



CITY OF MERRILL
CITY PLAN COMMISSION
AGENDA • TUESDAY OCTOBER 6, 2015

Regular Meeting

City Hall Council Chambers

5:00 PM

- I. Call to Order
- II. Minutes of previous meeting(s):
 1. Minutes of September 1, 2015 meeting
- III. Agenda items for consideration:
 1. Certified Survey Map (extraterritorial) from Steigerwaldt Land Surveying, LLC for parcel of land located in the Southeast Quarter of the Southeast Quarter of Section 33, Town 32 North, Range 6 East, Town of Merrill.
 2. Site Plan from Lincoln County for proposed new maintenance building on East Tenth Street, near the Lincoln County Service Center.
 3. Comprehensive Plan Presentation and Discussion on:
 - (a) Natural Resources
 - (b) Economic Development
- IV. Public Comment Period
- V. Establish date, time and location of next meeting
- VI. Adjournment



CITY OF MERRILL
CITY PLAN COMMISSION

MINUTES • TUESDAY SEPTEMBER 1, 2015

Regular Meeting City Hall Council Chambers 6:00 PM

I. Call to Order

In the absence of Mayor Bialecki, Alderman Burgener called the meeting to order at 6:00 P.M.

Attendee Name	Title	Status	Arrived
Pete Lokemoen	Aldersperson - Second District	Present	
Bill Bialecki	Mayor	Excused	
Mike Willman	Chairman - Park & Rec	Present	
Ralph Sturm		Present	
Melissa Schroeder		Present	
Ken Maule		Present	
Robert Reimann		Present	

Also in attendance: City Administrator Dave Johnson, City Attorney Tom Hayden, Building Inspector/Zoning Administrator Darin Pagel, Alderman Dave Sukow, Alderman Ryan Schwartzman, Renee Hertzfeldt, Michael Hertzfeldt, Brittany Williams, Sarah Hulce, June Kunze, Kay Schenzel, Marion Martell (arr. 6:07) and City Clerk Bill Heideman.

II. Minutes of previous meeting(s):

1. Minutes of August 4, 2015 meeting

The minutes were in the meeting packet.

Motion (Maule/Willman) to approve the minutes of the August 4th, 2015 meeting.

RESULT: APPROVED

III. Public Hearing(s):

1. Conditional Use Permit application from Building Block (Renee Hertzfeldt) for a Group Child Care facility at 122 North State Street.

City Attorney Hayden read the public hearing notice.

Building Inspector/Zoning Administrator Pagel reported that the property is currently zoned R-3 Residential. The application does not meet the qualifications for a Home Occupation, because the applicants do not plan on living at the property. Therefore, a Conditional Use Permit is necessary.

Motion (Lokemoen/Schroeder) to open the public hearing. Carried.

Renee Hertzfeldt stated that she would be willing to answer any questions. Alderman Lokemoen responded that the public portion of the meeting was for the public to make comments, and that, if the commission has questions for her, she could answer them after the public hearing was closed.

Attachment: 2015-09-01 Plan Commission minutes (1307 : Minutes of September 1, 2015 meeting)

Nobody spoke in favor of or against the application.

Motion (Schroeder/Reimann) to close the public hearing. Carried.

Alderman Lokemoen noted that he cannot recall another instance in which a residential-zoned property was used 100% for business. He has some concerns with the precedence that would be set if the application is approved.

Renee Hertzfeldt answered questions posed by Building Inspector/Zoning Administrator Pagel. She plans on employing four people at the facility. The hours would be from 5:00 A.M. to 5:00 P.M. Minimal remodeling is planned for the facility at this time. Building Inspector/Zoning Administrator Pagel suggested that Renee Hertzfeldt contact the State of Wisconsin to discuss handicapped accessibility issues.

Motion (Maule/Willman) to approve the Conditional Use Permit application as presented. Roll call vote resulted in a 3-3 tie. Voting Yes - Willman, Schroeder and Maule.

At a result of the tie vote, the application and an associated resolution will be referred to the Common Council with no recommendation.

IV. Public Comment Period

There was no public comment.

V. Establish date, time and location of next meeting

Tuesday, October 6th, 2015 in the City Hall Common Council Chambers. The time of the meeting is to be announced.

VI. Adjournment

Motion (Schroeder/Lokemoen) to adjourn. Carried. Adjourned at 6:14 P.M.

