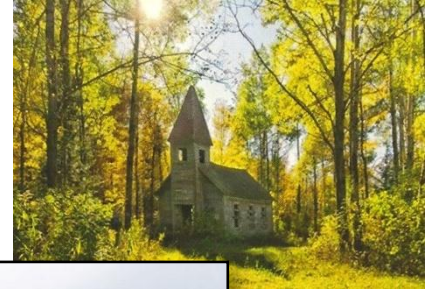


# SCHLEY LAND USE PLAN



**LINCOLN COUNTY, WISCONSIN  
ADOPTED MARCH 1, 2022**

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

### **Town Board**

Rick Dorn, Chairperson

Timothy Klimek, Supervisor

Gerald Plamann, Supervisor

### **Town Land Use Committee**

Earl Welker, Chair

Bonnie Prueser, Member

Joe Polak, Member

Tony Dallman, Member

Lea Ratajczyk, Member

### **Town Clerk**

Becky Dallman

### **County Staff Liaison**

Mike Huth, Land Services Administrator

## **I. Purpose of Town Land Use Plan**

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

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

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

## II. Background Information

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

### A. Location

The Town of Schley is located at the east central edge of Lincoln County. The Town is approximately 48.3 square miles in area. At its nearest point, the Town is located about three miles northeast of the City of Merrill along State Highway (STH) 17. Schley abuts the Towns of Merrill, Birch, Russell, and Pine River in Lincoln County.

### B. Growth Trends

The Town of Schley has historically contained a mix of, recreational, Agricultural and forestry uses. The population growth rate has been moderate. The town’s 2019 population based on the WI DOA preliminary count is 939.

### C. Summary of Significant Natural Resources

The Town’s landscape is characterized by areas of farmland near existing town and county roads, forests in more remote locations, and several river and stream corridors. The Prairie River, a major tributary to the Wisconsin known for its trout fishery, runs through the northwest sections of Town. The unique Prairie Dells Scenic Area (a 20-acre County park) is located along the River in Schley. The Manacke Creek and Big Hay Meadow Creek, tributaries to the Prairie, include significant adjacent floodplain and wetland areas. Both the north and south branches of the Pine River run through eastern sections of the Town. The State’s Natural Heritage Inventory program suggests the presence of rare plant or animal species in the section which includes the Prairie Dells Scenic Area, within Section 6 just southwest of Bloomville, and within Section 29 southwest of the intersection of County Highway (CTH) C and Town Hall Road.

The Natural Resources Conservation Service classifies most of the soils within the Town (particularly east of STH 17) as “prime farmland,” with a good portion being prime only where drained. There are larger blocks of wooded areas throughout the Town. These include County-owned forest lands, most of which are near the Town’s northwest corner. The *Lincoln County Forest Comprehensive Land Use Plan* identifies these areas as appropriate for multiple recreation, timber removal, and wildlife habitat uses. The northwest corner also includes the 950-acre City of Merrill Public Hunting Grounds. The *Lincoln County Outdoor Recreation Plan* suggests that the City and County enter into a land swap to transfer the jurisdiction of this property to the County for management as part of the County Forest.

#### D. Existing Land Use

Providing an accurate depiction of the Town's *existing* land use pattern is an early step in planning for a desired *future* land use pattern. Map 1 presents the existing (Year 2020) land use pattern within the Town, divided into several land use designations.

As suggested above, a vast majority of the Town is in open space uses such as agriculture and forestry. The amount of development in the Town is almost entirely residential.

. Small-scale commercial development is located in Bloomville at STH 17 and CTH J, CTH J and CTH X near the Town's north edge, at the corner of CTHs X and C (including a golf course), and at the corner of STH 17 and CTH C.

