PLAN forward

Lincoln–Lancaster County
2050 Comprehensive Plan

The Lincoln-Lancaster County 2050 Comprehensive Plan is a roadmap to "plan forward", not only in time, but in concept, to envision a community that is Livable, Equitable, Thriving, Resilient, and Innovative.

Introduction

CITY of LINCOLN

LANCASTER COUNTY
EST. 1859

Land Acknowledgement

The City of Lincoln Land Acknowledgement Statement reads as follows:

We want to acknowledge that our community rests on the traditional lands of the Ponca, Omaha, Winnebago, Dakota and Otoe Peoples past and present, and honor with gratitude the land itself and the people who have stewarded it throughout the generations. This calls us to commit to work in partnership with our Indigenous Peoples, continuing to learn how to be better stewards of the land we now inhabit as well.

PlanForward is the Comprehensive Plan for the City of Lincoln and Lancaster County. PlanForward embodies Lincoln and Lancaster County's shared vision for the future, out to the year 2050. PlanForward acknowledges the importance and interconnectedness of economic, environmental, and socio-cultural domains, and the ways in which technology and public policy are applied and affect outcomes in these domains. PlanForward therefore is a combination of practicality and vision and provides guidelines for sustaining the rich mosaic that now characterizes our growing community. The core promise embedded in PlanForward is to maintain and enhance the health, safety, and welfare of our community during times of change, to promote our ideals and values as changes occur, and to meet the needs of today without sacrificing the ability of future generations to meet their needs.

For a “good quality of life,” a community has more than jobs, shelter, utilities, and roads — there are numerous services, education, historic, natural, and cultural resources that are fundamental to enriching lives in our One Community.

One of the defining themes in Lincoln and Lancaster County's history of comprehensive planning is the consistent commitment to maintaining and enhancing the community's health, safety, and welfare during times of change, while upholding our shared ideals and values. Today, our nation and local communities face new challenges that shape not only how we respond in the present, but how we plan for the generations to come.

Now more than ever our interconnectedness and action-oriented lenses of equity are vital for us individually and as One Community. As we adopt and implement PlanForward we intentionally want to pause to reflect and celebrate some of the unique mosaics of our One Community, Lincoln and Lancaster County:

...one public school district in Lincoln, One Community.

...the Largest Yazidi community in North America.

...welcoming visitors from across the country for the Josh fight.

...being recognized for having the most welcoming fan base in college football.

PlanForward embraces the rich mosaic of our community's evolving needs and represents a thoughtful partnership between practicality and vision. Planning for sustainable change requires patience, commitment, effective collaboration, and timing, in addition to recognizing and accepting when matters are not within our capacity.

The Lincoln-Lancaster County 2050 Comprehensive Plan is a roadmap to "plan forward," not only in time, but in concept, to envision a community that is:



Resilient a capacity to adapt to new challenges, ensure the security of physical cultural resources and sustainably meet the needs of current and future generations.

Innovative continuous improvement and innovation through the use of data, technology, smart city strategies, and problem solving.

Livable a safe and healthy environment that provides a high quality of life for all residents.

Thriving engage businesses, educational institutions, economic development efforts, labor representatives, and other stakeholders to ensure that the community prospers by remaining a place of economic opportunity, maintaining a positive a positive business environment, and addressing workforce needs.

Equitable provide meaningful access to all opportunities and establishes a culture of belonging, regardless of a person's identity (i.e. economic status, race, ethnic background, culture, religion, gender, sexual orientation, age or mental, physical or linguistic ability).



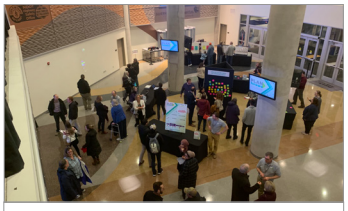
Growth Framework

1.5



Community Background

1.22



Public Engagement Process

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Growth Framework

The Growth Framework is a key element to turning the community vision into reality. The core elements of the Growth Framework are the Land Use Plan and Future Growth Tiers Map. The location, form, and timing of growth in Lincoln and Lancaster County are tied to the implementation of goals and policies across all topics discussed in PlanForward.



Fundamentals of Growth in Lancaster County

Lincoln and Lancaster County are One Community while containing a rich mosaic of households, living in a variety of urban and rural settings. We share a common bond and work cooperatively to promote future growth that offers new opportunities for living and working while conserving our local environmental and cultural resources for future generations.

In addition, Lincoln remains a unified community. The policies of a single public school district, drainage basin development, and provision of city utilities only within the city limits continue to be a positive influence and help shape the City for decades to come. These principles are sustained in order to preserve our ability to move forward as one community.

The following guiding principles for the development of the urban and rural environment are further expanded upon within the various sections of the plan.

The Urban Environment

- **Multi-directional contiguous growth.** Lincoln's future urban growth should generally occur in multiple directions around the existing city. Lincoln will continue to have managed and contiguous growth, including strengthening of our Downtown core. Lincoln's sense of community has been based on incremental, compact growth built on the foundations of established neighborhoods. Future growth will continue this traditional pattern and be linked to both the level of demand in the market and to the orderly extension of public improvements and services.
- **Gravity flow wastewater.** The City of Lincoln's wastewater collection system, in general, will continue to be a gravity flow system that is designed to use gravity as the main energy source to convey wastewater from the community to the water resource recovery facilities. This means that drainage basin boundaries are a primary guiding factor when determining availability of urban wastewater services and other infrastructure. This provides for contiguous growth, efficient long range planning, predictability for the private market, and cost-effective construction and management of the system.
- **Urban infrastructure availability.** The City of Lincoln will provide water and wastewater service only to properties located within the corporate limits of the city.
- **Maximized infrastructure investments.** The City of Lincoln's present infrastructure investment should be maximized by planning for well-designed and appropriately-placed residential and commercial development in existing areas of the city with available capacity. This can be accomplished by redeveloping underutilized

commercial centers into areas that include a mix of uses, and encouraging higher-density residential redevelopment in appropriate locations, including missing middle housing. New infrastructure investments to serve growth areas can be maximized by encouraging a higher density of both residential and commercial uses in these areas.

- **Downtown Lincoln.** Downtown Lincoln is the heart of our community, a unique common ground for all Lincoln and Lancaster County residents. Downtown Lincoln is becoming an increasingly attractive place to live, evolving into a vibrant mixed-use neighborhood where residents enjoy convenient access to housing, employment, dining, entertainment, and cultural amenities. At the same time, Downtown Lincoln belongs to all residents of Nebraska because “downtown” is synonymous with the University of Nebraska, state government, and the State Capitol building.



- **Commercial and industrial development.** New commercial and industrial development should be located in Lincoln and other incorporated communities. Lincoln has ample land area and infrastructure availability for commercial and industrial development. The situation is similar in most incorporated communities in the county. Rural areas of the county do not have access to urban infrastructure, and commercial or industrial development can add significant traffic and maintenance responsibilities to county roads.
- **Historic preservation.** Historic Preservation protects existing buildings and local landmarks that give a community its unique identity, building a strong sense of place, which is the deep emotional bond and pride people feel for their home. Without it, a town or city starts to look the same as any other. The Comprehensive Plan encourages the preservation and renewal of historic buildings, districts and landscapes, including rural landscapes. Development and redevelopment should respect historic precedents and building patterns to help maintain our communities' unique characteristics. Preservation is not just for grand mansions but also includes the everyday places that trigger memories for so many residents of Lancaster County.
- **Natural resource preservation.** Natural and environmentally sensitive areas should be preserved within and between neighborhoods. Conservation areas and open lands should be used to define and connect different neighborhoods. The natural topography and features of the land should be preserved by new development to maintain the natural drainageways and minimize land disturbance. The principles of conservation design should be followed when developing near areas with critical natural or cultural features.
- **One public school district.** Lincoln Public Schools is the only public school district within the City of Lincoln, and the Lincoln Public School boundary will continue to expand as the city limits of Lincoln expand.

