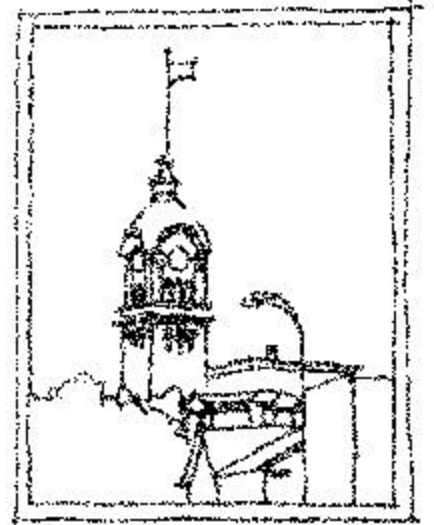


Town Land Use Plan
Town of Corning
Lincoln County, Wisconsin



Adopted by the Town Board:
March 27, 2001

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I. Purpose of Town Land Use Plan

The *Town of Corning Land Use Plan* will allow the Town to guide future development in a way that maintains the community's agricultural and "northwoods" character, protects natural resources, enhances recreational opportunities, provides for an efficient delivery of services, and balances private property rights with community interests. The *Town Land Use Plan* contains background information, maps, goals and objectives, and implementation strategies.

More specifically, the *Town Land Use Plan* recommends how lands within Corning should be used (e.g., forest, agriculture, residential) over the next 20 years, based on public input and the Town's vision, goals, and objectives. These recommendations may form the basis for new or updated tools to implement the *Plan*, such as zoning and subdivision ordinances. The recommendations should also be used as a basis for day-to-day development decisions, such as rezonings, conditional use permits, subdivisions, and parkland acquisitions. After adoption, the Town should occasionally consider logical amendments to the *Plan* based on changing conditions or new information.

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

II. Background Information

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

A. Location

The Town of Corning is located in the southwestern corner of Lincoln County. It is the largest Town in Lincoln County with approximately 146 square miles of land area. The Town is shaped like an "L", with the settled southeastern portion located about 15 miles west of Merrill and 20 miles north of Wausau. The sparsely populated northern portion is approximately 25 miles southwest of Tomahawk and 15 miles east of Rib Lake (in Taylor County). There are no cities, villages, or unincorporated "crossroad hamlets" in the Town. Within the County, the Town of Corning abuts the Towns of Tomahawk, Harding, and Scott. The Town also abuts land in Taylor and Marathon Counties.

B. Growth Trends

The Town experienced moderate population growth during the 1990s. Corning added 31 new residents to its population during the decade, growing from 795 full-time residents in 1990 to an estimated 826 in 2000, representing a 4% increase. The number of housing units in Corning increased from 346 in 1990 to an estimated 401 in 1999—a 16% increase.

C. Summary of Significant Natural Resources

The Town has two distinctive landscapes: forests, bogs, rivers and streams in Corning's north, central and southwestern portions, and scattered woodlands, streams and rolling farmland in the southeastern portion. The New Wood River and its tributaries flow through the north half of Town and the Copper River flows through the central and southeastern portions of Town. The Big Rib River flows through the Town's southwestern corner. Most of the sensitive natural areas within Corning, including wetlands and floodplains, are

associated with the New Wood and Copper Rivers and its tributaries. The State's Natural Heritage Inventory program suggests the presence of rare plant or animal species in Sections 26 and 35 in the northern portion; Sections 6 and 7 in the central portion; Sections 5, 6, 7, 8, 18, and 17 in the southwest portion; and Sections 19, 25, and 26 in the southeast portion.

The Natural Resources Conservation Service classifies most of the land within the Town as "prime farmland", with a good portion being prime only where drained.

D. Existing Land Use

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

A vast majority of the Town remains in open space uses. The northern two-thirds of Corning is forested, swampy and sparsely populated. Commercial forest product companies own large tracts of forestland in this part of Corning. The southern portion of Town—particularly the far southeastern corner—contains large blocks of agricultural land and smaller areas of private forestland and woodlots.

Most of the Town's developed lands are located in southeastern Corning and are used for single family residences. Residential development is predominately lined along County Highway M, State Highways 64 and 107, and along "section-line" roads such as Joe Snow Road and Leafy Grove Road. A small area of commercial and institutional development is located at the intersection of Joe Snow Road and Highway 64/107 and County Highway Z and Highway 107.

E. Existing Transportation System

The Town is well connected to the region through the existing roadway network. State Highway (STH) 64 generally runs east-west along the southern part of Corning (this road connects Merrill to Medford in neighboring Taylor County). Between 1992 and 1998, traffic volumes increased by approximately 34% along this highway. STH 107 also runs through the southeastern part of Town and provides access south to Marathon County. County Highways (CTHs) M, Z, and FF serve as collector roads. Local roads managed by the Town complement this major road network. Tower Road runs north-south and is the major road serving the central and northern portions of Corning.