#### E. Existing Transportation System

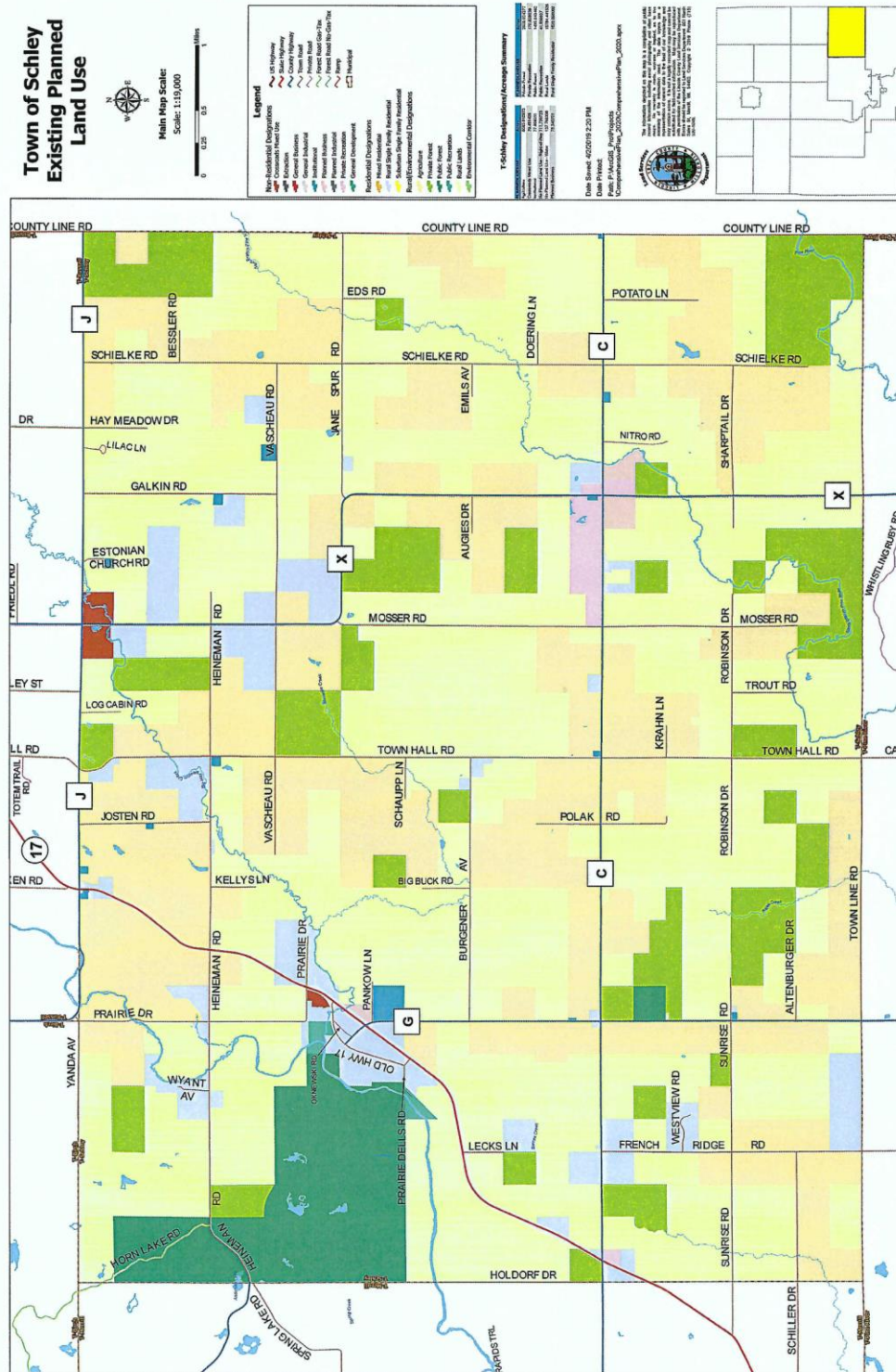
The Town, particularly its western half, is well connected to the region through the existing roadway network. STH 17, which connects Merrill and Rhineland, runs through the western part of the Town. . Traffic count reports of 2017 and 2019 show a small decrease in volumes. CTHs C and J serve as the main east-west collector roads through the Town, and CTH X serves as the main north south collector. Local roads managed by the Town complement this major road network. There are no railroads in the Town. There are two private grass air strips.

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

The Schley Town Hall (housed in an old school house) is located at the geographic center of the Town, at the intersection of CTH C and Town Hall Road. The Town does not provide public sanitary sewer or water services or own or operate any public parkland. The County owns and operates the Prairie Dells Scenic Area and Hay Meadow Park, which is near the confluence of Hay Meadow Creek and the Prairie River. The *Lincoln County Outdoor Recreation Plan* recommends the development of a trail to connect Hay Meadow Park with the Scenic Area (with a stop at the old log dam in between). The 40-acre Chilsen Forest is located at the southeast corner of CTHs G and C.

