance to food and entertainment options, to accommodate and attract new households.

Goal 3: Eliminate dilapidated and tax delinquent housing units, especially in downtown areas, maximizing property values.

Chapter 4 – Utilities and Community Facilities

Goal 1: Promote an effective and efficient supply of utilities, facilities and services that meet the needs and expectations of residents

Chapter 5 - Transportation

Goal 1: Provide an integrated, efficient, balanced, equitable and economical transportation system that provides mobility, convenience, and safety and that meets the needs of all citizens, including young, elderly, transit-dependent and disabled citizens. This includes providing choices in the mode of transportation (car, transit, bicycle, walking, etc.), easy transfer between modes, and accessible, safe, and convenient opportunities for those without the use of a motor vehicle.

Chapter 6 – Economic Development

Goal 1: To improve the economic well-being of Merrill through efforts that involve job creation, job retention, tax base enhancements, and other quality of life initiatives.

Chapter 7 – Land Use

Goal 1: Create an economically efficient and environmentally sustainable development pattern.

Chapter 8 – Intergovernmental Cooperation

Goal 1: Maintain a positive relationship with open communication with other government entities in the area, including surrounding towns, special districts, the county, the state, and the federal government.

Goal 2: Encourage and facilitate participation by the public in government

Measuring Plan Progress

To implement the goals of the comprehensive plan, various objectives and policies that relate to each chapter of the plan were developed. These are intended to provide direction to local leaders and staff, as well as citizens of the City of Merrill for the implementation of the Comprehensive Plan.

To measure progress towards meeting these goals, objectives, and policies, a variety of actions need to take place. Therefore, the task to measure plan progress, is as simple as determining if any action was taken or not, and if that action was taken according to the timeline. These "targets" will provide guidance to the city when specific actions are to be initiated. Based on the targets, measures of progress in achieving implementation of the comprehensive plan can be examined.

It should be noted that many of the policies identified in the plan are continuous or on-going and should also be monitored to measure the plan's overall success. Objectives can be categorized by the time it may take to accomplish them, generally short-term, or 1 to 5 years, mid-term, or 6

to 10 years, and long-term or 10 years or more.

It is recommended that a periodic "Plan Status" report be prepared to summarize the progress toward implementation. This report might be jointly developed by various city departments, as related to their involvement in the implementation of the goals, objectives, and policies developed within this plan. Ultimately, the success of the planning process will be measured by the future quality of life and prosperity experienced by both residents and visitors to Merrill.

Recommendations

Implementation of this plan depends on the willingness of local officials, to use it as a guide when making decisions that affect growth and development in the City. This section outlines some recommendations to implement the goals, objectives, and policies that are contained in the previous chapters of this plan.

These recommendations are:

1. The City Council should adopt the plan and use it as a guide for decision making.
2. The Plan Commission should become knowledgeable of the plan and use it to justify recommendations to the City Council on development issues.
3. The City should encourage citizen awareness of the Comprehensive Plan. It is also important that developers are aware of the plan.
4. The City should review its Zoning Ordinance to establish consistency between the two documents and incorporate any needed changes.
5. The City should periodically review the Comprehensive Plan and update the document in ten years.
6. City staff should incorporate the goals, objectives and policies of the plan into annual work plans and budgets.

Appendix A
Public Participation Plan

CITY OF MERRILL
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PLAN

This plan sets forth the techniques the City will use to meet the goal of public participation. Therefore, this Public Participation Plan (PPP) forms the basic framework to inform and involve the public in the comprehensive planning process.

The creation of the Public Participation Plan is a task required in meeting the requirements of Wisconsin's Comprehensive Planning Legislation (State Statute 66.1001). As the planning process develops, it should be expected that deviations from the plan might occur.

I. Objectives:

The following is a list of public participation objectives the City would like to achieve throughout the development and subsequent adoption of the Comprehensive Plan:

- Residents become aware of the importance of participating in the development of the Comprehensive Plan.
- That the public participation process be designed to engage all areas of the City.
- All members of the community are represented during the planning process.
- That the public has opportunities to provide their input (both formally and informally) at any time to the City throughout the planning process.
- That the public has access to all technical information and any analyses performed throughout the planning process.
- That input is elicited through a variety of means (electronic, printed, and oral) in such a way that it may be carefully considered and responded to.
- The process will involve key community groups such as the Chamber of Commerce, downtown groups, housing groups, and economic development organizations.
- That this process of public involvement strengthens the sense of community in the City.
- Gather public feedback about community desires for the future of the City of Merrill.
- Collaboration with the citizens in developing the comprehensive plans goals, objectives, and policies.
- Disseminate community input to ultimate decision makers for their consideration

The goal will be to inform, involve, and collaborate with the public and the community throughout the planning process. Successful involvement of the entire community will ensure all issues and community desires are considered and the goals created reflect the entire community's vision.

II. Techniques:

The public participation plan for the comprehensive plan will incorporate the following:

1. All meetings for the comprehensive plan process will be posted and open to the public. Updates will be made to the City Council from time to time. Many of these meetings will be televised on the local public access channel.

2. An open house type meeting will be held mid-way through the process and a public hearing will be held at the end of the process.

3. A planning website will be hosted by the NCWRPC for the City of Merrill Comprehensive Plan. The website will not only display data, but will also allow for comments to be submitted.

4. Key community stakeholders and groups will be identified and engaged to review the Comprehensive Plan.

5. A "comprehensive planning" display will be maintained in the lobby of City Hall that includes maps and an overview of the plan process. Comment sheets will be available as well.

6. An electronic planning survey will be conducted to gather public feedback about community desires for the City of Merrill.

7. A planning Social Media page (e.g. Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter) will be hosted by the City of Merrill for the Comprehensive Plan. The Social Media page will display data, meeting information, and will allow for comments throughout the planning process.

Throughout the plan process, the Plan Commission will act as the standing oversight committee. From time to time additional persons may be invited to provide information to the planning process.

The Plan Commission will review the plan and recommend its approval to the City Council.