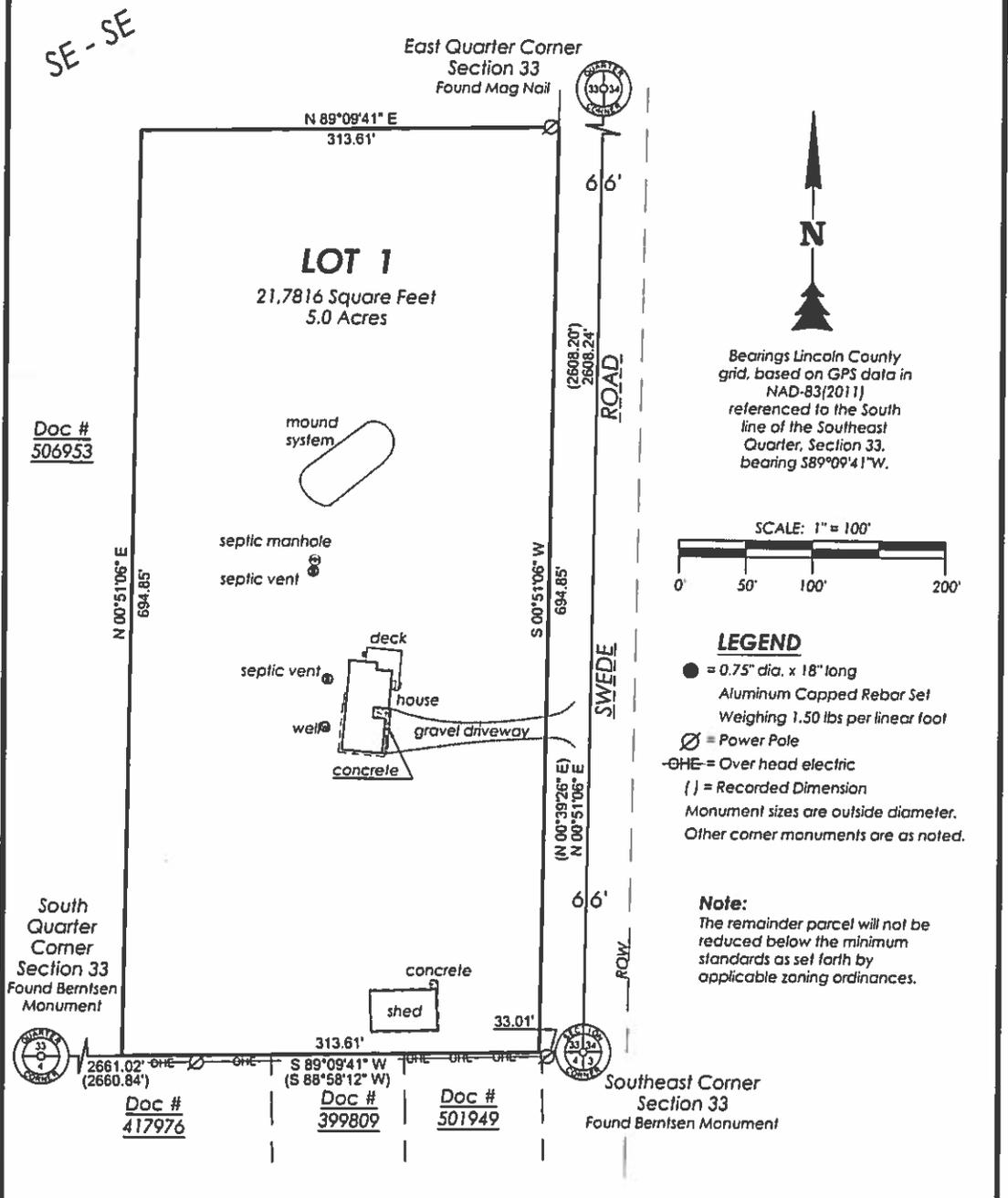
Heideman, Bill

From: Pagel, Darin
Sent: Monday, September 21, 2015 8:57 AM
To: Heideman, Bill
Subject: City Plan

Please add to City Plan Agenda "Consider Extraterritorial Certified Survey Map" , Thanks, Darin

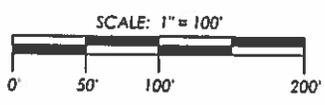
Lincoln County Certified Survey Map No. _____

Part of the
SOUTHEAST 1/4 of the SOUTHEAST 1/4,
Section 33, T32N, R6E
Town of Merrill,
Lincoln County, Wisconsin



N

Bearings Lincoln County grid, based on GPS data in NAD-83(2011) referenced to the South line of the Southeast Quarter, Section 33, bearing 389°09'41"W.



- LEGEND**
- = 0.75" dia. x 18" long Aluminum Capped Rebar Set Weighing 1.50 lbs per linear foot
 - ⊙ = Power Pole
 - OHE- = Over head electric
 - { } = Recorded Dimension
 - Monument sizes are outside diameter. Other corner monuments are as noted.

Note:
The remainder parcel will not be reduced below the minimum standards as set forth by applicable zoning ordinances.

STEIGERWALDT LAND SURVEYING, LLC

856 NORTH 4TH STREET, TOMAHAWK, WI 54487
 PHONE #: (715) 453-3274 FAX #: (715) 453-8325
 www.steigerwaldt.com

JOB #: 5046	DWG #: 5046 Simon	Sheet 1 of 2
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Lincoln County Certified Survey Map No. _____

Part of the
SOUTHEAST 1/4 of the SOUTHEAST 1/4,
Section 33, T32N, R6E
Town of Merrill,
Lincoln County, Wisconsin

LEGAL DESCRIPTION

A parcel of land located in the Southeast Quarter of the Southeast Quarter of Section 33, Town 32 North, Range 6 East, Town of Merrill, Lincoln County, Wisconsin, more particularly described as:

Commencing at the Southeast corner of said Section 33, marked by a berntsen monument in the centerline of Swede Road; thence S89°09'41"W along the South line of the Southeast Quarter of said Section 33, distance of 33.01' to an aluminum capped iron rebar on the Westerly right-of-way line of Swede Road being the place of beginning.

Thence continuing along said South line of the Southeast Quarter S89°09'41" W for a distance of 313.61 feet to an aluminum capped iron rebar; thence N00°51'06" E for a distance of 694.85 feet to an aluminum capped iron rebar; thence N89°09'41" E for a distance of 313.61 feet to an aluminum capped iron rebar on the Westerly right-of-way line of Swede Road; thence S00°51'06" W along said Westerly right-of-way line of Swede Road, for a distance of 694.85 feet to the place of beginning.

Together with and subject to any other covenants, easements, or restrictions of record or use.

Said parcel contains 5.00 acres.

SURVEYOR'S CERTIFICATE

I, Chad A. Besaw, Professional Land Surveyor No. S-3029, hereby certify that I have surveyed, divided and mapped the property shown hereon; that this map represents an accurate survey of said property to the best of my knowledge and belief; that I have performed this survey by order of Lynn Simon; and that I have complied with the requirements of Section 236.34 of the Wisconsin Statutes.

STEIGERWALDT LAND SURVEYING, LLC

Professional Land Surveyor No. S-3029
Dated this 16th day of September, 2015

Approved for recording under the terms of the Lincoln County Land Division Regulations.

Lincoln County Land Services Date

I, William N. Heideman, duly elected City Clerk, City of Merrill, hereby certify that the above Certified Survey was approved by the Common Council of the City of Merrill, Wisconsin at its regular meeting on _____ by Resolution No. _____

William N. Heideman Date
City Clerk

STEIGERWALDT LAND SURVEYING, LLC		
856 NORTH 4TH STREET, TOMAHAWK, WI 54487 PHONE #: (715) 453-3274 FAX #: (715) 453-8325 www.steigerwaldt.com		
JOB #: 5046	DWG #: 5046 Simon	Sheet 2 of 2

INITIAL FEE \$ _____

RECEIPT # _____

ADDITIONAL FEE \$ _____

RECEIPT # _____

APPLICATION FOR MAJOR OR MINOR SUBDIVISION / CONDOMINIUM

Return this signed application & fee to Lincoln County Planning & Zoning prior to preparing any map for recording.

Pre Plat-Consultation meeting with Town Officials & County Zoning Staff is required prior to submittal of a plat to assure that the lots will meet minimum standards and requirements of the town and the county.