No properties in the Town are listed on the National or State Register of Historic Places. However, there are no less than eight cemeteries or Native American burial sites in the Town. There is also a 100-year old Estonian Church located off County Hwy J in the north east portion of the town. A comprehensive survey of historic or archeological resources has not been conducted.





### III. Results of Public Participation Exercises

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

#### A. Town Vision Setting Workshop

A Town public meeting was held on December 11, 2018 for the purpose of gathering information for the review/update of the Town of Schley's Land Use Plan.

#### B. Visual Exercise

Thirty-seven (37) photos were taken in Schley, 35 of them were of "good" or "special" places. These photos can be grouped into four categories:

1. Images of the Prairie River, particularly the Prairie Dells Scenic Area, including images of water related activities such as fishing or canoeing.
2. The Town included a survey in the 2014 tax papers. There were 450 surveys sent out with a return of 44%. The Town received information on the financial status of the Town along with population and future direction of the Town.



3. Agricultural settings, including farmsteads; silos; red barns; and fields of ginseng, corn, hay and grain.



4. Neatly kept rural residences, especially those that blended with a rural or forest setting.



5. Small businesses and local institutions, such as the Town Hall, churches, and cemeteries.





Places that Committee members felt hurt the character of Schley were unkempt residential lots.

- C. The Town has support for and interest in;
- Strong support for maintaining the rural character and agricultural lands in the Town.
  - Interest in positive development. Reasonable amounts of growth in character with the Town—particularly along Highways 17, X, and C—may be appropriate.
  - Interest in developing and maintaining public park and recreation opportunities.
  - Desire to improve the appearance of the Town, particularly certain unkempt properties.
  - Support for Town resident involvement and desire to maintain a dedicated Town Board.

#### IV. Planning Framework

##### A. Town Vision Statement

A community vision statement is an expression of the direction the Town wishes to head over the next 20 years and beyond. In 2000 and 2020, the Town Plan Commission with resident input developed the following vision statement:

**Through the year 2040, the Town of Schley would like to promote the involvement of its citizens in making decisions that preserve rural character while allowing for positive change. Agriculture, rural residences, small businesses, and recreation are valued and should be encouraged and improved.**

##### B. Town Goals and Objectives

The development of goals and objectives is an important step in the planning process because these statements represent the basic values of the community. Goals are broad



statements that express general preferences for the long-term development of the community. Objectives are more specific than goals and are usually attainable through implementation activities, described later in this *Plan*. The following goals and objectives emerge from the Town's vision statement and public participation results.

**Goal 1: Preserve the rural setting and the unique quality of life of the Town**

*Objectives:*

1. Preserve agricultural opportunities, forest land, and sensitive logging
2. Work to keep property taxes as low as possible
3. Encourage new development in, locations, , and densities which support the preservation of rural character
4. Protect environmentally sensitive areas, including but not limited to the Prairie River, tributary creeks, and marshes
5. Identify, maintain, and preserve historic sites and buildings
6. Maintain and encourage a healthy mix of rural businesses, including home-based businesses

**Goal 2: Promote and enhance recreational opportunities in the Town**

*Objectives:*

1. Continue support of accessible recreational land in the Town
2. Encourage property owners to donate land or provide easements for recreational use
3. Collaborate with the County on improvements to existing recreational lands, including the Prairie Dells Scenic Area and Hay Meadow Park.
4. Cooperate on developing a recreational trail system in the Town
5. Support state and county efforts to restore the Prairie River
6. Promote recreational safety in the Town.

**Goal 3: Enhance the appearance of properties**

*Objectives:*

1. Work with the County on clear minimum property maintenance standards, citizen complaint procedures, and enforcement practices
2. Establish high quality development standards, particularly for commercial uses, mobile homes, and institutional uses
3. Collaborate with the County on new and updated zoning and subdivision regulations to support implementation of this *Plan*

**Goal 4: Encourage resident participation in Town planning and other activities**

*Objectives:*

1. Enhance communications between Town residents and Town government on issues related to land use planning, including future amendments to this *Plan*
2. Encourage community involvement in planning, development, and maintenance of the recreational system in the Town
3. Attempt to increase resident participation through techniques such as committee appointments to address key problems or opportunities in the Town

