

CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

Planning for the future is one of the more important responsibilities of local government. The preparation of a Master Plan is the means by which the citizens of the community express their preferences regarding the future development of the community. The Master Plan also plays an important role in inventorying and assessing the community's land base and natural features, and ensuring that the physical development of the community is compatible with the long-term health of the natural environment. The Master Plan assists local government in anticipating and planning for public facility needs. It also provides important background information concerning historical and current trends in the community - information which is useful to existing and prospective residents and business owners in the Township.

Specific uses and benefits of a Township Master Plan include the following:

- It is the statutory basis upon which zoning and other land use decisions are made. The Township Rural Zoning Act (P.A. 184 of 1943, as amended) requires that the Township's zoning ordinance be based upon a plan designed to promote the public health, safety and general welfare of the community. Therefore, the Master Plan and associated maps provide a basis for making land use decisions which are implemented through zoning and other legal devices, such as the Subdivision Control Act.
- The Plan serves as a resource document for Township decision-making. The goals and implementation strategies outlined in the plan provide a guide for the Planning Commission and Township Board in their consideration and review of zoning applications, community facility improvements, interlocal cooperation and other matters related to land use, development and the environment.
- The Master Plan provides a comprehensive statement of the Township's goals and policies. It helps direct growth into a desired development pattern, rather than leaving the future shape of the community to chance and circumstance. The Plan also helps educate and inform citizens, property owners, developers and adjacent communities about the Township's direction for the future.
- The Plan also helps coordinate the objectives and programs of other public agencies with local planning goals. Planning efforts and projects of the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT), Grand Rapids and Environs Transportation Study (GRETS), the Metropolitan Water and Sewer Planning Agency and others are able to better conform with local needs if a current community Master Plan is available to guide and inform these other agencies.
- Finally, the Master Plan helps decision makers and property owners protect sensitive natural features and maintain the aesthetic appeal of the community, by identifying and mapping important natural features and ways they can be protected.

The Township Planning Act, originally enacted as Act 168 of 1959, was amended in significant ways by Act 263 of 2001. Beginning in 2002, townships are required to review the Master Plan and "determine whether to commence the procedure to amend the plan or adopt a new plan" at least every 5 years. The 2001 amendment also established new requirements for intergovernmental consultation during the plan preparation process, including notifying adjacent communities of the initiation of the planning process and the opportunity for input, and providing a copy of the proposed plan to the planning commissions of adjoining communities for review and comment. These new procedures have been followed in the preparation of this plan.

The 2001 Township Planning Act amendment also included new provisions regarding the required content of the Master Plan. The law now states that

“the basic plan shall address land use issues and may project 20 years or more into the future. The plan shall include maps, plats, charts and descriptive, explanatory and other related matter and shall show the planning commission’s recommendations for the physical development of the unincorporated area of the township.”

In addition, the law states that the plan

“shall also include those of the following subjects which reasonably can be considered as pertinent to the future development of the township:

(a) A land use plan and program, in part consisting of a classification and allocation of land for agriculture, residences, commerce, industry, recreation, ways and grounds, public buildings, schools, soil conservation, forests, woodlots, open space, wildlife refuges, and other uses and purposes.

(b) The general location, character and extent of streets, roads, highways, railroads, airports, bicycle paths, pedestrian ways, bridges, waterways, and water front developments; flood prevention works, drainage, sanitary sewers and water supply systems, works for preventing pollution, and works for maintaining water levels; and public utilities and structures.

(c) Recommendations as to the general character, extent, and layout for the redevelopment or rehabilitation of blighted areas; and the removal, relocation, widening, narrowing, vacating, abandonment, or changes or use or extension of ways, grounds, open spaces, buildings, utilities, or other facilities.

(d) Recommendations for implementing any of its proposals.

In accordance with the above statutory provisions, this plan includes the following components:

- **Description and analysis of existing conditions in the Township.**

The existing characteristics of the community are described, including population history and other demographic characteristics, socio-economic characteristics of the community, predominant natural features, the existing land use pattern in the Township and the existing community facilities in the Township.

- **Issue identification.**

Based on a knowledge of past and current trends in the community, major growth and development issues which need to be addressed in future planning for the Township are identified.

- **Formulation of community goals and objectives.**

With input from the public, the community development goals of the community have been identified. The community goals and objectives have been expressed in the form of a “Vision Statement” for the community, which describes the desired future character and conditions that the community seeks to achieve.

- **Projection of Future Population**

Historical population trends and consideration of community goals are used to prepare projections of future population growth in the Township. Land needs for future residential, commercial and industrial growth can then be defined.

- **Future Land Use Map.**

Based on knowledge of what has happened in the past and our goals for the future, a Future Land Use Map is prepared which depicts the extent and direction of future growth in the community.

- **Community Facility Needs**

The Plan contains an identification of community facilities to meet existing needs as well as anticipated future needs resulting from future population growth, including roadway improvements, non-motorized transportation facilities, utility services, parks and others.

- **Plan Implementation Strategy**

The Master Plan identifies concrete actions which need to be taken by the Township to achieve stated Plan goals. Responsibilities for specific actions are assigned, and priorities and timeframes established for their accomplishment.

The following sections of this Plan are organized according to the major components listed above.