III. Distribution, Implementation & Update:

Upon completion and adoption of the Comprehensive Plan it will be distributed to all adjoining units of government, Lincoln County, the Wisconsin Department of Administration, and other interested parties. The City will make its best efforts to implement the findings of the Comprehensive plan through a variety of tools, including zoning. As with all plans, it is critical for them to be maintained and updated on a regular basis.

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Appendix B
Housing Programs

There are a number of programs available to local governments to aid with their housing needs. Below is a listing of some of the programs available:

Local Housing Organizations

Merrill Area Housing Authority

The Merrill Area Housing Authority provides affordable housing for elderly, people with disabilities, and low income individuals and families. Facilities managed by the Authority include Jenny Towers, Park Place, Westgate Apartments, Woodbine Duplexes, and some Family Homes.

Haven

Haven is a Merrill area organization that provides support to victims of domestic and sexual abuse. Haven provides emergency housing for abuse victims and assistance in locating affordable housing.

North Central Community Action Program

NCCAP provides services to low income people in Langlade, Lincoln, Marathon, and Wood Counties to alleviate poverty and encourage self-sufficiency. They provide assistance in reducing energy costs through home weatherization. THey also provide outreach assistance for homelessness prevention, food pantry services, referall, and other services..

State Programs

Wisconsin Department of Housing and Intergovernmental Relations

The Division of Housing and Intergovernmental Relations (DHIR) and its Bureau of Housing act as the State's housing authority. It administers the State portion of such federal programs as CDBG – Small City Housing, HOME, SHP, ESG, Transitional Housing, and Housing Opportunities for Persons with AIDS (HOPWA). DHIR also is responsible for State programs such as State Shelter Subsidy Grants, that provide up to one half of the operating budget of an emergency homeless shelter. Local Housing Organization Grants (LHOG) are also available to enable a community-based organization, tribe, and housing authority to increase its capacity to provide affordable housing. The Housing Cost Reduction Initiative (HCRI) offers grants to local housing entities (governmental, tribal, or nonprofit) for activities including rental aid, down payment assistance, homelessness prevention, and related housing initiatives.

Wisconsin Housing and Economic Development Authority (WHEDA)

According to its mission statement, "The Wisconsin Housing and Economic Development Authority (WHEDA) serves Wisconsin residents and communities by working with others to provide creative financing resources and information to stimulate and preserve affordable housing, small business, and agribusiness." Created in 1972 as the Wisconsin Housing Finance Authority, it issued its first bond of $27 million in 1974 to provide funding to public housing authorities, nonprofits, and private limited dividend entities. The name was changed to WHEDA in 1983, and in 1987 it began to administer the Low Income Housing Tax Credit and the Section 8 voucher program in 1989. In 1993 WHEDA set up the Wisconsin Preservation Trust, a nonprofit corporation whose mission is to preserve Section 8 units as affordable housing in perpetuity. WHEDA holds over $2 billion in assets and has made more than $52 million in multi-family housing loans. In addition to housing programs WHEDA administers programs to foster agriculture and small business.

Federal Programs

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)

The first step in securing a significant portion of federal housing aid is the preparation of a State Consolidated Housing Plan. "The Consolidated Plan provides the framework for a planning process used by States and localities to identify housing, homeless, community and economic development needs and resources and to tailor a strategic plan for meeting those needs." This is how the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) website (www.HUD.gov) describes the Consolidated Plan. Consisting of a 3 to 5-year strategic plan, annual action plans, and annual performance reports, the Plan must be updated annually. Eligibility for certain federal programs (CBDG, HOME, ESG) requires the preparation of a Plan, which consists of three parts: (1) a housing, homeless, community, and economic development needs assessment; (2) a housing market analysis; and (3) long-term strategies to meet priority needs. In order for a state to receive funding from the above or a number of other programs they must conform to the provisions of the Consolidated Plan. The Division of Housing and Intergovernmental Relations (DHIR) prepares the Wisconsin Consolidated Housing Plan, and is focused on low-income and special needs populations.

There are a number of programs available through HUD that can assist local communities in addressing their housing problems, but the two most prominent are Section 8 and HOME, both are directed at low-income residents and provide aid to states and local governments to satisfy their housing needs.

Section 8

Although Section 8 subsidies can be applied to any housing unit that meets the standards and where the owner agrees to participate in the program (tenant-based), there are also project-based programs. Generally these project-based programs involve financial aids to new construction or renovation projects or some form of federal mortgage guarantee, and carried with them a contract requiring that a certain number of units be set-aside for very low-income families for a set period of years, usually twenty. This program was largely discontinued in 1983. In recent years many contracts from the period when project-based subsidies were being granted have expired, causing substantial restructuring of the program. Procedures have been developed for the renewal and renegotiation of contracts securing a certain number of housing units for voucher-holding families.

Home Investment Partnership Program (HOME)

The other major housing program for low-income families in the open market is the Home Investment Partnership Program (HOME), the largest federal block-grant program to state and local governments designed exclusively to create affordable housing for low-income households. HOME is designed to be flexible. Participating Jurisdictions are required to match twenty five percent of the grant total and can use HOME funds for four types of affordable housing activities: rental housing development (acquisition, rehabilitation, and new construction); rehabilitation of owner-occupied properties; homeowner assistance; and tenant-based rental assistance. Rental housing development funds are available in exchange for agreement to provide a set number of affordable units within the project according to a formula based on the number and kind of units created with the funds, and the amount of funding. Units are committed to low-income housing for a fixed number of years. Income restrictions apply to eligibility requirements for HOME funded housing units. The Participating Jurisdiction is required to award a certain amount of HOME funding to Community Housing Development Organizations, local non-profits that develop affordable housing within the community.

Community Development Block Grants (CDBG)

Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) also can be used to provide affordable housing. Larger cities and counties receive CDBG funding directly from HUD, but cities with fewer than 50,000 residents and non-urban counties can receive grants through DHIR if their requests conform to the State Consolidated Housing Plan. States set their own standards for awarding CDBG funding, but are required to award at least 70 percent of these funds for activities that will benefit low-and-moderate-income persons. Communities are allowed great latitude in how CDBG funds can be used, including land acquisition, housing rehabilitation, and in certain circumstances new construction, direct assistance to homeowners such as down-payment assistance or revolving loan funds for first-time buyers, concentrated building code enforcement, and planning and administrative expenses.