- 1. This application will be a
 - Minor Subdivision (CSM) - 4 lots or less
 - Major Subdivision (County Plat) - 5 or more lots
 - Minor Condominium Plat - 4 units or less
 - Major Condominium Plat - 5 units or more
 - Condominium Addendum

This section to be completed by owner or surveyor:

2. Eleanor Fehlberg 12560 Hwy. 107 Merrill, WI 54452 715-536-5152
Owner or Seller's Name, Address & Phone Number

Lynn Simon 1771 Farmington Rd, Merrill WI, 54452 800-554-2642
(Person commissioning survey if other than owner) OP# 4, Ext 5763 (Church Mutual)

Chad A. Basaw 1856 N 4th St Tomahawk, WI 54487 715-453-3274
Surveyor's Name and Address

Applicant's Signature Chad A. Basaw Date 9/16/2015

3. Legal description of property to be divided: Sect(s) 33 T 32 N, R 6 E, GL SE 1/4 SE 1/4

Town of: Merrill Zoning Designation: R2-4

4. Tax Parcel Number(s) of land under this review: 0143206334994

5. Lake Classification (if applicable): () Low () Moderate () High
(Applies if any part of lot being created is within 1000' of a lake or flowage or 300' of a navigable stream)

6. Extraterritorial Jurisdiction? { Yes } { No } Municipality: City of Merrill

7. Town Jurisdiction? { Yes } { No } Municipality: Town of Merrill

8. Trans 233 approval required? { Yes } { No }

9. Will there be new roads that needs to be named { Yes } { No } (If yes, please follow-up with Road Naming Form)

10. Is any part of the property within the floodplain? { Yes } { No }

11. Is there any wetland on the property? { Yes } { No }

12. Number of lots / units that will be shown on this survey: 1

13. Approximate lot size(s): 5.0 acres

14. Total contiguous area retained by owner after this parcel is surveyed, not including this survey.
_____ Square Feet or 100 Acres

CONTINUED ON BACK SIDE →

15. Are there any improvements (structures) on the lots shown on this survey? {Yes} {No}
 Are there any improvements (structures) on a remainder parcel? {Yes} {No}

16. If there are improvements on the remainder, how close are they to the lot being surveyed? _____ FEET
 The grid represents one section of land (640 acres) at a scale of 8" = 1 mile. Show your parcel within the section in as much detail as possible. Include the location of existing buildings, roads, property lines, streams, ponds, lakes, and wetlands in relation to your proposed project.

SECTION NUMBER 33 T 32 N R 6 E

NW¼ NW¼	NE¼ NW¼	NW¼ NE¼	NE¼ NE¼
SW¼ NW¼	SE¼ NW¼	SW¼ NE¼	SE¼ NE¼
NW¼ SW¼	NE¼ SW¼	NW¼ SE¼	NE¼ SE¼
SW¼ SW¼	SE¼ SW¼	SW¼ SE¼	SE¼ SE¼



Heideman, Bill

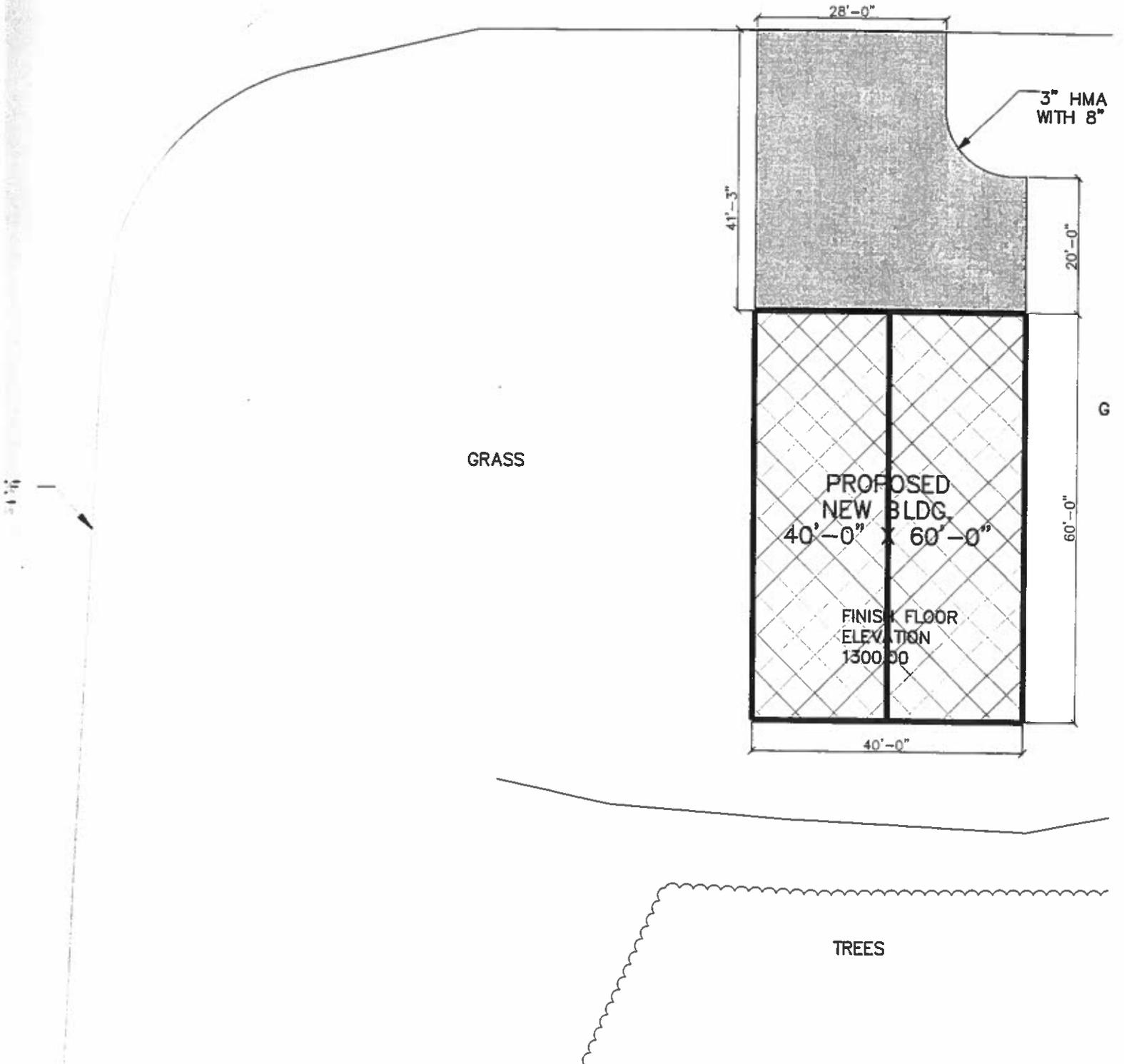
From: Pagel, Darin
Sent: Monday, September 28, 2015 11:30 AM
To: Heideman, Bill
Subject: city plan agenda

Please add " Review and action on site plan for Lincoln County Maintenance Building on 10th St."

