

# City of Merrill Sewer Service Area Plan 2025 - 2050



**FINAL DRAFT  
FOR CITY COUNCIL**



## **MERRILL SEWER SERVICE AREA PLAN 2050**

prepared for:

City of Merrill

by:

North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission

adopted by:

City of Merrill Common Council

on:

Xxxxxxx YZ, 2026

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## **SECTION 1.0 INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 PURPOSE**

This plan updates and supersedes the 1996 Merrill Sewer Service Area Plan, which is a formal element of Wisconsin's Areawide Water Quality Management Plan (AWQMP) for the Wisconsin River Basin. This plan was prepared by the North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (NCWRPC) with the support of the City of Merrill and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR). This plan delineates the 2050 sewer service boundary for the City of Merrill and lists the institutional structures, policies and procedures to implement the Sewer Service Area Plan.

The sewer service boundary identifies the geographic land area within which sanitary sewer service is acceptable, including delineation of environmentally sensitive areas to be excluded from sewered development to protect water quality, and intergovernmental jurisdictional issues and processes to enable cost-effective sewer service through the year 2050.

In addition to delineating a sewer service boundary, the Sewer Service Area Plan provides a framework for future planning at each individual municipal level. The data, trends, projections and findings developed in this Plan are consistent with the community plans for the City of Merrill and the Towns of Merrill, Pine River and Scott. The goals and policies updated during this planning process update and supersede those of the previous sewer service area plan and are to be used in the development of local policies concerning land use within these communities.

The Sewer Service Area Plan:

- ✚ establishes the geographic boundaries for possible sanitary sewer service to the year 2050;
- ✚ updates the existing institutional structure and processes for reviewing boundary and plan amendments and for conducting conformance reviews for sewer extensions at the local level;
- ✚ serves as a framework for community land development decisions;
- ✚ identifies environmentally sensitive areas (ESA) excluded from publicly sewered development to protect water quality in accordance with federal law and state statutes and administrative code. ESA delineations influence community development patterns, directing growth outside of these areas to protect water quality. Preserving environmental amenities also enhances and builds upon existing social, cultural and economic value in local communities; and
- ✚ is a formal element of Wisconsin's Areawide Water Quality Management

Plan and its implementation is therefore required to be in conformance with the state's water quality management plans and Wisconsin River Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) documents and implementation plans.

## **1.2 DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY AREA**

The planning area for the Merrill Sewer Service Area Plan is shown in Map 1. This area includes the communities with public sewer systems, the City of Merrill, along with the surrounding communities into which sewer service might be extended over the time horizon of the plan. These communities include the Towns of Merrill, Pine River, and Scott. All of the communities lie within Lincoln County. The planning area identifies the area of study for data collection and mapping. An understanding of the growth and development trends affecting the surrounding communities is necessary for a good planning process.

## **1.3 REASONS FOR AN UPDATE TO THE 1996 SEWER SERVICE AREA PLAN**

The primary reason behind the update of the Merrill Sewer Service Area Plan at this time is that the existing plan is out of date. In addition, the City is working on a plan with the Little Florida Countryside Community mobile home park to extend sewer service to address water quality issues. To accommodate the extension of service into this area north of the City, the sewer service area boundary will have to be expanded.

The existing SSA plan is the City's original plan which was adopted in 1996. The 1996 plan included ample area within the SSA boundary, and Merrill's growth was easily accommodated within it. Only two amendments have been required since 1996. The first amendment occurred shortly after the plan was adopted in order to correct some mapping errors that had been discovered and to add an area for a proposed new subdivision south of the city that was not foreseen. The second amendment was in 2015 when approximately 28 acres were added to accommodate a new area of commercial development just outside the SSA boundary on the east side of the city. A roughly equivalent area was removed from a remote part of the SSA to the west of the Wisconsin River as a swap to balance the addition.

Although the sewer service area remains of sufficient size to accommodate future growth, the 29-year age of the plan warrants an update. Standards and procedures for sewer service area administration have changed, and the update will provide the opportunity to bring administrative procedures in line with current sewer service area plans across the state. In addition, mapping and other relevant data within the plan can be brought up to date. Many aspects of mapping have improved since the original plan. In particular, data sets for key

elements of the environmentally sensitive areas, including floodways and wetlands, have been updated.

#### **1.4 FEDERAL AND STATE LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK**

Federal legislation for areawide water quality planning was enacted under the Federal Water Pollution Control Act Amendment of 1972 (Public Law 92-500), commonly known as the Clean Water Act and subsequent amendments in 1977 and 1987. These Acts set the framework for state and national water quality management programs with the goal of making the nation's waters safe for fish and aquatic life uses, recreational use, and human consumption (e.g., fishable, swimmable and drinkable). Congress mandated that this goal be achieved through a comprehensive program of water quality planning, municipal wastewater treatment facilities, and a national discharge permit program for municipal and industrial wastewater discharges. A key section of the Act(s) requires the preparation and implementation of Areawide Water Quality Management Plans.

Pursuant to these congressional mandates, the Wisconsin Legislature created chapters 281.11, 281.12 and 283.83 of the Wisconsin Statutes which gives the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) the state-level authority to act in the role of a delegated agency for the USEPA in the implementation of the Clean Water Act. Under this authority, Chapter NR121 of the Wisconsin Administrative Code was established specifying the policies, procedures and requirements for Wisconsin's Areawide Water Quality Management Plan program.

Under this framework, the USEPA together with the state of Wisconsin, has designated three water quality planning areas: Dane County, the seven county Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Area, and the Fox Valley Water Quality Planning Area. Within these "designated planning areas" every community with sanitary sewer is required to participate in sewer service area planning. Outside of these heavily populated metropolitan areas, there are 26 "undesignated" sewer service areas with populations over 10,000. In the Central Wisconsin River Basin, sewer service area planning is conducted by Marshfield, Merrill, Stevens Point, Wausau and Wisconsin Rapids. All plans (often referred to as 208 or sewer service area (SSA) plans) developed under this program must be approved by the WDNR and certified as amendments to the state's AWQMP through formal action by USEPA.

#### **1.5 WATER QUALITY MANAGEMENT PLANNING ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

Under NR 121.03 (8) "designated management agency" means any agency in an areawide water quality management plan having responsibility for implementing

specific plan recommendations or duties. This may be done through direct activities of the designated management agency or through delegation to other agencies or units of government. Within the context of the Merrill Sewer Service Area Plan, the following agencies are involved:

City of Merrill - serves as the designated management agency for the purpose of water quality management planning. The City Plan Commission provides primary oversight of Sewer Service Area Plan administration; however, the Common Council has final approval authority. City staff from the Administration and Public Works departments share administrative duties in support of the Plan Commission and Council.

Merrill Sewer Service Area Policy Advisory Committee (PAC) - is made up of representatives from the City of Merrill and the surrounding towns, including Town of Merrill, Pine River, and Scott. The PAC provided oversight on the development of the original Sewer Service Area Plan and continues to provide input on recommendations for boundary amendments that increase the overall size of the sewer service area (Type II), other plan amendments (non-boundary) and plan updates.

North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (NCWRPC) - conducts plan update development processes for the sewer service area plan and assists the City with processing amendments. Acts as a neutral third party in coordinating between the City of Merrill and the surrounding communities.

## **1.6 INTERRELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN SEWER SERVICE AREA PLANS, FACILITIES PLANS, AND WISCONSIN RIVER WATERSHED PLANS**

In Wisconsin, the WDNR is the delegated agency for Clean Water Act implementation. WDNR implements water quality programs in part through the Areawide Water Quality Management Plan (AWQMP) Framework, which is a compilation of guidance and programs to implement the Clean Water Act.

Certain elements have individual processes that are automatically certified as part of the state's AWQMP, and other elements are transmitted in annual letters from the WDNR to the USEPA as formal updates to the state's AWQMP. This process varies in terms of public participation, time frames and procedures. All elements are connected, and the Agency strives for consistency and continuity of programs for quality resource management.

Federal regulations (40 CFR 130.6) require that the AWQMP Programs address the following elements:

1. Total maximum daily loads—learn more about [TMDLs](https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/tmdls).  
(<https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/tmdls>)
2. Effluent limitations—effluent limits are covered under the [WPDES program](https://dnr.wi.gov/topic/Wastewater/DischargeTypes.html) administered by WDNR. (<https://dnr.wi.gov/topic/Wastewater/DischargeTypes.html>)
3. Municipal and industrial waste treatment—see WDNR's [Wastewater Program](https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/wastewater) for more information. (<https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/wastewater>)
4. Nonpoint source management and control—learn more about WDNR's [Nonpoint Source Pollution Program](https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/Nonpoint/aboutNPSprogram.html).  
(<https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/Nonpoint/aboutNPSprogram.html>)
5. Management agencies—see information about applicable laws, policies, guidance, and memoranda of agreement/understanding. [[Regional Planning Agency and local SSA Planning](https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/SurfaceWater/ssaplanning.html)].  
(<https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/SurfaceWater/ssaplanning.html>)
6. Implementation measures—WDNR implements various measures to carry out the AWQMP within the individual [water quality programs](https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/SurfaceWater).  
(<https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/SurfaceWater>)
7. Dredge or fill program—WDNR certifies dredge and fill permits (issued by the US Army Corps of Engineers) through its [§401 certification program](https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/Waterways/Permits/PermitProcess.html).  
(<https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/Waterways/Permits/PermitProcess.html>)
8. Ground water—visit DEQ's [Ground Water Program](https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/Groundwater) for more information.  
(<https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/Groundwater>)
9. [Watershed plans](https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/surfacewater/wqmplan)—learn more about assessments and surface water planning. (<https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/surfacewater/wqmplan>)

These elements are addressed in numerous programs that span WDNR's water programs. Additional components of the state's AWQMP include integrated reports, administrative rules, surface water monitoring and assessment programs, water quality standards and wastewater treatment programs.

Locally, these elements are reflected through a variety of planning requirements, including watershed plans, facilities plans and sewer service area plans. The relationships between these plans within Central Wisconsin is described below and illustrated in Map 2.

#### 1.6.1 WATERSHED PLANS

The Central Wisconsin River Basin is one of 23 major river basins in the State. The basin is comprised of the watersheds for each of the tributaries that drain into the central portion of the Wisconsin River. Watershed plans identify ecological restoration and remediation priorities and goals for the waters and watersheds and provide recommendations for specific management actions including rivers, lakes, nonpoint source grants, monitoring and additional management actions. Watershed plans, such as Nine Key Element Plans and Targeted Watershed Assessments, are developed and updated on a periodic basis, with a higher

priority focused on areas with known issues related to restoration, protection or management.

### 1.6.2 FACILITIES PLANS

In contrast with the regional character of watershed plans, the facilities plans are limited to a local area within a major river basin. The facilities plans deal with the planning and preliminary design related to the construction of municipal sewage treatment plants. Through a systematic evaluation of alternatives, the facilities plan is intended to assure that only cost-effective and environmentally sound treatment facilities are constructed.

### 1.6.3 SEWER SERVICE AREA PLANS

The Sewer Service Area Plan is also a local area plan that outlines procedures, land areas and decision criteria for ensuring cost-effective provision of public sanitary sewer. Unlike the facilities plan, which is an engineering plan for the treatment plant and collection system, the Sewer Service Area Plan identifies land areas projected for development with public sewer based on population projections, community growth trends and natural resource constraints.

## **1.7 GUIDELINES FOR PREPARATION OF THE SEWER SERVICE AREA PLAN**

- 1) The Sewer Service Area Plan shall be consistent with the requirements of Wisconsin Administrative Code NR121 "Areawide Water Quality Management Plans".
- 2) The Plan shall be generally consistent with the land use policies and recommendations of locally adopted comprehensive plans.
- 3) The Merrill Sewer Service Area Policy Advisory Committee shall provide input on the development of the Plan.
- 4) Opportunities for public participation, including a public hearing per NR121.08, will be provided as part of the development of the Sewer Service Area Plan.
- 5) The North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (NCWRPC) will act as a neutral third party in coordinating between the City of Merrill and the surrounding communities during the preparation of the Sewer Service Area Plan.

## **1.8 OVERVIEW OF PLANNING PROCESS AND PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT**

This Sewer Service Area Plan update was conducted by the North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (NCWRPC) in conjunction with the City of Merrill. The plan was reviewed by the Merrill Sewer Service Area Policy Advisory Committee (PAC) which is made up of duly designated representatives of each community in the service area, as follows:

- Mayor Steve Hass, City of Merrill
- Administrator Rod Akey, City of Merrill
- Utilities Manager Gabe Steinagel, City of Merrill
- Chairman Tony Baumann, Town of Merrill
- Chairman Steve Uttech, Town of Pine River
- Chairman Randal Detert, Town of Scott

The process involved planning meetings between the NCWRPC and key city departments to develop a package of update proposals. The package was presented to the Merrill Sewer Service Area Policy Advisory Committee (PAC) for review and comment.

A meeting was held on August 20, 2025 to present the draft sewer service area plan for the surrounding towns of Merrill, Pine River and Scott for the purposes of discussing the revised plan and gathering their input on the city's proposal. See Appendix A for a summary of the meeting outcomes.

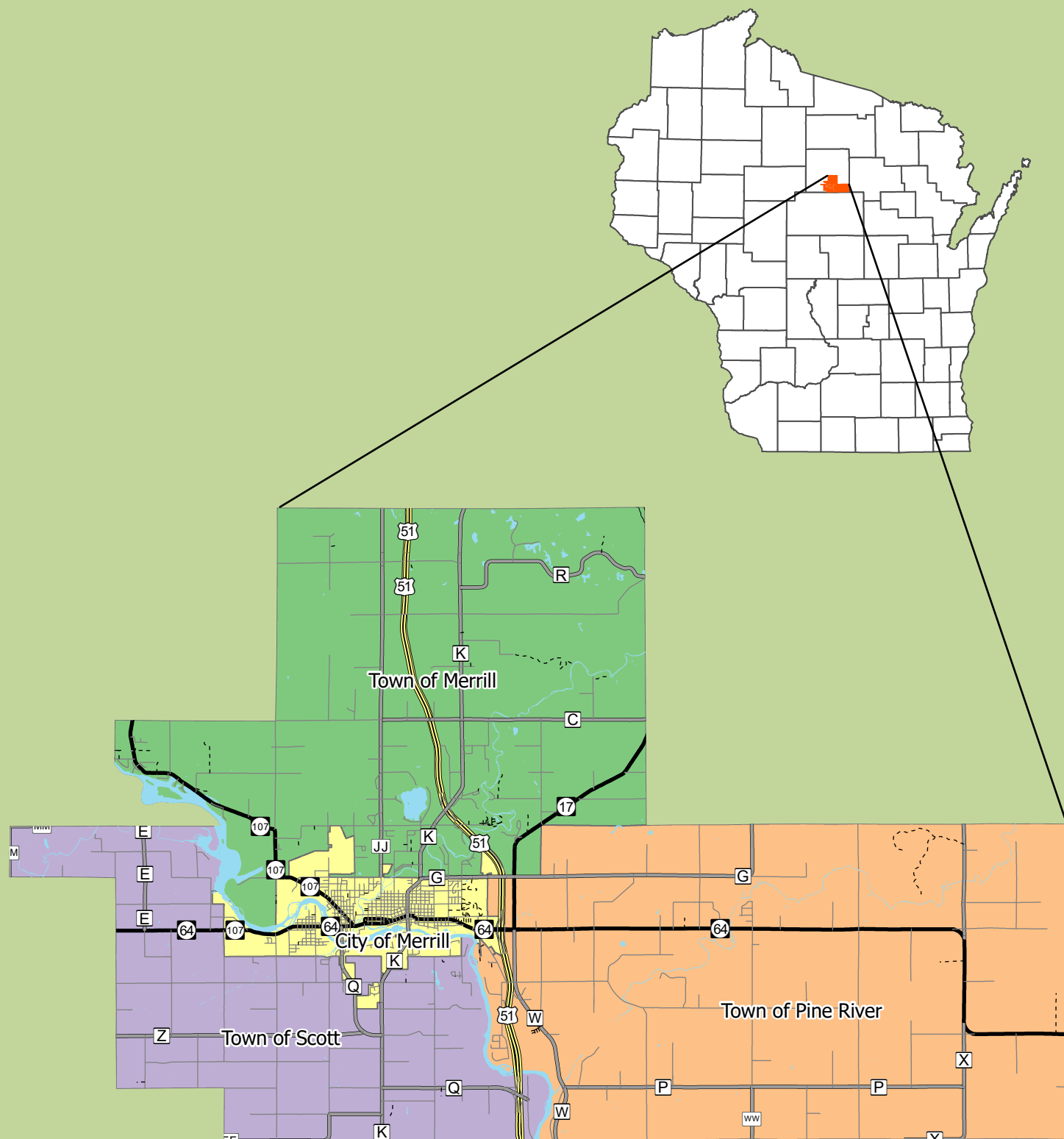
The City of Merrill Plan Commission also held a formal public hearing on the proposed plan. The final plan adoption process involved the City moving the plan through Plan Commission to full Council at regularly scheduled meetings.

The list of meetings involved in the planning process is as follows:

|                  |       |                           |                |
|------------------|-------|---------------------------|----------------|
| February 5, 2025 | Staff | City of Merrill           |                |
| April 20, 2025   | Staff | City of Merrill           |                |
| May 12, 2025     | Staff | City of Merrill           |                |
| June 23, 2025    | Staff | City of Merrill           |                |
| August 20, 2025  |       | Policy Advisory Committee |                |
| March 3, 2026    |       | City Plan Commission      | PUBLIC HEARING |
| _____, 2026      |       | City Council              | ADOPTION       |

Process documentation can be found in Appendix A.

**Map 1**  
**Merrill Sewer Service Area**  
**Study Area**

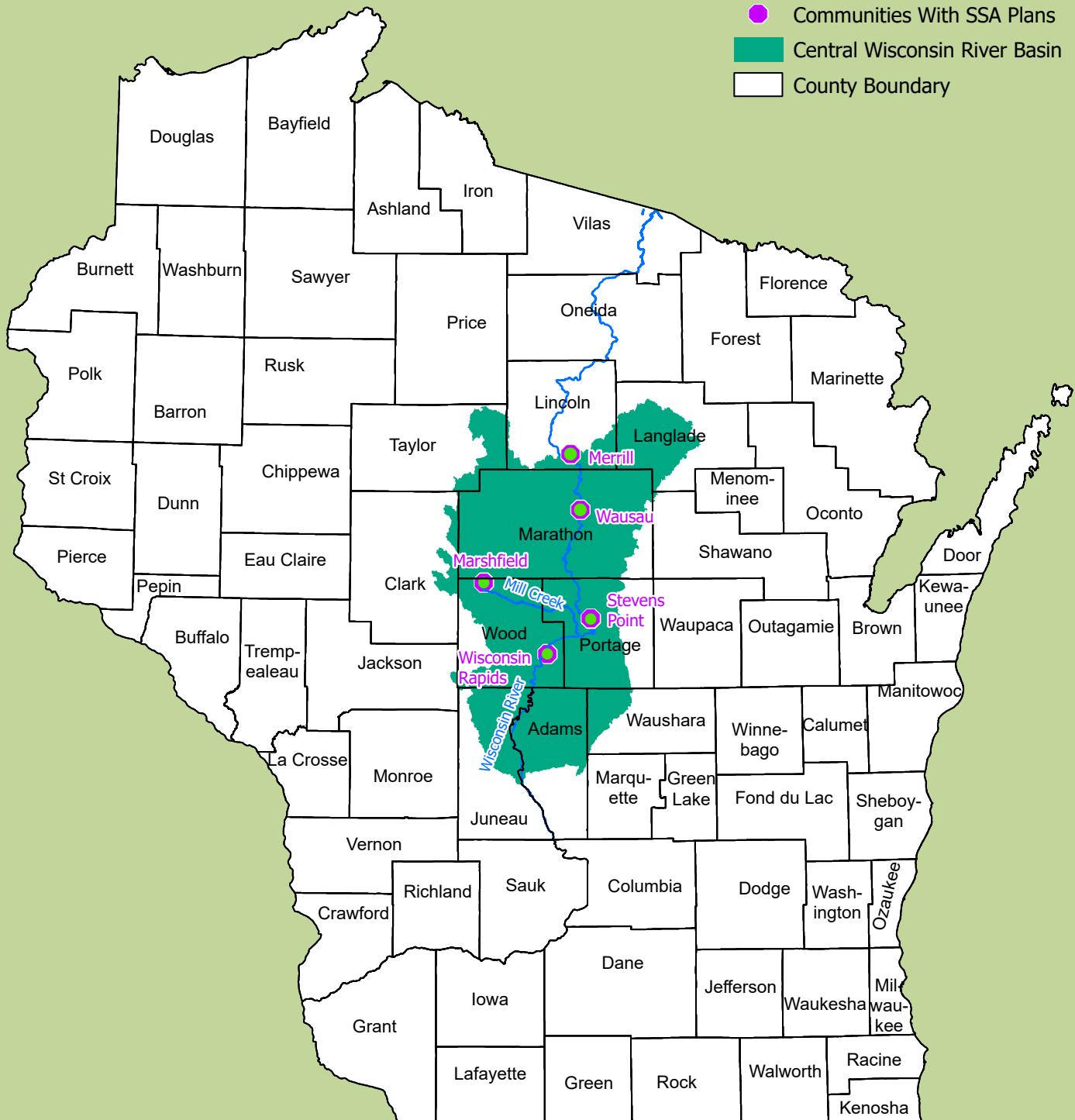


Prepared By: North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission

# Map 2 Water Quality Plan Relationships

## Legend

- Communities With SSA Plans
- Central Wisconsin River Basin
- County Boundary



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## **SECTION 2.0      LOCAL PLANS FOR WASTEWATER FACILITIES**

### **2.1      BACKGROUND ON FACILITIES PLANS**

A local wastewater facilities plan (often referred to as a 201 plan) identifies the facilities, programs, operational improvements, and policies necessary to meet the regulatory framework and permitting requirements. The WDNR regulates municipal (and industrial) operations discharging wastewater to surface water or groundwater through the Wisconsin Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (WPDES) permit program.