## V. Land Use Plan Map and Description

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

### A. Land Use Plan Map Designations

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

In general, differences between the three general *categories* of land use (e.g., between “rural/environmental” and “residential”) are intended to be greater than differences between the multiple *designations* within each category (e.g., between “rural lands” and “agriculture”). As such, following initial adoption of this *Town Land Use Plan*, the Town and County should not require a formal *Plan* amendment before acting on a development proposal which suggests a change in land use designation within the same category (e.g., when a land owner proposes to remove land from the “private forest” designation to the “rural lands” designation.) In contrast, the Town and County should require a formal *Plan* amendment before acting on a development proposal which suggests a change in land use designation that would also change the category (e.g., from “rural/environmental” to “residential”). Such changes lead to more significant shifts in land use policy and development impacts.

### B. Description of Land Use Plan Map

The Planned Land Use map recommends the continuation of a rural land use pattern in the Town. That pattern is focused on the preservation of prime and productive agricultural lands, environmental corridors including the Prairie River and its tributaries, and forested lands. More intensive development (e.g., subdivisions) would be directed to a limited number of areas with existing development and roads. These areas would mainly be focused near STH 17, but are also located at certain crossroads along CTH C and other places. In total, the amount of land designated for development on the Planned Land Use map exceeds the anticipated land use demand within the Town over the next 20 years, to account for uncertainties in the land market.

The following paragraphs describe the locations and recommendations for each of the major land use designations shown in the Planned Land Use map.

## 1. Agriculture

The planned *Agriculture* designation has been mapped over large blocks of farmland underlain by prime soils and in active farm use. This includes large blocks of farmland in the northcentral parts of the Town and other bigger farms mainly along certain roads (e.g., CTHs C and G). Other, more isolated farm tracts were generally not mapped within the planned *Agriculture* designation. New housing should be limited within the *Agriculture* planning district to a density of one home per 35 acres owned to prevent incompatibilities with agricultural operations, such as noise, dust, smells, and traffic. New housing that does occur should be located in woodlots, at the edges of fields, and on non-productive lands (see design examples in Attachment A). Compatible small non-farm businesses should also be allowed to provide supplemental income.

## 2. Rural Lands

The planned *Rural Lands* designation has been mapped throughout the Town, over areas generally exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics: areas of open lands and private woodlands not appropriate for more intensive development, in many cases because of distance from existing roads and development; isolated, generally smaller tracts of farmland; on lands adjacent to most environmentally sensitive areas and active forest lands. In addition to open space uses such as farming, new development in *Rural Lands* areas should generally be limited to housing at a density not exceeding one home per 20 acres owned. This *Plan* supports the clustering of these homes on smaller lots— rather than 20+ acre lots—per the density and design recommendations in Attachment A.

## 3. Public Forest/Public Recreation

The *Public Forest* designation has been mapped over County-owned forest lands and most of the current City of Merrill Public Hunting Grounds. Based on the recommendations of the *Lincoln County Outdoor Recreation Plan*, The Planned Land Use map also recommends within the *Public Recreation* category lands along the Prairie River between the existing Prairie Dells Scenic Area and Hay Meadow Park (much of which is actually shown as *Environmental Corridor*). This is meant to represent lands for potential County acquisition as part of the proposed Prairie Dells Scenic Area expansion and trail connection.

## 4. Private Forest

The *Private Forest* designation has been mapped over privately-held lands that are currently enrolled in State Forest Crop Land (FCL) or Managed Forest Land (MFL) programs, or currently zoned for forestry use. Mapped *Private Forest* lands are scattered throughout the Town. Year-round housing is not recommended for these areas due to impacts associated with forestry activities and restrictions associated with the FCL and MFL programs.

## 5. Environmental Corridors

*Environmental Corridors* are mapped over Wisconsin DNR-identified wetlands and FEMA-designated floodplains (both subject to county zoning), slopes of 15 percent or greater, and soils with a majority hydric content (i.e. soils formed under wetland-type conditions). These lands are focused along the Prairie and Pine Rivers and their tributaries. Some developed properties located near the confluence of Hay Meadow Creek and the Prairie River are located very near or possibly in the *Environmental Corridor*. New development should generally be discouraged in *Environmental Corridors* to protect environmental resources, prevent property damage, and preserve wildlife habitat. There may be some areas included within this designation that are suitable for development if planned carefully. Areas mapped *Environmental Corridor* exclusively due to steep slopes may be one example.