A number of other programs are available that foster affordable housing through providing mortgage insurance for qualified projects. By insuring lenders against loss these programs seek to increase the supply of housing for low and moderate income families. Among the most prominent of these programs is the Section 203(b), which is directed at single-family homes, and currently insures seven million loans. This program also allows aid for low to moderate income home buyers to reduce down-payment requirements, closing costs and fees paid. Another program, Section 203(k), covers renovation costs along with acquisition. Section 207 is directed at multi-family housing consisting of five or more units, and Section 231 provides mortgage insurance for elderly and disabled housing. Both of these programs have been eclipsed in recent years by Section 221(d)(3) (non-profit) and Section (d)(4) (for-profit) that provide mortgage insurance for multi-family housing at more favorable terms. Section 241(a) provides mortgage

insurance for repairs and addition, including health care facilities, and Section 251 insures adjustable rate mortgages.

There are also programs to provide aid to special-needs populations. Section 202 and Section 811 provide funding assistance for supportive housing for the elderly and the disabled. The SHP program provides funding for supportive housing for the homeless, and ESG supports emergency housing. The SRO program provides Section 8 rental assistance for single-room-occupancy housing. Title V provides that surplus federal property must be made available where possible to serve the needs of the homeless. The Shelter Plus Care program creates housing for the disabled homeless including other social services tailored to their needs.

Low Income Housing Tax Credit

Created by the Tax Reform Act of 1986, it has been one of the major sources of financial aid for low-income housing. Projects that meet the program standards can receive a tax credit for up to nine percent of the cost of providing affordable housing for 15 years. Since 1987, over 19,000 units of rental housing have been developed in Wisconsin for seniors, families, and persons with special needs under this program. To foster multi-family development targeting low-income residents, incentives are provided for development in rural counties and with fewer than 24 units.

U.S. Department of Agriculture – Rural Development (USDA-RD)

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) acting through its Rural Development program operates the Rural Housing Service that distributes more than $4 billion in loans and grants annually, generally in communities with population under 10,000. USDA-RD offers a number of programs including loan guarantees, grants, and direct loans to foster single-family and multi-family housing, affordable to low-income residents. Funding is available for site acquisition, renovations, technical assistance, housing preservation, and rental assistance. Also available is aid for community facilities, housing for farm labor, and technical assistance for what is known as mutual self-help projects where residents provide "sweat equity" on affordable housing projects. Most programs are limited to low-income persons. USDA-RD is also involved in a number of economic development efforts.

Section 515

The single most prominent program administered under USDA-RD is the Section 515 program that supports the construction of multi-family housing for low-income residents. Under the program, which has been in operation in Wisconsin since 1969, USDA underwrites fifty-year mortgages at a one percent interest rate in exchange for an agreement to provide housing for low and very, low-income residents. Unlike Section 8, the commitment to provide low-income housing runs for the life of the mortgage, and although owners can buy-out the mortgage, they can do so only if they meet certain conditions, including ensuring that no tenants are displaced as a result. Also available through this program is rental assistance similar to project-based Section 8 available to tenants in Section 515 financed buildings.

Section 502

Another prominent program of USDA-RD is the Section 502 Direct Loans. Under this program qualified applicants may obtain 100 percent financing to purchase an existing dwelling, purchase a site and construct a dwelling, or purchase newly constructed dwellings located in rural areas. Section 502 loans are primarily used to help low-income individuals or households purchase homes in rural areas and to provide financing at reasonable rates and terms with no down payment. Families must be without adequate housing, but be able to afford the mortgage payments, including taxes and insurance. These payments are typically within 22 to 26 percent of an applicant's income. In addition, applicants must be unable to obtain credit elsewhere, yet have reasonable credit histories.

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Appendix C
Economic Development Programs

There are a number of programs available to local governments to aid with their economic development needs. Below is a listing of some of the programs available:

Economic Development Organizations & Programs

There are a several organizations that in the area that provide economic development and related assistance. These are:

Local

Merrill Area Chamber of Commerce

The Chamber of Commerce provides general promotion and information about the community. The focus of the organization is tourism and events.

Merrill Area Development Corporation (MADC)

The MADC is a formal organization with the goal of stimulating economic development. The organization has been involved in a variety of activities such as the recent industrial park feasibility study. They also own the vacant land in the industrial park.

City of Merrill

The City of Merrill, with its Community Development Department, provides a variety of assistance toward economic development. The city has a community development director that is responsible for the management of the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program. The CDBG program provides loans for business projects and housing rehabilitation.

The City of Merrill Community Development Department administers a revolving loan fund (RLF) program. This is a gap financing program to assist businesses to create jobs and tax base in the city. To date, the Community Development Department has loaned over $75 million for economic development purposes to 56 businesses.

The City of Merrill administers a revolving loan fund (RLF) that was created through a Small Business Administration (SBA) loan. The initial loan amount $496,750 has grown to $551,750 and has assisted three businesses with gap financing in the City of Merrill. The current interest rate on the RLF loans are 3 percent and payments are received monthly.

Combined, these organizations/ programs provide assistance to the economic development efforts in the community. An opportunity exists for these groups to work together and develop common goals and collaborate to pool resources and maximize their effect on the community.

Lincoln County Economic Development Corporation

The Lincoln County Economic Development Corporation (LCEDC) is a county-wide corporation that provides assistance to economic development projects throughout the county. The corporation is located in the County Annex and is staffed by a director and secretary.

Regional

North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (NCWRPC)

The North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission is a designated Economic Development District (EDD) by the U.S. Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration. Under this designation, the Commission maintains a continuous process of planning assistance that supports the formulation and implementation of economic development programs designed to create or retain full-time permanent jobs and income. The NCWRPC provides services such as: economic research, marketing, financial packaging, evaluation and analysis of public infrastructure needs that support private economic development activity, and works with local units of government to maintain eligibility for certain grants.