State statutes that apply to facilities planning and operation include Chapter 227 on Administrative Procedure and Review, Chapter 281 on Water and Sewage and Chapter 283 on Pollution Discharge Elimination. In addition, a variety of rules have been promulgated into Wisconsin Administrative Code by the WDNR to implement these statutes. Plans for wastewater treatment facilities must be reviewed and approved by the WDNR. Section 281.41, Wis. Stats. requires WDNR review of municipal and industrial treatment plant construction plans as well as related monitoring systems and groundwater monitoring wells.

Merrill's current facilities plan was updated in 2023-24 and was under review by the WDNR at the time of this writing. Much of the planning data that is found in the facilities plan is applicable and was used in the preparation of this Sewer Service Area Plan.

### **2.2      EXISTING WASTEWATER TREATMENT AND COLLECTION FACILITIES**

The City of Merrill has the only municipal wastewater treatment facilities (plant and collection system) in the study area. This section describes the wastewater collection and treatment systems for the City. Table 1 provides a summary of the current design capacity for the Merrill Wastewater Treatment Plant. Wastewater treatment for areas outside the city are handled by private, on-site systems, and no sewer lines currently extend beyond the city limits or connect to the city sewers from outside. The City treatment plant does accept pumped wastewater from private septage haulers.

Currently (at the time of this update), the plant is operating at about 50% capacity and handles peaks without issue. The excess available capacity is due to the closure of the Ward paper mill. As such, City officials indicate that there is ample capacity to accommodate any future growth including new, unanticipated industrial users depending on the type and strength of the wastewater to be generated. Development proposals are monitored and evaluated to ensure the

plant can handle the wastewater they will generate before it is approved.

Future wastewater growth is expected to be minor based on growth projections (see Section 4), hence there are no concerns regarding WWTP capacity and the ability to handle future flows from the proposed SSA.

In addition, the City periodically conducts systematic evaluations and facilities planning to ensure their plant will remain able to provide for future growth as it develops. Section 2.3, below, provides an overview of the current status of facilities planning for the Merrill Wastewater Treatment Plant.

| TABLE 1: Design Flow and Loading – Merrill Wastewater Treatment Plant |              |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|
| FLOW:                                                                 |              |
| Average Design Flow-                                                  | 3.06 MGD     |
| Peak Flow-                                                            | 8.78 MGD     |
| LOADING:                                                              |              |
| Biochemical Oxygen Demand (BOD)-                                      | 2,435 lb/day |
| Total Suspended Solids (TSS)-                                         | 2,950 lb/day |
| Source: WDNR 2025.                                                    |              |

The City of Merrill maintains a collection and conveyance system that includes nine pumping stations and 325,500 feet of gravity sewer lines, see map in Appendix B. Merrill's collection system has historically had a high rate of infiltration and inflow (I/I), but the treatment plant has not experienced significant operational problems related peak flow events. The City has been actively addressing I/I removal and has seen improvement in I/I being conveyed to the plant.

The City's wastewater treatment facility (WWTF) is a conventional activated sludge facility providing primary settling and biological secondary treatment. Primary and thickened waste activated sludge is pumped to anaerobic digesters for digestion and stabilization. Digested sludge is dewatered via belt filter presses and stored on-site before being applied to farmland where its soil conditioning and fertilizing values are used.

Preliminary treatment consists of mechanical screening and aerated grit removal. Screened influent flows into three primary settling tanks, where a portion of the suspended solids and biochemical oxygen demand (BOD) are removed. The

plant influent is sampled in the splitter channel upstream of the primary settling tanks. All internal recycle streams and hauled waste, except two leachate streams, are included in the plant influent sample. Settled primary sludge is pumped to the primary digester. Primary settling would typically remove approximately 30 percent of the BOD and about 50 percent of the suspended solids in the wastewater. Based on January 2020 through December 2022 facility data, the WWTF is currently averaging removal of 28 percent BOD and 56 percent of suspended solids.

Primary effluent flow is measured through a Parshall flume located downstream of the primary tanks, discharges to a wet well, and is then pumped to the aeration tanks where secondary treatment occurs. In 2012, a full-scale pilot of the anaerobic-oxic (A/O) biological phosphorus removal process was implemented at the WWTF, and these modifications are still in place. The WWTF currently operates an A/O secondary treatment process where primary effluent is mixed with return activated sludge (RAS). A flow composited dipper-style automatic sampler is in the primary effluent pump station wet well.

From the aeration tanks, the activated sludge mixed liquor flows to the final clarifiers where biosolids settle and are either returned to the aeration tanks as RAS or pumped to the gravity thickener as waste activated sludge (WAS) for solids processing. Secondary effluent flows to a chlorine contact tank where a chlorine gas solution is injected into the clarified effluent. The chlorinated effluent is retained for a sufficient period, inactivating potentially harmful (pathogenic) microorganisms. Wastewater is then dechlorinated by the injection of a sodium bisulfite solution at a location near the outlet of the chlorine contact tank.

Alum may be injected into the forward flow at alternative locations, including the WWTF influent, the primary effluent, and a temporary dosing point at the secondary clarifier splitter box. Caustic solution can be injected into the primary effluent to raise the pH before discharge to the Wisconsin River; however, this has not been necessary since implementation of the biological phosphorus removal process system.

WAS is discharged to a gravity thickener. Thickener overflow is returned to the head end of the WWTF and thickened WAS is pumped to the primary anaerobic digester. The primary sludge and WAS are held and mixed in the primary digester under anaerobic conditions. Organic matter decomposes through the action of anaerobic microorganisms producing stabilized biosolids and gases. Methane gas produced during the decomposition process in the primary digester is used as fuel in the respective boiler-heat exchanger to heat the anaerobic digesters and the control building. Excess methane gas is directed to a waste gas burner.

Digested sludge is transferred to the secondary digester for storage and supernatant separation. The secondary digester is not heated nor mixed. The supernatant, which is drawn off the top of the digester, is returned to the treatment plant upstream of the primary tank. Digested sludge that settles to the bottom is normally pumped to belt filter presses for dewatering. After dewatering, biosolids are either stored in an on-site sludge storage facility or applied to farmland.

In addition to the city's collected wastewater, the treatment plant accepts and treats wastewater from private septage haulers. There is no set service area, but septage is subject testing and preapproval. Volume and strength of incoming septage is monitored to maintain optimal treatment plant operations. For example, wastewater from the Lincoln County Landfill is not currently accepted due to its excess strength. Hauled septage comprises less than 10% of the flow capacity at the treatment plant.

### **2.3 STATUS OF THE LOCAL WASTEWATER TREATMENT FACILITIES PLAN**

The City's WPDES permit was just reissued (effective April 1, 2025), and the City is currently meeting all its permit limits and requirements, so, nothing is required at this time, despite some aging infrastructure. However, the pending facilities plan reviewed potential future regulatory standards that are expected to impact WWTF operations and identified facility needs and potential modifications to address those concerns. Areas expected to have future limits which may affect the City include phosphorus, nitrogen, ammonia, E coli, PFAS (and other emerging compounds), and biosolids management. The facilities plan also addresses replacements or retrofits necessary to deal with aging infrastructure issues, including the challenges with biological phosphorus (bio-P) removal.

The facilities plan recommends a number of provisions to address anticipated regulatory concerns over the next ten years. The City is considering implementing a number of process upgrades for the wastewater treatment plant such as switching to UV (ultraviolet) disinfection due to its numerous advantages over chlorine disinfection. In January 2026, the City submitted its updated facility plan to DNR for review and approval. Approval of the facility plan will be required before plans/specs approval or construction of any reviewable projects (e.g., new ultraviolet disinfection system).

The only major sewer line extension currently being planned involves a joint effort between the City of Merrill and the Little Florida Countryside Community mobile home park north of the City. The City will extend sewer east along 14<sup>th</sup> Street and then north to the city limits while the Little Florida group will be responsible for the remaining line and connections. This would allow wastewater from the area to

be conveyed to the Merrill plant for treatment in order to address water quality issues. Little Florida would own its connection lines as a private system that ties into the municipal collection system for treatment at the city's plant. Typically this is not done, and there are no other non-city lines connecting to the city's sewer system, however, the Little Florida group has reached an agreement with the City of Merrill to treat the wastewater collected from the mobile home at the City WWTF without annexation.

The proposed solution to the mobile home park's water quality problems involves privately owned sewer lines installed in the Town and connecting to City facilities inside the city limits. Since City owned facilities do not extend beyond the city limits, there is no planning obligation for the City except the SSA program requirement that the area receiving sewer service be included in the SSA plan boundary. The Town of Merrill was invited to a meeting on August 20, 2025 to review and comment on the proposed update to the SSA plan. It was apparent that the Little Florida group had not been in contact with the Town regarding its water quality problems. If the SSA update is not approved, Little Florida will not be able to get sewer treatment from the City, and the Town would need to find alternate solutions to the water quality problem. In addition, the Little Florida group should contact the Town of Merrill regarding any development approvals or permitting that may be required for the sewer line installation within the Town.

## **SECTION 3.0     AREAWIDE WATER QUALITY MANAGEMENT PLANNING, WATERSHEDS AND WATER QUALITY CONDITIONS**

### **3.1     BACKGROUND ON AREAWIDE WATER QUALITY MANAGEMENT PLANNING**

WDNR is required by section 303(e) of the Clean Water Act to develop a Continuing Planning Process (CPP). The CPP may be described as an umbrella that coordinates all aspects of water pollution control to help ensure the states maintain progress toward protecting and preserving water quality. The state CPP is a description of the state's water quality management and planning activities, providing references to technical documents and sources that explain water quality programs in greater detail. The CPP describes ongoing processes and planning requirements of the state's Areawide Water Quality Management Plan (AWQMP).

The AWQMP is not a single plan or document but rather a compilation of the guidance and programs that WDNR uses to implement Clean Water Act requirements. The AWQMP Program provides a structure and foundation on which implementation activities are attached, including Sewer Service Area Plans, Wastewater Facility Plans, permits for effluent limits, stormwater plans and other projects funded through CWA monies, as well as watershed plans, which identify the condition of water and recommendations for management actions.

Watershed Plans document and summarize the condition of health of water resources within the area. Watershed plans incorporate information on current and changing land use, population change, water resource potential and assessments of current conditions based on biological, physical and chemical data compared to established water quality standards and thresholds.

Watershed plans identify ecological restoration, protection, and remediation priorities and goals of the waters and watersheds and provide recommendations for specific management actions including rivers, streams, lakes, wetlands, nonpoint source grants, monitoring, and additional management actions. Watershed plans are updated on a rotating basis, with a higher priority, targeted focus on areas with known issues related to restoration, protection or management.

The CPP encompasses the broad picture of how decisions are made, how programs relate, and how the public is involved. Wisconsin's AWQMP concerns how programs are implemented, particularly within a specific basin or watershed - through monitoring, assessments, grants, and more. Watershed plans apply the rules, programs, guidance, and identify opportunities for management actions at

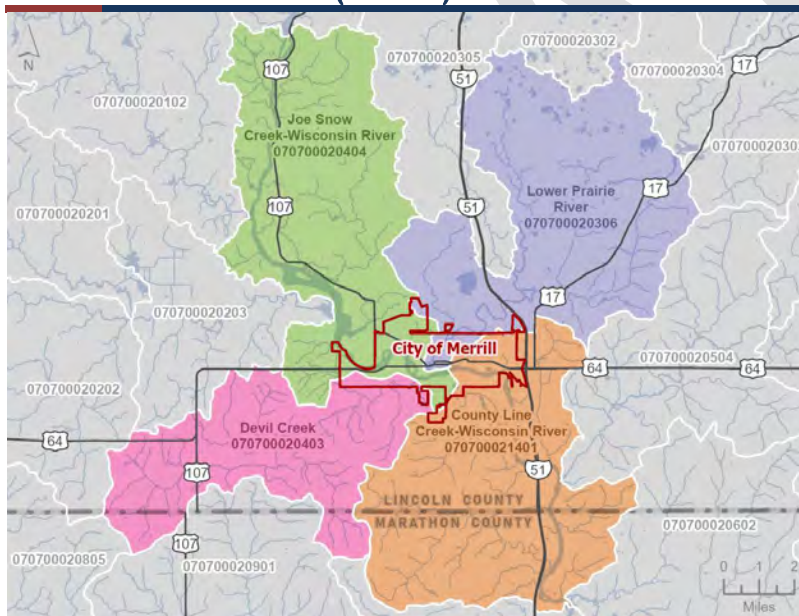
a catchment (basin/watershed) and water level (stream, lake, etc.).

### **3.2 MERRILL AREA WATERSHEDS**

The City of Merrill lies in the Upper Wisconsin River Basin on the border between the Northern and Central Sub-basins. The City straddles the Wisconsin River and has area within four watersheds, see Figure 1.

The north-west portion of the city lies within the Joe Snow Creek/Wisconsin River HUC 12 Watershed which flows in from the north-west. The north-central portion of the city lies within the Lower Prairie River HUC 12 Watershed, which flows from the north towards the Wisconsin River. The south-east portion of the city lies within the County Line Creek/Wisconsin River HUC 12 Watershed which flows from the south toward the Wisconsin River. The south-west portion of the city lies within the Devil Creek HUC 12 Watershed which flows from the southwest toward the Wisconsin River.

**FIGURE 1**  
**Merrill Area Watersheds (HUC 12)**



The City of Merrill Wastewater Treatment Plant discharges directly to the Wisconsin River. No other regulated point source discharges are currently located within city limits.

The primary active watershed study for the Wisconsin River in the Merrill area is the Wisconsin River TMDL.

### 3.3 WISCONSIN RIVER TOTAL MAXIMUM DAILY LOAD (TMDL)

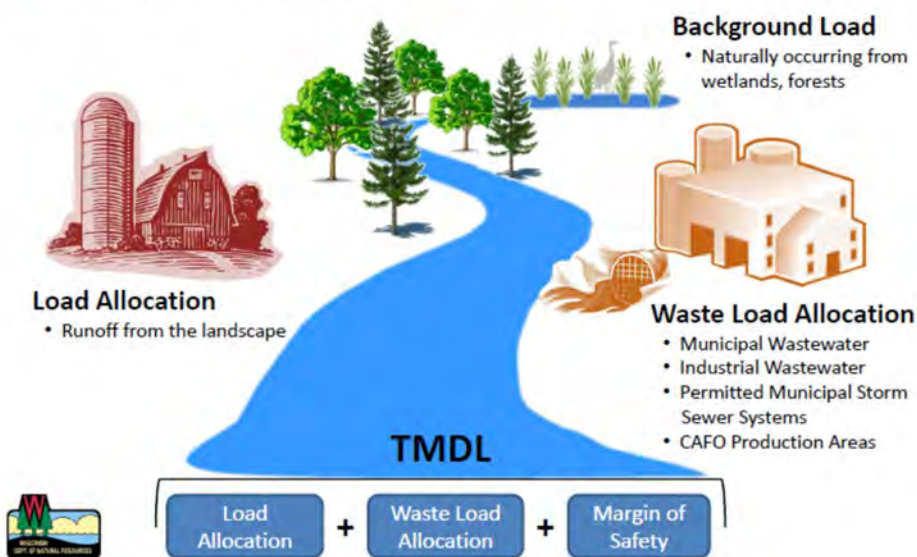
In recent years, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources' efforts in planning for and managing water quality within the Wisconsin River basin have revolved around the development of a total maximum daily load or TMDL. The Wisconsin River TMDL study area applies to a large area from the river's headwaters in Vilas County to Lake Wisconsin in Columbia County, covering 9,156 square miles – approximately 15 percent of the state.

TMDLs were created by the Clean Water Act in the 1970s but were not implemented or enforced by EPA until the late 1990s when a string of lawsuits challenged EPA's inaction. The Wisconsin River TMDL process began in 2009 with an extensive water quality monitoring process throughout the watershed to provide data for detailed watershed and reservoir model development.

A TMDL is the amount of a pollutant that can be discharged into a waterway and still meet water quality standards. Under existing conditions, many reservoirs and tributaries in the Wisconsin River do not meet water quality standards due to excess pollutant loads, meaning they are not suitable for their designated uses, such as fishing, wildlife habitat, and/or recreational activities such as boating and swimming. The TMDL concept is illustrated in Figure 2.

**FIGURE 2**  
**WRB Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL)**

*Each subwatershed is assessed for:*



From the modeling, all point source dischargers within the watershed receive a waste load allocation. Municipalities will be affected on two fronts: storm water and wastewater discharge. Each community will have to work out an implementation plan on how it might best achieve its limits, which will then be incorporated into its discharge permits. Implementation will be phased over a number of permit cycles.

The City of Merrill WWTF has a waste load allocation (WLA) for phosphorus. The Total Phosphorus WLA for the City WWTF is 1,943 lbs/yr. The WLA calculated based upon the approved SSC (site-specific criteria) is 3,413 lb/yr, and this is also the WLA listed in section 3.2.1.5 of the current WPDES permit effective April 1, 2025. The most recent 12-month rolling average (November 2024 through October 2025) phosphorus mass in the city effluent is 1,870 lb/year, which is well below the 3,413 lb/yr SSC WLA and also slightly below the WLA of 1,943 lb/yr. The facility is also meeting the SSC WLA derived monthly average WLA of 11 lbs P/day. The city has evaluated its facilities for long-term phosphorus compliance and continues to monitor this situation. The city's next facilities plan will address its phosphorus compliance needs, refer to Section 2.3.

The TMDL study and implementation plan provides a framework and prioritizes resources for water quality improvement in the Wisconsin River Basin by determining: the magnitude of the existing pollutant load; what the contribution is from each pollution source; how much pollution needs to be reduced by in order for each waterway to meet water quality standards and achieve their designated uses (fishing, recreation, habitat etc.); and how the needed pollutant load reductions will be achieved for each waterway.

### **3.4 DISCUSSION OF WATER RESOURCE CONDITIONS IN THE MERRILL AREA**

Surface and ground water quality in the Merrill area is generally good.

Water quality in the Lower Prairie River watershed is very good with significant portions of the Prairie River and its tributaries designated as Outstanding or Exceptional Resource Waters (ORW/ERW) and/or classified trout streams. Potential threats include agricultural activities and non-metallic mining – erosion and sedimentation.

Water quality in the Devil Creek watershed is fair to good, but the waters have been degraded by non-point source pollution. Agricultural activities result in erosion and sedimentation, contributing to water quality problems.

High-Quality Waters within and adjacent to the City of Merrill include the

Wisconsin River, Alexander Flowage, Devil Creek, and the Prairie River.

Both the Lower Prairie River and the Joe Snow Creek watersheds have Healthy Watershed High Quality Waters protection priority designations and are Wisconsin River Basin Protection Priority Watersheds as well as statewide priority protection watersheds (in the top 30% healthiest watersheds statewide). Despite covering large urban portions of the City of Merrill in their most downstream reaches, both watersheds have >75% natural land cover remaining, suggesting that a strategy of protection will be a key strategy for maintaining water and watershed quality in these areas.

In the Wisconsin River itself, downstream of Merrill, toxins such as PCP (pentachlorophenol) are a concern. PCP is used in the wood industry as a wood preservative. Another concern is nutrient loading, in particular phosphorus. See the section on TMDL, above. In addition, this section of the Wisconsin River is on the 303(d) Impaired Waters list due to PCBs (Polychlorinated Biphenyls), an industrial chemical, mercury, and prior/current contaminated sites within city limits. Work is ongoing related to this contamination.