## 6. Rural Single Family Residential

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

- *Hay Meadow-Prairie Neighborhood*: This planned neighborhood, located near Hay Meadow Creek, would build off of and connect existing residential developments. This area is home to existing small subdivisions, well served by roadways (especially STH 17), and close to the scenic and recreational opportunities of the Prairie River. The principles of “conservation neighborhood design” should be used for new subdivisions and home sites in this area (see “5 acre density” conservation neighborhood design example in Attachment A). Protection of river and creek shoreline areas and natural storm water management techniques should be priorities. In particular, on-site storm water detention should be required in new subdivisions to control the quality and quantity of water reaching the Hay Meadow Creek and Prairie River during storms. Further, new lots should not have direct driveway access to STH 17. Instead, new lots should back onto this highway wherever possible, and existing tree lines or landscape buffer yards should be retained or provided in their backyards. Homes should take access from an interconnected network of existing and planned local roads.
- *Highway C Corridor*: Traveling along CTH C, from STH 17 to the east, provides an excellent flavor of the rural land use pattern in Schley. This drive includes small businesses, a golf course, the Town Hall, clusters of residences, productive agricultural fields, forests, and several creek crossings. Care should be taken in preserving this interesting rural pattern, in part by avoiding the “stripping” of residences along the entire stretch of CTH C. As such, the Planned Land Use map recommends that future residential development be clustered, to the extent practical, near areas with existing development mainly focused near five



crossroads: STH 17, French Ridge Road, CTH G, Town Hall Road, and CTH X. Sensitive design of new homes and upkeep of older properties should be emphasized in this highly visible corridor.

- *Smaller Neighborhood “Clusters”*: Smaller clusters of residences are planned primarily in locations where existing clusters of housing already exist. These include the secluded Mosser Road area, three areas along Heineman Road, and Bloomville.

#### 7. Nonresidential Development

The Planned Land Use map identifies a few areas as appropriate for additional small scale commercial development. These include the lands near the intersections of Highways 17 and C, X and C, and 17 and G. Appropriate uses would be convenience based businesses, intended to serve the surrounding community and users of nearby recreational sites. New development in these areas should be of high-quality and designed to fit within the surrounding rural character and surrounding residential context. The Town should pay special attention to building design, landscaping, access, signage, lighting, and storm water management. Although not mapped, additional or expanded recreation-based uses would also be appropriate near these intersections.

### VI. Other Plan Recommendations

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

- Explore the potential for participation under the State Farmland Participation Program, which would enable farmers in planned Agriculture areas to receive state tax credits.
- Support the introduction and operation of agriculture-support businesses consistent with the character of the Town. For example, if a large scale implement dealership wanted to locate in the Town, it should be in an area planned for commercial use. Smaller, inconspicuous businesses could be allowed to locate in non-commercially planned areas. Also, provide families with opportunities for small non-farm businesses to supplement farm income.
- Work with UW-Extension staff to develop farming operations that emphasize community and environmental sustainability.
- Keep intensive non-farm development away from *Agriculture*, *Public Forest*, and *Private Forest* areas, and locate new homes built in *Agriculture* areas out of productive fields.
- Allow the tapping of maple trees and processing of maple syrup.
- Support logical additions to the County Forest.
- Encourage County Forestry personnel to enforce recommended forestry management practices within each of the designated “aesthetic management zones” described in the *Lincoln County Forest Comprehensive Land Use Plan*.

- Work with the County and State to support the continued restoration of the Prairie River, including fishery and natural plant species restoration and erosion control.
- Work with the County on a study to more definitively identify the boundaries of the *Environmental Corridor* and underlying environmental features (e.g., wetland, floodplain) on lands near the confluence of the Hay Meadow Creek and Prairie River.
- Encourage the design, location, and landscaping of new development in a manner that does not detract from the rural character of the Town. Require and review site, landscaping, signage, building design, and lighting plans for all commercial uses.
- Initiate or work with the County on a comprehensive survey of historic and archaeological resources in the Town, and preserve these resources.
- Work with the County to ensure that the same standards are equally applied to both public and private entities with regard to any future mining activities in the Town. The Town will also map existing extraction sites.