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

The Town Hall building is located at the intersection of Joe Snow Road and Highway 64/107. There are currently no Town- or County-owned park areas within Corning. Two large areas owned by the state include the New Wood Wildlife Area in Corning's northern portion and land along both sides of Big Rib River in the southwestern corner of Town. The Town does not provide public sanitary sewer or water services. The Town's volunteer fire department maintains a facility next to the Town Hall building. The nearest medical care facility, library and post office is located in the City of Merrill.

There are no properties in Corning listed on the National or State Register of Historic Places. However, there are four cemeteries in the Town (one with tombstones dating back to the 1700s). A comprehensive survey of historic or archeological resources has not been conducted in Corning.

MAP 1: EXISTING LAND USE

III. Results of Public Participation Exercises

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

A. Key Planning Issues Exercise

The Committee participated in a preliminary exercise during the Summer of 2000 to identify key planning-related issues in the Town of Corning, which included the following:

- *Land Use:* Agriculture lands and forestlands have potential for development. Swamp lands are currently zoned as forestlands. County zoning does not reflect the Town's desired land use pattern. Town does not have a subdivision ordinance.
- *Community Character:* Rural lands, woodlands, and farmland define the town's character. County's zoning standards impact the overall character of the Town's growth (e.g., 20-acre minimum lot size for new homes in Agricultural District).
- *Pace of Development:* The current pace of development is slow. Some residents want no development to occur. Others support residential growth, but not at a fast rate. The pace of development in Corning is influenced not only by growth in the Merrill area, but also growth in the expanding Wausau area in neighboring Marathon County.
- *Housing:* There is one rural subdivision located along Hilly Road. There are a number of mobile homes in the community. No major rehabilitation problems.
- *Economic Development:* Commercial development is not a problem. Town dump has been closed and capped. Cranberry, dairy and logging are major economic activities in town.
- *Transportation:* Road maintenance on the heavily traveled town roads is the major concern. Paving town roads is a major cost issue. Joe Snow, Natzke Road and Midway Road are problem roads. Dangerous intersections include CTH M and STH 64, and STH 107 and STH 64.
- *Intergovernmental Issues:* There are no intergovernmental problems with County or surrounding Towns. Good relationship with the Town of Corning Fire Department.
- *Environment:* Preserve and enhance Copper River and Big Rib River (Moses Park). Natural resources are currently under-utilized, but some residents do not want to see those natural resources over-used.
- *Community Services and Facilities:* Need for low-impact park at the Goodrich Dells area along the Big Rib River in the southwest corner of Town, abutting Taylor County.

B. Town Vision Setting Workshop

The Town of Corning's vision setting workshop was held on May 23, 2000 to better understand the community's key planning issues and obtain participants' vision for the Town's future. This workshop was attended by nine Corning residents.

Many participants stressed their desire to preserve Corning's recreational and natural features. Designating areas for single family subdivisions, while preserving large tracts of open land, was identified as a Town priority. Participants also expressed an interest in enhancing fire protection and strengthening mobile home ordinances and standards.

When asked to describe the Town's strengths, common responses included the abundant recreational opportunities, open space and natural features, good relations between residents, and the low crime rate. When asked to describe the Town's weaknesses, common responses included a limited amount of job opportunities, lack of developed park and recreational areas for families, and lack of land use planning and development standards.

C. Visual Preference Exercise

In Summer 2000, the Committee completed a visual preference exercise to capture the Town's defining character as seen from the eyes of residents. Committee members photographed the "special places" that capture the Town's character. These photographs suggest places that Committee members wish to preserve or see more of in the future. Members also photographed places that they felt hurt the character and appearance of the Town. Of the 44 photos taken in Corning, 40 of them were of "good" or "special" places. These photos can be grouped into four main categories:

1. *Agricultural Images*: Agricultural-related photographs included farm buildings, pastures, and crop fields. (Below is an active farm located along CTH M in the southeast portion of Corning).



2. *Cultural Landscape Images*: Several photographs were taken of cultural and historic sites. One cemetery in Corning dates back to the 1700s. (Below is a photo of a tombstone in an unnamed cemetery located along Elm Grove Road).



3. *Residential Development Images:* Some photographs showed country homes and recreational cabins. (The cabin below is located at the intersection of CTH M and Savaske Road).



4. *Natural Scenes:* Photos that depict the Town's rural character including images of wooded country roads, streams, and wildlife. (The Middle Fork of the Copper River along Wegner Road is shown below).