The Rural Environment

- **Focus on agriculture.** Rural areas should be preserved for agriculture, a limited supply of low density residential, and other compatible land uses. Acknowledge the fundamental "right to farm" in agriculture districts.
- **Future urban growth.** Preserve areas for the future growth of incorporated towns in the county, including areas outside of the current one-mile zoning jurisdiction of certain towns. Areas within Lincoln’s growth tiers should be preserved as agriculture to allow for future urbanization.

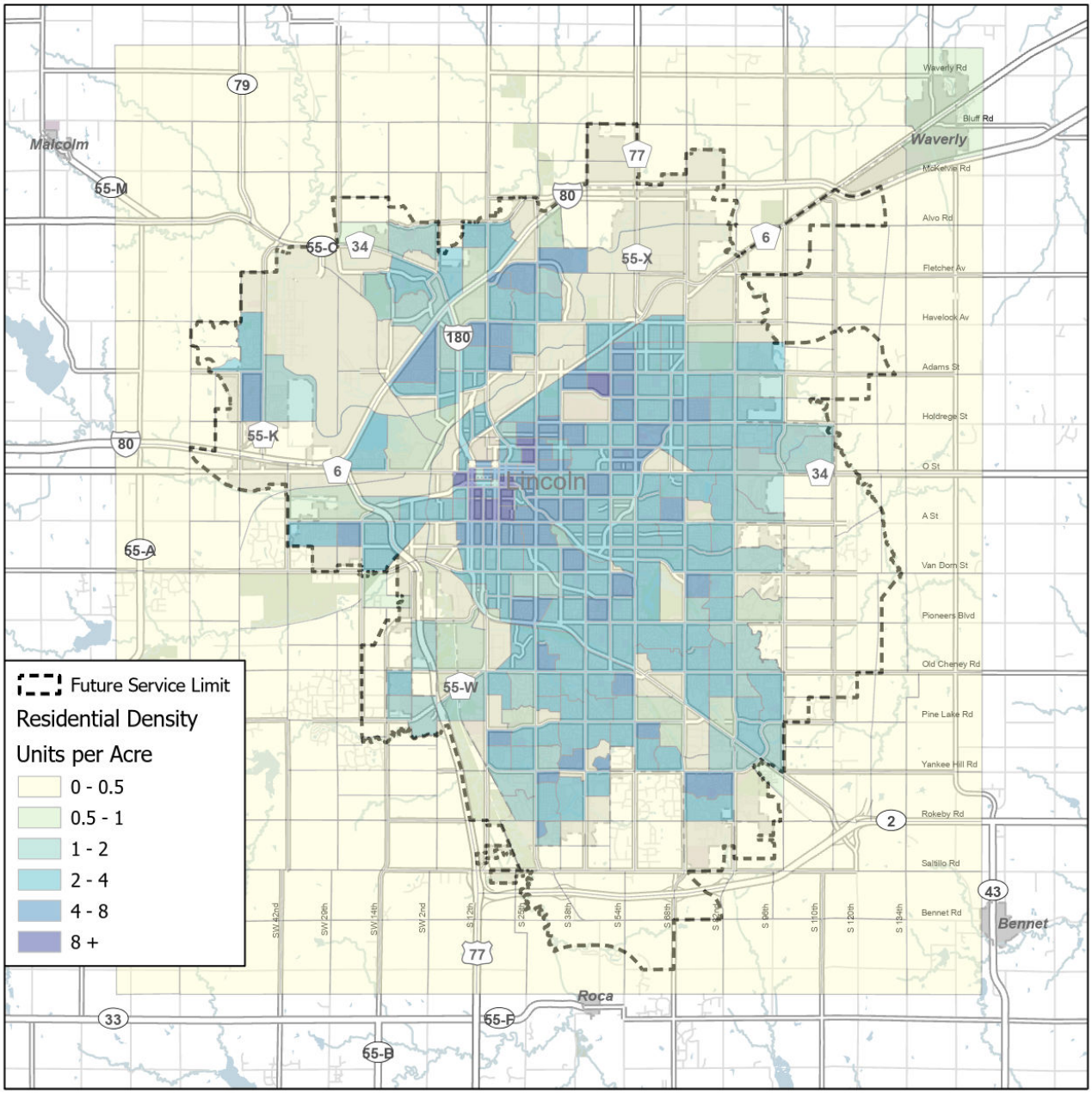
- **Natural resource preservation.** Ensure that acreage and rural development preserve and protect environmentally sensitive areas, and maximize the preservation of our nonrenewable resources.

The Community in 2050

The following assumptions provide the framework for growth in the 2050 plan. More information on population and demographic trends can be found in the *2050 Demographic Projections report.*

- Lancaster County is projected to add approximately 119,000 residents by 2050, with 107,000 of those new residents in Lincoln. The growth for both Lincoln and Lancaster County averages to roughly 1.05 percent per year.
- Lincoln will remain roughly 90.5 percent of the County's total population.
- Lancaster County is projected to add approximately 53,000 households by 2050, with 48,000 of those new households in Lincoln (roughly 1,600 new households per year).
- 25 percent of all new dwelling units in Lincoln will be infill, meaning they will be located within the existing city. This equates to roughly 12,000 infill units over the next 30 years. The infill assumption aligns with development trends in recent years and reflects a rising demand for more housing options in urban settings. More information about housing trends in Lincoln can be found in the *Residential Land Inventory Report*.
- New growth areas will have an average gross residential density of 4.0 du/acre. This aligns with development trends in recent years. Figure GF.a shows residential densities across Lincoln. Many of the existing areas have a gross density of at least 4.0 du/acre. In recent years the gross density of approved development plans in growth areas has also been 4.0 du/acre. Most edge areas are shown on this map at a lower density because they are not yet fully built-out. As more homes continue to be built and edge areas become more established, the density of 4.0 du/acre will continue to spread into growth areas.
- The population age 65 and above is projected to increase from 45,600 (14.2 percent of total) in 2020 to 74,900 (17 percent of total) in 2050. This contributes to the projected reduction in household size from 2.36 persons per household in 2020 to 2.30 persons per household by 2050. It also suggests that senior living options and high-quality healthcare will continue to be important during the planning period.
- The minority population is expected to increase from 20.5 percent of the county's total in 2020 to 35.3 percent of the county's total in 2050.

Figure Gf.a: Residential Density



What do these assumptions mean for the community over the next 30 years? Many families with children will likely desire suburban development similar to what is seen today, and the growth framework provides ample opportunity for traditional suburban development. However, there are indications that other segments of the population may have different housing needs. The large increase in households with a head of household over the age of 65 may create a demand for smaller dwellings with smaller yards, multi-family units such as apartments, condos and townhouses, or assisted living facilities. The younger segment of the population, particularly college-aged or recent college graduates, often express a desire for a more urban setting that includes access to transit, proximity to amenities such as shopping and dining, and smaller dwellings that don't require a great deal of time spent on maintenance.