With regard to wastewater discharge, the City is considering switching to UV (ultraviolet) disinfection to take advantage of its numerous benefits over chlorine disinfection, refer to section 2.3. Concerns being monitored include nutrients (phosphorus and nitrogen), ammonia and chloride to ensure maintenance of discharge limits. In addition, the City continues to work on mercury minimization efforts. The City also monitors new emerging issues such as PFAS. Currently, PFAS has been below the water quality criteria in Merrill's water systems.

## **SECTION 4.0 PLANNING AREA GROWTH PROJECTIONS**

### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

Communities regularly develop and use population projections for various reasons, including local comprehensive plans, facilities plans for municipal wastewater treatment, and others. The methodology used to generate projections can sometimes skew the numbers in favor of a particular outcome. To avoid such bias, regulatory applications of population projections may specify the required projections or methodologies to be used. This is the case with the sewer service area planning program in which Wis. Statutes (s.16.96) and WDNR regulations require use of the latest official state population projections developed by the Wisconsin Department of Administration (DOA).

The current DOA projections extend municipal populations out to the year 2050. These DOA population projections serve as the base from which the various calculations and projections for this sewer service area plan were developed.

### **4.2 HISTORICAL POPULATION GROWTH**

Lincoln County has experienced gradual population shifts over time, reflecting broader regional trends. While traditionally a more rural area, urbanization has influenced its growth patterns. Historically, the growth of the Merrill urban area has been a major component of the overall growth of the County. As Merrill itself grew gradually to exceed 10,000 population by 2000, the surrounding towns also grew significantly. By 2020, the City had begun to decline to pre-1970 levels, while the adjacent towns of Merrill, Pine River and Scott saw an overall, combined increase of 51% or 2,073 people. This increase in population surrounding the City has fueled the expansion of commercial and industrial areas within the City.

| <b>TABLE 2: Population Trends 1970 - 2020 Merrill And Surrounding Communities</b> |                 |          |               |          |                  |          |             |          |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|----------|---------------|----------|------------------|----------|-------------|----------|
|                                                                                   | City of Merrill |          | T. of Merrill |          | T. of Pine River |          | T. of Scott |          |
| Year                                                                              | Pop.            | % Change | Pop.          | % Change | Pop.             | % Change | Pop.        | % Change |
| 1970                                                                              | 9,502           |          | 1,742         |          | 1,271            |          | 1,046       |          |
| 1980                                                                              | 9,578           | 0.80     | 2,591         | 48.7     | 1,463            | 15.1     | 1,149       | 9.8      |
| 1990                                                                              | 9,860           | 2.94     | 2,716         | 4.8      | 1,552            | 6.1      | 1,210       | 5.3      |
| 2000                                                                              | 10,142          | 2.86     | 2,964         | 9.1      | 1,893            | 22.0     | 1,320       | 9.1      |
| 2010                                                                              | 9,661           | -4.74    | 2,980         | 0.5      | 1,869            | -1.3     | 1,432       | 8.5      |
| 2020                                                                              | 9,347           | -3.25    | 2,881         | -3.3     | 1,874            | 0.3      | 1,377       | -3.8     |
| Source: U. S. Census & NCWRPC 2025.                                               |                 |          |               |          |                  |          |             |          |

Table 2 displays these historical population trends for the Merrill Urban Area. The following sections discuss the historical growth for each community within the area: City of Merrill, Town of Merrill, Town of Pine River and Town of Scott.

#### 4.2.1 CITY OF MERRILL

The City of Merrill has experienced population fluctuations over the past several decades. From 1970 to 2000, the city saw steady growth, reaching a peak population of 10,142 in 2000. Then in subsequent decades, Merrill experienced a decline, with a 4.74% decrease between 2000 and 2010 and an additional 3.25% drop from 2010 to 2020.

However, current estimates indicate a reversal in the declining trend with 36 new residents since the 2020 Census. According to Wisconsin Department of Administration estimates, as of 2024, the City's population was 9,383. The rebound is likely attributable to Merrill's strength as a hub for industries such as insurance, manufacturing, and mill work. However, it is difficult to determine how much of this growth is being captured by the surrounding communities.

#### 4.2.2 TOWN OF MERRILL

The Town of Merrill experienced a surge in population during the 1970s of nearly 49%. Growth slowed in the 1980s to a much lower, but solid 4.8% increase, before ballooning another 9.1% by 2000. However, between 2000 and 2010, the population growth slowed significantly, increasing by only 0.5%, before seeing a decline of 3.3% the past decade. The Town of Merrill's access to Highway 51 could drive future growth in the town.

#### 4.2.3 TOWN OF PINE RIVER

Between 1970 and 1980, Pine River experienced a significant increase in population of 15.1%. There was continued growth in the 1990s of 6.1% followed by another major jump of 22% by 2000. From 2000 to 2010, the Town's population dropped slightly by 1.3%, but by 2020 had rebounded slightly by 0.3%. Access to Highway 51 and convenient location between Merrill and Wausau are likely factors in the Town's continued growth.

#### 4.2.4 TOWN OF SCOTT

The Town of Scott maintained strong and steady increases in population between 1970 and 2010, posting increases of 9.8%, 5.3%, 9.1% and 8.5% over those four decades. However, between 2010 and 2020, the population growth finally

slowed like its neighbors with a decline of 3.8%. Access to Highway 51 and convenient location between Merrill and Wausau could drive future growth in the town.

**4.3 POPULATION PROJECTIONS**

**4.3.1 CITY OF MERRILL POPULATION PROJECTIONS**

Sewer service area plans are required to account for population growth over the planning period. For sewer service area planning purposes, population forecasts are required to be consistent with figures from the Wisconsin Department of Administration (DOA). Table 3 provides a population projection summary by five-year increments for the City based on the projection figures from DOA. According to those figures, the City of Merrill is projected to lose 2,372 people by 2050. This is a 25.4% decrease from the 2020 population.

| TABLE 3: City of Merrill 2050 Population Projection Summary<br>by Five - Year Intervals |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
|                                                                                         | 2020  | 2025  | 2030  | 2035  | 2040  | 2045  | 2050  |
| City of Merrill                                                                         | 9,347 | 9,020 | 8,694 | 8,297 | 7,901 | 7,438 | 6,975 |
| Source: DOA 2024 & NCWRPC 2025.                                                         |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |

**4.3.2 TOWN POPULATION PROJECTIONS**

The DOA population projections also indicate steady declines for the three towns surrounding the City of Merrill as well. Combined, the towns are projected to decrease by 1,393 or 22.7% by 2050. Table 4 provides the population projection summary by five-year intervals for each town based on the projection figures from DOA.

| TABLE 4: Merrill Area Towns Population Projection Summary<br>by Five - Year Intervals |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Town of:                                                                              | 2020  | 2025  | 2030  | 2035  | 2040  | 2045  | 2050  |
| Merrill                                                                               | 2,881 | 2,784 | 2,687 | 2,568 | 2,449 | 2,309 | 2,168 |
| Pine River                                                                            | 1,874 | 1,841 | 1,807 | 1,756 | 1,704 | 1,634 | 1,563 |
| Scott                                                                                 | 1,377 | 1,326 | 1,274 | 1,213 | 1,152 | 1,081 | 1,010 |
| Source: DOA 2024 & NCWRPC 2025.                                                       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |

## **4.4 URBAN AREA LAND USE PROJECTIONS**

### **4.4.1 INTRODUCTION**

Precise projections of the future land use requirements of an urban area are often difficult to determine because of continually changing conditions, and the fact that land area needs of an urban area are satisfied in large part by lands throughout the County. The Sewer Service Area Plan recognizes that the primary determinants of land needs on a long-range basis are subject to significant change that will certainly happen over time, and that such change cannot be accurately accounted for.

Such determinants include private sector decisions that determine the market for doing business in the urban area, technological and economic factors which may increase or decrease land needs for certain uses, governmental policy and regulation, energy factors and continually changing cultural preferences for styles of working and living. For example, the overall growth projection for the Merrill Area would be reduced if an energy crisis would make it more necessary to live and do business in metropolitan areas, as opposed to the current preferences to live and do business in small cities and rural areas.

This Plan contains projections of the acreage of lands within the urban area judged necessary for and having "potential" for commercial, industrial and residential uses, and which have a reasonable likelihood of development according to current trends and economic outlooks. While these projections are not based exclusively upon future population, they nevertheless were developed with future population needs in mind.

In doing this, the projected quantities of land required to meet the needs of the urban area include excess lands beyond actual need. The excess lands are provided to account for the reality that in a free-market economy there is expected to be flexibility of choice of building sites when purchasing land for development. This is necessary to avoid excessively high prices which would be caused by unreasonable limitations on land availability. This "market factor" is further discussed later in this section.

Planning for an adequate supply of developable land operates within the overall philosophy that restricting development of certain lands for public interest purposes such as environmental and agricultural protection is necessary and desirable. The land use projections and recommendations in this report acknowledge and attempt to serve this overall land use planning philosophy.

#### 4.4.2 URBAN AREA LAND REQUIREMENTS

This Plan recognizes that the actual level of development may vary from the projections shown. The projection figures are intended to be indicators of the nature and intensity of future development, and as such the specific figures themselves do not represent any official or final level of acceptance.

The projected quantities of future land uses are generally based upon the following factors:

- 1) Future land use plans within adopted community comprehensive plans,
- 2) Land use planning principles and locational criteria,
- 3) Natural land capabilities,
- 4) Potential and likelihood of public utility extensions,
- 5) Degree of access and potential for improvement,
- 6) Availability and use of lands, and
- 7) Local governmental and citizen goals and values already known to exist or emerging in certain areas.

#### 4.4.3 RESIDENTIAL LAND REQUIREMENTS

##### 4.4.3A AVERAGE HOUSEHOLD SIZE

Projections of the average number of persons per household are an important variable in estimating the amount of additional land that will be needed for residential purposes.

On the national level, the population per household has steadily declined since the 1960's, while the country's total population has increased. The decline in household size is reflected in the large increase in the nation's housing stock.

On a community level, changes in average number of persons per household are influenced by national trends, but even more so by the mix of housing types and the age and cost of the community's housing stock. The factors that influence household size on a community basis make these projections difficult, however, such projections remain necessary to determine the amount of residential land consumption during the planning period.

The persons per household projections shown in Table 5 were developed by DOA as part of their population projection program. However, these figures had not been updated at the time of this writing and did not include 2045 or 2050. The

NCWRPC extrapolated those numbers based on trends in the DOA data. The decline in average household size for each community in the urban area is shown from 2020 to 2050.

| <b>TABLE 5: Projected Change in Average Persons Per Household for Merrill Area 2020 to 2050</b> |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
|                                                                                                 | 2020 | 2025 | 2030 | 2035 | 2040 | 2045 | 2050 |
| C. Merrill                                                                                      | 2.23 | 2.10 | 2.07 | 2.03 | 2.01 | 1.99 | 1.97 |
| T. Merrill                                                                                      | 2.41 | 2.30 | 2.26 | 2.23 | 2.20 | 2.19 | 2.17 |
| T.Pine River                                                                                    | 2.49 | 2.31 | 2.27 | 2.24 | 2.21 | 2.19 | 2.17 |
| T. Scott                                                                                        | 2.51 | 2.48 | 2.44 | 2.41 | 2.37 | 2.35 | 2.33 |
| Source: DOA 2013, Census 2020, & NCWRPC 2025.                                                   |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |

#### 4.4.3B AVERAGE DEVELOPMENT DENSITY

Projecting future development density is another important variable in determining residential land needs. Table 6 shows the densities at which the level current development has occurred through 2024 for each community in the planning area. These densities were determined using land areas calculated through the NCWRPC project geographic information system (GIS) database, the DOA 2024 population estimates, and the above persons per household data.

The average residential population density provided by the service area is calculated to be 7.83 persons per residential acre with the overall population density at 1.95 persons per acre. This density converts to a residential development density of 3.73 housing units per acre (0.93 hu/ac. overall) based on the estimated average household size for Merrill.

| <b>TABLE 6: Average Residential Development Density of the Urban Area, 2024</b> |                                                       |                                                                   |                                                                       |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Community                                                                       | Overall Average Population Density (persons per acre) | Average Residential Population Density (persons/residential acre) | Average Residential Development Density (housing units per res. acre) |
| City of Merrill                                                                 | 1.95                                                  | 7.83                                                              | 3.73                                                                  |
| Town of Merrill                                                                 | 0.09                                                  | 2.22                                                              | 0.97                                                                  |
| Town of Pine River                                                              | 0.05                                                  | 0.58                                                              | 0.25                                                                  |
| Town of Scott                                                                   | 0.07                                                  | 1.73                                                              | 0.70                                                                  |
| Source: NCWRPC 2025.                                                            |                                                       |                                                                   |                                                                       |

This density is significantly higher than the average density of unsewered parts of the planning area, also illustrated in Table 6. The higher density level is needed for cost-effective sewer service.

#### 4.4.3C RESIDENTIAL LAND REQUIREMENTS

As a result of the DOA projections that indicate a drastic decline in the population of the planning area by 2050, no additional residential acreage demand can be projected. Theoretically, as the average persons-per-household declines more housing units are needed, but this is balanced by the population loss. Similarly, new residents coming in are offset by the population loss. Some remaining residents will seek a change of residence within the City, but again, residential acreage being made available by the population loss will overshadow any demand for new units.

#### 4.4.4 COMMERCIAL AND INDUSTRIAL LAND REQUIREMENTS

Commercial and industrial growth are important determinants of land requirements in the urban area. Labor force figures for Merrill were obtained from the U.S. Census Bureau's Local Employment Dynamics (LED) website. This data shows an average annual growth in employment of 0.17%. Between 2012 and 2022, the number of jobs in Merrill increased from 5,724 to 5,824. Total employment will therefore be expected to increase by 264 jobs by 2050.

The LED data indicates that approximately 21% of this employment is goods producing (industrial) and 79% trade and other services (commercial). This ratio breaks down the estimated employment to 55 additional industrial workers and 209 new commercial employees. These employment estimates were used in conjunction with NCWRPC estimated employment densities (number of employees per acre) for commercial (15.34) and industrial (4.22) land use types to determine acreage needs for future employment.

Thus, an estimate of 27 additional commercial (14) and industrial (13) acres for the urban area is anticipated by the year 2050. These figures are somewhat more conservative than the City's current comprehensive plan, which may be due to originating pre-pandemic, prior to the resulting economic downturn.

#### 4.4.5 PUBLIC PARK AND OUTDOOR RECREATION NEEDS

Park and outdoor recreation needs can constitute a significant portion of land within the future urban area. The recommended standard used by the NCWRPC

in figuring park needs is 10.5 acres per 1,000 population. This standard is not intended to include specialized outdoor recreational facilities such as nature reserves, hunting grounds, public utility lands, golf courses, athletic fields, private facilities or school lands. The above standard may be conservative in meeting current and future needs.

As a result of the DOA projections that indicate a drastic decline in the population of the planning area by 2050, no additional public parkland acreage demand can be projected.

#### 4.4.6 PUBLIC AND INSTITUTIONAL LAND REQUIREMENTS

Public and institutional use of land is typically a smaller but important element of an urban area. In some cases, public land consumption may be more significant such as the location of the county seat or a heavy federal government presence. Typically, this category of land use includes things like government services, schools, utilities, and churches among others. This projection is based on the existing level of service in terms of the land area devoted to public and institutional uses per person in the community.

However, as a result of the DOA projections that indicate a drastic decline in the population of the planning area by 2050, no additional public or institutional acreage demand can be projected.

#### 4.4.7 RIGHT-OF-WAY LAND REQUIREMENTS

The space consumed for the transportation facilities which we use to access all the land types discussed above is often overlooked when doing acreage allocation for land use needs. Although modern planning practice is often recommending that communities shift to "neo-traditional" standards including narrower streets, right-of-way can still consume significant amounts of land which must be accounted for because other "hard" developments are typically not located within these reserved areas. Right-of-way consumes as much as 25 percent of the developed land area of communities in Wisconsin. In Merrill, the GIS database indicates that right-of-way area amounts to about 9 percent, which will be assumed to remain constant over the planning period.

Thus, the estimate for additional land needed for right-of-way totals about 3 acres through 2050 based on the acreage allocated for other land uses specified above.

#### 4.4.8 ALLOWANCE FOR MARKET FACTORS

As stated earlier, the philosophy of this Plan is to provide additional lands beyond the net needs of the urban area to provide flexibility and choice in development sites. To accommodate factors beyond the control of local government which render lands unavailable for development, a market factor of 2 has been provided. This factor was based on the projected future land area needs and a cursory review of undeveloped lands in and around the urban area, as well as the likelihood that a given piece of property will be available for development at any given time.

Current projections (on which the allocation of area expected to require sewer service in the future are based) reflect development conditions that are significantly curtailed due to the economic downturn. Within the long-range planning horizon of this Sewer Service Area Plan, economic recovery and improved development conditions are anticipated. Resulting growth is anticipated to exceed the current projections in the long-term. This market factor allowance is necessary to accommodate this development and provide flexibility and choice in siting.

The market factor makes available an additional 60 acres over the actual net need within the year 2050 sewer service area to accommodate market decisions

#### 4.4.9 TOTAL URBAN AREA LAND REQUIREMENTS

The estimated additional land needs in the year 2050 for the Merrill Urban Area are projected to be 90 acres. This acreage will consist of the following land use needs shown in Table 7.

| <b>TABLE 7: Projected Additional Sewered Land Area Needs for Merrill by Year 2050</b> |                    |               |                      |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|---------------|----------------------|
| Land Use                                                                              | Net Acreage Demand | Market Factor | Total Acreage Demand |
| Residential                                                                           | 0 Acres            | 0 Acres       | 0 Acres              |
| Commercial                                                                            | 14 Acres           | 28 Acres      | 42 Acres             |
| Industrial                                                                            | 13 Acres           | 26 Acres      | 39 Acres             |
| Recreation                                                                            | 0 Acres            | 0 Acres       | 0 Acres              |
| Institutional                                                                         | 0 Acres            | 0 Acres       | 0 Acres              |
| ROW                                                                                   | 3 Acres            | 6 Acres       | 9 Acres              |
| <b>Totals</b>                                                                         | 30 Acres           | 60 Acres      | 90 Acres             |
| Source: NCWRPC, 2025.                                                                 |                    |               |                      |

It should be noted that the City of Merrill Comprehensive Plan utilizes more optimistic growth projections. The estimated land needs presented here have been updated for 2025 and incorporate the required DOA population projections, modified methodologies for commercial acreage allocation and market factor assignment.

#### **4.5 INFILL AND REDEVELOPMENT OF VACANT LANDS**

A certain amount of undeveloped land exists within the current corporate limits of the City of Merrill. This Plan recognizes that infill development is good public policy and establishes goals and objectives to achieve infill. There is a clear cost effectiveness advantage to infill development that has infrastructure like sewer and water lines already installed or available nearby. These areas may have been by-passed by development or be available for redevelopment like brownfields. A detailed inventory of these sites was beyond the scope of work for this Plan. However, a basic analysis using GIS tools indicated about 720 acres of potentially developable land was contained within the city limits and the baseline SSA boundary. These areas are included in the acreage allocation for the sewer service area.

Sites that are developed with available sewer service, but vacant and available for possible reuse/redevelopment were not inventoried for this Plan. However, the number of sites of this type is considered low, as Merrill has a good history of reuse.

## **5.0 ENVIRONMENTALLY SENSITIVE AREAS**

### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

Delineating environmentally sensitive areas is one of the most important components of a sewer service area plan. These areas need to be protected in order to protect water quality.

According to Administrative Code NR 121 provisions, "Major areas unsuitable for the installation of waste treatment systems because of physical or environmental constraints are to be excluded from the service area. Areas to be considered for exclusion from the sewer service area because of the potential for adverse impacts on the quality of the waters of the state from both point and nonpoint sources of pollution include but are not limited to wetlands, shorelands, floodways and floodplains, steep slopes, highly erodible soils and other limiting soil types, groundwater protection areas, and other such physical constraints."

For purposes of this Sewer Service Area Plan, floodways, wetlands and areas of steep slope have been identified as the elements that will be designated as the environmentally sensitive areas or ESAs. The Advisory committee selected these areas based on the ESAs mapped in the original 1996 plan even though updated GIS databases resulted in a larger area excluded from sewered development. A discussion of other possible ESA candidates yielded no new additions.

Environmentally sensitive areas are defined, generally, as those areas that are unsuitable for sewered development because of the potential significant adverse impact upon water quality (see NR 121.05(1)(g)2.c.). The sewer service area is that area presently served or anticipated to be served by a sewage treatment system within a sewer service area plan's planning period. Technically, the sewer service area does not include environmentally sensitive areas, which are delineated separately and do not count in acreage allocations for sewered development.