North Central Wisconsin Development Corporation (NCWDC):

The North Central Wisconsin Development Corporation (NCWDC) is a Regional organization created for the purpose of managing a two Regional revolving loan funds. Currently businesses in the following counties are eligible: Adams, Forest, Juneau, Langlade, Lincoln, Lincoln, Oneida, Portage, Vilas, and Wood. The NCWDC is a non-profit organization and is staffed by NCWRPC. One fund was funded by USDA- Rural Development using the Intermediary Relending Program (IRP) and the other was funded by a grant from HUD.

Small Business Development Centers:

The Wisconsin Small Business Development Centers (WSBDCs) The Wisconsin Small Business Development Center Network (WSBDC) includes 12 business assistance centers and three specialty service centers for small businesses and entrepreneurs. Associated with four year campuses of the University of Wisconsin system, the WSBDC assistance centers provide free one-on-one counseling and moderately-priced training programs designed to promote local entrepreneurship and small business growth.

North Central Wisconsin Workforce Development Board (NCWWDB):

North Central Wisconsin Workforce Development Board (NCWWDB) is a public/private partnership between government and business that plans, administers and coordinates Workforce Investment Act (WIA) employment and training programs in the nine counties of Adams, Forest, Langlade, Lincoln, Lincoln, Oneida, Portage, Vilas, and Wood. This region is known as Workforce Development Area 6. The NCWWDB purpose is to provide policy, planning, oversight and funding for local workforce development programs and address workforce issues as they emerge within our region.

Central Wisconsin Economic Development (CWED)

Central Wisconsin Economic Development (CWED) Fund, Inc. manages a loan fund to support business growth in the region. The CWED Fund is a regional loan fund covering Central Wisconsin including Lincoln County. Money is available for new and existing businesses in the private sector. The objective is to create new jobs, increase incomes, leverage bank financing, fill financing gaps, and expand the tax base. The goal is to encourage business retention and expansion, attract new businesses and provide employment opportunities in and around Lincoln County.

Centergy:

Centergy serves a diverse five county region, with a wide range of progressive, innovative businesses and industries most notable are advanced manufacturing, emerging sustainable and bio-based technologies, and leading health care. Centergy is a non-profit organization comprising a variety of businesses, Chambers, CVBs, organizations and individuals, working together to improve the region's business climate and civic infrastructure. Collaboration with their partnering entities provides effective synergy.

Grow North Economic Development Organization

Grow North was created to promote economic development in eight counties in Northeast Wisconsin, including Lincoln County. Grow North is an investor/ sponsor driven organization who recognizes the importance and value of collaboration to ensure that the Grown North Region remains competitive in both the state and global economies.

State:

Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation:

The Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation is the state's primary department for the delivery of integrated services to businesses. Their purpose is to 1) foster retention of and creation of new jobs and investment opportunities in Wisconsin; 2) foster and promote economic business, export, and community development; and 3) promote the public health, safety, and welfare through effective and efficient regulations, education, and enforcement.

WEDC manages a variety of programs intended to assist business and communities. These include:

Brownfield Program: Wisconsin's Brownfield Program provides grant funds to assist local governments, businesses and individuals with assessing and remediating the environmental contamination of an abandoned, idle, or underused industrial or commercial facility or site. This program helps convert contaminated sites into productive properties that are attractive and ready for redevelopment.

Capacity Building Grants (CB): CB grants are designed to help strengthen Wisconsin's economic development network by assisting local and regional economic development groups with economic competitive assessments and the development of a comprehensive economic development strategy.

Certified Sites: A certified site designation serves as a pre-qualification, indicating that a property's title is clear; that it possesses sufficient utilities and other infrastructure for industrial use, and that it is properly zoned and has adequate transportation access for such uses, among other criteria.

Historic Preservation Tax Credit: The tax credit applies to certified historic buildings. Under the program, owners of eligible buildings may receive a state income tax credit for 20 percent of the qualified rehabilitated expenditures.

Business Opportunity Loan Fund: Financing options ranging from loans to loan guaranties for businesses making investments to expand in or relocate to Wisconsin.

Workforce Training Grants: Developed to assist businesses in workforce retention and expansion into new markets and technology, training grants provide funds to businesses planning to upgrade or improve the job-related skills of its full-time employees.

Idle Industrial Sites redevelopment Program: Highly competitive program offering grants to Wisconsin communities for the implementation of redevelopment plans for large industrial sites that have been idle, abandon, or underutilized for at least five years.

The Industrial Revenue Bond (IRB) Program: The IRB program involves an allocation of Federal tax-exempt status on bonds that will be issued by a business to finance an expansion project. By classifying the bonds as tax exempt, the company is able to offer the bonds at a reduced interest rate. Although this program is heavily utilized, its use is limited to small and mid-size manufacturers with strong financial statements.

Community Development Investment (CDI) Grant Program: The Community Development Investment Grant Program will support redevelopment efforts by providing financial incentives for shovel-ready projects with emphasis on, but not limited to, downtown community driven efforts. Successful recipients will demonstrate significant, measurable benefits in job opportunities, property values and/or leveraged investment by local and private partners.

DWD offers programs in vocational rehabilitation, employee training, child care establishment, and adult apprenticeship programs in construction, services, and industrial/ manufacturing activities, a**mong others.**

Fast Forward Program: Wisconsin Fast Forward is a $15 million in grant program for employer-led, customized worker training projects. The intent is to provide essential assistance that cannot be met through an existing program. Grants will be awarded to maximize the impact of funds in catalyzing local collaboration and also encouraging the development of sustained pipelines that directly align with employer needs. The jobs of the 21st-century economy depend on these training programs.

Board of Commissioners of Public Lands:

The BCPL operates one of the largest public lending programs in the state. The BCPL State Trust Fund Loan Program finances community and school projects across Wisconsin. BCPL has made loans to municipalities and school districts for public purpose projects in icluding economic development, local infrastructure, capital equipment and vehicles, building repairs and improvements, and refinancing existing liabilities to reduce future borrowing costs.

Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR):

The DNR provides a comprehensive and new streamlined program that consolidates state and federal cleanups into one program (e.g., hazardous waste cleanup, underground storage tank investigation & cleanup, spill response, state-funded clean ups, and Brownfield sites). Assistance is also provided to businesses seeking to clean up and re-use existing Brownfield sites for commercial, public or green space uses. The DNR also inventories Brownfield sites through their Tracking System (BRRTS) and Geographic Information (GIS) registry. These databases connect to statewide information about contaminated sites, spills, cleanups and other data.

Wisconsin Housing and Economic Development Authority (WHEDA):

WHEDA is responsible for a number of housing and economic development functions. WHEDA works with local and state economic development professionals, businesses, and lending institutions to help an individual expand or modernize a farm or business. WHEDA offers guarantee programs, participation lending programs, a venture debt fund, a Wisconsin equity investment fund, Small Business Guarantees (WSBG), direct loans, New Market Tax Credits, and interest rate subsidies are utilized within a financial package to help ensure that the project has the best chance for long term success.

Federal:

Economic Development Administration (EDA):

The EDA is part of the U.S. Department of Commerce focusing on providing financial assistance to meet the economic development needs of distressed communities. EDA works with states, Regions, and communities to assist in the creation of wealth and minimize poverty using capacity-building and planning techniques as well as research grants and strategic initiatives. All EDA investments must be targeted in areas that demonstrate need or economic distress and, out of those qualifying communities; assistance is directed toward those projects that will generate long-term economic growth.

EDA's programs include:

Public Works Program: empowers distressed communities to revitalize, expand, or upgrade their physical infrastructure to attract new industry, encourage business expansion, diversify local economies, and generate or retain long-term, private sector jobs and investment. Examples of past investments include water and sewer facilities, industrial access roads, rail spurs, port improvements, skill-training facilities, technology related infrastructure, as well as the demolition, renovation, and construction of publicly owned facilities.

Economic Adjustment Program: assists state and local interests in the design and implementation of strategies to adjust or bring about a change in economy due to industrial or corporate restructuring, natural disaster, reduction in defense expenditures, depletion of natural resources, or new federal laws or requirements.

Technical Assistance Program: often supports feasibility studies on potential economic development projects to help fill the knowledge and information gaps that may prevent

local leaders in distressed areas from making optimal decisions on economic development issues. Often these studies involve evaluations of proposals for industrial parks or business incubators. Sometimes, however, these funds may be used to sponsor conferences, develop revitalization plans, or to establish Geographic Information Systems for local planning and development purposes.

U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA):
The SBA provides financial, technical, and management assistance to help citizens start, run, and grow their businesses. The SBA has many programs focused primarily on making business loans and providing counseling and training programs for small businesses.

SBA's Certified Development Company (504) Loan Program provides growing businesses with long-term, fixed-rate financing for major fixed assets, such as land and buildings. 504 loans can be used to fund land purchases and improvements, grading, street improvements, utilities, parking lots and landscaping, construction of new facilities, or modernization, renovation, or conversion of existing facilities. A Certified Development Company (CDC) is a nonprofit corporation set up to contribute to the economic development of its community. The Region utilizes the statewide Wisconsin Business Development Finance Corporation to access this program.

U.S. Department of Agriculture, Rural Development:
USDA Rural Development provides a wide range of programs to assist in community and economic development in farm and rural areas across the US. While the USDA's housing, empowerment, and utility programs are beneficial to the stability of communities, it is their business and cooperative programs that are the most directly applied to economic development.

Business and Industry (B&I) Guaranteed Loan Program: helps create jobs and stimulates rural economies by providing financial backing for rural businesses. This program provides guarantees up to 90 percent of a loan made by a commercial lender. Loan proceeds may be used for working capital, machinery and equipment, buildings and real estate, and certain types of debt refinancing. The primary purpose is to create and maintain employment and improve the economic climate in rural communities.

Intermediary Relending Program (IRP): finances business facilities and community development projects in rural areas. This is achieved through loans made by the Rural Business-Cooperative Service (RBS) to intermediaries. Intermediaries re-lend funds to ultimate recipients for business facilities or community development. Intermediaries establish revolving loan funds so collections from loans made to ultimate recipients in excess of necessary operating expenses and debt payments will be used for more loans to ultimate recipients.

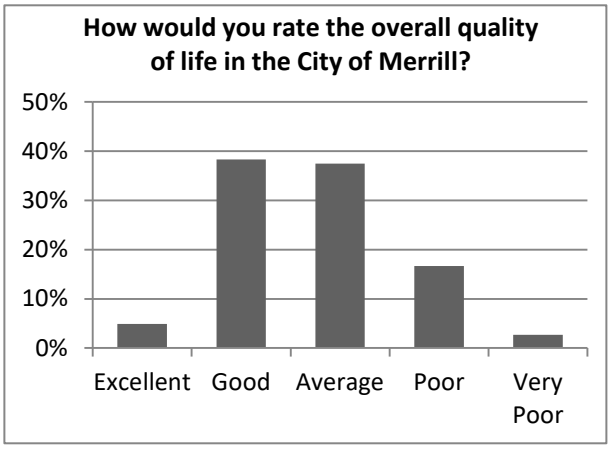
Rural Business Development Grants (RBDG): RDBG is a competitive grant designed to support targeted technical assistance, training, and other activities leading to the development or expansion of small and emerging private businesses in rural areas that have fewer than 50 employees and less than $1 million in gross revenues. Programmatic activities are separated into enterprise or opportunity type grant activities.

Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)
The EOA Brownfields Program provides direct funding for brownfields assessment, cleanup, revolving loans, and environmental job training. To facilitate the leveraging of public resources, EPA's Brownfields Program collaborates with other EPA programs, other federal partners, and state agencies to identify and make available resources that can be used for brownfields activities. In addition to direct brownfields funding, EPA also provides technical information on brownfields financing matters.