The trend toward smaller average household sizes will also have an impact. Since the 1940s household size in Lancaster County has been steadily falling, from over 3 persons per household in the 1940s, '50s and '60s to 2.36 persons in 2020, down to a projected 2.30 persons in 2050. The decrease in household size will mainly be due to more single person households, as the senior population increases and the younger population waits longer to start families. It may also indicate an inclination toward smaller houses and more multi-family housing.

A third trend which may have an impact, although probably smaller than the others already mentioned, is the increasingly diverse racial and ethnic mix experienced in the community. It is unclear what effect an increasing racial and ethnic diversity will have on the housing patterns of the community, but there may be new markets for housing products not currently common in Lincoln. Immigrants from all over the world may bring a desire for community form that more closely resembles their former homeland, including multi-generational household arrangements.

E1: Great Neighborhoods and Housing and *E2: Infill and Redevelopment* discuss the development of different housing types across the community over the next 30 years.

Benefits of Well-Planned Growth

When planning for Lincoln's growth an emphasis on appropriately-placed and well-designed infill benefits the entire community by providing:

- **A focus on maintaining existing infrastructure.** A higher proportion of infill development allows the city to focus more funds on enhancing and maintaining current infrastructure and services.
- **Predictable and efficient provision of new infrastructure.** The City's policy of contiguous growth anchored by a gravity-flow wastewater system provides a cost-effective, predictable, and efficient way to construct and maintain urban infrastructure and services necessary to serve new growth areas.
- **Shorter automobile trips.** In general, with more infill there would be less distance between housing, jobs, and services. This would benefit all residents by reducing system-wide lane miles traveled: fewer drivers would need to make an "across town" commute, and people taking short trips would be more likely to use other modes of transportation, which would decrease added strain on the street network.
- I**ncreased viability for alternate modes of travel.** A higher proportion of infill supports multiple modes of transportation. Transit becomes more effective at higher densities, and increased infill development would create increased demand for more riders along existing routes. In addition, trail and on-street bicycle facility investments become more practical with more users. This is good not only for users of non-auto travel, but also for motorists as vehicular traffic growth and related congestion can be slowed.
- **Reduced parking needs.** Mixed use infill allows for shared parking with uses that share non-concurrent demand times. For example a building with a mix of commercial and residential uses could have a stronger commercial parking demand during the day and stronger residential parking demand in the evening. This shared parking approach provides more efficient use of land, reduces unnecessary pavement, and helps limit sprawl.
- **Reduced carbon emissions.** Shorter automobile trips and more users of alternative transit will help to reduce the community's carbon footprint over the next 30 years.
- **Balanced growth throughout the community, across both existing areas and new growth areas.** Continued investment within the city ensures that our existing neighborhoods and commercial areas remain vibrant and desirable locations. More "rooftops" near existing commercial areas help to support continued commercial investment.

- **Preservation of surrounding rural areas.** Increased infill in Lincoln will help preserve the rural character of Lancaster County, including the preservation of productive farmland and sensitive natural environments.

Land Use Plan

There is one land use plan for both the City of Lincoln and Lancaster County. The land use plan displays the generalized location of each land use. It is not intended to be used to determine the exact boundaries of each designation. The area of transition from one land use to another is often gradual. The Comprehensive Plan also encourages the integration of compatible land uses, rather than a strict segregation of different land uses.

Individual proposals for land use changes should be evaluated using best available information. Issues such as the presence of floodplains, effect on neighboring land uses, and preservation and protection of natural resources are among the considerations that should be reviewed in making specific land use decisions.

More information about how the Land Use Plan was determined is in the *Growth Scenario Report*.