The Plan uses the term "environmentally sensitive areas" rather than "environmental corridors" primarily due to the inconsistent use of the term "environmental corridors" across the state. Additionally, "environmental corridors" implies the need for the subject resource to be linear or contiguous within the sewer service area, however, such contiguity is not required for an area to be sensitive and in need of protection under NR121 for maintenance of water quality.

A sewer service plan regulates only sewered development. Its authority does not prohibit unsewered development from occurring in environmentally sensitive

areas though mitigation may be recommended or required depending on specific circumstances. These areas may also be regulated by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers or other agencies. A proposal that would encroach on land under the environmentally sensitive area designation to allow sewer development may require a Clean Water Act Section 404 permit or a Wisconsin Statutes Chapter 30 permit and water quality certification for compliance with NR103, or other permits in order to protect water quality.

To install new sewer lines or lift stations with expanded service areas, a community needs a sewer extension "conformance letter" sometimes referred to as the water quality management (WQM) letter. The letter documents the determination that the proposed development lies within the sewer service area, but not within an environmentally sensitive area.

The environmentally sensitive areas shown on the sewer service area maps are a representation of the conditions at the time of map preparation, using the best available data. The maps do not reflect field survey work that specific development proposals require. The presence and location of navigable waters, floodways, wetlands and similar site features must be verified by field survey, and applicable permits must be obtained prior to any land disturbing activity. Verification may be required by the WDNR for water quality certification purposes before approving any sewer extension or SSA amendment. Site inspection takes precedence over the sewer service area map.

| <b>TABLE 8: ENVIRONMENTALLY SENSITIVE AREA (ESA) GUIDELINES</b> |                                                                                         |                                                                                                                                        |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Element</b>                                                  | <b>Applicable Features</b>                                                              | <b>Delineation Guide</b>                                                                                                               |
| FLOODWAY                                                        | Waterways delineated in WDNR Surface Water Data Viewer / FEMA Flood Insurance Rate Maps | ✓ Channel of stream and the adjoining area required to carry flood flows associated with the regional flood (NR116.03, Wis. Adm. Code) |
| WETLANDS                                                        | Wetlands delineated on WI Wetland Inventory Maps                                        | ✓ Mapped Area                                                                                                                          |
| STEEP SLOPES                                                    | Areas of Slope 12% or Greater                                                           | ✓ General Area of Slope                                                                                                                |
| Source: NCWRPC, 2025.                                           |                                                                                         |                                                                                                                                        |

The remaining entries of this section discuss in detail the elements that comprise the environmentally sensitive area for purposes of this sewer service area plan. Table 8, above, provides a "quick reference" summary of the guidelines for environmentally sensitive area designation.

## **5.2 FLOODWAY**

The floodplain is the land calculated to be covered by floodwater during the 100-year flood. The floodplain includes the *floodway* and the flood fringe. The *floodway* is the channel of the river or stream and those portions of the floodplain adjoining the channel required to carry and discharge the flood waters or flood flows associated with the 100-year flood (see NR 116.03 Wis. Adm. Code).

Most development is not allowed within the floodway by state and federal regulations. Development can occur within the flood fringe with appropriate flood proofing measures. The added expense of developing in the flood fringe versus other upland areas will control the rate and extent of floodplain development.

To prevent development in a high hazard area, floodways are excluded from sewer service areas. Sewer service area plans or amendments should be consistent with approved floodplain zoning ordinances.

Plans or amendments which would result in a reduction of storm or flood water conveyance or storage capacity must be denied unless remedial actions which conform to NR 116 are identified and approved prior. When there is an existing, lawful development within the floodway, a plan or amendment may include the development within the boundaries of the proposed service area.

Lands officially determined to be out of the mapped floodway are considered removed from the ESA unless other factors dictate. These areas are typically documented with a Letter of Map Revision (LOMR) or Letter of Map Amendment (LOMA) issued by FEMA.

The FEMA DFIRM, or Digital Flood Insurance Rate Map, data was used to map the floodway as part of the environmentally sensitive area for this Plan, see Map 3. FEMA completed an update of the flood mapping for Lincoln County in 2011.

There are several streams in and around the Merrill study area with associated floodway. The major river is the Wisconsin River which flows through the center of the city. Two other primary streams and their tributaries drain the area into the Wisconsin River, including the Prairie River and Devil Creek. The Prairie River enters

from the northeast and cuts across the study area to intersect with the Wisconsin River (north side) to the southwest. Devil Creek cuts across the southwest corner of the study area to intersect with the Wisconsin River (south side).

### **5.3 WETLANDS**

Wetlands are areas where water is at, near or above the land surface long enough to be capable of supporting aquatic or hydrophytic vegetation and having soils indicative of wet conditions (see NR 103 Wis. Adm. Code). Although wetlands are often associated with waterbodies, especially shoreland wetlands which are very ecologically important, many wetland areas may not be directly adjacent to a lake or stream. State and federal regulations control development activities in wetland areas. Permits are required for activities that impact wetlands. In some cases, wetland mitigation or replacement is required.

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.

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, wetlands play an important role in water quality.

To protect water quality wetlands are excluded from sewer service areas. The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources will not approve any sewer service area plan or amendment that allows new service to new development within a wetland.

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources' Wisconsin Wetland Inventory data was used to map the wetlands as part of the environmentally sensitive area for this Plan, see Map 3. A wetland delineation may be required to verify boundaries.

Many wetlands occur across the study area, ranging in size from less than two acres to several hundred acres. According to these inventory maps, most wetlands in the study area are forested mixed or mixed forest/scrub types with

wet soil conditions. Some of the wetlands are emergent/wet meadow types.

#### **5.4 STEEP SLOPES**

Areas with slopes 12% and over were identified using geographic information system (GIS) vector intercept analysis on U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) 10-foot contour data and mapped as part of the environmentally sensitive area for this Plan, see Map 3.

These areas are generally found along the rivers and streams through the study area but scattered landforms exist.

Slopes over 12% are environmentally sensitive because construction on steep slopes can result in severe bank erosion and damaging siltation of a water body.

#### **5.5 COMPOSITE ENVIRONMENTALLY SENSITIVE AREAS MAP**

The environmentally sensitive areas shown on the sewer service area maps are a representation of the conditions at the time of map preparation, using the best available data, see Map 3. The map does not reflect field survey work that specific development proposals require. The presence and location of wetlands, navigable waters, floodway, and similar site features may require verification by field survey and applicable permits must be obtained prior to any land disturbing activity, preferably before a review is submitted to the WDNR for approval. WDNR staff will evaluate the navigability of any streams involved and whether or not a water quality certification is needed before promulgating an administrative decision.

In the event of questions or controversy regarding an environmentally sensitive area delineation on a specific site, contact WDNR regulatory and planning staff for further guidance.

#### **5.6 PROTECTION OF ENVIRONMENTALLY SENSITIVE AREAS**

Protecting water quality is one of the primary functions of a sewer service area plan. Surface water, including lakes, streams and their associated shorelands and floodplains, wetlands and groundwater are protected by a layered system of regulations and programs at all three levels of government: local, state and federal. The sewer service area plan does not supersede any existing or future regulations or requirements that are applicable to any environmentally sensitive area. A proposed sewer development is still responsible for meeting all legal requirements and obtaining all necessary permits, as well as compliance with the

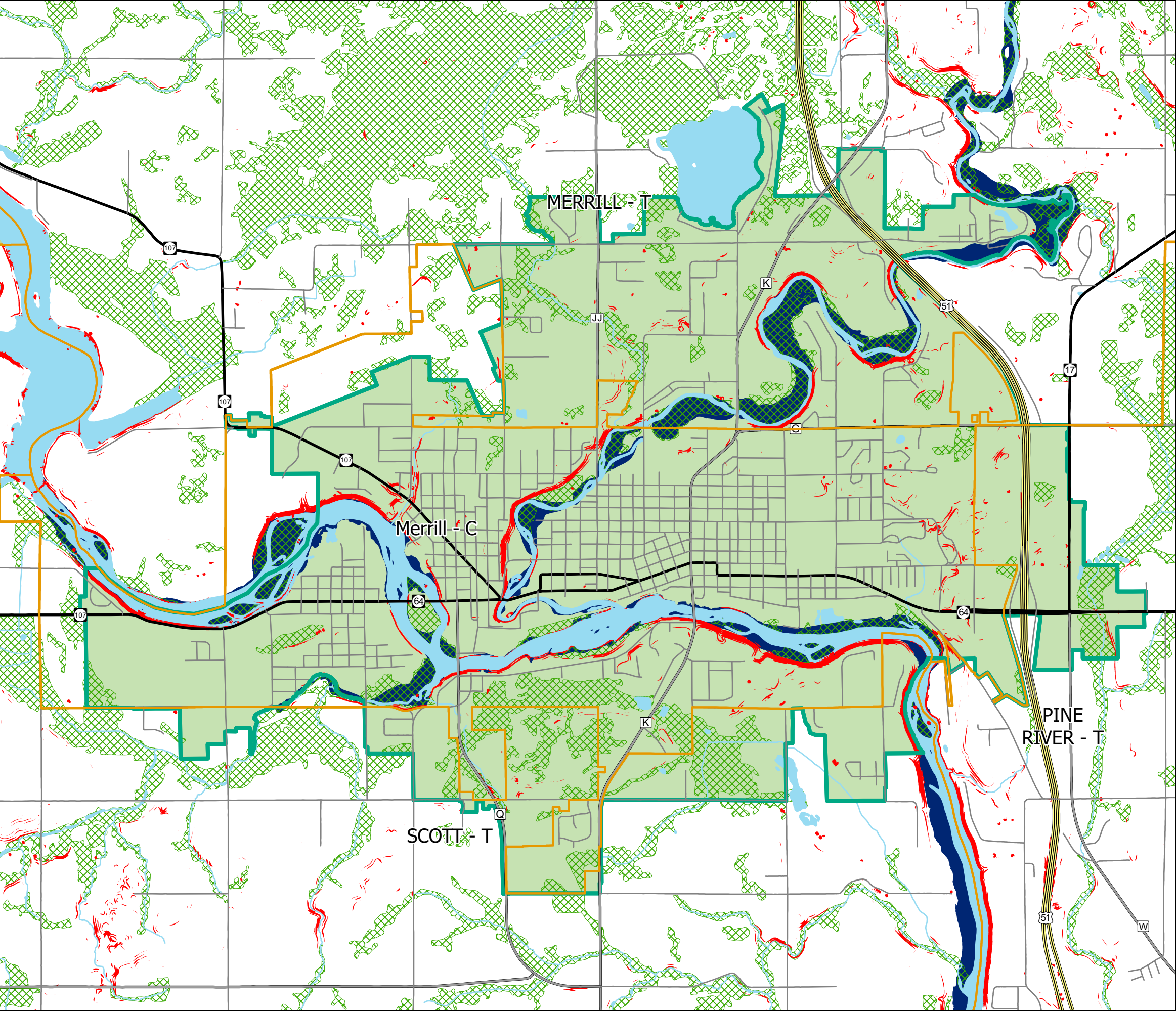
sewer service area plan.

Sewer extensions will not be approved for development within an environmentally sensitive area identified in this Plan, however, they may be allowed to cross certain sensitive areas with the appropriate permits if necessary to facilitate development adjacent to these areas.

Best management practices, or BMPs, are encouraged and sometimes mandated to minimize degradation or loss of a resource through a variety of techniques to reduce the impact of construction and development on the natural environment.

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**Map 3**  
**Environmentally**  
**Sensitive Areas**



**Legend**

- Minor Civil Divisions
- U.S. Highways
- State Highways
- County Highways
- Local Roads
- Water
- Wetlands
- Steep Slopes > 12%
- Floodway
- SSA Boundary



Prepared By:  
North Central Wisconsin  
Regional Planning Commission

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## **6.0 URBAN AREA COMPREHENSIVE PLANS**

### **6.1 INTRODUCTION**

Under current state law, for a community's plan to carry any legal weight it must be a comprehensive plan as defined in the statute. As a result, most communities have completed a comprehensive plan. Such is the case in the Merrill area. A review and analysis of the completed plans for the participating municipalities within the study area is an essential element in the development of the Merrill Sewer Service Area Plan. Consideration of the individual community's comprehensive plans assisted in the development of a Sewer Service Area Plan that safeguards area water quality while being consistent and compatible with the community's view of future development.

Currently, the City of Merrill and the Towns of Merrill, Pine River and Scott have adopted comprehensive plans. This section, along with the plan maps in Appendix C, provides an overview of the comprehensive plans of the study area communities available at the time of developing the Merrill Sewer Service Area Plan. Included in each overview are important points of consistency between the local plan and the Sewer Service Area Plan. The individual plans should be consulted directly for additional detail on specific land use issues in any of the communities in this study area.

Sewerage facilities are an important part of an interactive system of land use and development. These facilities are influenced by the pattern of development and exert a strong force in determining that pattern. The following sections discuss the locally adopted plans which represent the desired development patterns of the urban area communities. These plans will guide the urban area's future growth and will assist local engineers and consultants in designing sewer systems to accommodate expected growth. In addition, the plans indicate which areas are not viewed as primary growth zones within the Merrill urban area.

### **6.2 CITY OF MERRILL COMPREHENSIVE PLAN**

The City of Merrill's current comprehensive plan was adopted by the City Council in 2017 and references the Sewer Service Area Plan extensively. This Sewer Service Area Plan is consistent with the stated goals, objectives and policies of the city plan, specifically to "Maintain a safe and clean natural environment for residents," through "enforcement of regulations in environmentally sensitive areas" (Natural Resources Goal 1 – Objective 1), and "Development adjacent to rivers(streams), lakes and wetlands needs to be planned to not negatively impact these areas" (Objective 3), as well as, to "Promote an effective and efficient supply of utilities,

facilities and services that meet the needs and expectations of residents" (Utilities and Community Facilities Goal 1); "Coordinate community facilities and utility systems development and use with land use, transportation, and natural resource planning" (Objective 1); "Direct intensive land development to areas where a full array of utilities, community facilities and public services are available" (Objective 2); "Encourage compact and well-planned urban development areas, so that community facilities and services can be provided in a cost-effective manner" (Policy 1); and Promote long-range sanitary sewer system planning to accommodate projected growth and development" (Policy 3), as well as, to "Create an economically efficient and environmentally sustainable development pattern" by "providing an adequate supply of developable land for residential, commercial, industrial, and other uses" (Land Use Goal 1 – Objective 1); by "utilizing existing public facilities to serve new development whenever possible" (Policy 1); "coordinating the Sewer Service Area Plan and the Comprehensive Plan" (Policy 4); and "encouraging collaboration between the City of Merrill and neighboring jurisdictions with regard to planning initiatives and development policies" (Policy 10).

Under the Intergovernmental Cooperation chapter goals and objectives, items such as "Maintain a positive relationship and open communication with other government entities in the area, including surrounding towns..." (Goal 1) and "Work cooperatively with county and adjacent towns to jointly review and coordinate development under the City's extra -territorial zoning and subdivision review authority, and to review projects under county zoning" (Policy 2), show coherence with the Sewer Service Area Plan.

The Comprehensive Plan's land use is of the traditional mixed urban use type with a central business district (CBD) surrounded by predominately residential use with areas of commercial and industrial uses. The City is surrounded by agricultural uses, scattered residential, woodlands and open space. In general, commercial development is stretched along State Highway 64 from the Highway 51 interchange to the west side of the City, with the newest commercial development near the Highways 51 and 64 interchange. Governmental uses such as the county & city offices, library and schools are located along this corridor as well, including some public housing. Numerous other publicly owned parcels are scattered throughout the City, including governmental facilities and a variety of parks and other open spaces.

Industrial uses are concentrated near the railroad tracks along the Wisconsin River and the northwest part of the City near the airport and industrial park. Residential uses dominate most of the other areas of the City. As the Airport Industrial Park is nearly full, the City has identified new areas for future development around the airport property. In addition, the east side of the City is expected to be the

primary focus for future commercial and industrial growth.

The city plan is implemented through zoning, subdivision and other ordinances and programs. The zoning ordinance is a standard code with a variety of residential districts that provide for urban level densities. Although “low-density” zoning districts are available, the Comprehensive Plan recommends a variety of mixed use and infill concepts. The subdivision ordinance has provisions requiring land suitability for development, parkland dedication, and layout of both sanitary and storm sewer. The City has an updated stormwater and erosion control ordinance. There have been discussions regarding cooperative boundary agreements with the surrounding towns, but no agreements have been implemented at this time.

### **6.3 TOWN OF MERRILL COMPREHENSIVE PLAN**

The Town of Merrill worked cooperatively with Lincoln County to develop its comprehensive plan jointly as part of the Lincoln County Comprehensive Plan. This plan was updated in 2022. The county plan references the Sewer Service Area Plan.

The county plan has number of goals that establish consistency with the Sewer Service Area Plan including those related to preservation of environmentally sensitive areas and provision of efficient/cost-effective public services. In addition to these countywide goals, the plan contains goals and objectives sections specific to each town participating in the plan.

This Sewer Service Area Plan is consistent with the stated Comprehensive Plan goals and objectives for the Town of Merrill, specifically to “Preserve sensitive natural features and resources” (Goal 3) by “Protect[ing] environmentally sensitive areas, including but not limited to the Prairie River, marshes, waterfronts, and areas of steep slope” (Objective A) and “Ensuring the adequate and safe disposal of sewage to protect groundwater quality” (Objective C), as well as, to “Propose a land use pattern that directs intensive new development to areas that are well served with...public facilities and away from environmental corridors...” (Goal 2, Objective B) and “Encourage and participate in intergovernmental cooperation efforts and achieve shared goals among Town, County, City of Merrill, and adjoining towns.” (Goal 2, Objective F) Other related objectives include: “Cooperate on the siting of a modern business park near Highway 51 with Lincoln County and the City of Merrill,” “Encourage the redevelopment of aging commercial/industrial sites near the Highway K and C intersection,” and “Where public services are not available, allow businesses without significant water or waste disposal needs.” (Goal 1, Objectives B, C & D)

Key recommendations in the Town of Merrill Plan include establishing a mixed use “town center” near the intersection of Highways K and C, with industrial development further south along Highway K. Most residential development is planned for the southern parts of the Town with the northern parts planned primarily for open space uses.

The town plan is implemented through County zoning and subdivision ordinances and other local ordinances and programs. The zoning ordinance is a standard code with a variety of residential districts that primarily provide for rural, low-densities, although higher density “suburban” residential zoning districts are available. The County also has stormwater management and erosion control standards within the zoning ordinance. There have been discussions regarding a cooperative boundary agreement with the City of Merrill, but no agreements have been implemented at this time.

#### **6.4 TOWN OF PINE RIVER COMPREHENSIVE PLAN**

The Town of Pine River Comprehensive Plan prepared by the Pine River Planning & Zoning Committee and adopted in 2019. The plan does not specifically reference the Sewer Service Area Plan, but the Sewer Service Area Plan is generally consistent with the stated goals of the town plan, specifically to “Protect Water Resources.” (Goal 6)

Commercial and residential development is expected to occur along Highways 64, 51, 17 and W, particularly in proximity with the City of Merrill. Additional residential development is anticipated within existing subdivisions and other locations around the Town, in particular the western portion in proximity to the City.

The town plan is implemented through its own zoning ordinance and the County shoreland and subdivision ordinances. The Town zoning ordinance is a standard code with a variety of residential districts that primarily provide for rural, low-densities, although higher densities are attainable in the “subdivision” district. The County also has stormwater management and erosion control standards. There have been discussions regarding a cooperative boundary agreement with the City of Merrill, but no agreements have been implemented at this time.

#### **6.5 TOWN OF SCOTT COMPREHENSIVE PLAN**

The Town of Scott worked cooperatively with Lincoln County to develop its comprehensive plan jointly as part of the Lincoln County Comprehensive Plan. This plan was updated in 2022. The county plan references the Sewer Service Area Plan.

The county plan has number of goals that establish consistency with the Sewer Service Area Plan including those related to preservation of environmentally sensitive areas and provision of efficient/cost-effective public services. In addition to these countywide goals, the plan contains goals and objectives sections specific to each town participating in the plan.

This Sewer Service Area Plan is consistent with the stated Comprehensive Plan goals and objectives for the Town of Scott, specifically to “Direct intensive new development...to areas which are well-served with...public facilities and away from environmental corridors...” (Goal 1, Objective B), as well as, to “Preserve access to and promote sensitive development near the Wisconsin River” and to “Continue to support and participate in efforts to protect and restore the Devil Creek Watershed.” (Goal 3, Objectives D & E) Other related objectives include: “Establish a regular working relationship between Town and City planning and land use officials” and “Work with the City of Merrill on...addressing boundary land use and public service issues...” (Goal 4, Objectives C & D)

Key recommendations in the Town of Scott Plan include directing residential development to the Highway K and Q corridors, planning for commercial uses at the Highway Q/51 interchange area and other key crossroads, and supporting a long-term plan for the connection of Highway Q across the Wisconsin River to Highway P in the Town of Pine River.

