ONE: WHAT IS THE GREENPRINT CHALLENGE?

A. DEFINITION

The Greenprint Challenge is part of an overall long-range planning effort designed to provide the City of Lincoln and Lancaster County with an approach for sound and sensitive urban and rural development, that is interwoven with the community's desire for maintaining and enhancing the ecological and economic benefits from our natural and cultural environment.

The Greenprint Challenge frames a context within which crucial planning decisions concerning environmental, natural and cultural resources issues can be effectively pursued.

B. PURPOSE AND OVERVIEW

This undertaking was initiated and managed by the Lincoln City-Lancaster County Planning Department, in close working cooperation with the City of Lincoln Parks and Recreation Department and the Lower Plate South Natural Resources District.

The Greenprint Challenge has been developed for the purpose of assuring the health and integrity of the ecosystem upon which Lancaster County is superimposed and for capturing the community-wide quality of life and economic benefits that can be derived from such an ecosystem.

Suitable water and air quality, flood plain governance, habitat protection, and soils management all contribute to a vigorous ecosystem. Proper land use planning and plan implementation can also aid in maintaining an overall healthy natural system. The Greenprint Challenge endeavors to provide a framework for the wise preservation and perpetuation of these critical natural features in Lancaster County.

The Greenprint Challenge recognizes that there is an emerging ethic in Lancaster County about the natural world and the inter-relationship of human activity and our natural heritage. This ethic encourages a sensitivity to the natural environment as economic and development decisions are made. This sensitivity fosters an attitude that environmental concerns should permeate all planning processes.

The physical system that would be created through the Greenprint Challenge process has the potential to serve multiple purposes. Some of the **environmental benefits** to be derived from the fulfillment of the Greenprint Challenge concepts include:

- Preserving valuable habitat and ecosystem features to maintain biodiversity
- Furthering opportunities for creation of "signature landscapes" throughout the County
- Affording passive and active recreation
- Creating physically appealing linkages and connections between neighborhoods and natural areas
- Fostering sustainable natural systems
- Recognizing the role played by watershed functions in development and provision of utility services
- Championing the value of prairie restoration and preservation
- Seeking the reasoned conservation of agriculturally productive lands
- Recognizing and conserving cultural and historic resources

The Greenprint Challenge also acknowledges the strong relationship between a community's environmental well-being and a **community's economic well-being**. A number of "economic eco-values" were identified as part of the process including:

- Maintaining a favorable "quality of life" through the management of natural features that enhance the community's attractiveness as a place to live and work
- Enhancing property values through proximity to parks and natural areas
- Protecting life and property through flood plain protection
- Lessening tax burden for future flood control structures and stream channelization
- Furthering health and saving health care costs through improved air and water quality
- Supporting physical and psychological health benefits through access to outdoor recreation
- Advancing land development opportunities by identifying areas needing long term protection from those more suitable for development

The Greenprint Challenge looks beyond single issues and functions to incorporate common principles of ecological design and considers the multiple attributes and their interactions across various landscapes. The ultimate implementation of the Greenprint Challenge will be fundamental in preserving and enhancing the quality of like through the community. Such an integrated system can highlight and enhance natural systems and provide significant social and economic benefit.

C. RELATIONSHIP TO CITY-COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING PROCESS

The county-wide Greenprint Challenge is intended to serve as a key element in developing a new Comprehensive Plan for the City of Lincoln and Lancaster County.

The Greenprint Challenge should serve as the environmental and natural resource underpinning of the Plan's overall design and should ultimately help frame the preparation of the Comprehensive Plan's' future plan use policy directive. It will also serve to guide the planning for future parks, open spaces and trails.

The fundamental relationship between the Comprehensive Plan and the Greenprint Challenge has been established in part through the drafting of the Plan's working "Vision Statement." This Vision states in part,

> *"Clean air, clean water, parks and open space, mature trees, signature habitats, and prime and productive farmlands are valuable assets. Conservation areas, floodplains, green spaces, and parks define, and help create linkages between, neighborhoods and surrounding population areas. The Comprehensive Plan takes into consideration the effects of natural phenomena not only upon localized development, but also the community as a whole, upon private ownership issues, and upon recreational opportunities. The Plan thus commits Lincoln and Lancaster County to preserve unique and sensitive habitats and endorses creative integration of natural systems into developments."*

This Vision Statement serves to lend basic guidance and direction to the role to be played by the County natural features in the fulfillment of the Plan's ultimate land use planning policies. The Greenprint Challenge serves as an ethic that should influence all City-County planning processes.

D. ADDITIONAL GREENPRINT CHALLENGE BACKGROUND

The natural resource features have a long-standing role in the City and County's overall planning process. Two recent activities that merit particular note are as follows:

Natural Resources-Geographic Information System (NR-GIS): The City and County's comprehensive planning process has a rich legacy of integrating environmental considerations into the area's planning policies and documents. Several long-standing, and more recent, committee's have contributed extensive expertise toward the conception and acceptance of natural resource strategies.

These groups, and the individuals servicing on them, assisted local staff in a year-long effort to capture a warehouse of digital information about the environmental features of the City and County. This effort—entitled "Natural Resources-Geographic Information System (NR-GIS)—assembled and created a broad range of natural resource data about the area for use in analyzing the geographic character and relationships of the present environment. NR-GIS ultimately served as the informational foundation for the development of the **Greenprint Challenge** concepts and report.

Community Attitude Survey: As part of the background for the creation of a new City-County Comprehensive Plan, a random sample telephone survey was conducted of local households. A total of 710 respondents were queried over a two-week period in October and November 2000. This survey sought opinions on a wide variety of long range community planning issues—including the natural environment and its place in the planning process.

The statistically valid sample revealed a strong desire on the community's part to preserve the integrity of the natural character of the County as the area grew in size and population. When questioned about the importance of a range of planning issues, "Growth that preserves environmental qualities" and "Preserv[ing] natural resources" received the highest rating scores.

When asked about trade-offs involving such natural resources as

native prairies, wetlands, tress ad flood plains, the households surveyed were strongly in favor of preserving such natural assets even if it meant that public funds would need to be used to purchase land development rights. The positive responses to these trade-off questions ranged in the 60 to 75 percent positive range.

And while transportation and traffic flow were chosen as the top issues needing emphasis in the next three to five years, preserving the natural environment and maintaining a system of managed and balance growth also received high marks.