Figure GF.b: 2050 Future Land Use Plan

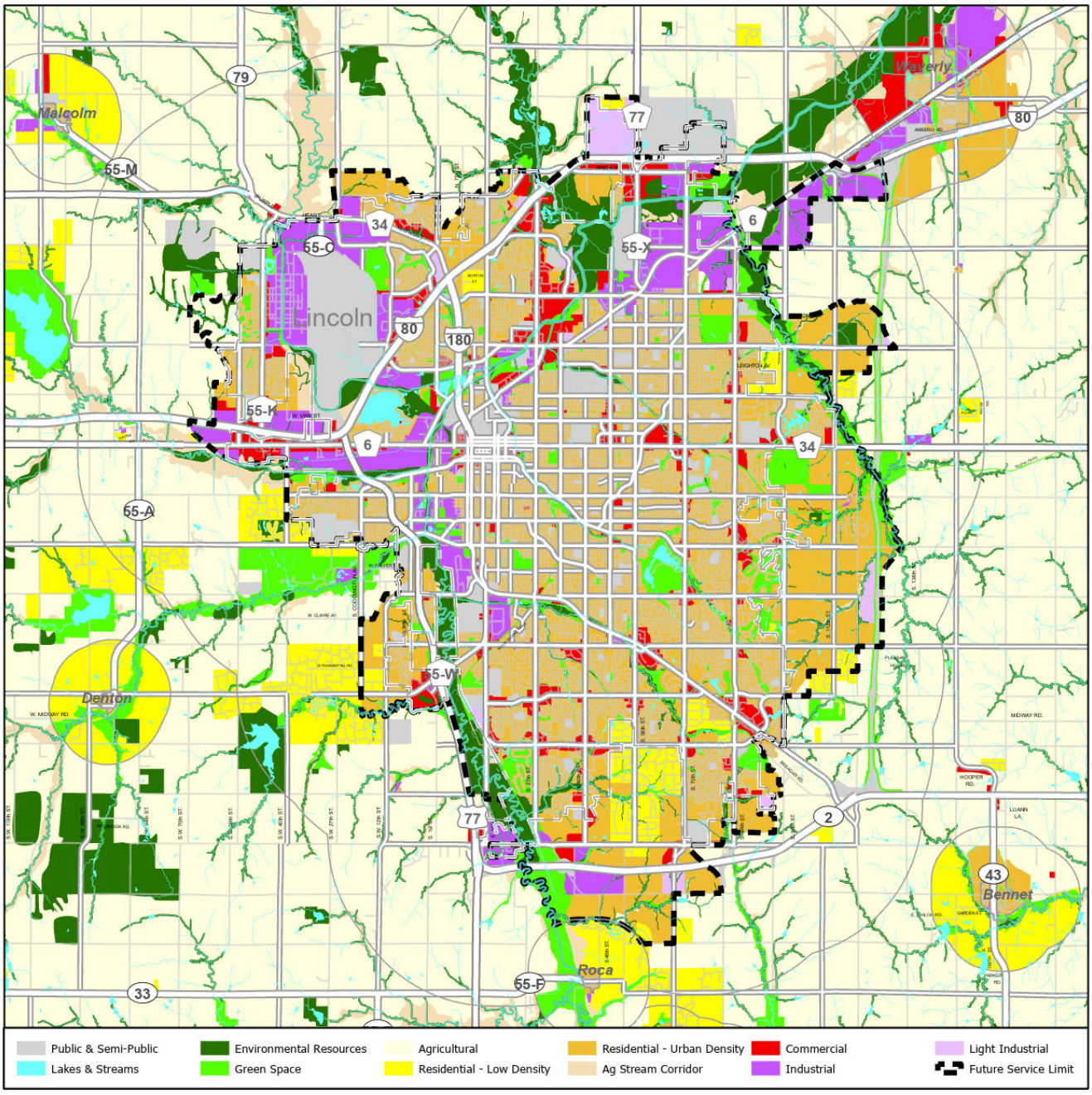
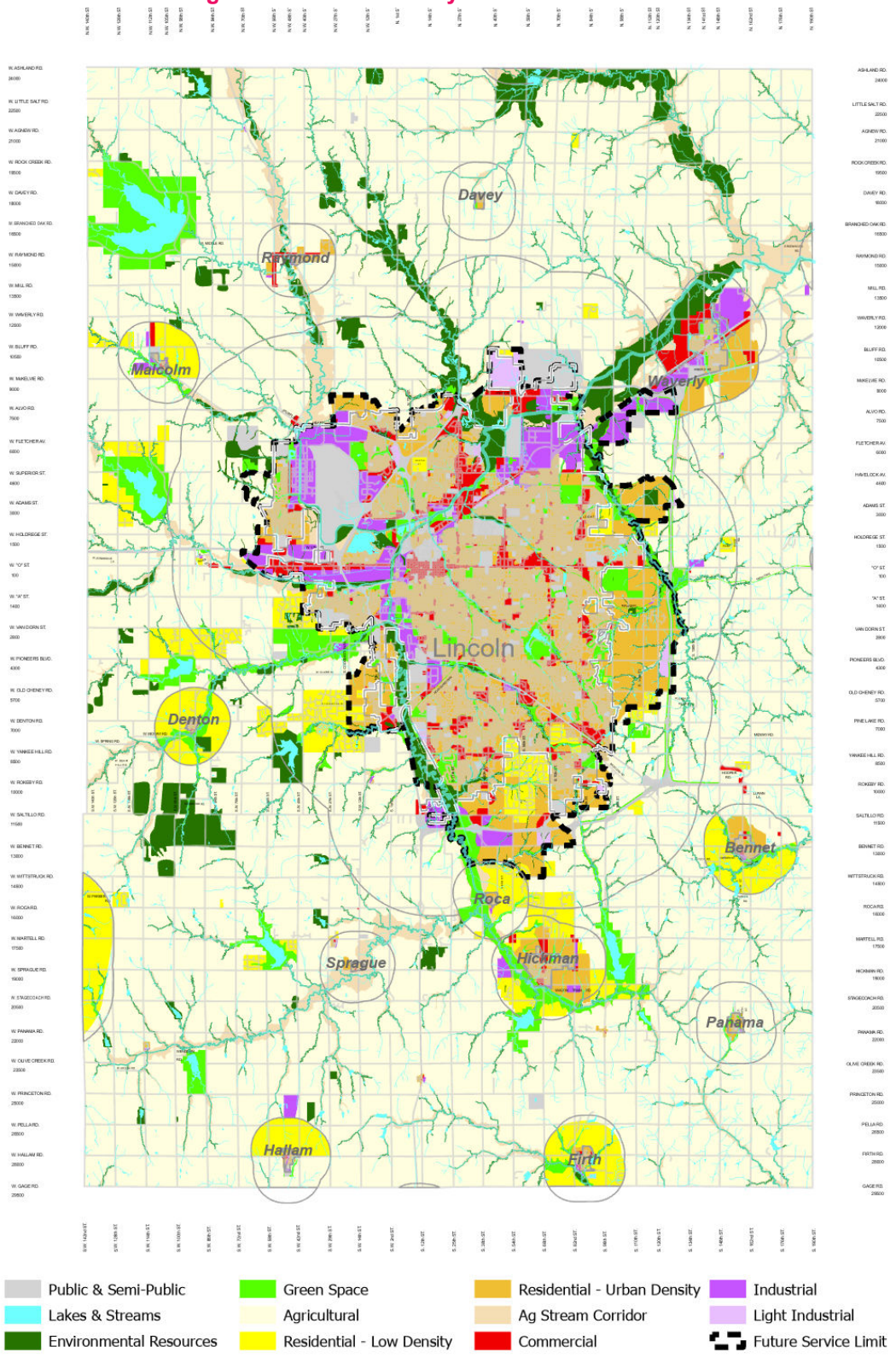


Figure GF.b: 2050 County Future Land Use Plan



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The land use plan for Lincoln and Lancaster County contains several general categories of land use types that are listed below:

Industrial. Areas where railroads, manufacturing, trucking and transportation facilities are the dominant land use, with some commercial activities.

Light Industrial. Areas for light manufacturing and assembly, warehousing, business trade, research and development, and associated office and retail uses. Proximity to major transportation routes is important. Uses in this category would produce little or no noise, odor, vibration, glare, or other objectionable influences and would have little or no adverse effect on surrounding properties.

Commercial. Areas of retail, office, service and residential mixed uses. Commercial uses may vary widely in their intensity of use and impact. Individual areas designated as commercial in the land use plan may not be appropriate for every commercial zoning district.

Urban Residential. Residential uses in areas with varying densities ranging from more than fifteen dwelling units per acre to less than one dwelling per acre. All types of housing are appropriate here, from detached single family, duplex and missing middle, to higher density multi-family. Undeveloped areas shown as Urban Residential may also include neighborhood-scale commercial and other compatible uses that will be added to the map after approval of development plans.

Low Density Residential. Residential areas, often referred to as acreages, having densities ranging from 1 to 5 acres per dwelling unit, with a typical density of 3 acres per dwelling unit. Existing Low Density Residential areas within the Future Service Limit with urban utilities available may also be appropriate for future Urban Residential development.

Agricultural. Land principally in use for agricultural production and compatible industries like solar and wind energy production. Agricultural land may be in transition to more diversified agribusiness ventures such as growing and marketing of products (e.g., horticulture, silvaculture, aquaculture) on site. Some land in the Agricultural category may be enrolled in voluntary preservation programs such as the USDA Conservation Reserve Program (CRP).

Public and Semi-Public. Areas of public or semi-public land use and/or structures that serve the general public. Only the largest facilities are shown on the land use plan. Highways and interstates are also included in this category.

Green Space. Public or privately-owned areas predominantly used for recreation, such as parks, golf courses, soccer or ball fields, and trails. Many green space areas also serve functions such as buffers between incompatible uses and as stormwater management areas. In some cases, privately-owned Green Space such as golf courses may also be appropriate for future Urban Residential development.

Lakes and Streams. This category includes the larger stream corridors, lakes, and ponds.

Agricultural Stream Corridor. Land intended to remain in open space, predominately in agricultural use, but that may also include parks, recreation fields, or parking areas when near future commercial, industrial, or public uses. These areas are mostly in the 100 year floodplain, outside of the existing Lincoln urban development.

Environmental Resources. Land and water masses which are of particular importance for maintenance and preservation, such as saline wetlands, native prairie, and some floodway and riparian corridors.

Future Service Limit. The land use plan also displays the future service limit for the City of Lincoln. Land inside this line represents the anticipated area to be provided with urban services within the planning period.