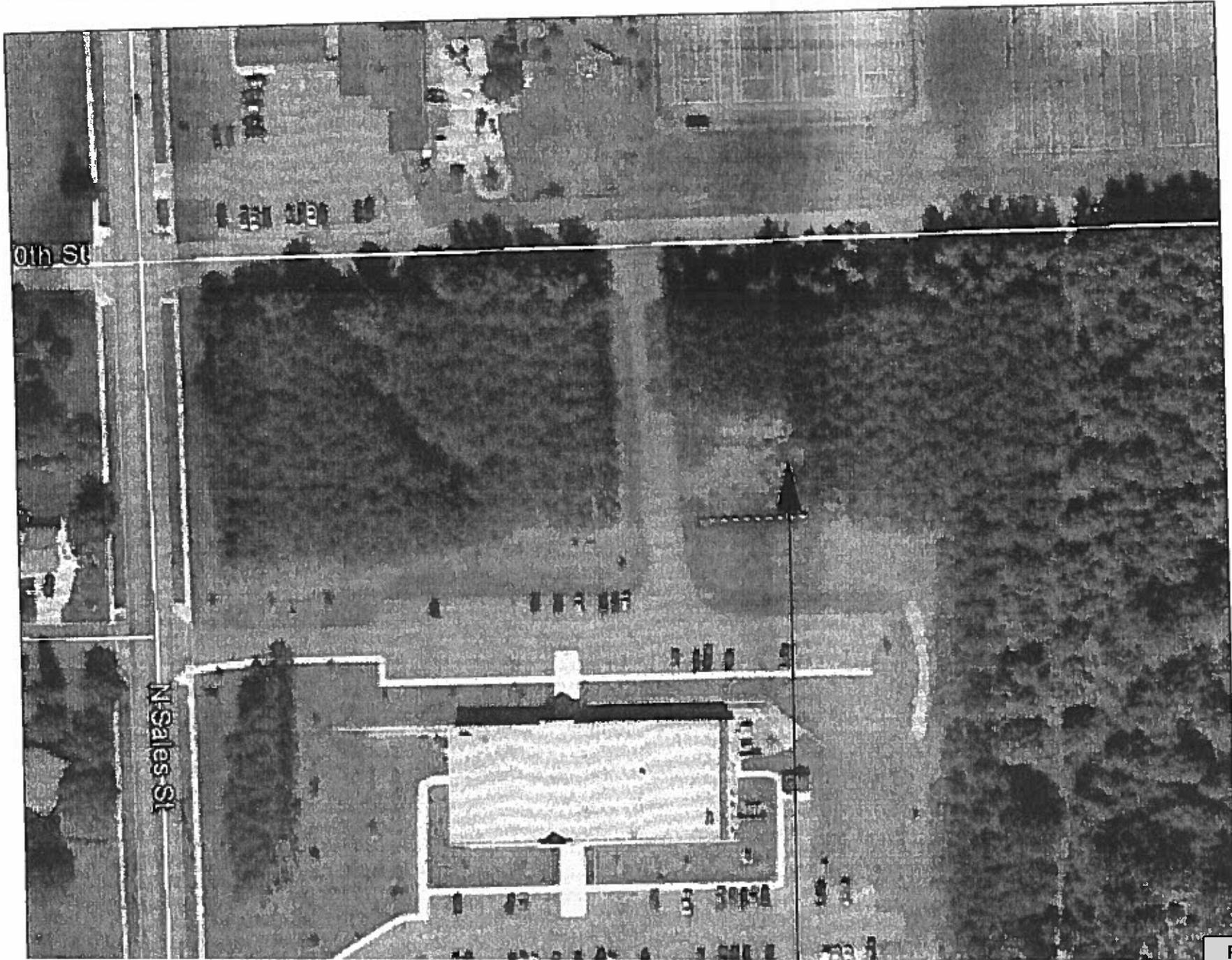
Thanks, Darin.

10TH STREET

EXISTING STREET PAVEMENT



L. 1



Attachment: Site Plan Info (1308 : Site Plan for new County Maintenance Building)

Heideman, Bill

From: Coleman Peiffer <cpeiffer@ncwrpc.org>
Sent: Tuesday, September 29, 2015 3:05 PM
To: Heideman, Bill
Cc: Johnson, David
Subject: Fwd: Merrill
Attachments: 02 Natrual Resources.pdf; 06 - Economic Development.pdf; Map_NR.pdf

Good afternoon Bill,
 Please find the attached documents for next Tuesday's planning commission meeting. Please distribute to the commission for discussion.

I plan on spending most of the time on the economic development element as the natural resources haven't changed in Merrill in a long time.

I will also be presenting a PowerPoint to lead the economic development discussion and will bring a laptop to hook into the system.

Based on a recent economic development element meeting with Wausau, this will take approx. an hour and a half.

Thank you for the help,

--
 Coleman Peiffer, AICP
 Senior Planner
 North Central Wisconsin
 Regional Planning Commission

cpeiffer@ncwrpc.org
715-849-5510 ext. 306

CHAPTER 2: NATURAL RESOURCES

Background

This chapter reviews the natural environment and resources in the city, such as groundwater, forests, sensitive areas, threatened and endangered species, stream corridors, surface water, floodplains, wetlands, wildlife habitat, metallic and nonmetallic mineral resources, parks, open spaces, historical and cultural resources, community design, recreational resources and other natural resources. These resources are the foundation of city.

A. 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.

1. Merrill Comprehensive Plan, 2006

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

2. 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 programming recommendations.

3. 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 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.

4. 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.

Thus, the Sewer Service Area Plan will serve 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.

5. 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

6. Merrill Parks & Recreation Plan. 2013-2018

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. This plan is more fully examined in the Utilities & Community Facilities Chapter.

7. Lincoln County Comprehensive Plan 2000-2020

The Lincoln County Comprehensive Plan addresses natural, agricultural, and cultural resources for all of the surrounding towns. Most land in agricultural production is south and east of Merrill. The main plan recommendations for this element are to:

- Minimize nonagricultural development in farming areas;
- Support the continuation of the family farm;
- Explore opportunities to expand the county forest; &
- Protect known historic and archeological sites.
- New development should generally be discouraged in environmental corridors

Environmental corridors are mapped in the county plan, and generally contain wetlands, floodplains, steep slopes of 15 percent or greater, and soils with a major hydric content as determined from the Lincoln County Soil Survey.

8. 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.

9. Lincoln County Outdoor Recreation Plan, 2012-2016

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 an 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.

B. Natural Resource Issues

- Maintaining environmental standards while continuing growth

Stormwater runoff may threaten the exceptional listing of local water bodies. 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.

- Water Quality

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

- Contaminated Sites

There are contaminated sites in the city, which is no surprise since all communities with commercial and industrial 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 great 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 helps to enhance the quality of life in the community.

Inventory & Trends

A. 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 restraints and environmental issues need to be identified to plan properly.

- 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.

- Topography

Lincoln County is in the Northern Highland physiographic region of Wisconsin. Merrill 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 thereby affecting soil structure, porosity, and content of nutrients have altered many soils.

B. Water Resources

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

1. 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. See the water resources map.

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 sewer 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 because of mercury and PCB contamination.