Appendix D
Community Survey Summary

2016 Merrill Comprehensive Plan Survey Results Summary

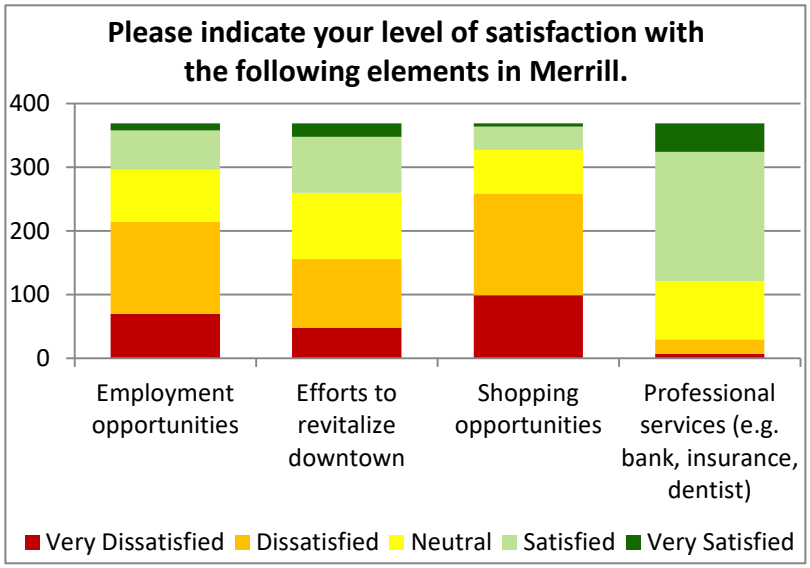
Overview

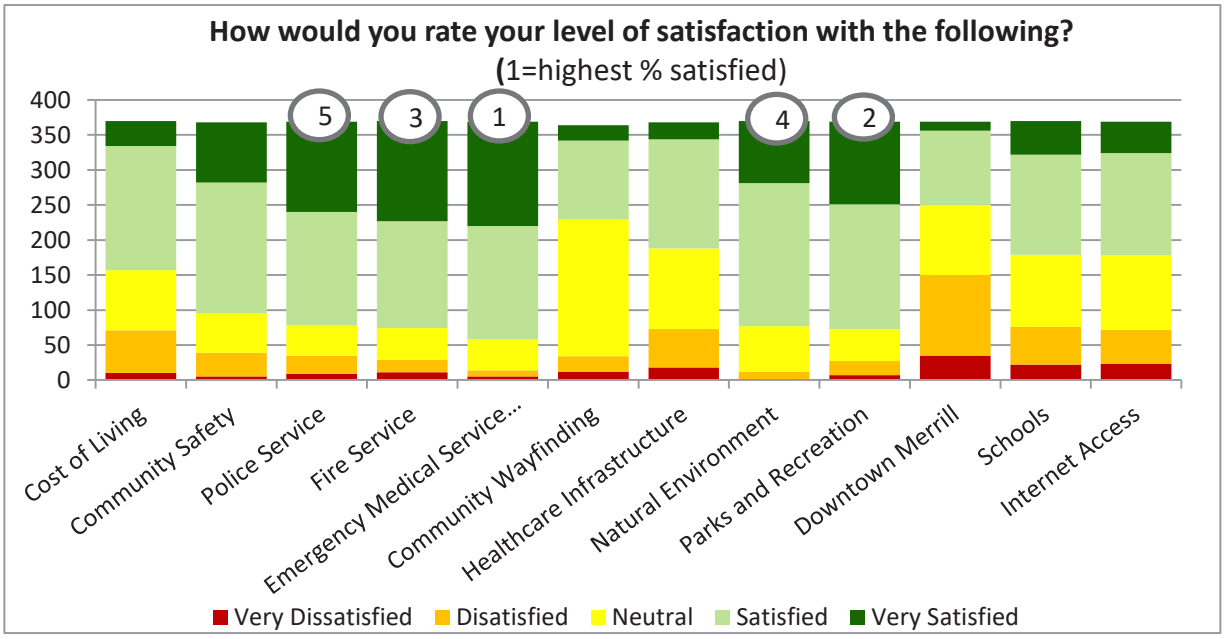


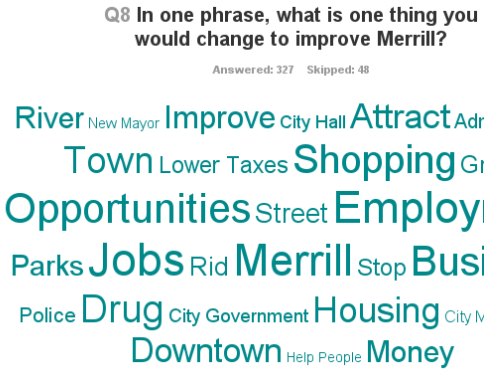
- **375 Responses**
- **87% are Merrill residents**
- 42% have no children living at home, 15% have 3 or more.
- **88.3% own their place of residence, compared to 54% of Merrill as a whole.**
- **Over 50%** live in Merrill primarily because **they were raised here or have a family here**, 19% have a good job, and 17% feel stuck.
- Most respondents (30%) were between 35 and 44 years old, 26% younger and 44% older.
- 54.5% are male, compared to 47.6% of Merrill overall.
- Over 70% are employed full time.
- 60% that are employed work in Merrill, and 31% work outside of Lincoln County.
- **Most (80%) feel safe walking in their neighborhood**.

Community Facilities and Services

- 49% think Merrill is attractive
- 63% think public property is well maintained; only 27% think private property is well maintained.
- Historic preservation is important to 76% of respondents.
- 87% want more events and festivals and 84% enjoy having the Lincoln County Fair in Merrill.
- 36% believe Merrill needs more performing arts space and 36% are neutral.
- 34% believe Merrill should have more public art, 37% are neutral.
- The three most important issues identified were: Attracting large regional employers; maintaining a good school system, and retention and expansion of local employers. The next three were: developing the downtown; expanding shopping opportunities; and developing the riverfront.