The town plan is implemented through County zoning and subdivision ordinances and other local ordinances and programs. The zoning ordinance is a standard code with a variety of residential districts that primarily provide for rural, low-densities, although higher density “suburban” residential zoning districts are available. The County also has stormwater management and erosion control standards within the zoning ordinance. There have been discussions regarding a cooperative boundary agreement with the City of Merrill, but no agreements have been implemented at this time.

## **6.6 NORTH CENTRAL WISCONSIN REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION REGIONAL COMPREHENSIVE PLAN**

The Regional Comprehensive Plan (RCP) was prepared by the NCWRPC staff and adopted by the Commission in 2025 to replace the previous Regional Comprehensive Plan. The RCP was prepared under the authority of s.66.0309 and is intended to provide long-range policy direction for guiding growth, development and redevelopment in north central Wisconsin and for making public and private investment decisions in the Region. The RCP does not specify details of local development plans.

The Sewer Service Area Plan is consistent with the following RCP goals and objectives:

- Preserve and protect the region's landscape, environmental resources, and sensitive lands while encouraging healthy communities.
- Protect sensitive lands from overdevelopment to minimize adverse effects of erosion, pollution and soil and habitat degradation.
- Encourage land use policies that minimize negative environmental impacts from development.
- Encourage local units of government to utilize existing capacity of services and facilities before new services and facilities are provided.
- Promote redevelopment of idle and/or vacant sites by planning and zoning for a mix of employment, residential, and recreational activities while utilizing remediation programs.
- Provide adequate supply of developable land to meet existing and future market demand for residential, commercial, and industrial uses.
- Encourage land uses, densities, and regulations that promote efficient development patterns and relatively low municipal, State, governmental, and utility costs.
- Focus development in existing downtowns and infill sites and reuse historic buildings.
- Reuse vacant land and structures in innovative ways.
- Support waterfront redevelopment that enhances the economy and environment.
- Promote infill development, especially for residential uses.
- Encourage the coordination and cooperation among nearby units of government and special districts.
- Encourage local units of government to provide quality public services in an efficient and cost-effective manner.

## **SECTION 7.0 GOALS, OBJECTIVES & POLICIES OF THE SSA PLAN**

### **7.1 INTRODUCTION**

One of the most important steps in developing an urban area sewer service area plan is to establish some overall goals and policy objectives to guide the development and implementation of the plan. The goals and policies presented in the previous, 1996, Sewer Service Area Plan were reviewed and updated by the planning team and Policy Advisory Committee.

The following goals and policies constitute the adopted guidelines for making decisions related to the implementation of the Sewer Service Area Plan through the following actions:

- 1) Establishment of boundaries for the 2050 sewer service area,
- 2) Review of sewer extension requests,
- 3) Review of Sewer Service Area Plan Amendments, and
- 4) Other reviews related to sewer service.

### **7.2 GOALS, OBJECTIVES AND POLICIES**

GOAL I) Provide and maintain public utilities and services which efficiently meet the needs of each community while protecting water resources and the quality of the environment.

OBJECTIVE I.1) Make maximum use of the existing facilities.

POLICIES: I.1.1) Where compatible with community plans and other community policies, sanitary sewer extensions into areas in proximity to existing development will be given high priority, while extensions which may cause leap-frog or sprawl development will be discouraged.

I.1.2) Encourage increased density of development through local land use regulations.

I.1.3) Provide sufficient land area for higher density development through zoning.

|           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|-----------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| OBJECTIVE | I.2) Develop efficient water, sewer, flood control, and solid waste facilities in such a way as to protect the quality of the environment, particularly surface and groundwater resources.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| POLICIES: | <p>I.2.1) Environmentally sensitive open space and unique natural areas should be preserved and not used for urban development.</p> <p>I.2.2) Proposed developments should include areas which set aside open space for recreation, storm water retention, and natural drainage ways for storm water run-off.</p> <p>I.2.3) Local units of government should work together on comprehensive stormwater management planning to identify stormwater management needs in the planning area. Stormwater control ordinances that address both water quality and quantity should be adopted by all local units.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| OBJECTIVE | I.3) Control the development of areas where environmental sensitivity indicates that development should not take place.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| POLICIES: | <p>I.3.1) Urban development should be directed to land suitable for development and discouraged on unsuitable land, such as floodways, wetlands, and steep slopes.</p> <p>I.3.2) Subdivision plat designs which do not provide adequate means of protecting future residents from problems associated with drainage and steep slopes should be rejected. In addition, developers should be required to submit detailed plans for adequately draining such areas.</p> <p>I.3.3) Certain floodway, wetland, steep slope and other potentially sensitive areas will be zoned for recreation or conservation uses.</p> <p>I.3.4) Sewer extensions will not be approved for development in Environmentally Sensitive Areas identified in the Sewer Service Area Plan, subject to field survey. However, they may be allowed to cross certain sensitive areas with the appropriate permits to facilitate development adjacent to these areas.</p> |

GOAL II) Guide the future development of the City of Merrill within the defined sewer service limits in an efficient, sequential, orderly, and compatible manner.

OBJECTIVE II.1) Extend sewer services only to those areas where demand exists and only within the sewer service area.

POLICIES: II.1.1) Extensions will not be made beyond the sewer service area boundary unless the Plan is amended.

II.1.2) Sewers may not be extended beyond the sewer service area, however, they should be sized to accommodate future development that may occur outside of the service area in the future. It should be noted that interceptor sizing is not a factor in the local review process. Interceptor sizing is based on code specifications.

II.1.3) Public utilities and services will be extended to development areas on a cost-effective basis.

OBJECTIVE II.2) Provide sufficient land area in which the future development of the City can be accommodated.

POLICIES: II.2.1) The Sewer Service Area Plan should be reviewed and updated as necessary, and at least every ten years to accommodate changing growth and development trends.

II.2.2) A "market factor" will be incorporated into planned sewer service area acreage allocation to allow flexibility of choice among competing sites for over-priced properties, properties not being made available to the market, or buyer fancy.

OBJECTIVE II.3) Encourage utilization of vacant land within the City that is already provided with urban services.

POLICIES: II.3.1) Direct infill development and redevelopment toward areas that do not require upgrading existing public facilities.

II.3.2) Future urban development should be encouraged to infill vacant developable lands within existing corporate limits and then staged outward adjacent to existing urban level

development.

GOAL III) Encourage future development, occurring outside the sewer service limits, to locate in an efficient, orderly, and compatible manner.

OBJECTIVE III.1) Encourage development that is consistent with city, town and county plans.

POLICIES: III.1.1) Planning should be done on an area-wide basis with representatives of the local governing units.

III.1.2) Efforts should be made to emphasize the benefits from new development to the entire urban area, not just each separate governmental entity; and to increase intergovernmental cooperation.

III.1.3) Review of proposed development of area-wide significance should have input from all involved units in the urban area.

III.1.4) Sewer service extensions will be used as a tool to implement community plans by directing growth into the most desirable areas.

GOAL IV) Promote higher density development.

OBJECTIVE IV.1) Minimize problems associated with large lot rural subdivisions locating in the sewer service limits.

POLICIES IV.1.1) Rural residential development within the sewer service area should be planned to accommodate future urban densities and urban services.

IV.1.2) Surveys and subdivision plats creating new residential development sites within the sewer service limits should be discouraged unless arrangements are made for future provision of urban services including sanitary sewer and water.

## **SECTION 8.0      MERRILL SEWER SERVICE AREA BOUNDARY PLAN**

### **8.1      INTRODUCTION**

This section ties together the previous sections of this report to establish the Merrill Sewer Service Area boundary for 2050. This official boundary is depicted in the Sewer Service Area Boundary Map, see Map 4. This boundary is administered according to the procedures and criteria outlined in Section 9 of this report.

This Sewer Service Area Plan is considered an amendment to the State of Wisconsin Areawide Water Quality Management Plan, as described in Section 3 of this report.

At the local level, this water quality management framework has two primary components: the planning for facilities to improve water quality through the cost-effective collection and treatment of wastewater; and the planning for an area within which those wastewater facilities can be extended while excluding environmentally sensitive areas that might impact water quality if developed. This Sewer Service Area Plan provides that second component.

The facilities planning for the City of Merrill is described in Section 2 of this report. The processes for the facilities plans/studies and the process for the sewer service area plan utilize the same source material for community growth plans and projections, so theoretically, the sewer service area will be sized appropriately for the planned facilities, and the capacity of the facilities will be adequate to handle the anticipated growth.

The growth projections developed in Section 4 of this report determine what size the sewer service area should be to accommodate that growth. The environmentally sensitive areas identified in Section 5 determine where development must be prohibited to protect water quality: the primary purpose of this Plan. The comprehensive plans discussed in Section 6 for the various communities in the urban area are used in conjunction with the environmentally sensitive areas to help determine where the sewer service area boundary lines are drawn. The goals and objectives of this Plan, as spelled out in Section 7, are consistent with the local comprehensive plans in calling for orderly growth that protects environmentally sensitive areas and water quality.

### **8.2      SEWER SERVICE AREA BOUNDARY MAP**

The designation of a sewer service area boundary is the major element of the overall planning process of this Sewer Service Area Plan. The boundary takes into

account the projections of future population, land demands, environmentally sensitive areas, and input on the part of community representatives.

The sewer service area designated on the Boundary Map, see Map 4, in this section provides for the projected land needs of the City of Merrill to the year 2050 as identified in Section 4. The boundary excludes environmentally sensitive areas, as identified in Section 5, to prohibit them from sewer development in order to protect water quality. The Sewer Service Area can be amended to reflect changes in growth needs within the urban area. The boundary amendment procedures are located in Section 9 of this report.

Table 9 displays a summary of the change in the service area between the previous plan and the new 2050 plan. Overall, the sewer service area is increased by 3 acres. This represents a negligible increase of 0.1% over the previous area. Due to the significant decline in population for the City of Merrill projected by DOA, very little additional land-use acreage demand can be projected. Based on these calculations there is more than sufficient land within the existing sewer service area boundary to accommodate the growth allocation. As a result, any expansion of the sewer service boundary in one area necessitates a reduction in another to maintain the size of the allocated sewer service area.

It should be noted that a number of factors are involved with the transition from the old to the new. First, many of the individual data sets that make up the map, such as parcel lines, road center lines, and environmental features such as slopes, hydro and wetlands inventory, have all been updated since the last plan and accuracy levels continue to improve. There was a significant difference in the environmentally sensitive areas data from 1996 to 2025. Additionally, there are always problems, gaps, mismatches, etc., in updating old data in a GIS system. Mapping technicians adjusted the boundary linework to match up with current data: fixing gaps, slivers, alignment with obvious physical elements on the ground (parcel lines, roads, tree lines, etc.) and incorporating the updated WDNR wetland inventory and FEMA floodway data.

The remainder of the changes include areas added to accommodate the development of new airport facilities, potential commercial development of the east side of the city and a mobile home park northeast of the city that will be extended sewer service without annexation. To balance these additions, areas on the west side of the sewer service area were removed where no development is anticipated along with a small area north of the city that is unlikely to be developed.

Inclusion of lands within the Sewer Service Area does not imply that all of those lands will be developed with sanitary sewer by the year 2050. Many factors

including market demand, land availability for sale, accessibility, and political decision making will ultimately determine the amount of land which is sewered by the end of the planning period.

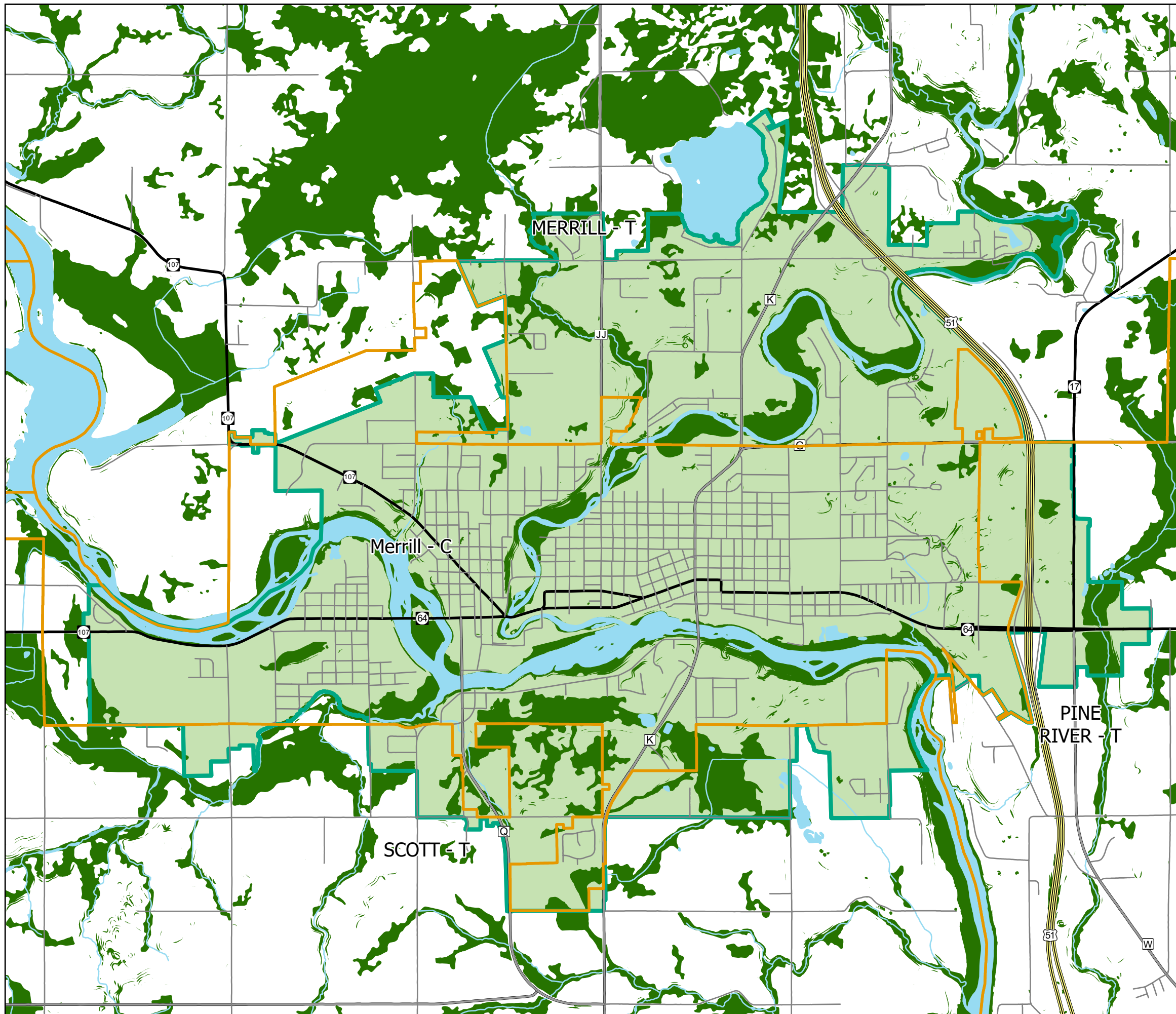
| <b>TABLE 9: Sewer Service Area Boundary Profile</b>                    |                               |                             |                                          |                                   |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
|                                                                        | <i>Total Area<br/>(Acres)</i> | <i>ESA Area<br/>(Acres)</i> | <i>Developed/Served<br/>Area (Acres)</i> | <i>Available<br/>Area (Acres)</i> |
| <i>Baseline*</i>                                                       | 7,679                         | 1,567                       | 3,129                                    | 2,983                             |
| 2025                                                                   | 7,681                         | 1,566                       | 3,129                                    | 2,986                             |
| <i>Source: NCWRPC 2025. *Corrected/adjusted boundary line and ESA.</i> |                               |                             |                                          |                                   |

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**Map 4**  
**Merrill Sewer Service Area**  
**Boundary Map**

**Legend**

- Minor Civil Divisions
- U.S. Highways
- State Highways
- County Highways
- Local Roads
- Water
- SSA Boundary
- Environmentally Sensitive Areas



Prepared By:  
North Central Wisconsin  
Regional Planning Commission

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## **SECTION 9.0 SEWER SERVICE AREA PLAN ADMINISTRATION**

### **9.1 INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this section is to establish simple, complete guidelines for putting the Plan to use. Specific topics addressed in this section include the local review of sewage treatment facility proposals, how the Plan can be amended and by whom, and when and how the Plan will be subject to comprehensive updating processes.

The North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (NCWRPC) has agreed to act as a neutral third-party, designated agent for the administrative procedures for this Plan. Under this agreement, the City of Merrill will handle basic administrative functions such as sewer extension reviews and shepherding amendment processes while the NCWRPC will provide technical assistance and staff reviews for amendments, as well as coordinating with the WDNR on amendment review and approval.

Minor updates have been made throughout the following procedures to bring them in line with current sewer service area administrative practices and make them functionally consistent with other SSA Plans in northcentral Wisconsin.

### **9.2 SEWER EXTENSION REVIEW PROCESS**

This process is triggered by a sewer extension project or other development project within the Merrill sewer service area boundary that includes sanitary sewer requiring permits from the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) or the Department of Safety and Professional Services. Proposed projects not requiring review under s.281.41 Wis. Stats., NR 108 Wis. Adm. Code or SPS 382 Wis. Adm. Code are not subject to sewer extension review under this Plan.

This Plan provides the necessary guidelines for local review of applications for extension of sanitary sewers in the City of Merrill sewer service area. The local review will be conducted to determine whether or not the proposed sewer extension is in conformance with the approved Plan. NR 110, Wis. Adm. Code, requires that all facility plans and all plans and specifications for reviewable projects, including sewer extensions, must be in conformance with the sewer service area plan. The determination will focus on the location of the proposed extension and any environmentally sensitive areas (ESAs); that is, does the extension go beyond the established sewer service area boundary and does it violate an ESA? Note that a sewer line may actually cross an ESA if there are no

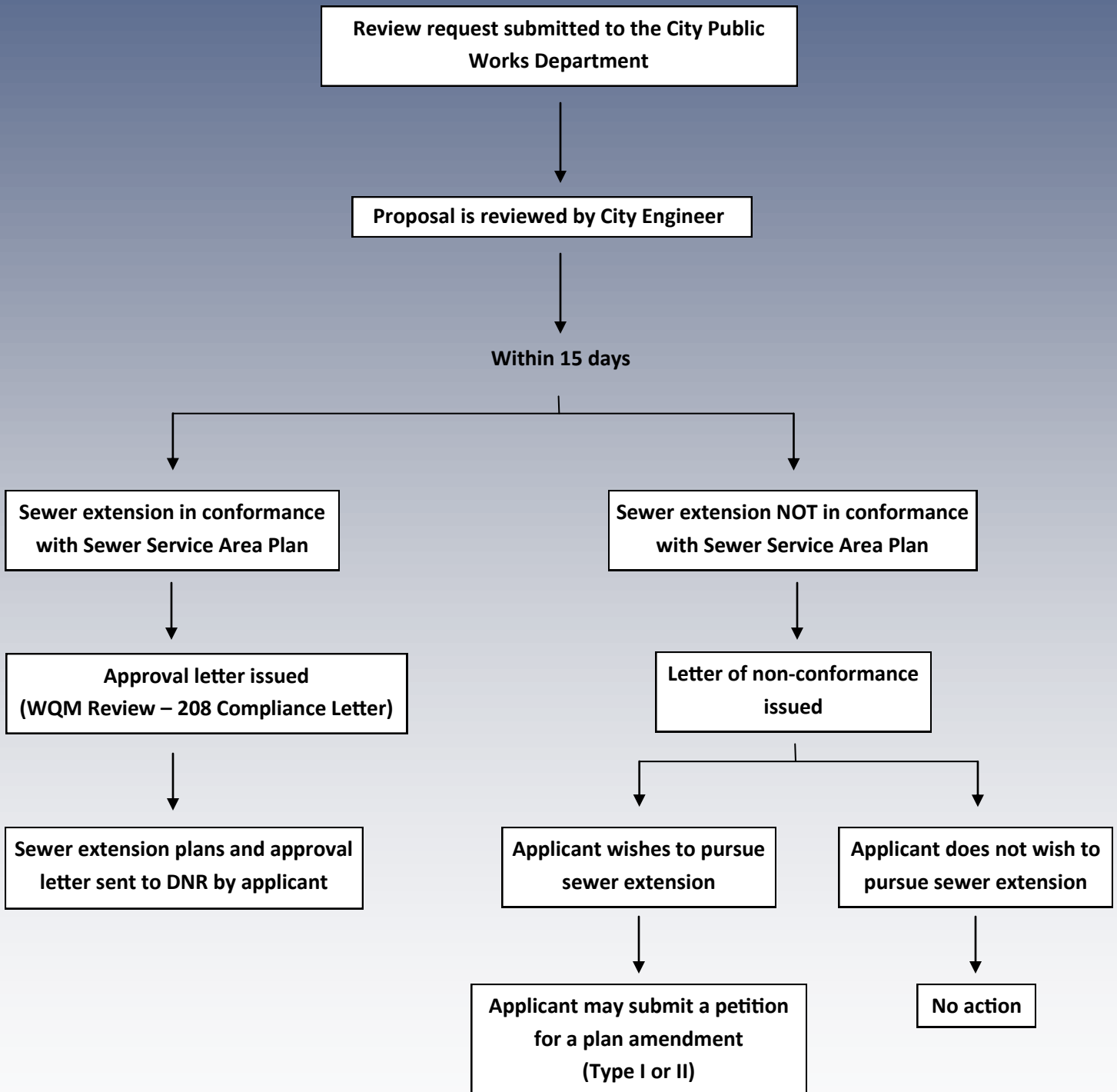
other feasible options for avoiding it, but the proposed sewer development must not be in the ESA. The following paragraphs outline the local review process (see also Figure 3):

- 1) The Applicant submits a written request (letter or email) and simple plan map of the proposed sewer extension and the immediate and ultimate service area for the proposed extension to the City of Merrill Public Works Department. The submittal shall also include a brief description of size, beginning and ending points and type of structures to be served. To avoid unnecessary project delays, this submittal should be made early in the planning process, prior to completing detailed plans and specifications for the project. Submitting the plans early will ensure that local review is made prior to submittal of the plans to the State and that costly detailed sewer design and specification documents are not prepared for areas that do not conform to the Sewer Service Area Plan and are subsequently rejected by the State.
- 2) The City Engineer will review all submissions and will provide the Applicant with a review letter (aka 208 Conformance Letter) within 15 days of receipt. If the proposed sewer extension is in conformance with the Plan, the letter from the City Engineer should be attached to the sewer extension plans which are submitted to the State by the applicant.
- 3) If the proposed sewer extension is not in conformance with the Plan or if there are questions about consistency, the Applicant will be notified by letter from the City of Merrill Public Works Department within 15 working days after receipt of the proposal.
- 4) If the proposed extension is not in conformance with the approved Plan, the Applicant should determine if it wishes to further pursue the sewer extension proposal. If not, no further action is necessary.
- 5) If the proposal is to be pursued, the Sewer Service Area Plan must be amended in order for the proposed extension to be in conformance. The process for amending the Plan is contained in Section 9.5, below. With the approval of the appropriate amendment, the City of Merrill Public Works Department may issue the letter of conformance for the sewer extension.