2. Wetlands

Wetlands perform many indispensable roles in the proper function of the hydrologic cycle and local ecological systems. In terms of hazard mitigation, they act 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.

Wetlands to the north and west of Merrill are considered the source of water for two of the city's five municipal wells.

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.

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; that is why any expansion of well capacity was sought in the eastern well field aquifer.

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.

3. 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 the severest (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.

4. Groundwater

The groundwater in the Merrill area meets municipal, industrial, and rural needs. Well water is available at various depths, depending on the general topography, the distance above permanent stream levels, and the character of the underlying aquifer. All of the wells are relatively shallow, gravel packed, and 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.

C. 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, and 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. See Woodlands Map.

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 can add value to land for property owners, help cool buildings and neighborhoods, break the cold winds to lower heating costs, 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.

D. 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. The Natural Heritage Inventory County map is included as an Attachment.

- 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. 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.

E. 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.

There is one surface water contamination site, 6 groundwater contaminated sites, and 15 soil contaminated sites in the City of Merrill according to BRRTS.

Every EPA Enviromapper database permit holding site 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.

F. 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 in open space uses. 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 in open space uses. 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.

G. 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.

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.

One new park has been created by removal of a dam on the Prairie River. In 1999, the Ward Paper Mill Dam in the town of Merrill was removed, restoring the river to a free-flowing condition. The former underwater impoundment land is now restored to native prairie and wetlands with trails, canoe and angler access, and educational facilities.

Parks are shown on the Utilities & Community Facilities map in this plan. Each park is identified in the Utilities & Community Facilities chapter of this plan.

H. Historic & Cultural Assets

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.

A brief community history is located in Chapter 1.

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.

A. Natural Resources

Goal1:

Provide a safe, clean and orderly natural environment for residents.

Objectives:

1. Require enforcement of existing regulations in environmentally sensitive areas.
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.
3. Development adjacent to rivers, lakes, streams, and wetlands needs to be carefully planned in order to not negatively impact these areas.

Policies:

1. Identify key natural resources.
2. The city will communicate with residents regarding regulations.
3. Maintain water levels and preserve surrounding natural areas.
4. Identify and protect the public open spaces and wildlife habitats from development to preserve the city's scenic areas.
5. Work with Lincoln County on informational programs and brochures regarding natural resources to educate and inform the public.
6. Encourage a buffer area around delineated wetlands, with no buildings.
7. Work to ensure enforcement of floodplain zoning, conservancy zoning and shoreland zoning ordinances to protect water quality.

Goal 2:

Future non-metallic mining sites will not negatively impact the planning area or its residents.

Objectives:

1. All existing and possible mining sites should be identified and mapped by Lincoln County.
2. Incompatible uses with mining will not develop adjacent to one another.
3. Views, the natural environment and rural characteristics will not be harmed by mining operations.

Policies:

1. The city will acquire the Lincoln County mining location maps and use them when deciding land use issues.
2. The city will steer incompatible uses away from identified mining sites.

Goal 3:

Maintain the area's diverse wildlife habitat.

Objectives:

1. Protect the city's areas of threatened and endangered species.
2. Maintain connections among wildlife habitat areas.

Policies:

1. Support the preservation of key habit areas and large undeveloped contiguous natural areas.
2. Support neighboring jurisdiction's wildlife preservation plans.
3. Incorporate natural resource areas in plans for parks and open spaces.
4. Promote native species landscaping.
5. The city will work with federal, state and county agencies to seek funding for habitat protection.

B. Agricultural Resources

Goal 1:

Provide for the future viability of the agricultural resources within the planning area until a time it can be converted to a higher best use.

Objectives:

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.
2. Provide for an orderly changeover of agricultural land to other uses.
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.
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.

Policies:

1. Develop an Official Map detailing future plats within the city and its planning area (Extraterritorial Plat Authority area). These areas adjacent to farmlands should be planned with adequate buffers.
2. Coordinate with the Towns of Merrill, Pine River, and Scott in the future planning of agricultural lands adjacent to the city. Areas that are to remain in agricultural production should be buffered from existing and future developments of the city.
3. The City Council and City Plan Commission will meet/consult with the Towns of Merrill, Pine River, and Scott, and the state to ensure cooperation in land use planning especially with those lands on the periphery of the city and within the extraterritorial planning area.
4. The city will continue to inform and work with its neighbors on future land use plans/changes according to s 66.1001.

C. Cultural Resources

Goal 1:

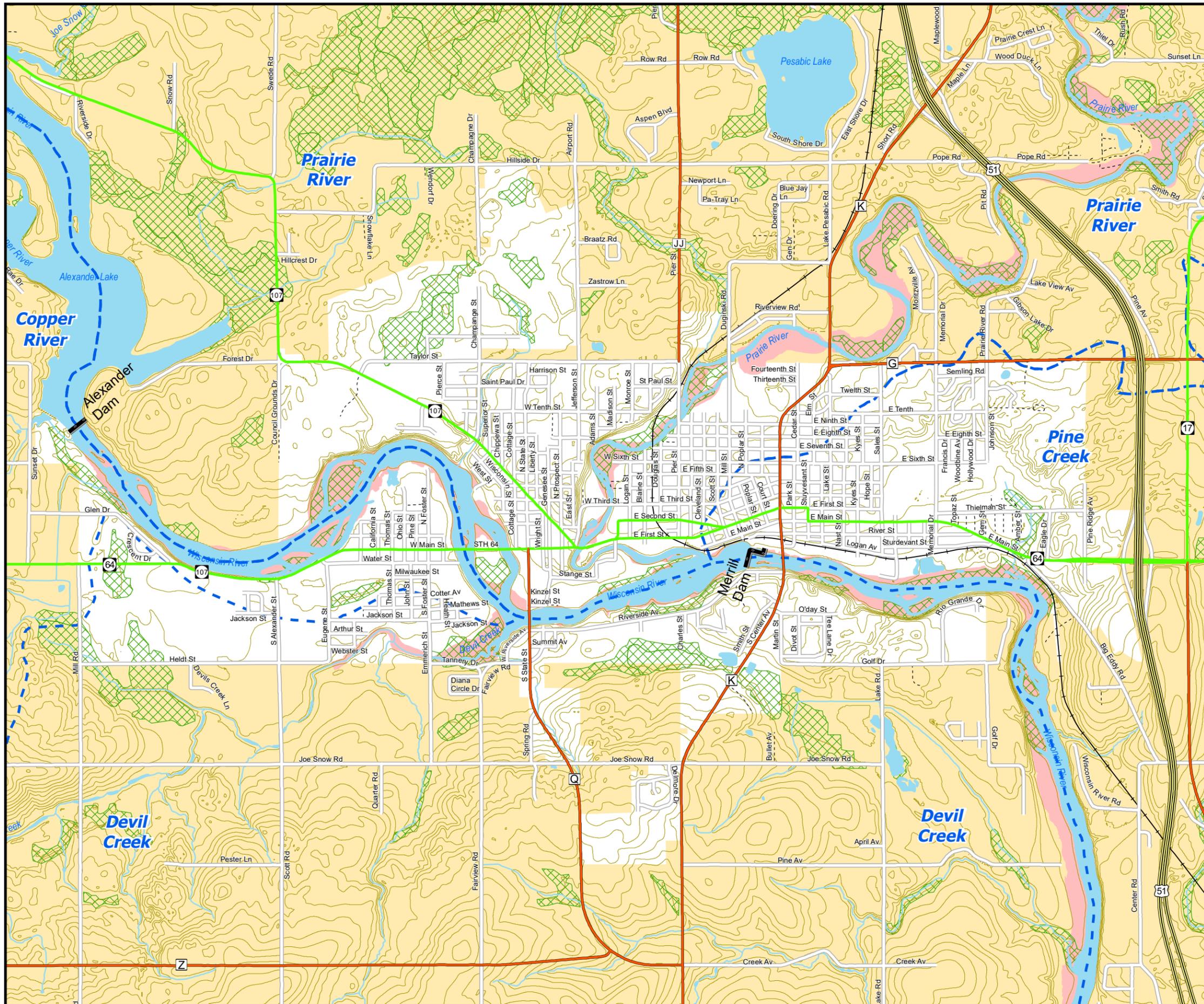
The city's historic, archeological and cultural locations and structures will remain preserved for the city residents.