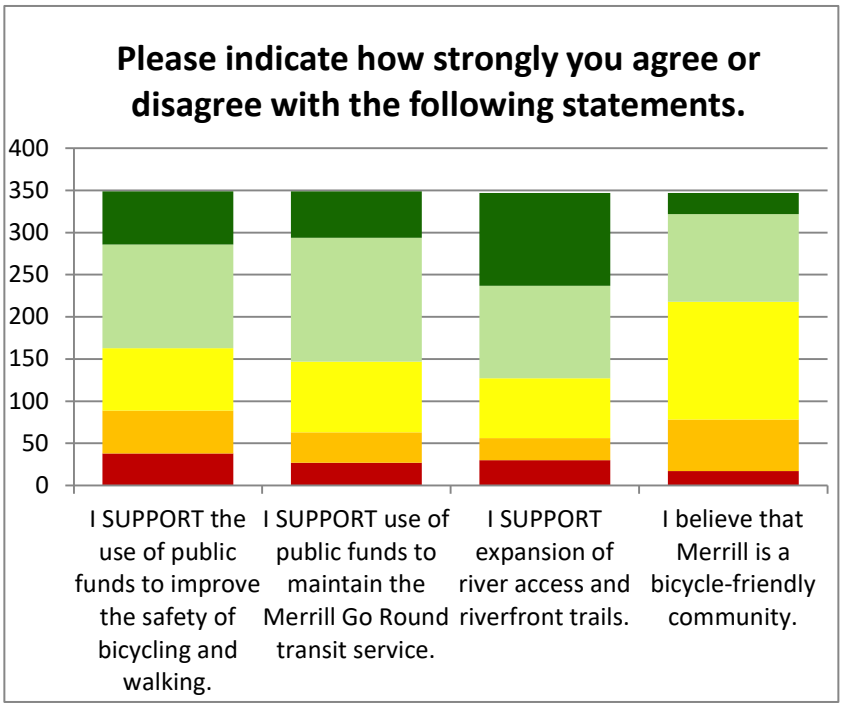
- A summary of the best things about Merrill is: the small town atmosphere, sense of community, the parks and River Bend Trail, proximity to nature/the northwoods, proximity to Wausau, safety and affordability.
- A summary of things to improve are: more shopping and restaurant options, more employment opportunities, attractiveness of the gateways and private property.
- Many more ideas and thoughts provided by respondents!

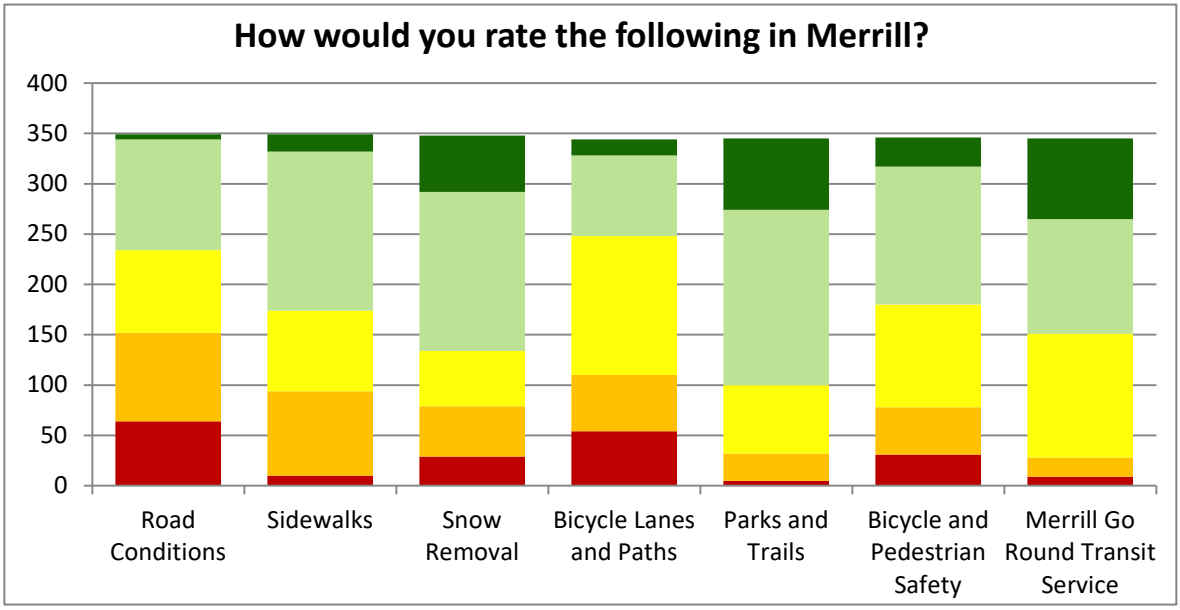
Parks and Recreation

- Top 10 Recreational Activities: Walking/Hiking; Boating, Canoeing, Kayaking; Fishing; Driving for Pleasure; Gardening; Hunting; Camping; Swimming; Playground Activities; Bicycling.
- Most (69%) believe Merrill has sufficient park space.
- 14% visit parks multiple times a week, 29% visit parks weekly and 26% visit parks monthly.
- The four parks with the highest percentage of respondents visiting at least once per year were: Council Grounds State Park, Merrill Festival Grounds, Riverside Park, and the MARC.

Transportation

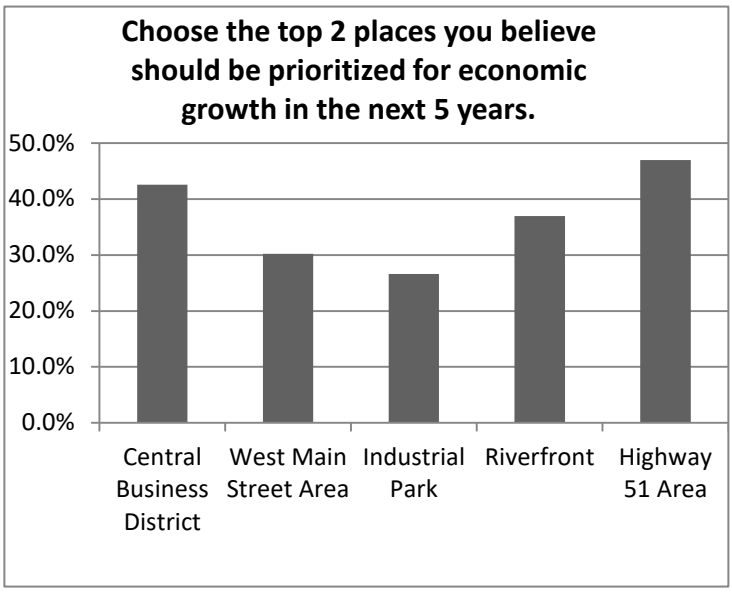
- Over 70% of respondents said they are **not likely to use the bus**, yet 58% support or strongly support **using public funds to maintain the system**.
- The top 3 investment priorities were: **Maintain existing roads**, **improve existing roads (enhance safety/traffic calming)**, and **improve and develop trails**.
- 74% would like to bike or walk more. **Motorist behavior** was the most cited factor preventing people from bicycling or walking more frequently (33%), followed by **road/sidewalk surfaces are poor** (26%) and **sidewalks, bike lanes and paths do not connect my destinations** (24%). 26% have no desire to bicycle or walk.
- Numerous suggestions on "problem" roads or intersections, including uncontrolled intersections, roads where speeding traffic is a concern, maintenance, areas that are difficult to navigate on foot or by bicycle, and other suggestions.