D. Summary of Participation Efforts

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

- Desire to maintain the overall pattern of existing land uses in the Town.
- Strong support for wilderness preservation.
- Desire to improve local fire protection.
- Desire to review the County's approval process for mobile home development.
- Support for preserving large tracts of open land while planning for smaller pockets of residential development.
- Interest in better understanding the consequences of converting farmland to non-farmland use.

IV. Planning Framework

A. Town Vision Statement

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

“Over the next 20 years, the Town of Corning will continually strive to provide families an exceptional place to live and raise their youth in a rural atmosphere offering enhanced recreation areas, open wilderness, and thoughtfully planned and designed development, maintaining rural and treasured natural resources and quality town municipal services.”

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 natural and recreational areas

Objectives:

1. Maintain hunting, fishing, and hiking opportunities. Hiking opportunities can be particularly enhanced along the Ice Age Trail.
2. Preserve the Town’s farmland.
3. Develop and promote park and recreational areas for families.
4. Pursue and create the park at Goodrich Dells.
5. Preserve environmental corridor features including waterways, streambeds, woodlands, and wildlife habitats through the adoption and implementation of zoning and ordinance standards.
6. Protect areas of open space and natural features.

Goal 2: Assure that adequate public services are provided to residents

Objectives:

1. Enhance the Town’s fire protection services.
2. Maintain government accessibility.
3. Increase employment opportunities.
4. Maintain the Town’s low crime rate.

Goal 3: Attain a viable balance of land uses that reflect the community’s desire to protect forestland and promote residential growth

Objectives:

1. Create a plan for future land uses and desired development to manage growth.
2. Guide subdivision development to areas with existing development.
3. Minimize or prevent the subdivision of forestland.

Goal 4: Protect and enhance the Town’s identity

Objectives:

1. Develop standards for trailer homes.
2. Maintain good relations between residents.

3. Promote Corning's relaxed, small town atmosphere.
4. Promote the strong work ethic of local residents.
5. Minimize the use of property for the storage of automobile and industrial equipment.
6. Minimize the visibility of power lines.

V. Land Use Plan Map and Description

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

A. Land Use Plan Map Designations

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

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

B. Description of Land Use Plan Map

In general, Map 2 recommends the continuation of a rural land use pattern in Corning, focused on the preservation of the Town's unique environmental features, protecting large blocks of private forestlands, and maintaining prime agricultural lands in the southeastern part of Town. Map 2 shows more intensive development directed away from these resources and into areas with existing development and infrastructure. These include small pockets of residential development along Highway 64, particularly where this highway intersects Mink Road, CTH Z, CTH M, and Joe Snow Road. In total, the amount of land designated for residential development far exceeds the anticipated land use demand within the Town over the next 20 years.

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

1. Agriculture

The *Agriculture* planning district has been mapped over large blocks of farmland underlain by prime soils and in active farm use. These areas cover large portions of southeastern Corning. The Town should promote continued agricultural operations in these areas. Compatible small non-farm businesses should also be allowed to provide supplemental income opportunities. New housing should be limited in these areas to a density of one home per 35 acres owned to prevent incompatibilities with agricultural operations (e.g., noise, dust, smells, and traffic). If new housing development occurs in this *Agricultural* area, it should be located in woodlots, at the edges of fields, and on non-productive lands (see design examples in Attachment A).

2. Rural Lands

The *Rural Lands* designation has been mapped throughout the southern part of Town, over areas generally exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics: privately held woodlands not currently zoned for forestry; open lands not being farmed; isolated tracts of marginal farmland; “buffer” areas between planned residential development and planned agricultural use; and lands adjacent to other environmentally sensitive areas.

New development in *Rural Lands* areas should generally be limited to housing at a density not exceeding one home per 20 acres owned. This *Plan* supports the clustering of these homes on smaller lots—rather than 20+ acre lots—per the density and design recommendations presented in Attachment A.

3. Private Forest

The *Private Forest* designation was mapped over privately-held lands that are currently:

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

In very limited situations, certain inaccessible forested lands not fitting within the above categories were also included in the *Private Forest* category. *Private Forest* lands are concentrated in the northern, central and southwestern areas. Year-round housing is not recommended for these areas due to impacts associated with forestry activities. The Town’s recommended density for seasonal cabins or residences in *Private Forest* lands in Corning is one unit per 40 acres.

4. Public Forest and Public Recreation

The *Public Forest* designation was mapped over lands owned by the State or County.

The *Public Recreation* designation was mapped over the 1,600-acre, state-owned New Wood Wildlife Area and the adjacent 1,960-acre block of state-owned forestland to the west.

The Goodrich Dells area along the Big Rib River was also designated *Public Recreation*. To meet the recreational needs of residents in this corner of Lincoln County, the County’s *Outdoor Recreation Plan 1997 – 2001* recommends that this area develop as a County Park

site. Suggested facilities include a multi-use trail along the river to accommodate hiking, bicycling and cross country skiing; parking and restroom facilities; playground equipment, picnic facilities, and a swimming beach with canoe access.