FIGURE 3

# City of Merrill

## Sewer Extension Review Process



Please contact the City Public Works Department at (715) 536-5594 with any questions.

### **9.3 REVIEW OF PLUMBING PLANS SUBMITTED FOR STATE APPROVAL**

Plumbing plans for certain types of plumbing installations may require a conformance letter under Wisconsin Administrative Code Chapter SPS 382.20(4). Before the Department of Safety and Professional Services can approve the plumbing plans, the contractor needs a conformance letter stating that the proposed structure is within the sewer service area but not within an environmentally sensitive area. The review procedure for such plumbing plans follows the same outline as for sewer extensions, above.

### **9.4 OTHER REVIEWS**

From time to time, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) or other state agency may request / require review of various activities related to sewer service, but not specifically identified within this Plan. These reviews should parallel procedures established in this Section. If it is determined that the requested review does not fit within guidelines of this plan, the Merrill Area Sewer Service Area Policy Advisory Committee (PAC) should meet to discuss and make a recommendation.

### **9.5 MS4 Permit**

The City holds a Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4) Permit. While the MS4 permit is not directly affected by the SSA Plan, any construction projects over an acre, cumulatively associated with the implementation of the plan will need to obtain a Stormwater Construction Permit (Notice of Intent/NOI). Any updates to the storm sewer system will need to be documented in the MS4 permit supporting documents and provided in the Annual Report.

### **9.6 AMENDMENT PROCESS**

#### **9.6.1 INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this section is to detail the process to be followed in amending this Plan, a process which is essential for maintaining a service area which is in the best interest of the communities in the Merrill area and in the best interest of the area's water quality. Amendments will provide communities and private developers with the needed flexibility to incorporate unanticipated community growth, additional technical data, changing community trends and continuous public input into the sewer service area planning process. The City of Merrill, in conjunction with the North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (NCWRPC) will administer the amendment process, and the City of Merrill will

maintain the records of boundary amendments and incorporate those amendments on the service area map and in the text of the Plan during the updating process.

There are two types of amendments that can be used to modify the service area boundaries. The first, a "Type I Amendment", involves a situation where the service boundary is changed, but the service area acreage is not increased. Under these circumstances, the administrative procedure for acting on the local service area boundary changes would be similar to that used for local zoning ordinance amendments with input from the surrounding / affected communities.

The second type of boundary amendment, a "Type II Amendment", would increase the service area acreage. The primary justification for a Type II Boundary Amendment is for unanticipated new population growth or large commercial/industrial development to be served by sanitary sewers above that which was projected in the Plan. In all likelihood, if the Plan is updated regularly there will not be any amendment of this type. However, if there is a need for this type of amendment, the Sewer Service Area Policy Advisory Committee (PAC) would hear and make recommendation on the proposed boundary expansion.

Both types of amendment procedures were developed to provide a fair and reasonable means of reviewing service area boundary changes. These procedures include public notice, public hearings and public records of the hearing proceedings.

Service area boundary amendment standards were established to provide a broad framework for analyzing the merits of proposed amendments and to identify basic parameters for the two types of amendments. These amendment standards are presented below and the detailed procedures for both types of amendment follow.

#### 9.6.2 AMENDMENT STANDARDS

In order to provide an equitable and uniform basis for revising the sewer service boundaries, all proposed boundary amendments must meet standards 1 through 3 below, as well as standard 4 (Type I) or 5 (Type II). Annexations or detachments of territory, as defined in Chapter 66, Wis. Stats., within the boundaries of the sewer service area do not constitute amendments to the service boundaries and are therefore not subject to the amendment procedures.

- 1) There will be minimal adverse impacts on water quality as a result of development stimulated by the amendment.

- 2) Existing or planned sewage facilities and interceptors must have sufficient capacity to treat the projected wastewater flows generated by the added territory.
- 3) The boundary amendment must be in general conformance with adopted County or local community development or land use plans and the established goals and objectives of this Plan.
- 4) The configuration of sewer service area boundaries may be modified provided there is no increase in the total acreage projected in the Plan for the service area (Type I) and modifications of the boundary promote cost-effective, orderly and logical extension of sewer development. This type of amendment would most likely occur where development in a particular location abuts the current limits of the service area; a developer or municipality proposes an additional development beyond this boundary in conformance with adopted County or local plans; and there are adequate existing or planned sewer facilities to serve the needs of the area added. Since this type of boundary amendment does not involve an increase in the total service area acreage, an area which is equal to the amount of land added must be removed from the service area.
- 5) The established acreage of the service area may be increased by amending the service boundary (Type II) only when it can be demonstrated to meet one of the following criteria:
  - A. There is a documented need for a sanitary sewer collection system for areas of existing development.
  - B. There is a documented need for sanitary sewer to serve a proposed unique facility or development.
  - C. There is a documented need for flexibility to accommodate unanticipated short-term development required for reasonable community growth that is consistent with adopted community plans.
  - D. An environmentally sensitive area is re-designated provided there are no significant adverse water quality impacts.
  - E. There is an error in the maps, data, projections or allocations of the adopted Plan.
- 6) Additions to the sewer service area must be contiguous with the existing boundary, and amendments shall not create voids in the service area.

### 9.6.3 AMENDMENT PROCEDURES

#### 9.6.3A TYPE I AMENDMENT

A Type I Amendment expands the sewer service area boundary in one location with an equivalent contraction in another. For every acre added to the service area, an area of equal size is removed. Type I Amendments result in a swap of area to generally maintain the total service area acreage.

The following procedure is to be used for a Type I Amendment (see also flowchart in Appendix D):

- 1) A petition to amend the sewer service area boundary is filed with the City of Merrill. The petition must include:
  - A. A map showing the location of the property with reference to the existing sewer service area boundary;
  - B. General development plans for the area including land use proposals, environmentally sensitive areas to be excluded, and a preliminary timetable for implementing the development plan;
  - C. Estimates of existing and anticipated population, wastewater generation and means of collection from the area; and
  - D. Other information deemed relevant to the application to help reviewers make a determination.
- 2) The City refers the petition to the affected communities and the NCWRPC for review and comment.
- 3) If the petition proposes an addition to the sewer service area, the NCWRPC, working with the City, shall propose an area of equal size for removal. Any affected community shall be asked for review and comment. Generally, land recommended for removal from the service area will have a low potential for development in the near future because of recent development trends in the community, inadequate urban services, unique environmental features, or poor site conditions due to slopes, soils or groundwater.
- 4) The NCWRPC prepares a report on the proposed amendment and consults with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR).
- 5) Within 60 days of the filing of the petition, the City Plan Commission holds a

public hearing and makes a recommendation on the proposed amendment following publication of a Class I Notice in accordance with Chapter 985, Wis. Stats. and including notification submitted to the surrounding affected communities. In formulating a recommendation, the Commission should consider:

- A. testimony received at the public hearing;
- B. comments from other local communities, the NCWRPC and the WDNR;
- C. information on the impact the amendment would have on sewer line and treatment plant capacity, water supply facilities and other needed services;
- D. conformance with community plans;
- E. development trends in the area;
- F. features of the physical environment; and
- G. conformance with the adopted Sewer Service Area Plan goals and objectives and the amendment standards.

A record of the public hearing proceedings and testimony shall be kept by the Plan Commission and a copy forwarded to the NCWRPC.

- 6) Following the public hearing, the recommendation of the Plan Commission is submitted to the City Council along with the hearing record and comments from other agencies and local communities.
- 7) The Council shall review the recommendation and take final action on the amendment. All or any part of the petitioned land may be added to the service area.
- 8) Amendments approved by the City shall be submitted to the NCWRPC within 30 days of approval. The NCWRPC shall transmit the amendment to the WDNR for final approval. (Exception reviews under the provisions of paragraph 10 of this subsection, below.)
- 9) The WDNR will review the amendment and notify the City and the NCWRPC of their decision. If the WDNR rejects the amendment, the City may appeal the decision under Section 9.6, below.
- 10) Where the proposal for a Type I amendment is to add an area of 10 acres or less in size and to remove an area of equal size, and neither the area to be added or removed contain any ESA lands, the final decision to approve the amendment may be made by the City Council. These amendments do not require WDNR review and approval, but formal notification,

including a map and background information, will be forwarded to the WDNR.

#### 9.6.3B TYPE II AMENDMENT

A Type II Amendment expands the sewer service area boundary without an equivalent contraction. Type II Amendments result in an increase in the total service area acreage.

It is anticipated that Type II Amendments will be relatively infrequent because the sewer service area boundaries will be periodically re-evaluated during the Plan update process. This update will, among other things, propose modifications to the service boundary based upon unanticipated growth occurrences. The following procedure is to be used for a Type II Amendment (see also flowchart in Appendix D):

- 1) A petition to amend the sewer service area boundary is filed with the City of Merrill. The petition must:
  - A. include all items A through D under Subsection 9.5.3A 1), above;
  - B. compare the population projections of the Plan with actual population increases in the community;
  - C. compare vacant land projections in the Plan with the actual amount of land vacant and anticipated population in the amendment area;
  - D. provide data on the current development density of the community; and
  - E. supply information on the capacity of existing sewer lines and treatment facilities to serve the area.
- 2) The City refers the petition to the affected communities and the NCWRPC for review and comment.
- 3) The NCWRPC prepares a report on the proposed amendment and consults with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR).
- 4) Within 60 days after receiving the petition, the Merrill Area Sewer Service Area Policy Advisory Committee (PAC), holds a public hearing and makes a recommendation on the proposed amendment following publication of a Class I Notice in accordance with Chapter 985, Wis. Stats. In formulating a recommendation, the Committee should consider:
  - A. testimony received at the public hearing;
  - B. comments from other local communities, NCWRPC and the WDNR;

- C. information on the impact the amendment would have on sewer line and treatment plant capacity, water supply facilities and other needed services;
- D. conformance with community plans.
- E. development trends in the area;
- F. features of the physical environment; and
- G. conformance with the adopted Sewer Service Area Plan goals and objectives and the amendment standards.

A record of the public hearing proceedings and testimony shall be kept by the City of Merrill and forwarded to the NCWRPC.

- 5) Following the public hearing, the recommendation of the Sewer Service Area Policy Advisory Committee (PAC) is submitted to the Merrill City Plan Commission along with the hearing record and comments from other agencies and local communities for review and comment. The Plan Commission comments, along with the other supporting material, are then submitted to the City Council.
- 6) The Council shall review the recommendation and take final action on the amendment. All or any part of the petitioned land may be added to the service area by the City Council.
- 7) Amendments approved by the City shall be submitted to the NCWRPC within 30 days of approval. The NCWRPC shall transmit the amendment to the WDNR for final approval.
- 8) The WDNR will review the amendment and notify the City and the NCWRPC of their decision. If the WDNR rejects the amendment, the City may appeal the decision under Section 9.6, below.

#### 9.6.3C      OTHER PLAN AMENDMENTS

Except for sewer service area boundary changes which follow the specific procedures above, any other amendments to this Plan will require review and recommendation of the Merrill Area Sewer Service Area Policy Advisory Committee (PAC).

Proposed amendments should be submitted to members of the PAC at least one week prior to a meeting at which the amendment is expected to be reviewed. Amendment recommendations by the Committee will be transmitted to City Plan Commission for action and sent by the NCWRPC to the WDNR for review and final approval.

## **9.7 APPEAL RIGHTS**

Wisconsin statutes and administrative rules establish time periods within which requests to review department decisions must be filed. For judicial review of a decision pursuant to ss. 227.52 and 227.53, Wis. Stats., a party has 30 days after the decision is mailed, or otherwise served by the department, to file a petition with the appropriate circuit court and serve the petition on the department. Such a petition for judicial review must name the Department of Natural Resources as the respondent.

To request a contested case hearing pursuant to s. 227.42, Wis. Stats., a party has 30 days after the decision is mailed, or otherwise served by the department, to serve a petition for hearing on the Secretary of the Department of Natural Resources. All requests for contested case hearings must be made in accordance with s. NR 2.05(5), Wis. Adm. Code, and served on the Secretary in accordance with s. NR 2.03, Wis. Adm. Code. The filing of a request for a contested case hearing does not extend the 30-day period for filing a petition for judicial review.

## **9.8 PLAN UPDATE**

The SSA Plan is reviewed periodically by the City, the PAC, the NCWRPC and the WDNR. If it is determined that a major update of the sewer service area plan is required, the update should include the following as a minimum:

- A review and update of population and the demographic projections.
- A review of population densities, household size changes and urban development trends in the area.
- The impact of major land use changes or developments in the urban area should be assessed.
- A review of any significant changes to environmentally important lands in the area.
- Revisions to the goals and objectives of the Plan to reflect changing conditions, trends and socio-economic atmosphere.
- A brief description of relevant events occurring during the preceding years which impact on area-wide water quality management planning.

- A brief description of any amendments to the Plan and service area boundaries made since the last update.
- A revised service area boundary extended to accommodate the urban area's anticipated population.
- A review of changes in the institutional structure for Plan review and implementation.

Updates of the Merrill Area Sewer Service Area Plan should be coordinated by the City of Merrill and the North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (NCWRPC).

APPENDIX A  
MERRILL SEWER SERVICE AREA PLAN

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Planning Process Documentation

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**CITY OF MERRILL  
CITY PLAN COMMISSION  
TUESDAY, MARCH 3, 2026 MINUTES  
REGULAR MEETING    CITY HALL COUNCIL CHAMBERS    6:00 PM**

- I. **Call to Order** Mayor Hass called the meeting to order at 6:00 pm  
Present: Mayor Hass, Melissa Schroeder (remote), Alli Henkelman, D8  
Alderperson Rutkowski, Ralph Sturm, Jim Finucan  
Present Not Voting: Building Inspector/Zoning Administrator Darin Pagel, City  
Administrator/Public Works Director/City Engineer Rod Akey, City Clerk Anderson-  
Malm, Anthony Baumann (Town of Merrill), Matt Leder (Town of Scott), Steve  
Uttech (Town of Pine River), Darryl Landeau (North Central WI Regional Planning  
Commission)  
Excused: Chad Krueger
- II. **Minutes from Previous Meeting**
  1. **Consider placing the minutes from the February 3rd meeting on file**  
- (Schroeder/Henkelman) motion/second to place minutes on file. The motion  
passed.
- III. **Public Hearing**
  1. **Public Hearing Notice** - City Clerk Anderson-Malm read the public hearing  
notice.
  2. **Update to the City of Merrill Sewer Service Plan originally adopted in  
1996 to protect water quality.** - (Finucan/Rutkowski) motion/second to open  
the public hearing. The motion passed. The public hearing started at 6:02 pm.  
Darryl Landeau - North Central WI Regional Planning Commission, gave an  
update regarding the Sewer Service Plan. The plan has been modernized  
from the 1996 version and was adjusted for procedural items and boundaries.  
Anthony Baumann - W4168 Cty Rd C - spoke regarding concerns about the  
plan. He addressed concerns of lack of communication and transparency with  
the three townships, the City of Merrill and North Central WI Regional  
Planning Commission. He had questions regarding the Little Florida mobile  
home park regarding their plans for sewer expansion. He also voiced  
concerns regarding annexation.  
Darryl Landeau readdressed the commission and responded to the concerns  
from the Town of Merrill representative.  
CA Akey discussed the Little Florida portion of the concerns. The City of  
Merrill would extend the sewer on city property and Little Florida owners  
would cover their area. The owners of Little Florida would be responsible for  
contacting the townships for approval. The city is looking into any back  
payments that may be owed to the townships. He also stated this plan is  
required by the DNR and EPA. The townships are not required to vote on this  
plan and this is not the next step in annexation.  
Zoning Administrator Pagel stated the sewer plan was adjusted with the  
Nickolas and NorTrac additions.

Commission member Sturm asked questions regarding the Little Florida concerns which were answered by CA Akey.

Following discussion, (D8 Alderperson Rutkowski/Henkelman) motion/second to approve the City of Merrill Sewer Service Plan and forward to the Common Council with a recommendation. The motion passed.

(Henkelman/Sturm) motion/second to close the public hearing. The motion passed, and the public hearing closed at 6:18 pm.

- 3. An amendment to M.M.C. Section 113-317(n) for the removal of Conditional Use language.** - (Finucan/Henkelman) motion/second to open the public hearing. The motion passed. The public hearing opened at 6:25 pm. Building Inspector/Zoning Administrator Pagel explained the conditional use language ordinance revisions. Shipping containers remain as temporary use. There was no one to speak for or against the ordinance language revision. (Henkelman/Sturm) motion/second to close the public hearing. The motion passed, and the public hearing closed at 6:27 pm. (Mayor Hass/Schroeder) motion/second to approve the amendment and forward it to the Common Council. The motion passed.

**IV. Public Comment** There was no public comment.

- V. Adjournment** (Henkelman/D8 Alderperson Rutkowski) motion/second to adjourn. The motion passed. The meeting was adjourned at 6:29 pm.

Minutes respectfully submitted by City Clerk Anderson-Malm

*Minutes are in draft form until approved at the next scheduled meeting.*

**CITY OF MERRILL**  
1004 EAST FIRST STREET  
MERRILL, WI 54452

**NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARINGS**

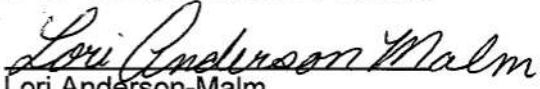
All persons interested will be given an opportunity to be heard at a public hearing to be held by and before the City Plan Commission of the City of Merrill, Wisconsin, commencing at **6:00 p.m. on Tuesday, March 3, 2026 in the Council Chambers, City Hall**, 1004 East First Street, Merrill, Wisconsin, on the following proposed matters, to wit;

- 1.) A Public Hearing to consider an update to the City of Merrill Sewer Service Plan originally adopted in 1996 as required by the Federal Clean Water Act and State Administrative Code N.R. 121 to protect water quality.
- 2.) A Public Hearing to consider an amendment to M.M.C. Sec. 113-317(n) for the removal of Conditional Use language.