#### B. Transportation

- Work with the Lincoln County Highway Department to implement the five year Town Road Improvement Program (TRIP) to provide for the phased upgrading of Town roads.
- Plan for a network of interconnected new roads in major planned development areas, for reasons of highway access control, rural character preservation (visibility of development), and the current inaccessibility of certain planned development areas.
- Support access control and rural character objectives by discouraging large amounts of “side of the road” development with direct access to State and County highways.

#### C. Utilities and Community Facilities

- Support County acquisition of lands and development of trails connecting the existing Prairie Dells Scenic Area and Hay Meadow Park, including a stop at the old log dam. Provide or require logical public access points to this area and other sections of the Prairie River and Hay Meadow Creek, particularly as nearby lands develop.
- Work with the County to assure that a full range of recreational uses are allowed in the County Forest, and that the Prairie Dells Scenic Area and Hay Meadow Park are improved with a range of appropriate recreational facilities to serve Town residents.
- Coordinate community volunteers to work with the County to improve and maintain parks (i.e., “adopt-a-park” program). Develop a system in which users of these recreational areas can provide feedback on desired facilities or improvements.
- Work with local snowmobile clubs and property owners to designate snowmobile and ATV routes along certain Town roads, connecting to major trails in the area.

#### D. Housing and Economic Development

- Work with Lincoln County to address housing, zoning, or property maintenance code violations on existing properties. Explore opportunities to upgrade these standards at the Town or County level.
- Encourage developers to plan for new neighborhoods using the principles of “conservation neighborhood design.” These principles emphasize providing housing in proximity to parks, open spaces, and services; blending automobile convenience with the creation of safe, comfortable places to live and walk; preserving and enhancing natural systems that define, sustain, and connect neighborhoods; and promoting rural character by “hiding” development from main roads through natural topography, vegetation, and setbacks.
- Establish guidelines for the siting of mobile homes in a manner consistent with county, state, and federal law.
- Work with the County to establish logical zoning rules for multi-family housing in rural areas. Such uses of the land should be most strongly encouraged where sanitary sewer is available. Where sewer is not available, lot sizes should be adequate to support the necessary septic system.
- Promote small-scale retail and service uses and private recreational uses in designated locations near planned *Rural Single Family Residential* and *Public Recreation* areas.
- Work with the County to support and allow small locally-owned business development and home based businesses where there will be no impact on surrounding properties.

#### E. Administration and Intergovernmental Cooperation

- Develop a public participation strategy to encourage citizen involvement in Town planning and administration.
- Consider appointing interested residents to committees to address and make recommendations on the following issues: historic resource identification and preservation, research and designation of additional snowmobile trails, implementing an “adopt-a-park” program to assist in the improvement and maintenance of recreational and scenic areas in the Town, and undertaking other major land use issues as they arise.
- Provide a copy of this *Town Land Use Plan* to all surrounding local governments in Lincoln County.
- Work with Lincoln County on zoning ordinance administration, day-to-day decision making (e.g., conditional use permits), and eventual updating.
- Work with surrounding towns to address any unforeseen conflicts between local plans. None are anticipated between the Town’s plans and those for Pine River, Merrill, and Russell. The Town of Birch does not currently have zoning, so it is extremely difficult to project future land use in adjacent areas in Birch.

#### F. Plan Adoption and Implementation

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

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

This Plan includes many recommendations for guiding land development and preservation within the Town over the next 20 years. Some of the recommendations may be applied immediately, such as recommendations for where new subdivisions would and would not be appropriate. Other recommendations will require subsequent Plan implementation activities, including the following:

- Consider implementing ordinances and design standards to encourage the appropriate siting of homes in areas along Town roads where limited development is proposed.
- Participate to the full extent allowed by law in the County zoning process to assure that Town desires are brought forward in zoning decisions.
- Work with Lincoln County on an update of the County's zoning ordinance to properly implement the land use recommendations of this *Plan*. Many provisions of this *Plan* cannot be implemented without a new or substantially revised zoning ordinance.
- Annually review this *Plan* to gauge progress on implementation and consider logical amendments based on changes in conditions. A more detailed review and update should be performed every five to ten years. Forward all adopted *Plan* amendments to the County for incorporation into the *Lincoln County Comprehensive Plan*.