Objectives:

1. To 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.
2. Promote public art throughout the community.

Policies:

1. The city will work to preserve the locations of these sites.
2. The city will discourage the destruction of these sites and will not allow incompatible uses around them that would have negative impacts on the resource.
3. The city will work to recognize historic figures or events.
4. The city will work with federal, state and county agencies to ensure all sites are identified and properly protected.
5. Utilize festivals/celebrations to honor notable individuals and/or historic events.
6. Develop and maintain a list of all public art in the city.



Map ?
Natural Resources
 City of Merrill

DRAFT

Legend

-  US Highway
-  State Highways
-  County Highways
-  Local Roads
-  Private Roads
-  Railroad
-  Dams
-  Watershed Boundaries
-  Contours 10ft
-  Wetlands
-  Floodplains
-  Water



0 0.5 Miles

Source: WI DNR, NCRWPC, FEMA

This map is neither a legally recorded map nor a survey and is not intended to be used as one. This drawing is a compilation of records, information and data used for reference purposes only. NCRWPC is not responsible for any inaccuracies herein contained.



**North Central
 Wisconsin Regional
 Planning Commission**

210 McClellan St., Suite 210, Wausau, WI 54403
 715-849-5510 - staff@ncwrpc.org - www.ncwrpc.org

CHAPTER 6 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Background

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.

A. Previous Studies

1. 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.

2. Business Park Market Feasibility Study

In 2001, the Merrill Area Development Corporation hired a consultant to conduct a Feasibility Study. The study commenced to evaluate the most appropriate type of development for the I-39/STH 64 interchange, give site and market conditions.

The key findings of this study were that there does not appear to be a large immediate demand for additional commercial or industrial land in the City. In fact, base upon land values, overall demand for land in Merrill appears to be depressed compared to other areas. The region has an adequate supply of business park space for the next decade and demand for commercial land appears to be focused at the Highway 51 corridor area. Significant environmental and man-made restrictions on the site are additional inhibitors for general commercial or industrial development.

There may be opportunity, however, to create a niche development that can be part of an overall strategy to increase demand for Merrill as a location and also generate demand for this site. Although it is beyond the scope of this study to explore the reasons for an apparent lack of demand for the community, one way of increasing demand for a location is to change the image of perception of that location.

3. Merrill Business District Overview

This study was conducted in 2000 to identify some baseline information to better understand the Merrill market area and examine new retail and service opportunities for its downtown business district.

The brief report developed a drive time map to determine the Trade Area, which is the Merrill zip code (54452) area. A trade area is the geographic area that contains the largest concentration of customers for a given area. The population of the trade area has a population of about 21,000 persons with a household income of \$26,000. The University of Wisconsin-Extension completed this study.

4. 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.

1. 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.
2. 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.

5. 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.

6. Labor Market Conditions in Lincoln County

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.

7. Lincoln County Business Retention Survey

The Lincoln County Economic Development Corporation conducted this study in 2000. The study included 28 firms in both Merrill and Tomahawk. These firms accounted for nearly 70 percent of employment in the manufacturing and services. The survey found that 67 percent of respondents felt that labor supply shortages and skills were the greatest problems in recruiting. The survey also examined the business climate in the community. Overall, about 13 percent said the area was “excellent”, 63 percent said “good”, and 25 percent said “fair”. The community concerns were labor availability and skills, taxes, school costs, and fiber optics. Some opportunities were listed in the report, they are: industry led educational imitative, business and school collaboration on business curriculum, and telecommunications linking Lincoln County.

8. Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS)

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 agency that is responsible for maintaining that federal designation. As a part of maintain that designation, the NCWRPC annually prepares a CEDS report. The report serves to summarize and assess economic development activities of the past year and present 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.

9. Regional Livability Plan

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 comprehensively discusses how transportation, housing, economic development, and land use affect livability in the region. The RLP provides a variety of 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 the city of Merrill as they are the metro area in the region and have a central business district.

B. Economic Development Issues (Incorporate the Strategic Plan)

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 a 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.

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.

A. 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 Issues and Opportunities section.

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. The largest percent increases in employment were in Administrative and Support of 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.

See Table 1 Employment by Sector

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. 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 of 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.

B. Employment by Occupation

The economy is made up of 23 different occupations. They are: Management Occupations; Business and Financial Operations Occupations; Computer and Mathematical Occupations; Architecture and Engineering Occupations; Life, Physical, and Social Science Occupations; Community and Social Service Occupations; Legal Occupations; Education, Training, and Library Occupations; Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports, and Media Occupations; Healthcare Practitioners and Technical Occupations; Healthcare Support Occupations; Protective Service

Occupations; Food Preparation and Serving Related Occupations; Building and Grounds Cleaning and Management Occupations; Personal Care and Service Occupations; Sales and Related Occupations; Office and Administrative Support Occupations; Farming, Fishing, and Forestry Occupations; Construction and Extraction Occupations; Installation, Maintenance, and Repair Occupations; Production Occupations; Transportation and Material Moving Occupations; and Military Occupations.

Between 2010 and 2015, 13 of the 23 occupations experienced positive employment growth in the city of Merrill resulting in a 1 percent growth in employment. The 10 occupations that experienced a decrease in employment lost 240 jobs. Those 10 occupations accounted for 26 percent of the total employment in 2015. Education, Training, and Library Occupations experienced the largest decrease in employment decreasing 128 jobs, a negative 25 percent change.