Anyone having any questions regarding the hearing should contact Director of Public Works, Rod Akey at 715-536-5594.

Dated: February 13, 2026

CITY OF MERRILL, WISCONSIN

By:   
Lori Anderson-Malm  
City Clerk



**CITY OF MERRILL**  
**CITY PLAN COMMISSION**  
**AGENDA • TUESDAY, MARCH 3, 2026**

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|                        |                                   |                |
|------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------|
| <b>Regular Meeting</b> | <b>City Hall Council Chambers</b> | <b>6:00 PM</b> |
|------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------|

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To attend remotely call 973-457-8534 PIN 739 482 873 #

**I. Call to Order**

**II. Minutes from Previous Meeting**

1. Consider placing the minutes from the February 3rd meeting on file

**III. Public Hearing**

1. Public Hearing Notice
2. Update to the City of Merrill Sewer Service Plan originally adopted in 1996 to protect water quality.
3. An amendment to M.M.C. Section 113-317(n) for the removal of Conditional Use language.

**IV. Public Comment**

**V. Adjournment**

The Merrill City Hall is accessible to the physically disadvantaged. If special accommodations are needed, please contact the Merrill City Hall at (715) 536-5594.

**MERRILL SEWER SERVICE AREA  
POLICY ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

**AUGUST 20, 2025**

**MEETING MINUTES**

---

**1. Welcome and Introductions**

The Policy Advisory Committee for the Merrill Sewer Service Area met on Wednesday, August 20, 2025 at City Hall, 1004 East First Street, Merrill at 5:30 pm. Those in attendance were as follows:

Rod Akey, City of Merrill

Tony Baumann, Town of Merrill

Randal Detert, Town of Scott

Steve Hass, City of Merrill

Darryl Landeau, NCWRPC

Ron Lemmer, Town of Scott

Gabe Steinagel, City of Merrill

Steve Uttech, Town of Pine River

**2. Review of Sewer Service Area Planning Regulations and Requirements**

Mr. Landeau of the NCWRPC provided an overview of Wisconsin's water quality planning framework, the federal requirements (Clean Water Act / Environmental Protection Agency compliance) that must be met, and the state administrative code that drives sewer service area planning. Members were referred to Section 1 of the draft plan report for further details on the planning process and regulatory requirements.

**3. Discuss Update of Marshfield Sewer Service Area Plan**

Mr. Landeau provided an overview of the process for updating and modernizing the existing 1996 vintage plan and described each section of the new plan, including its purpose. Because the official population projection for the city is negative, the overall size of the sewer service area cannot be increased. The group discussed the proposed additions and subtractions from the sewer service area. Mr. Akey pointed out some of the city's thinking behind the adjustments.

The following provides an overview of the adjustments and proposed changes in each area around the city. The attached map provides a visual representation of all proposed additions and deletions.

#### Town of Merrill

The Little Florida Mobile Home Park group within the Town of Merrill is in need of sanitary sewer service to address their failing septic systems and water quality issues. The most cost-effective solution is connection to the City of Merrill sewer system. The city has agreed to work with Little Florida cooperatively on a plan to allow connection to the city system to treat their wastewater at the city's Wastewater Treatment Plant without annexation.

Private sewer main will be extended by Little Florida to the city limits, and the city will extend a public sewer main to that point to make the connection. The area must be included within the sewer service area boundary for this extension to be approved by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. The Little Florida area is too far from the current city limits for annexation at this time, and the city has no current interest / plans to annex this area.

This is the only area of the Town of Merrill proposed for expansion of the sewer service area. The sewer service area is retracted in several areas of the Town of Merrill, the largest of which is about 40 acres at the US 51/CTH K interchange.

#### Town of Pine River

The area bordered by CTH G, USH 51 and STH 17 is part of an area of potential long-term commercial development for the city. Currently, approximately 30 acres at the north end of this area is outside the sewer service boundary. The sewer service area is proposed for expansion to include this area. This is the only area affected within the Town of Pine River.

#### Town of Scott

Some platted lots near the golf course are proposed for addition to the sewer service area. While there are no plans to extend sewer service to this area, the smaller lots may need sewer in the future.

The other area where the sewer service area was technically expanded is south of Heldt Street on either side of Scott Road. The previous service boundary did extend south of Heldt Road but bisected parcels creating a situation where some parts of property parcels were within the service area and some parts of those same parcels were out. This change brings consistency for parcel owners in an area where the city has received development inquiries.

These are the only areas of the Town of Scott proposed for expansion of the sewer service area. The sewer service area is retracted in several areas of the Town of Scott, the largest of which is about 13 acres stretched along Joe Snow Road east of CTH K.

There was open discussion by the group during which the following issues were brought up:

- Mr. Baumann was concerned about annexation, in general but in relation to Little Florida in particular.
- Mr. Landeau stated that annexation is a separate issue from the sewer service area process which only applies to whether or not an area may be served by the sewer system. And, while Merrill, like most cities, has a policy of not providing sewer without annexation, exceptions can be made at the city's discretion. Which is the situation with Little Florida where the city has agreed to provide the sewer service they need to address their problems without annexation at this time. However, inclusion of Little Florida in the Sewer Service Area is required to extend the sewer as planned.
- Mr. Akey stated that annexation of Little Florida is not feasible at this time under the current plan to be implemented between Little Florida and the city.
- Mr. Uttech asked about the effect of land use.
- Mr. Landeau indicated that sewer service area does not affect land use, and all applicable land use regulations still apply as they otherwise would.
- Mr. Uttech asked about "expansion" of the area with the population going down.
- Mr. Landeau responded that the overall size of the service area in acres is frozen at its previously established size and cannot increase in acreage due to the lack of new population growth. However, it can be adjusted within that acreage threshold. It's been nearly 30 years since the original boundary was set, and things change over time. The proposed changes reflect current thinking on areas more likely or less likely to need sewer service in the future. It does not mean there are existing plans to develop and/or annex a given area.
- Mr. Baumann felt he needed to consult with his town board.

#### 4. Consider Acceptance of the Merrill Sewer Service Area Plan Update for Submission to WDNR

Motion by Mr. Detert, seconded by Mr. Hass, to submit Town input on plan via email.  
Motion carried.

Editor's note: The following email responses were received from towns:

- "After review/discussion at the Town of Merrill Board meeting on September 8, 2025, the Town of Merrill Board decided to vote no on the City of Merrill Sewer Service Area Plan 2025-2050.

Any questions please contact the Town of Merrill through email: clerk-treasurer@townofmerrillwi.gov

Respectfully,  
Tony Baumann  
Town of Merrill Chairman”

- “Good Afternoon Darryl,  
With respect to the vote on the proposed Merrill Sewer Service Area Plan. I vote no on the proposed plan. I find that receiving the packet the afternoon of August 20, 2025 to have been too short of notice for voting on that date. I believe that I have heard statements about potential buyers of the Town of Scott property that was added to the plan was not transparent to the Town. The plan was developed with no apparent input from the surrounding communities. The topics that were covered including the allowing of the extension of the sewer north were obviously not discussed with the Town of Merrill, yet they were set for approval. I do understand that the input with the town is not required. That discussion is needed for respect and courtesy if nothing else.  
I have reached out to the people in the town and did get a very good response. That response was 100% no.  
I would like to meet and discuss a proposed plan that is acceptable to all.  
Thank you

Randal Detert  
Chairman  
Town of Scott  
Lincoln County, Wisconsin”

- The Town of Pine River decided to vote no on the proposed Merrill Sewer Service Area Plan because they feel there should be an agreement between the city and surrounding towns on “how far to go”, the Town sent a boundary agreement to the city a number of years ago and received no reply, and the town received no compensation for land annexed.

Steve Uttech, Chair Town of Pine River  
via telephone 10/8/25

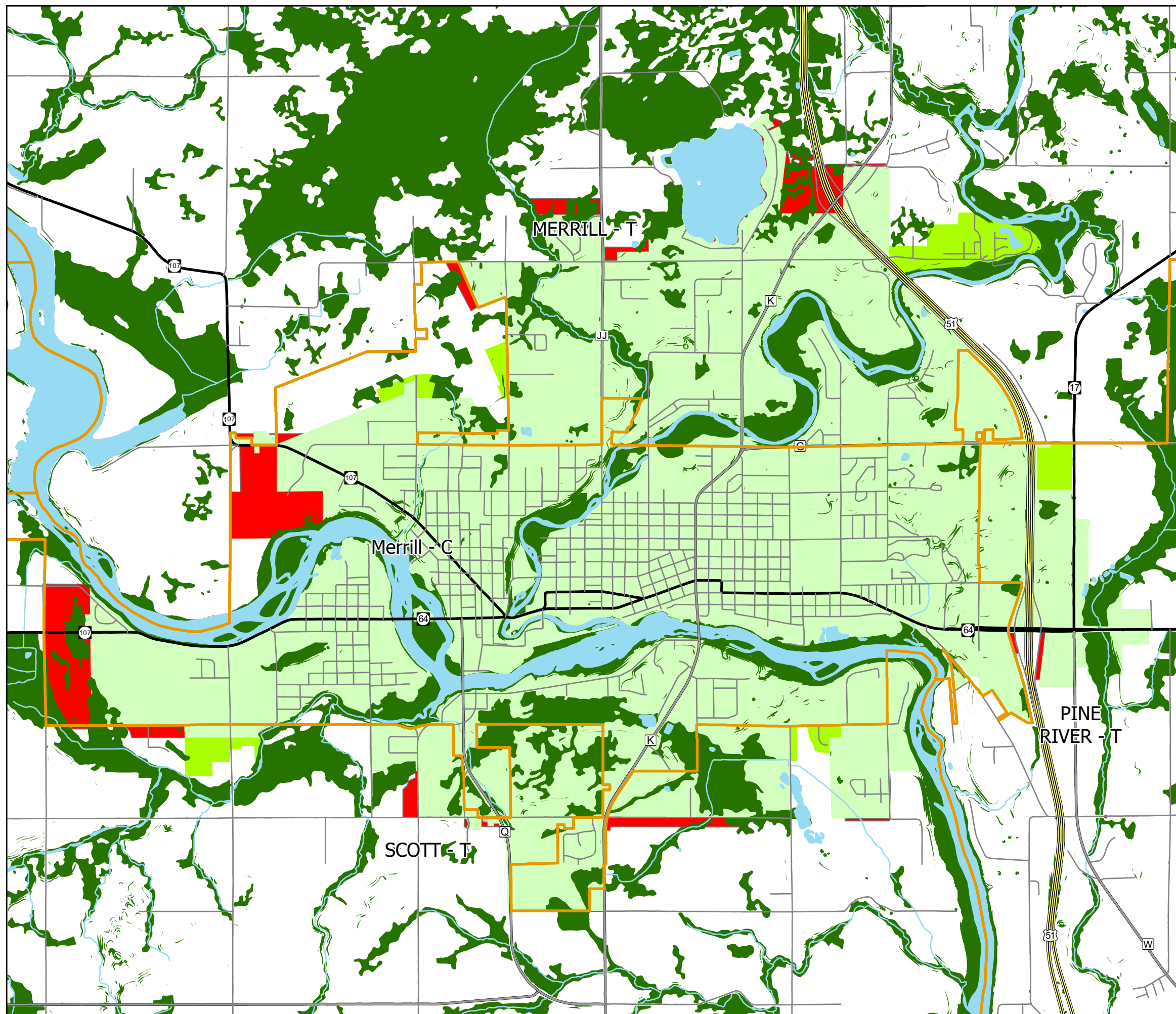
## 5. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 6:45 pm.

**Merrill Sewer Service Area  
Boundary Changes**

**Legend**

- Minor Civil Divisions
- U.S. Highways
- State Highways
- County Highways
- Local Roads
- Water
- Existing SSA
- New Addition
- New Deletions
- Environmentally Sensitive Areas



Prepared By:  
North Central Wisconsin  
Regional Planning Commission

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[illegible]**EMAIL** (or phone if no email)

City of Merrill

[illegible]

# Engineering

## Utility

## Streets

**Merrill Sewer Service Area Update Meeting 05/12/25**

[illegible]

**Merrill Sewer Service Area Update Meeting 04/20/25**

[illegible]

APPENDIX B  
MERRILL SEWER SERVICE AREA PLAN

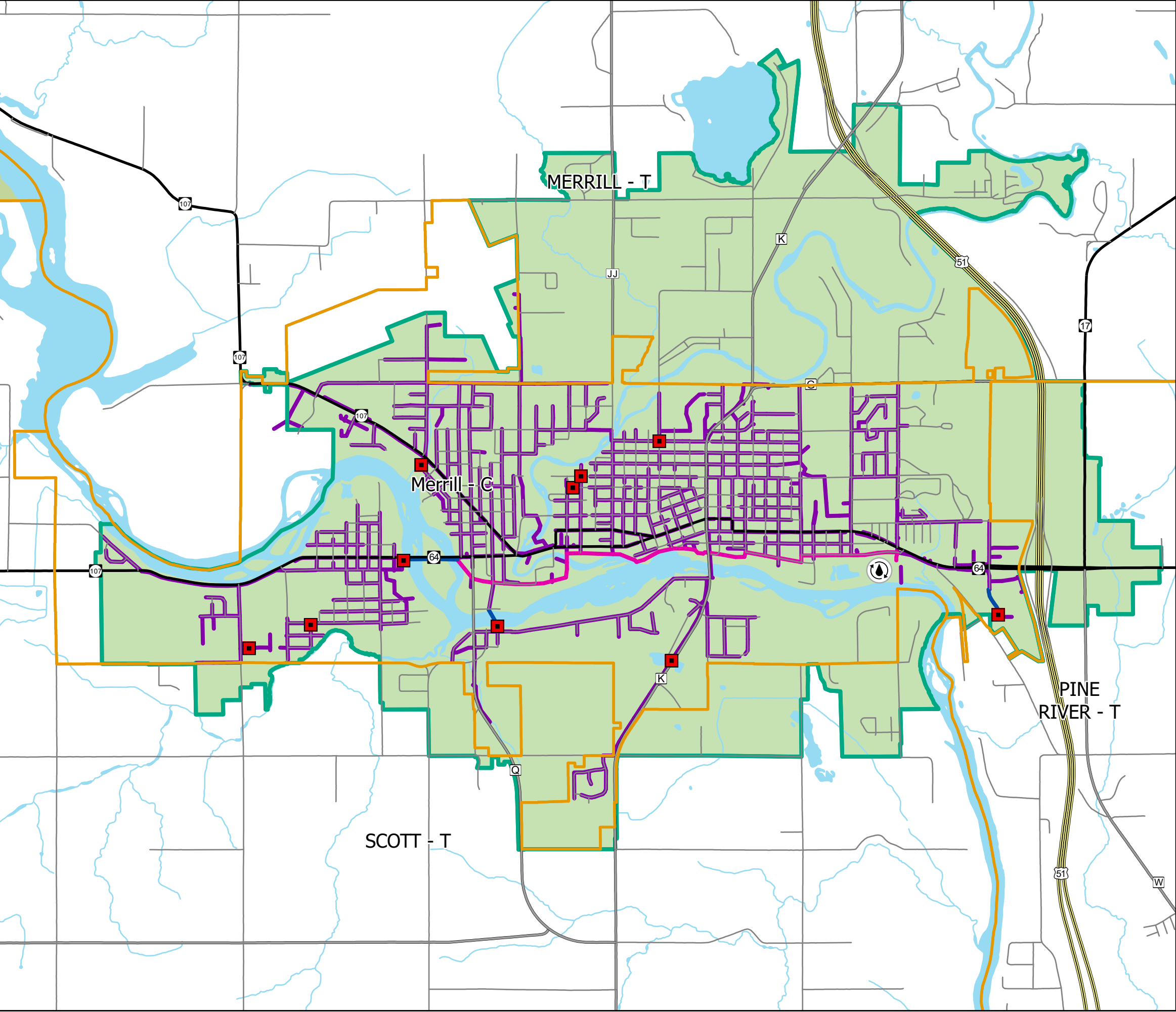
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Wastewater Facilities Map

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Merrill Sanitary Sewer System



Legend

- Minor Civil Divisions
- U.S. Highways
- State Highways
- County Highways
- Local Roads
- Water
- Gravity Sewer Main
- Interceptor
- Pressurized Sewer Main
- Lift Station
- Wastewater Treatment Plant
- SSA Boundary



Prepared By:  
North Central Wisconsin  
Regional Planning Commission

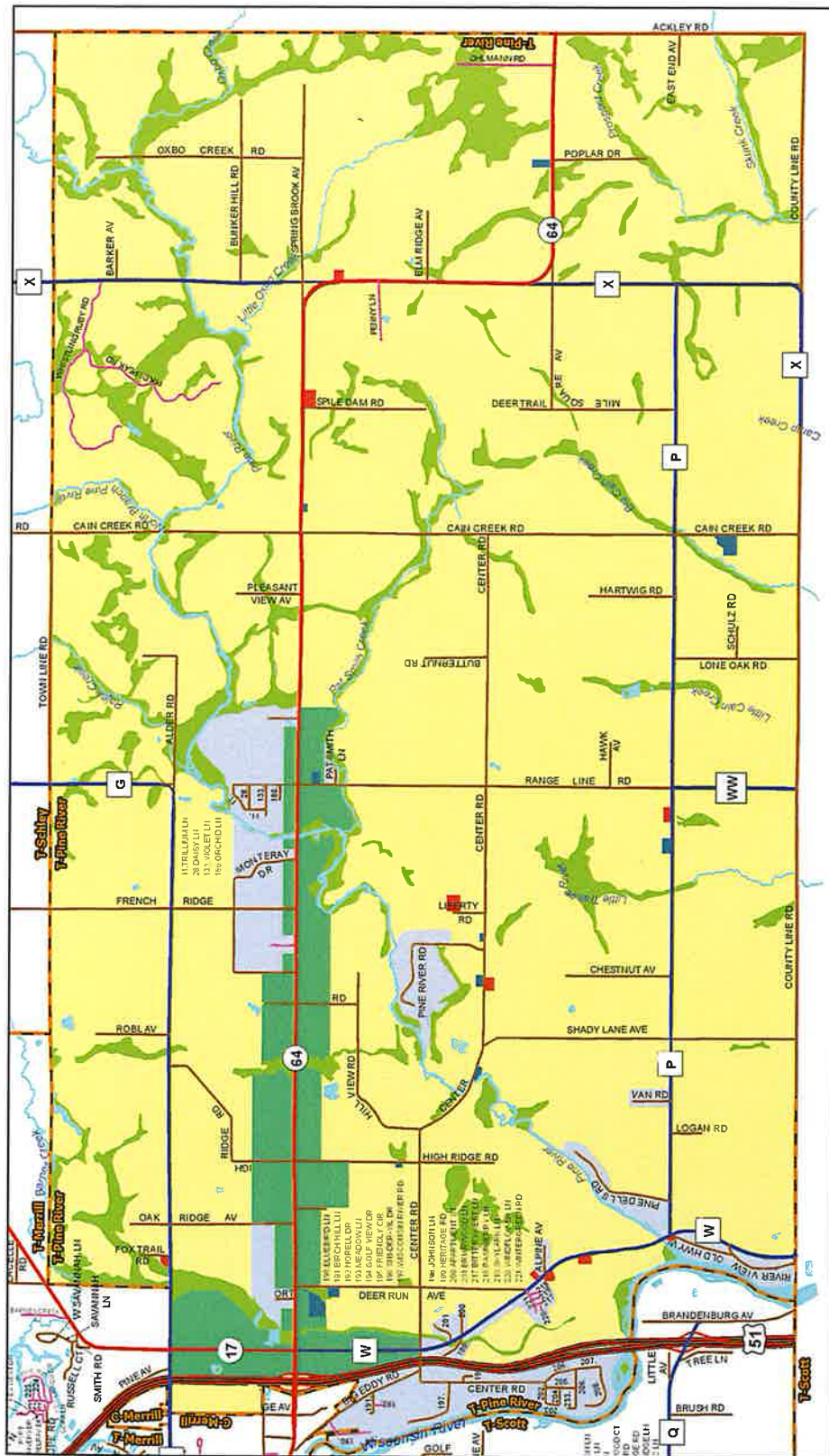
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APPENDIX C  
MERRILL SEWER SERVICE AREA PLAN

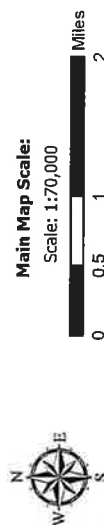
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Community Future Land Use Maps

DRAFT



## Town of Pine River Future Land Use



**Legend**

- US Highway
- State Highway
- County Highway
- Town Road
- Private Road
- Forest Road Gas-Tax
- Forest Road No-Gas-Tax
- Ramp