The land use plan also displays the generalized land use plans for other incorporated places within the county. These include:

- City of Hickman Comprehensive Development Plan, adopted 2025
- City of Waverly Comprehensive Development Plan, adopted 2023
- Village of Bennet Comprehensive Plan, adopted 2019
- Village of Davey Comprehensive Development Plan, adopted 1977
- Village of Denton Comprehensive Development Plan, adopted 1977
- Village of Firth Comprehensive Development Plan, adopted 2019
- Village of Hallam Comprehensive Development Plan, adopted 2011
- Village of Malcolm Comprehensive Plan, adopted 2019
- Village of Panama Comprehensive Development Plan, adopted 2013
- Village of Raymond Comprehensive Plan, adopted 2000
- Village of Roca Comprehensive Development Plan, adopted 2017
- Village of Sprague Comprehensive Development Plan, adopted 1977

Individual plans are posted on the *Planning and Development Services Department website.*

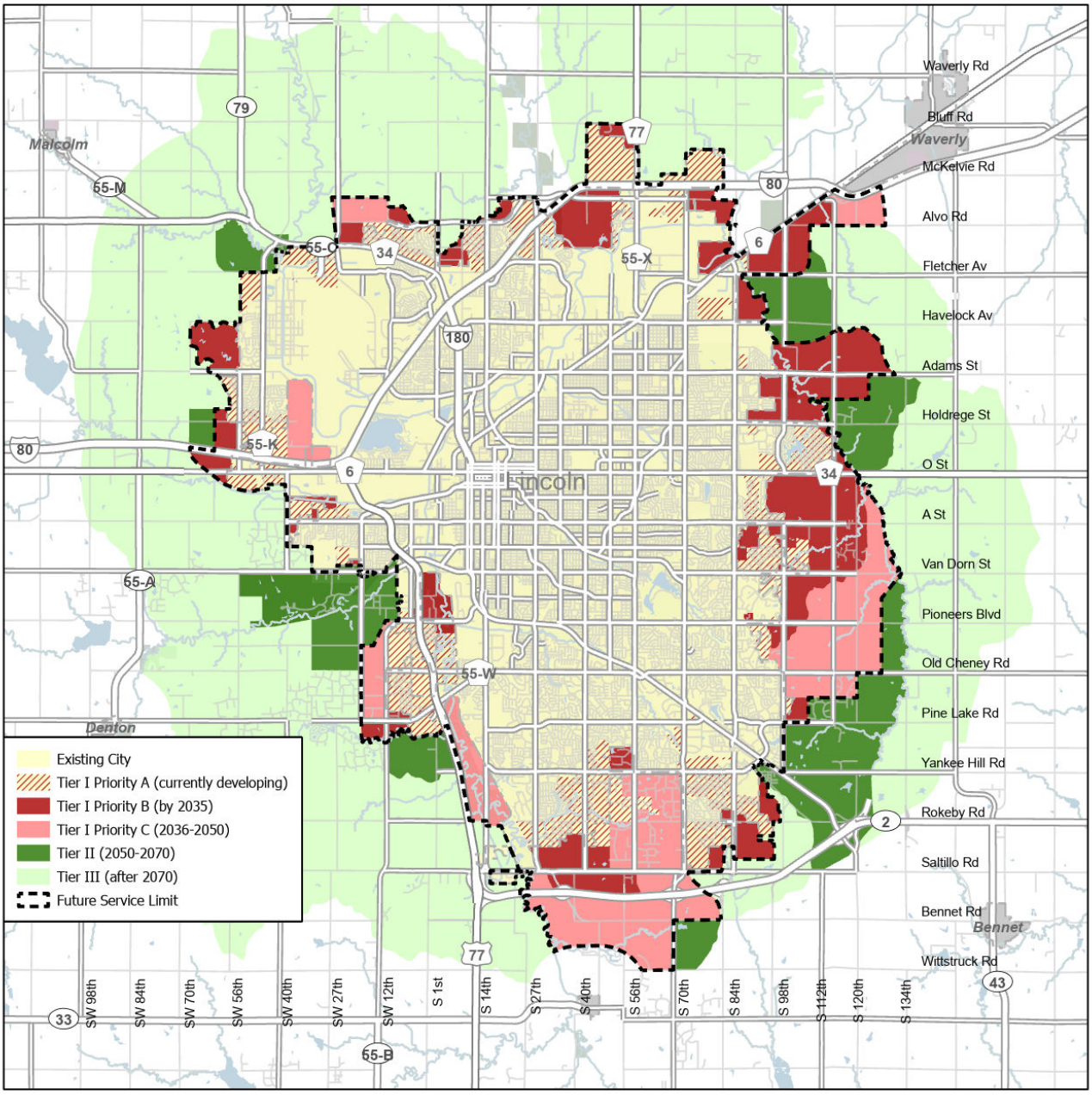
Where land use designations in these plans are not identical to those used in the Lincoln/Lancaster County land use plan, adjustments were made to reflect the intended land use.. At all times, individual towns should be consulted as the source for decisions within their zoning jurisdictions.

The Planning Department will continue its policy of coordinating with other Lancaster County towns by sharing information, notifying them of activity near their jurisdictions, and continually updating the land uses identified in their individual comprehensive plans on the Lancaster County Future Land Use map.

Future Growth Tier Map

In order to facilitate a sustainable growth pattern, the Priority Growth Tiers Areas map shows the phased growth anticipated over the next 50 years and beyond. The growth areas are broken up into four general regions: Redevelopment and infill in the existing city, and the Tier I, II, & III growth areas. Tier I includes three Priority Areas for phasing development as discussed below. Priority A, which is mostly within the existing city limits, is shown as red hatching over the yellow area, Priority B is shown in dark red, and Priority C in pink. Tier II is shown in dark green and Tier III in light green.

Figure GF.c: 2050 Priority Growth Area



Tier I

Tier I reflects the "Future Service Limit," approximately 50 square miles of developing areas and beyond the existing city limits where urban services and inclusion in the city limits are anticipated within the 30-year planning period. This area should remain in its current use in order to permit future urbanization by the City.

Lincoln regularly maintains at least a 10-year development cushion for potential growth areas and will continue to do so in PlanForward. This means that the Tier 1 area, meant to accommodate Lincoln's growth through 2050, has enough land area to satisfy demand through 2060. This "extra" land is included in order to provide flexibility for development options within the 2050 Future Service Limit.

The top priority for infrastructure improvements is the existing city and areas that are currently under development. In order to provide for the orderly future growth of the city, additional land is identified in Tier I as the next area for improvement. However, the community does not have the financial resources, nor is it necessary, to provide urban services to the entire Tier I area within the next few years. So within Tier I, the community needs to prioritize areas for infrastructure improvements.

Priority A of Tier I — 18.0 square miles

Priority A is comprised of undeveloped land within the City limits, as well as areas that are not yet annexed but which have approved preliminary plans such as preliminary plats, use permits, community unit plans, or planned unit developments, or areas outside city limits that will have immediate infrastructure access upon annexation.



There are still significant infrastructure needs within the existing city and areas currently under development. The top priority areas are those which are within the city limits at the beginning of the planning period. In some cases, annexation agreements commit the City to the construction of certain improvements (arterial roads, water and wastewater lines) by a predetermined date, or commit the City to the repayment of their cost which may have initially been assumed by the developer. Priority A serves as the “future urban area” for purposes of annexation per state statute, and these areas are appropriate for immediate annexation upon final plat approval. In general, commitments to serve the Priority A areas should be met before the annexation of new areas within Priority B.