Office and Administrative Support Occupations account for the largest percentage of the city's employment, accounting for 16 percent of all employment. Almost 1,300 people are employed in this occupation, increasing employment by 51 people or 4 percent over the past 5 years. Production Occupations accounts for the second largest percentage of employment in the city, accounting for 15 percent of all employment. Between 2010 and 2015, employment in this occupation increased 37 people, or 3 percent. Transportation and Material Moving Occupations account for the third largest percentage of employment, accounting for 9 percent of all employment. Over 700 people in the city of Merrill are employed in this occupation. Combined, the top three occupations account for 40 percent of all employment. Over the 5 year period, Protective Service Occupations experienced a 12 percent growth in employment, the largest in the city. Transportation and Material Moving Occupations experienced the largest net increase in employment, increasing employment by 52 people, one more person than Office and Administrative Support Occupations.

Occupational employment in Lincoln County is similar to the City of Merrill, increasing employment 456 jobs, or 4 percent over the five year period. The top three occupations in the county are Production Occupations, Office and Administrative Support Occupations, and Sales and Related Occupations. These three occupations account for 39 percent of all employment in the county. Farming, Fishing, and Forestry Occupations experienced the largest growth over the 5 year period, increasing 23 percent. Production Occupations experienced the largest net increase in employment, increasing employment by 188 people.

See Table 2: Occupation Employment-

C. 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.

$$LQ = (e_i/e_t)/(E_i/E_t)$$

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 3 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 Table 3 Location Quotient-

D. Location Quotient Analysis –

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 region's 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.

An industry 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 then 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 Economies

The city of Merrill has four driver economies 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 economies 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 Economies

The city of Merrill has five emerging economies: Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction; Construction; Administrative and Support of 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 of 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 Economies

The city of Merrill has two maturing economies: 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 economy: Retail Trade. The 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.

Trouble Economies

The city of Merrill has seven trouble economies: 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 has seven trouble economies: 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.

See Bubble Charts and tables-

E. 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 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, those actively looking for work, 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. The increase in labor force is primarily due to a 2.3 percent 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.

See Table Labor Force

F. 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 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.

G. Laborshed

A laborshed is defined as the area or region from which an employment center draws its commuting workers. In 2013, only 1,919 of the 5,832 jobs in the city of Merrill were filled by people who also live in Merrill. On a daily basis, roughly 3,913 people traveled into the city of Merrill for work. In contrast, 3,233 employed city residents leave the city for work on a daily basis. Overall, the city has a positive net migration of 680 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.

See Table 7 (or graphic) City workforce migration-

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. 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.

See Table 8 in migration destinations-

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. 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.

See Table 9 out migration destinations-

H. 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. The total number of jobs in the city of Merrill is projected to be 8,391 in 2025. The Administrative and Support of 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 increase 53 percent over the ten year period, the largest projected increase. In alignment with the city of Merrill, the Administrative and Support of 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.

See Table 10 Sector Projections-

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. 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 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.

See Table 11 Occupation Projections-

I. 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.

J. Income Levels

Both median household income and per capita incomes were discussed in the Issues and Opportunities section. 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 a 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.

K. Major Employers

Table 12 lists the major employers in the city of Merrill, which is primarily made up of insurance agencies, manufacturers, and healthcare companies.

See Table 12 major employers-

6.3 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.

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, 40 of the 90 acres are developed. There is no rail access at this industrial site, but the park does have direct access to highway 107. The 50 acres of available land is owned by the Merrill Area Development Corporation (MADC). There is very little land left in the Airport Park and the city needs to begin planning to add additional park space.

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 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 Area

In 2004 the city created a redevelopment authority. The boundaries of the redevelopment authority are the same as the city boundaries. However, the downtown is a priority area for redevelopment.

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.

See Map X Generalized Redevelopment Areas

- **Riverfront** – 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.

Revitalization and Beautification Areas

Revitalization differs from redevelopment since the focus is not on a reuse, but rather more 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 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 does have some beautiful park facilities, however, 64 westbound from Highway 51, does not capture that sentiment.

Tax Incremental Financing Districts

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

The Redevelopment Authority and Common Councils use of TIF is based upon case-by-case development/redevelopment plans.

The eight TIF districts are:

Number	TID Type	Created	Geographic Area
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

See map X for the geographic location of all eight TIF districts.

6.4 Economic Development Programs

A. Local Economic Development Capacity

There are four primary economic development organizations in the community. These are: the Merrill Area Chamber of Commerce, Merrill Area Development Corporation, the City of Merrill, and the Lincoln County Economic Development Council.

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.

The City of Merrill also has the ability to develop tax incremental districts (TID) throughout the city. Typically, TID districts are used to provide infrastructure in an area to promote development. A TID district allows local governments to invest in infrastructure and economic development projects and apply the increment of increased property tax revenue realized by those projects in retiring the costs of those improvements. There are eight active Tax Increment Financing Districts in the city. TID 1 and TIF 2 has been retired.

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.

The City created a redevelopment authority in 2007. That organization has the ability to secure additional economic development funds for the City.

B. County Programs

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.

The County is a member of Central Wisconsin Economic Development (CWED). CWED manages a large multi-county revolving loan fund. Lincoln County has invested their RLF into CWED to leverage their fund and with other RLF's. By rolling the county RLF into the CWED fund, Lincoln County businesses have access to \$2.7 million. The money is available for new and existing businesses in the private sector.

C. Regional Programs

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. has \$2.7 million available in funds 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 Economic Development Organization:

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 in 2004 and is dedicated to the 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 Grow North Region remains competitive in both the state and global economies. Their economic development partners determine the actions of the organization and help to support the mission of growing the economy of the Northwoods and ensuring the region is able to sustain and grow vibrant businesses and communities.

D. State Programs

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.

Board of Commissioners of Public Lands- Loan Program (BCPL): 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 including economic development, local infrastructure, capital equipment and vehicles, building repairs and improvements, and refinancing existing liabilities to reduce future borrowing costs.

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.

Brownfield Site Assessment Grant (SAG): Grant funds to Approved projects to assist local governments with conducting initial environment assessment and demolition activities on an eligible abandon, idle, or underutilized industrial or commercial site.

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.

Enterprise Zone Program: The State of Wisconsin provides tax incentives to new or expanding businesses whose projects will affect distressed areas. The zone is "site specific" and applies to only one business. Projects must affect distressed areas suffering from high unemployment, low incomes, declining population, declining property values, and plant closings and that have high numbers of people on public assistance. Businesses earn credits only by creating new full-time jobs or by conducting environmental remediation on a "Brownfield" site. The Region currently has four designated enterprise zones and all are located in the central sub-Region. They are: Renaissance Learning in Wisconsin Rapids; Award Flooring, and Lincoln Electric in Merrill; and Lands' End in Stevens Point.