**Municipal Boundary**

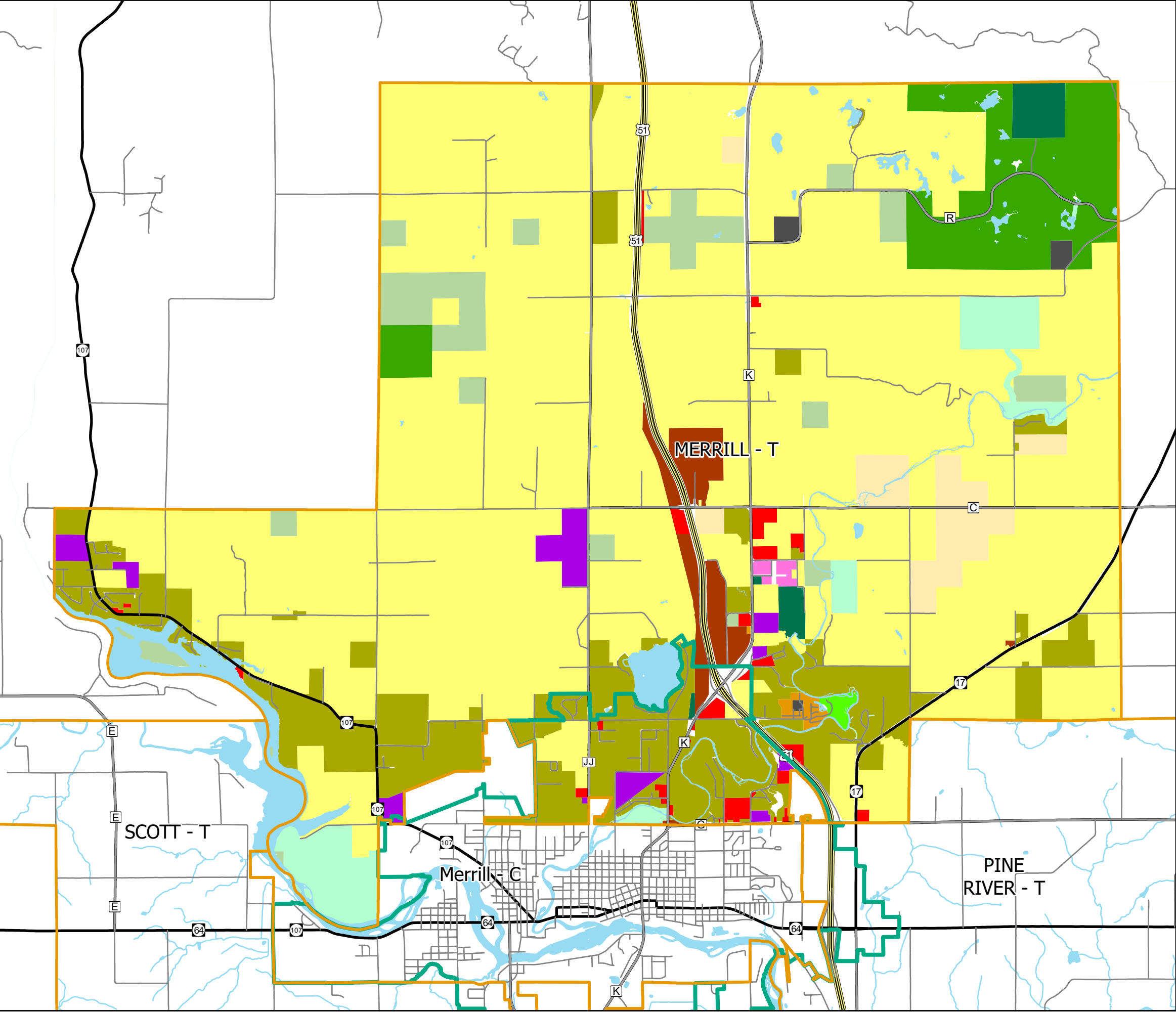
- Open Land
- Residential
- Commercial
- Crossroads Mixed Use
- Government / Institutional
- Water
- Wetland

**2019**

The information depicted on this map is a compilation of public record information including aerial photography and other base maps. No warranty is made, express or implied, as to the accuracy of the information used. The data layers are a representation of current data to the best of our knowledge and may contain errors. It is not a legally recorded document and should not be used for field-verified information. Map may be reproduced with permission of the Lincoln County Land Services Department, 801 North Sales St. Merrill, WI. 54452. Copyright © 2019 Phone (715) 539-1049.



Town of Merrill  
Future Land Use



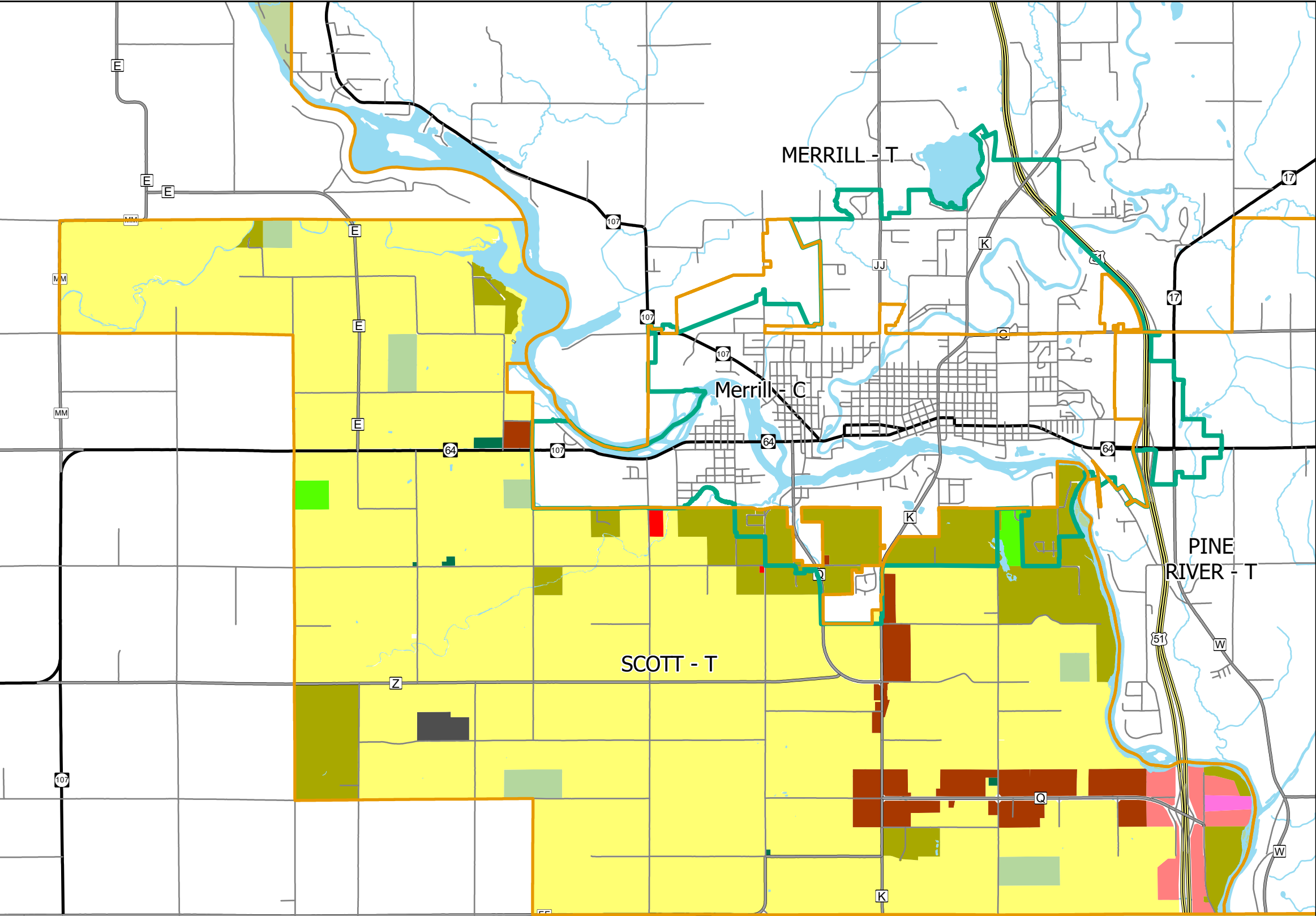
**Legend**

- Minor Civil Divisions
- U.S. Highways
- State Highways
- County Highways
- Local Roads
- Water
- Existing SSA
- Future Land Use**
  - Agriculture
  - Crossroads Mixed Use
  - Extraction
  - General Business
  - General Industrial
  - Institutional
  - Mixed Residential
  - Planned Business
  - Planned Industrial
  - Private Forest
  - Private Recreation
  - Public Forest
  - Public Recreation
  - Rural Lands
  - Rural Residential
  - Suburban Residential



Source: Lincoln County  
Comprehensive Plan

Town of Scott  
Future Land Use



**Legend**

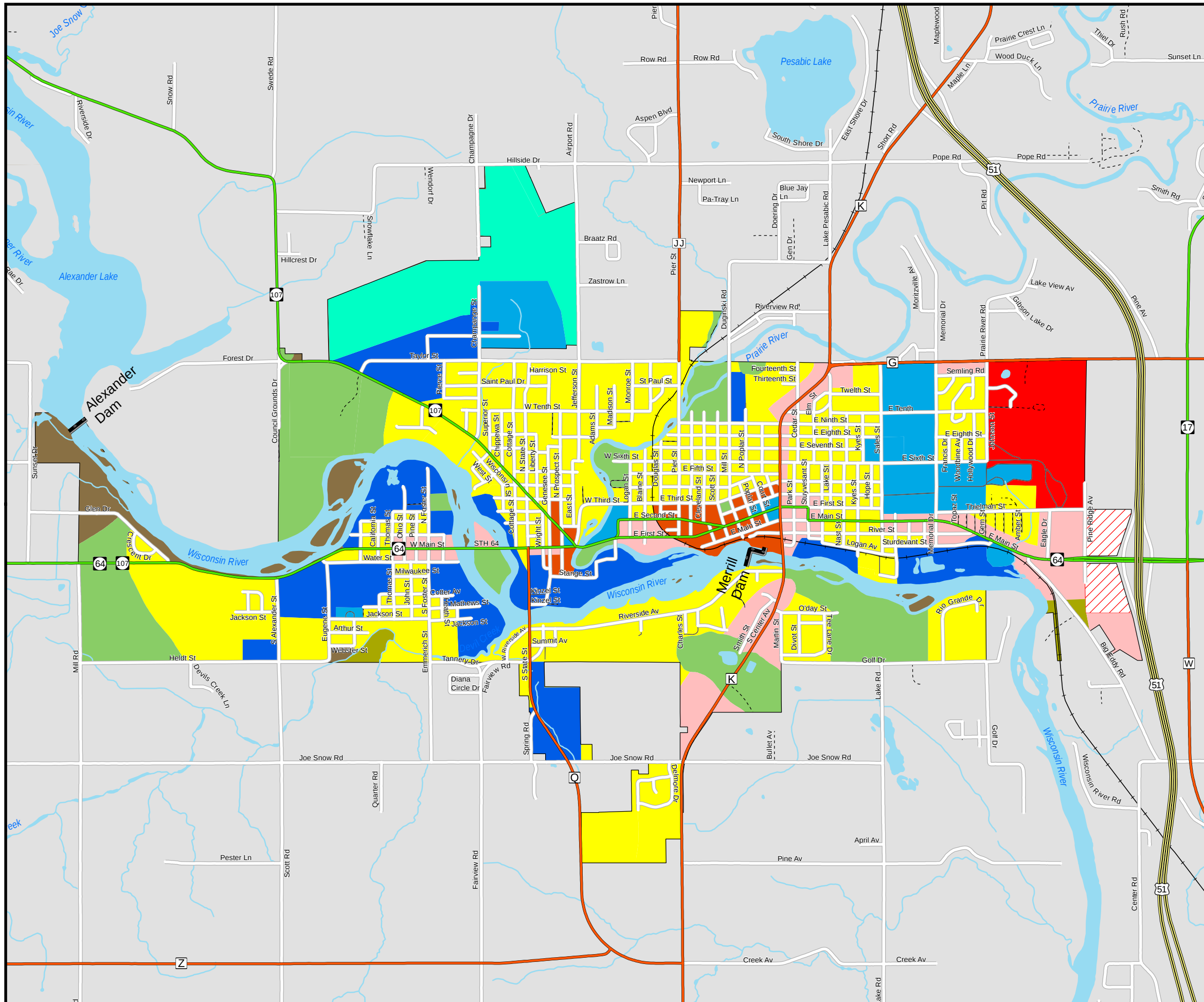
- Minor Civil Divisions
- U.S. Highways
- State Highways
- County Highways
- Local Roads
- Water
- Existing SSA

**Future Land Use**

- Agriculture
- Crossroads Mixed Use
- Extraction
- General Business
- General Industrial
- Institutional
- Mixed Residential
- Planned Business
- Planned Industrial
- Private Forest
- Private Recreation
- Public Forest
- Public Recreation
- Rural Lands
- Rural Residential
- Suburban Residential



Source: Lincoln County  
Comprehensive Plan

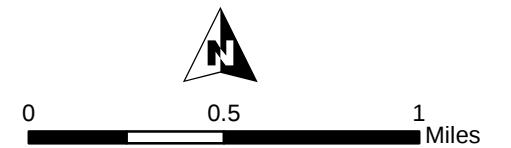


# Future Land Use Plan

## City of Merrill

### Legend

- US Highway
- State Highways
- County Highways
- Local Roads
- Private Roads
- Railroad
- Dams
- Water
- Agriculture / Forest
- Business Park
- Industrial
- Commercial
- Interchange Development
- Governmental / Public / Institutional
- Airport
- Mixed Use Commercial
- Neighborhood Residential
- Rural Residential
- Open Space / Preservation
- Transportation Corridors



Source: WI DNR, NCWRPC

This map is neither a legally recorded map nor a survey of the actual boundary of any property depicted. This drawing is a compilation of records, information and data used for reference purposes only. NCWRPC 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](mailto:staff@ncwrpc.org) - [www.ncwrpc.org](http://www.ncwrpc.org)

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APPENDIX D  
MERRILL SEWER SERVICE AREA PLAN

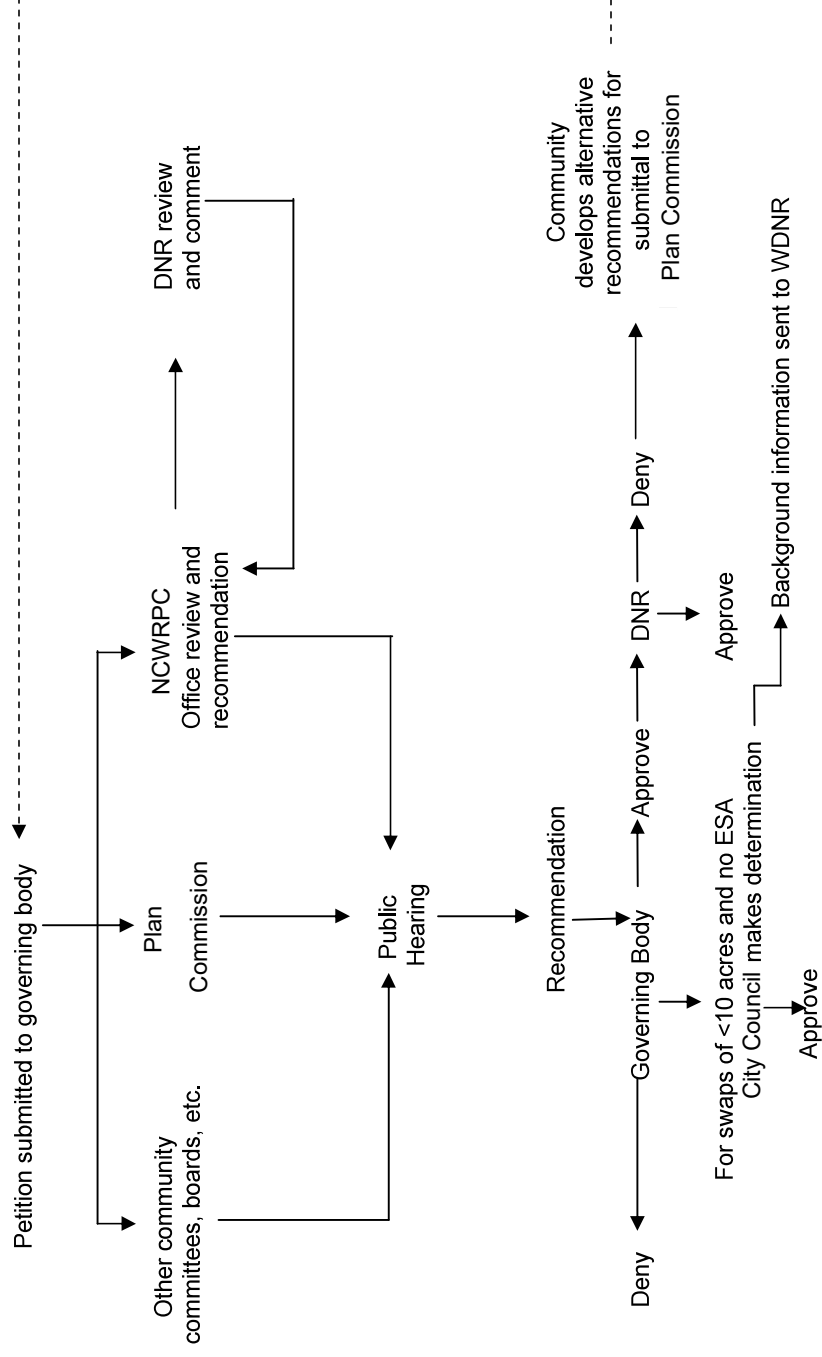
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SSA Amendment Process Flowcharts

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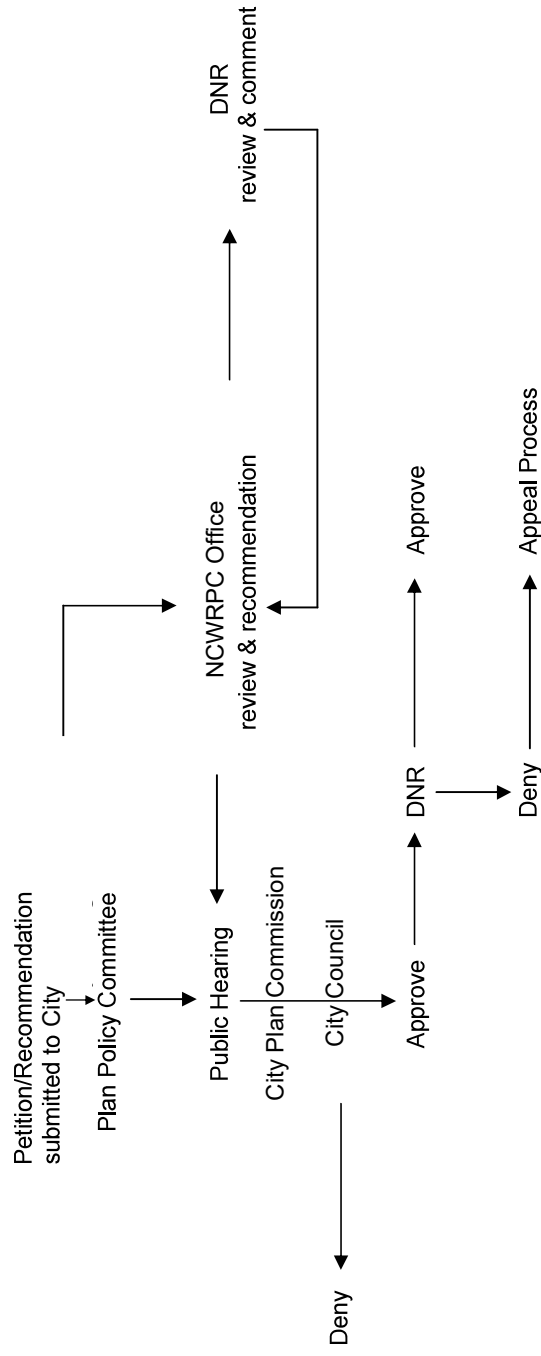
## FLOW DIAGRAM OF TYPE I AMENDMENT PROCESS



NOTE: Under a Type I Amendment, the acreage in the service area remains constant. An area is added to a sewer service area and an area of equal size is removed from the same sewer service area.

Type I Amendment Flow Diagram.

# FLOW DIAGRAM OF TYPE II AMENDMENT PROCESS



NOTE: Under a Type II Amendment, a community which is growing faster than projected in the plan may increase its service area if certain conditions are met.

Type II Amendment Process Flow Diagram