5. Environmental Corridors

Environmental Corridors are mapped over Wisconsin DNR-identified wetlands and FEMA-designated floodplains (both subject to county zoning), slopes of 15 percent or greater, and soils with a majority hydric content (i.e. soils formed under wetland-type conditions). *Environmental Corridors* are not shown within the existing and planned County Forest. New development should generally be discouraged in these areas to protect the environmental resources, prevent property damage, and preserve wildlife habitat. The large amount of Environmental Corridors in the Town is attributable to the wetlands in this region.

6. Rural Single Family Residential

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

Larger areas of planned residential development are located along Highway 64, near the intersection with Mink Road, CTH Z, Joe Snow Road, and CTH M. Located near clusters of existing homes and businesses, these areas are well served by roadways and are near environmental corridors. The principles of “conservation neighborhood design” should be used for new development in this area, particularly buffering from Highway 64 where homes should ideally not front onto this highway. (For more information on “conservation neighborhood design”, see Section VI (D) below and Attachment A). These new residential areas should provide park or open space, an interconnected local road network and use natural stormwater management and progressive erosion control techniques.

Other smaller pockets of single family residential development are planned for lands at the intersection of Joe Snow Road and Corning Road; at the end of Prast Road, and at the intersection of CTH M and Leafy Grove Road.

7. Nonresidential Development Districts

Map 2 recommends an area of *Planned Business* development at the intersection of Highway 64/107 and Joe Snow Road, and at the intersections of Highways 64 and 107 and CTH Z. These planned businesses should serve the surrounding planned residential areas and be designed in a way that enhances the rural character of Corning.

MAP 2: Planned Land Use Map

VI. Other Plan Recommendations

A. Agricultural, Natural, and Cultural Resources

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

B. Transportation

- Continue to work with the Lincoln County Highway Department to update and implement the Town Road Improvement Program (TRIP) to provide for the appropriate upgrading of Town roads.
- Consider implementing Town road impact fees for new development projects that place a burden on or require the upgrading of Town roads.
- Plan for a network of interconnected new roads in planned residential development areas, for reasons of highway access control, rural character preservation (visibility of development), and the current inaccessibility of certain planned development areas.
- Consider applying to the State for “rustic road” status along one or more Town roads. To qualify, a roadway must have outstanding natural features, including native vegetation, abundant wildlife, open areas or agricultural vistas that make the area unique.
- Support access control and rural character objectives by discouraging large amounts of “side of the road” development on State and County highways.

C. Utilities and Community Facilities

- Provide new neighborhood parks within the large area planned for significant *Rural Single Family Residential* uses. The Town may acquire at least some of that land through requiring parkland dedications and/or park impact fees from new subdivisions.
- Follow the recommendations of the County’s five-year *Outdoor Recreation Plan* and support the development of a County Park site along the Big Rib River (Goodrich Dells area). The Town and Lincoln County should work with neighboring Taylor County on the possibility of this site developing as a joint regional park facility.
- Support the Town’s volunteer fire department and work with the County and State to ensure that the department has adequate equipment and training.

D. Housing and Economic Development

- Work with Lincoln County to address housing, zoning, or property maintenance code violations on existing residential or commercial properties.
- Encourage developers to plan for new neighborhoods using the principles of “conservation neighborhood design,” particularly in areas with significant natural resources. These principles emphasize providing housing in proximity to parks, open spaces, and services; blending automobile convenience with the creation of safe, comfortable places to live and walk; preserving and enhancing natural systems that define, sustain, and connect neighborhoods; and promoting rural character by “hiding” development from main roads through natural topography, vegetation, and setbacks. The principles are reflected in the illustrations in Attachment A.
- Promote neighborhood-serving retail development near planned *Rural Single Family Residential* areas, and allow small, low-impact nonfarm businesses on farming properties.
- Work with Lincoln County in updating the County’s review process for mobile home development.

E. Intergovernmental Cooperation

- Provide a copy of this *Town Land Use Plan* to all surrounding local governments in Lincoln County and surrounding counties.
- Work with Lincoln County on zoning ordinance administration, day-to-day decision making (e.g., conditional use permits), and eventual updating.
- Continue to monitor the Wisconsin Public Service Corporation’s plan to build a 250-mile transmission line between Wausau and Duluth. If the selected route for this power line runs through Lincoln County, the Town should recommend that the route follow Corning’s western boundary (the Lincoln-Taylor county line) along existing road-right-of-way to reduce environmental, visual and community character impacts.
- Work with surrounding towns to address any unforeseen conflicts between local plans.

F. Plan Adoption and Implementation

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

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

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

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