Priority B of Tier I — 16.8 square miles

Areas designated for development in the first half of the planning period (to 2036) are generally contiguous to existing development and should be provided with basic infrastructure as they develop. Some of the infrastructure required for development may already be in place. Some infrastructure improvements may be made in the near term while others, such as road improvements that are generally more costly, may take longer to complete. In certain cases, areas in Priority B have special agreements that include some level of commitment to build future infrastructure. These areas move into Priority A upon approval of development plans.

Priority C of Tier I — 16.2 square miles

The next areas for development, after 2036, are those which currently lack almost all infrastructure required to support urban development. In areas with this designation, the community will maintain present uses until urban development can commence. Infrastructure improvements to serve this area will not initially be included in the City’s Capital Improvement Program (CIP), but will be actively planned for in the longer term capital improvement planning of the various city and county departments.

Guidelines for Amending Priority Areas:

- Infrastructure should generally be provided in different directional growth areas, depending upon limited financial resources and if there is development interest in the area.
- The community should only approve development proposals that can be adequately served by initial urban improvements such as electricity, water, sewer, pedestrian facilities and roads, and by all urban improvements

and services in the long term. Initially, roads may not be built to the full capacity; for example, rural asphalt roads may continue to be used for some period, or a two lane urban street may be built and later expanded to four lanes with turn lanes when conditions warrant. Public safety services and schools may be provided to an area by facilities that are more distant and new facilities phased in over time.

- Generally, adequate infrastructure improvements should be completed in all Priority A areas where there is development interest prior to beginning infrastructure in Priority B and C areas.
- It is anticipated that there may be unique circumstances that may warrant consideration of development of land in Priority B prior to the full completion of improvements in Priority A. In addition it is expected that there will be proposals to change land from Priority C to B. Proposals for changes from Priority C to B should be evaluated and considered through a review process that considers the following items:
  - The project is contiguous to the City and proposed for immediate annexation (for Priority A), and is consistent with principles of the Comprehensive Plan.
  - The developer provides information demonstrating how the necessary infrastructure improvements to serve the area would be provided and financed. The City should contact other public agencies to obtain their report on the infrastructure necessary to serve the area, including utilities, roads, fire service, public safety, parks, trails, schools and library needs.
  - The impacts that development in the area will have on capital and operating budgets, level of service, service delivery and Capital Improvement Programs are addressed, including impact of financing, utility rates and other revenue sources and to what degree the developer is willing to finance improvements. In order to maintain a fiscally constrained plan, acceleration of one project may mean other planned projects must be removed from the list of future facilities.
  - There is demonstrated substantial public benefit and circumstances that warrant approval of the proposal in advance of the anticipated schedule.

Growth into most of the Priority C areas is comparatively inefficient in terms of required capital investment as compared to the Priority B areas.



Tier II

Tier II is an area of approximately 18.9 square miles that defines the geographic area the city is assumed to grow into immediately beyond Tier I. It shows areas where long term utility planning is occurring today and acts as a secondary reserve should Tier I develop faster than anticipated. Tier II should remain in its current use in order to allow for future urban development.

Infrastructure planning, especially for utilities such as water, wastewater and watershed facilities, can reach beyond the Plan's 30-year time horizon to 50 years and further. Water, wastewater and watershed master plans identify infrastructure, environmental issues and future project needs in undeveloped sub-basins. As new areas are proposed for transfer from Tier II to Tier I, these plans should be used to assist in guiding development.

The Plan's premise is that within the next ten years, if the anticipated growth expectations are realized, additional areas from Tier II will be added to Tier I. Such change would include amending the Future Service Limit accordingly to reflect the new 30-year planning time frame. Conversely, if growth is slower or more dense than anticipated, the addition of new areas may not be necessary.

The balance between the efficient use of existing urban infrastructure and the provision of a sufficient supply of land to maintain an affordable lot supply is a delicate one, and one that should be carefully considered in this process. It is important that relevant data be maintained and critical analysis be conducted in any decision to increase the supply of Tier I land.

Tier III

Tier III provides an approximately 128.4 square mile area for Lincoln's longer term growth potential — beyond 50 years. This area is based upon the drainage basins located within the 3-mile extraterritorial jurisdiction, excluding the area identified as Salt Creek Tiger Beetle habitat. Little active planning of utilities or service delivery is likely to occur in the near term in Tier III. However, it should also remain in its present use in order to provide for future urban development.

Supporting High-Quality Growth

The existing growth process includes many tools to approve development plans as part of the zoning and subdivision process. Most commonly-used tools for residential and mixed use neighborhoods are preliminary plats, Community Unit Plans (CUPs) and Planned Unit Developments (PUDs).

Preliminary Plat: The preliminary plat is the standard tool used to create a subdivision per the subdivision regulations of Lincoln (Lincoln Municipal Code Title 26) and Lancaster County (Lancaster County Subdivision Regulations). A preliminary plat illustrates how land will be divided into lots for future homes and businesses, showing proposed lots and streets, the placement of utilities and easements, and the presence of floodplains or other natural features.

Per LMC 26.03.020 the purpose of the subdivision regulations are:

(To) provide for the harmonious development of Lincoln and its environs; to prescribe standards for the laying out of subdivisions in harmony with the comprehensive plan; for the coordination of streets and utilities within subdivisions with other existing or planned streets and utilities; for coordination of subdivisions with other features of the comprehensive plan to provide for adequate open space for traffic, recreation, light and air; and for the distribution of population and traffic in such a manner so as to create conditions favorable to health, safety, convenience or prosperity, all in accordance with applicable state statutes.

Preliminary plats include detailed development and design standards, and allow very limited flexibility in modifying those standards for specific projects. Preliminary plats are typically submitted alongside a change of zone as part of a development application.

Community Unit Plan (CUP): A CUP is a zoning tool used that can supplement traditional subdivision regulations by allowing for variation in lot size, subdivision layout, public infrastructure, and other elements typically found in a preliminary plat. CUPs are only allowed in residential zoning districts and certain situations in rural areas of the county.

Per LMC 27.62.10 the purpose of a CUP is:

To permit and to encourage the creative design of new living areas, as distinguished from subdivisions of standard lot sizes and standard street systems, and in order to permit such creative design in buildings, open space, and their interrelationship while protecting the health, safety, and general welfare of existing and future residents of surrounding neighborhoods.

CUPs are utilized for both new growth and infill projects. They are a powerful tool that can support the residential development goals of the Comprehensive Plan, including flexibility for a variety of housing types integrated into a single neighborhood.

Developments utilizing the Community Unit Plan (CUP) process should demonstrate creative design consistent with the intent of the regulations. While the current regulations do not specifically define creative design, this flexibility provides an opportunity to encourage innovative site planning, building design, and project features that advance community goals. As the regulations evolve, additional guidance on the application of creative design should be considered. Examples of creative design may include:

- A minimum of three housing types within the neighborhood.
- No housing type exceeding 70 percent of total units.
- At least 20 percent of units consisting of duplexes, townhouses, cottage housing, triplexes, or fourplexes.
- Implementation of conservation design principles as described in Policy 18.
- Gross density of at least 5.0 dwelling units per acre.

The current one-acre minimum size for a CUP is intended to discourage spot zoning and preferential treatment of a single property in a neighborhood.