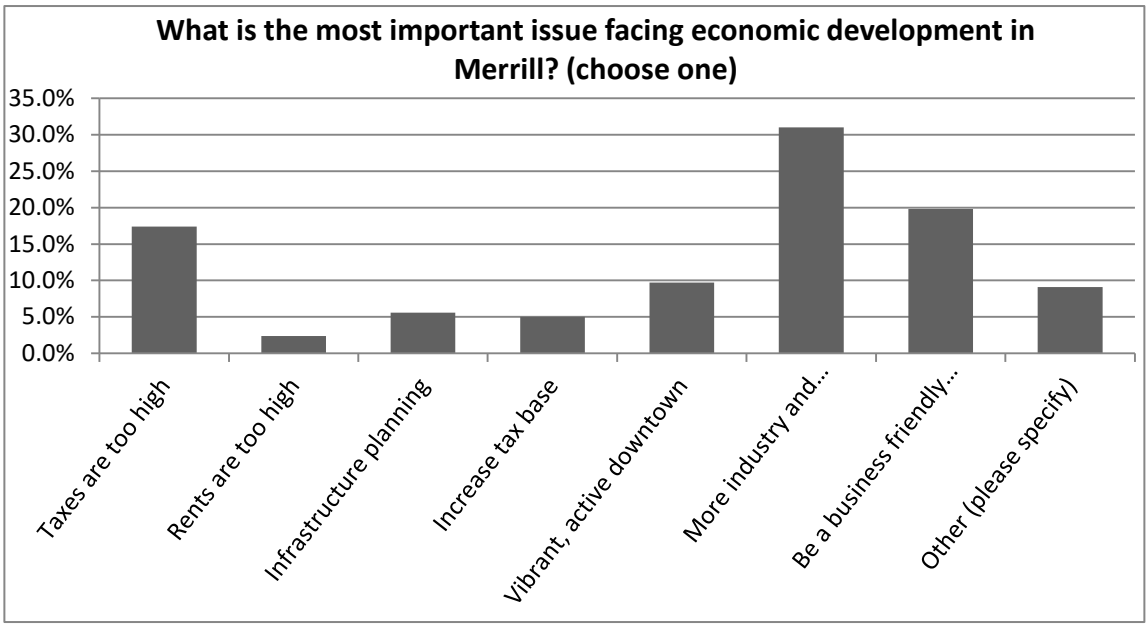


Economic Development

- The top three most important issues facing economic development in Merrill were: more industry and manufacturing (31%), be a business friendly community (20%), and taxes are too high (17%).
- Local retailers were viewed as the greatest opportunity for a vibrant downtown Merrill. Other popular options included restaurants and bars, entertainment, and cultural activities.



- Lack of new local businesses and entrepreneurs were viewed as the greatest challenge by a large margin (72%), underutilization of buildings also had a higher number of responses (21%).



Other Questions

- 47% consider themselves somewhat or very engaged in local government, while 53% are not very engaged or not engaged at all.
- The two **primary barriers** to being more engaged in local government are "**I do not think anyone will listen to me**" (37%) and "**I have too many other personal/business commitments**" (36%).

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Appendix E
Adoption Ordinance

CITY OF MERRILL

1004 EAST FIRST STREET
MERRILL, WI 54452-2586

AN ORDINANCE: By City Plan Commission Re: Amending Chapter 109, Section 109-2 Comprehensive Plan	ORDINANCE NO. 2017-02 Introduced: March 14, 2017 1st Reading: March 14, 2017 2nd Reading: March 14, 2017 3rd Reading: March 14, 2017 Committee/Commission Action: **RECOMMENDED FOR PASSAGE**

AN ORDINANCE

The Common Council of the City of Merrill, Wisconsin, does ordain as follows:

Section 1. Chapter 109, Section 109-2 of the Code of Ordinances for the City of Merrill is amended as follows:

- **Sec. 109-2 – Comprehensive Plan.**

The city comprehensive plan as approved by the city plan commission on October 4, 2016, after public input and in compliance with the requirements of Wis. Stats. 66.1001, and as filed in the city clerk's office immediately thereafter, and as prepared by North Central Regional Planning, was approved by the City of Merrill Plan Commission, by resolution on October 4, 2016, and filed in the city clerk's office

Section 2. **Severability.** In the event any section, subsection, clause, phrase or portion of this ordinance is for any reason held illegal, invalid or unconstitutional by any court of competent jurisdiction, such portion shall be deemed a separate, distinct and independent provision, and such holding shall not affect the validity of the remainder of this ordinance. It is the legislative intent of the Common Council that this ordinance would have been adopted if such illegal provision had not been included or any illegal application had not been made.

Section 3. **Repeal and Effective Date.** All ordinances or parts of ordinances and resolutions in conflict herewith are hereby repealed. This ordinance shall take effect from and after its passage and publication.

Moved by: Alderman Schwartzman

Adopted: March 14, 2017 7-0

Approved: March 15, 2017

Published: March 24, 2017

Approved:

William R. Bialecki, Mayor

Attest:

William N. Heideman, City Clerk

City of Merrill
Comprehensive Plan
2017