Capital Catalyst Program: Grants to local organizations that contribute matching dollars to locally-managed seed fund for investments in high-growth, technology based companies.

Qualified New Business Venture (QNBV): Early stage businesses developing innovative products, processes or services may be designated as QNBVs by the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC). This designation allows eligible angel investors and qualified venture capital funds to receive a tax credit based on their equity investment.

Technology Development Loan Program: Flexible lending program designed to assist high-tech startup and emerging growth companies in financing the development and launch of innovative products and services.

Seed Accelerator Program: Grants to local organizations that operate mentor-driven business modeling training programs to provide funds to participating start-ups.

Export Technical Assistance: Assistance to expand the sale of Wisconsin-made products outside of the United States and to help companies develop an export strategy.

ExportTech: Export acceleration program to help Wisconsin companies expand their global market reach through targeted export strategy development and execution.

Global Business Development Grants: Grant funding to support the growth and expansion of exports by Wisconsin companies.

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, among 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.

Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Bureau of Remediation and Redevelopment:

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.

Other state resources include:

Impact Seven, Inc., is one of more recognizable statewide organizations that provide micro-loans for small business start-ups and expansions (Source: www.impactseven.org) The Wisconsin Women's Business Initiative Corporation (WWBIC) also provides micro-loans to predominately women, people of color, and those with lower incomes (Source: www.wwbic.com). The Wisconsin Business Development Finance Corporation provides financial assistance and resources to business and lenders throughout the state (Source: www.wbd.org).

E. Federal Programs

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:

1. 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.
2. 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.
3. 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.

1. 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.
2. 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.
3. Rural Business Development Grants (RBDG) – RBDG 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.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT GOALS

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

During the of the city strategic plan in 2014, the city completed an exercise in preparation for 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 us 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 more of the entities that promote region 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 heir “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.

General Development Strategies

There are five basic areas of economic development strategies that should be used to promote economic development activity in the city of Merrill. The comprehensive strategy should address all five of the areas in some way.

Retention

Retention means keeping the local firms that already exist in the area. The goal is to assist these firms as needed to stay profitable. All economic development efforts should view retention as the first and most important goal.

Expansion

Working with local businesses to promote expansions can lead to a stronger economy. Expansion leads to the creation of new employment and more profits, therefore expansion is a boon to local economies.

Creation

The creation of new businesses in a community has obvious benefits. Rather than luring the businesses into the community, the businesses are “home-grown”. These types of businesses are usually small in the beginning, but have the potential to grow into larger businesses.

Attraction

The basic premise behind attraction is to bring, or recruit, an existing business to locate their headquarters or a branch within the community. This may be achieved through a combination of economic incentives, marketing, and local amenities.

Workforce

Supplying a workforce with the knowledge, skills, and abilities is key to economic growth. The ability to attract and retain workers is instrumental in attracting and retaining businesses and allowing them to expand their services. Companies are drawn to locations that have access to the best workforce.

Goal: 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.

Objectives:

1. Initiate a program with Lincoln County to prepare a Countywide economic development plan.
2. Create tax increment finance districts to provide some of the financial assistance needed to pursue the City's economic development goal.
3. Encourage Lincoln County government leaders to partner with the City on some of Merrill's economic development activities that have broad, regional impacts. An area suitable for development as an industrial park should be identified, if possible, within the long-term growth area on the City's east side. An industrial park in the vicinity of the Eastern Arterial (CTH X) would have good transportation linkages.
4. Work to reduce the City's property tax rate to ensure it is not a barrier to new development, business activities, or property ownership.
5. Coordinate economic development activities between the City of Merrill, Lincoln County, and other communities within the urban area to assure there is not a duplication of economic development services and to minimize the creation of competing publicly-funded economic development activities.
6. Provide an environment that encourages expansion and retention of existing businesses through networking and making resources available to foster growth. Economic development staff should remain as networked in the community as possible, making personal visits to local businesses on a regular basis.
7. Promote the City of Merrill as an ideal location for establishing new residential, commercial, and industrial development projects because of its low cost of living, extensive infrastructure and services, and high quality of life for employees and business owners. Marketing tools, including the City's economic development web site, trade publications, newsletters to real

estate site selectors, and attendance at trade shows should be utilized.

8. Maintain existing and create new private/public partnerships to demonstrate the community's commitment to, and support for, economic expansion.
9. Support economic revitalization of downtown by encouraging diverse economic activity, including government and professional offices; insurance and financial services; convention, lodging, food/beverage, and entertainment; education and training; retail trade; and high-density residential uses.
10. Identify issues and opportunities facing key industry groups and take actions to enable them to continue operation and to expand in the City of Merrill
11. Encourage the incubation of new local firms and support entrepreneurs with technical, collaborative, and administrative services through the Merrill Business Development Center.

Policies:

1. The City will 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.
2. The City will continue to make revitalization and redevelopment of downtown Merrill, the Wisconsin River waterfront, and the Stewart Avenue/US Highway 51 corridor a high priority.
3. The City supports and encourages efforts to stimulate private investment and reinvestment in Merrill and the creation of jobs for an expanding work force.
4. The City will continue to work cooperatively with Lincoln County and other area municipalities to coordinate regional marketing efforts and encourage economic development that benefits the entire Merrill urban area.

Strategies/Actions:

1. Work with Lincoln County to prepare a countywide economic development plan.
2. Identify and prioritize areas where tax increment financing (TIF) can be used to facilitate economic development.
3. Develop and maintain an up-to-date database of vacant and underutilized commercial and industrial land and buildings. The database should include in-depth information on properties that are available for private development.
4. Consider developing revitalization plans for select commercial corridors, such as Grand Avenue, First Avenue, Third Avenue, Sixth Street, Thomas Street, and Merrill Avenue.

5. Identify barriers and competitive disadvantages affecting the City and develop a plan to mitigate these issues.
6. As part of a business retention program, economic development staff will continue to make regular, personal visits to local businesses.
7. Evaluate and routinely update the City's marketing tools to make sure they remain current.
8. Routinely evaluate and modify, if necessary, the City's list of target markets.
9. Continue to use Unified Development District zoning in the Central Business District and other commercial areas to encourage and facilitate high quality, mixed use development that is acceptable to neighboring property owners.
10. Coordinate development regulations and provision of infrastructure needed to establish downtown Merrill as an important center for retail, office, government, high-tech business, residential, cultural, entertainment, and recreational uses.
11. Continue to seek outside sources of revenue to fund many of the facilities and services that reach a larger population base than just Merrill residents.
12. Continue to market vacant land and buildings in Merrill West Business and Industrial Park