A maximum size for CUPs should be considered. The great neighborhoods concept, discussed further in *E1: Great Neighborhoods and Housing*, emphasizes a mix of uses as a defining feature of a successful neighborhood development. Because the CUP zoning tool is available only in residential districts, an overly large CUP, such as one spanning an entire square mile, can unintentionally limit opportunities to integrate neighborhood scale commercial uses. Establishing a reasonable maximum size would help ensure CUPs support, rather than hinder, the mixed use character envisioned in the great neighborhoods framework.

Planned Unit Development (PUD): A PUD is a zoning tool that is similar to a CUP, except PUDs allow for a mix of uses such as residential, commercial, and light industrial as part of a single development plan.

Per LMC 27.60.010 the purpose of a PUD is:

To promote the public convenience and necessity; protect the health, safety, and welfare, to implement the goals and policies of the Comprehensive Plan and are to be used when it is necessary or appropriate to:

a. Permit flexibility in the regulation of land development;

b. Encourage innovation in land use, variety in design, layout, and type of construction;

c. Encourage the economy and efficiency in land use, natural resources, the provision of public services and utilities and the preservation of open space.

Many of Lincoln's major projects at mixed-use redevelopment nodes have utilized the PUD tool including 35th & Holdrege/Idylwild, 48th & Holdrege, 48th & Leighton, and 27th & Nebraska Parkway. PUDs have also been used for mixed-used projects in growth areas including Fallbrook (1st & Alvo), Village Gardens (56th & Pine Lake), and Prairie Village North (84th & Adams).

The PUD zoning tool is one of the most effective mechanisms for creating new neighborhoods aligned with the Great Neighborhoods concept discussed in *E1: Great Neighborhoods and Housing* and mixed use nodes and corridors as discussed in *E2: Infill and Redevelopment*. The City should evaluate ways to support more creative PUDs and encourage high quality mixed use redevelopment.

Incentives and Financing

P7: Redevelopment Incentives discusses incentives to support high-quality growth. Tax Increment Financing (TIF) is the most common financial incentive from the City, and is primarily used for infill redevelopment projects. The policy also discusses tax incentives, land assembly, streamlined permitting, and impact fee exclusions as ways to support development.

In 2026 the State Legislature approved the Community Improvement District (CID) tool to help fund public infrastructure improvements like roads, utilities, and sidewalks within a development. Enabled by the passage of LB 1114, CIDs can levy taxes, issue bonds, and build or maintain public improvements, functioning similarly to Sanitary and Improvement Districts (SIDs) but operating entirely within municipal boundaries. By allowing infrastructure costs to be spread over time rather than paid upfront, CIDs are intended to make residential, commercial, and mixed use projects more financially feasible.

The CID tool may be an opportunity for the City and development community to continue implementing high-quality growth in accordance with the principles expressed in this section and throughout the Comprehensive Plan.

Concurrency

Public infrastructure - including transportation facilities, water, sewer, parks, schools, and libraries – is essential to the health, safety, and welfare of the community. In new growth areas, the most essential public infrastructure (such as electricity, water, sewer, pedestrian facilities and roads) should be made concurrently with that growth.

Some public infrastructure, such as water and sewer lines, is most efficiently built to serve the ultimate demand of the new area. Other public infrastructure, such as arterial roads, may be provided in proportion to the initial need, with later improvements added as growth proceeds. Still other services, such as schools and libraries, may be provided at more remote locations until the population to support a new facility is in place. Developing public infrastructure in this manner will protect the public health, safety and welfare of the community while efficiently using taxpayer funds.

Conversely, infrastructure should not be built or developed if it is not needed. Public resources are scarce and should be conserved and used efficiently. Development of infrastructure beyond the needs of the community is a waste of resources and is not beneficial to the community as a whole. Thus, some improvements, such as park land, must be obtained early in the process, but may not be fully improved until more development occurs. Land for other services such as fire and police stations or schools may also be obtained. This may also apply to road improvements, which in early stages can be adequately served by two-lane paved streets, after obtaining the needed future urban right-of-way, with additional lanes planned for but not developed until later when traffic demand warrants the improvements.

The key to a successful community is the concurrent development of infrastructure proportionate to the development and need of the community — a balance between the need for infrastructure and the need to conserve resources.

Annexation

The City of Lincoln requires that properties receiving municipal services be located within city limits. City annexation should occur before any property is provided with water, sanitary sewer, or other potential City services. In most cases this also means that annexation must occur prior to a property receiving an urban zoning designation.

Information regarding annexation procedures can be found in *P62: Annexation.*

Annexation is a necessary and vitally important part of the future growth and health of Lincoln. The City of Lincoln has been successful with urban development occurring within its city limits. The City routinely annexes land at the request of a developer or landowner as part of the regular development process. This allows properties to be supplied with City services when they are needed, and the City benefits from the property taxes, utilities, and other fees that City residents pay.

Some developed properties along the City's edge may not be interested in further development and thus will not request annexation. It makes sense for the City to initiate annexation of adjacent properties that are already developed and require a minimal public investment to serve.

Reasons for City-initiated annexation include:

- Equity for taxpayers. Properties on the urban edge already benefit from many City services, such as streets, parks, trails, libraries, and snow removal on adjacent streets, without paying City taxes and fees. Annexation balances the provision of appropriate and reliable services with the "fair share" payment for those services.
- Clarity of service areas for maintenance and emergency response.
- Allow for continued growth of Lincoln in an efficient and orderly fashion.

Annexation generally implies the opportunity to access all City services within a reasonable period of time. Voluntary annexation agreements may limit or otherwise outline the phasing, timing or installation of utility services (e.g., water, sanitary sewer), and may include specific or general plans for the private financing of improvements to the infrastructure supporting or contributing to the land uses in the annexed area. The annexation of large projects may be done in phases as development proceeds.

The character of existing residential areas should be respected as much as possible during the annexation process. When low density "acreage" areas are proposed for annexation due to the City's annexation policy, additional steps should be taken to ease the transition as much as possible, such as public meetings, advance notice and written explanation of changes as a result of annexation. In general, many aspects of acreage life may remain unchanged, such as zoning or covenants. However, any annexation of existing residential areas will include some costs that must be the responsibility of property owners.

Annexation to facilitate the installation of improvements and/or possible assessment districts is appropriate if it is consistent with the annexation policies of the Plan listed above.

Guidelines in this section are specific to the City of Lincoln. Each town in Lancaster County has its own procedures for annexation.

Nebraska Revised Statutes:

15-104 (excerpt)

The City Council may by ordinance at any time include within the corporate limits of such city any contiguous or adjacent lands, lots, tracts, streets, or highways such distance and in such direction as may be deemed proper... Such city shall have power by ordinance to compel owners of land so brought within the corporate limits to lay out streets and public ways to conform to and be continuous with the streets and ways of such city, or otherwise as appears best for the convenience of the inhabitants of such city and the public.

Community Background



Lincoln and Lancaster County have a rich background that will continue to shape the community's future.

History

The City of Lincoln and Lancaster County lie within the Platte River Valley in southeastern Nebraska. A little more than 50 miles west of the Missouri River, the county's natural features are characterized by uplands, stream terraces, and bottom lands. The region was historically covered by native tallgrass prairie that served as home to buffalo, antelope, grassland birds, and many other smaller species of plants and animals.

The county's 846 square miles are situated mostly within the Salt Valley Basin. Native Americans and early settlers were attracted to the area by the natural forming salt flats. One of the region's earliest European settlers was Captain W.T. Donovan of the Crescent Salt Company. He named the settlement Lancaster after his home in Pennsylvania. "Lancaster" was later used to name both the county and the county seat in 1859.

The Region

The City of Lincoln today serves as both the capital for the State of Nebraska and the seat of government for Lancaster County. As of 2025, the County's estimated 334,049 residents comprise the second largest metropolitan area in the State. The Lincoln Metropolitan Statistical Area includes Lancaster and Seward counties and 352,081 people. The broad southeastern Nebraska region is home to over one million people, including the greater Omaha urban area to the east.



Southeastern Nebraska is experiencing a growing sense of social, cultural, and economic interdependence. The Interstate 80 corridor offers a major link between the State's two largest urban areas and the region as a whole. Strengthening ties between the two cities and the surrounding rural communities is integral to the region's future success in providing employment, recreational, and other opportunities.

The City of Lincoln and Lancaster County are committed to further examining regional planning issues for southeastern Nebraska. Much public dialogue about the future of the region is needed if core planning issues and potential solutions are to be fully explored.

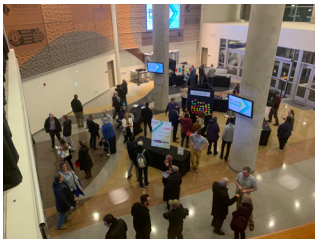
The People

PlanForward embraces a growing, changing community. The Plan energetically recognizes the long-term growth potential of the City of Lincoln and Lancaster County, and opportunities presented by the fundamental demographic changes in the community.

Lancaster County's population is assumed to reach nearly 440,000 persons by the year 2050 — that's over 117,000 more people than the County's year 2020 population base of 322,608 persons. The adjectives "steady" and "stable" accurately describe Lancaster County's expected future growth. Between 2020 and 2050, the projections indicate growth of nearly 40,000 persons and 18,000 households each decade. The county should reach the milestones of having 150,000 households just after 2030, and 400,000 people in 2040. To understand future changes, the projections compare population values between non-Hispanic Whites and all other population groups. The projections indicate the portion of Lancaster County's population comprised of persons of color rises by five percentage points per decade, similar to what occurred in the 1990s and 2000s. The number of non-White and Hispanic residents more than doubles from about 65,000 in 2020 to 155,000 in 2050, when one in three Lancaster County residents will be a person of color.

While those age 20 to 24 remain the largest Lancaster County population segment out to 2050, aging represents a central element of future population change. Growth occurs across all age groups, but the projections show the highest percentage gains happen as "baby boomers" born from 1946 to 1964 age into older age categories.

Public Engagement Process



Lincoln and Lancaster County have a rich background that will continue to shape the community's future.

Acknowledgements

The Planning Department wishes the thank the following:

- The community experts and leaders, City-County staff, and Planning Commission members who volunteered their time to serve on various Comprehensive Plan committees and provided input on plan content.
- The hundreds of Lancaster County residents who attended the in-person and virtual events and participated in the public surveys.
- Students from the UNL Community & Regional Planning Program capstone studio classes from Spring 2020, Spring 2021, and Fall 2024 who provided invaluable research on background topics in the Plan.

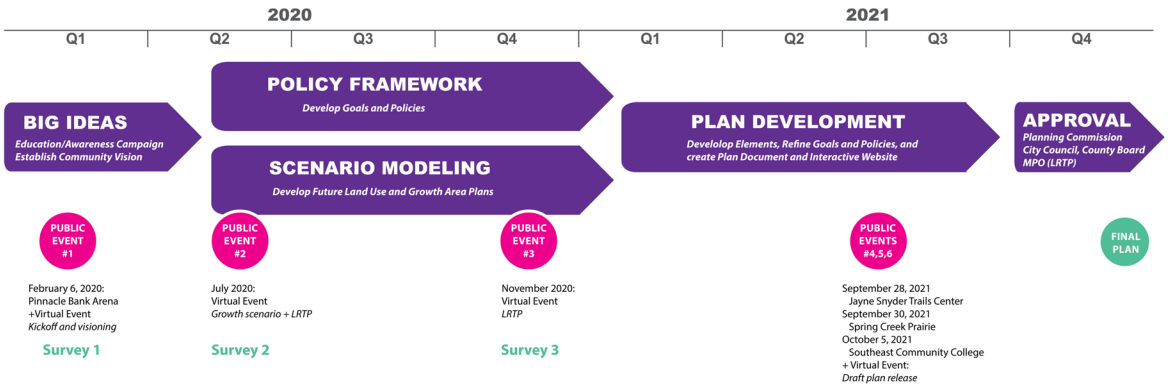
Public Engagement Process Summary

The Lincoln-Lancaster County 2050 Comprehensive Plan embodies Lincoln and Lancaster County's shared vision for the future, out to the year 2050. The theme of the Comprehensive Plan is "Plan Forward," because it will envision a future that not only looks forward in time, but also forward in concept with new and innovative ideas to support our growing community.

The development of the Comprehensive Plan included extensive public input with contributions from all facets of the community – from local leaders and topic area experts, to regular citizens who have shared interest in building a strong vision for Lincoln and Lancaster County.

The development of the Comprehensive Plan was coordinated with the development of the Long Range Transportation Plan, a separate document that focuses on transportation needs and is required for the City and County to receive federal transportation funds.

The major activities and timeline are summarized below. More detailed information is available in the *Public Outreach Summary*.



DRAFT

Community Committee

Members: Planning Commission members along with community stakeholders of various backgrounds – neighborhoods, business, sustainability/resiliency, design, etc.

The Community Committee had a primary role in helping to develop and review content for the Comprehensive Plan and Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP). The Committee worked with staff to study, analyze, and discuss major elements of both plans. Eighteen Community Committee meetings were held on a typically monthly schedule, stretching from January 2020 to August 2021. Most meetings were held over zoom and also made available to the public on Facebook Live.

Equity Subcommittee

Members: Included organizations that provide services to marginalized community members. Representatives included staff or members of organizations from Community Action, OutNebraska, New Americans Taskforce, Afrikan Community Network, Nebraska Appleseed, Civic Nebraska, Lincoln Public Schools, League of Human Dignity, Black Leaders Movement, and the Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired. The meetings were facilitated by Inclusive Communities, a non-profit focused on education and advocacy related to the topics of diversity and inclusion.

More information about the Equity Subcommittee can be found in the *Equity Subcommittee Summary*.

Staff Committee

Members: City and County staff and agency representatives from LES, Black Hills, LPS, and Norris.

The Staff Committee is the primary method for City and County staff to be involved with the process. Their activities included development and review of plan content and public outreach activities. Plan content specific to various City and County departments was developed through one-on-one meetings with committee members. Eight Staff Committee meetings were held from January 2020 to August 2021 along with numerous one-on-one meetings with committee members.

2026 Update

This document was updated in 2026 in accordance with the update process described in the Implementation section. The 2026 update was an opportunity to affirm major assumptions, update information, and add important new items. The planning horizon remains 2050.

Public engagement was critical to determining updated community priorities and reviewing proposed concepts for the Plan. The update process was coordinated with the Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) and Lincoln Mobility Plan and included three public open houses, associated virtual open houses, multiple pop-up events throughout the community, and coordination with neighborhood groups and business organizations.

In addition to public engagement, the Planning Commission and an internal Staff Committee helped guide the overall update process.

Information about the process can be found in the 2026 *Public Outreach Summary*.