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MEMORANDUM

To: Laketown Township Planning Commission
From: Gregory L. Ransford, MPA 
Date: November 13, 2018
Re: Revisions to Master Plan Preface, Chapter One, Chapter Two, and Chapter Three

Pursuant to your direction provided at your October 22, 2018 meeting, attached are the revised Preface, Chapter One, Chapter Two, and Chapter Three documents for the draft Master Plan. Rather than outlining the changes herein, we believe the revisions are easy to understand and capture your direction. We provide the chapters with the Word tracking feature enabled. Through tracking, deletions are shown in strikethrough text and additions are shown in underlined text.

It is important to note that additional minor revisions were made as a result of our peer review process. As you know, our Associate who was intended to be part of that peer review process has been focusing on a personal matter and was therefore unable to be a part of this process. Despite this language being reviewed by the Planning Commission prior to peer review, we felt this practice was worth the exercise at this point in the draft. Again, the results of the peer review are minor.

Lastly, our notes from your October meeting indicate that Manager Meshkin was intending to reexamine the then recommendation bullet point seven (7) from Chapter Three, which is provided below for your convenience. As a result, the provision (now bullet point eight (8)) has not changed.

Rezoning for LDR or MDR density projects should not be permitted until public water and sanitary sewer is provided.

We will be prepared to discuss these items further at your November 26, 2018 meeting. If you have any questions, please let us know.

GLR
Principal Planner

Attachments

Preface
Laketown Township Master Plan
2019

Introduction

Legal Requirement

In accordance with the Michigan Planning Enabling Act, Act 33 of 2008, as amended, this Master Plan was created to serve as a guide for development within Laketown Township.

Intent and Purpose

The Laketown Township Master Plan ~~is designed to~~ address^{es} and direct^s proposed land use and development in a compatible fashion with existing and future uses, the natural environment, the availability of public utilities, the capacities of transportation networks, the design and distribution of recreational opportunities and other public places, the linear relationship of the landscape including compatibility of structures, uses, and natural features, as well as numerous other planning and community attributes.

The Laketown Township Master Plan ~~will~~ guide^s and accomplish^{es} development that is coordinated, adjusted, harmonious, efficient and economical. In addition, the Master Plan ~~will~~ promote^s the sustainability of uses for current and future needs that best protect and enhance the public health, safety, ~~morals~~ community values, order, convenience, prosperity and general welfare.

The Master Plan ~~may~~ project^s more than ~~20~~ twenty years into the future and must be revisited at least every five years to ensure its legitimacy.

Content

Cornerstone Components

A Master Plan shall include:

- Maps, plats, charts and descriptive content showing the recommendations of the Planning Commission for the physical development of the unincorporated areas of the township.

A Master Plan should minimally address the classification and allocation of land for the following, as can be reasonably considered:

- Agriculture, residences, industrial and commercial uses, public buildings and spaces, schools, environment, recreation and transportation, areas for redevelopment and various other characteristics of the township.

A Master Plan should generally address and accommodate the location and extent of the following:

- Transportation networks (i.e. streets, bicycle facilities, railway, waterways, airports and pedestrian improvements).
- Waterways and waterfront developments
- Sanitary sewer and water supply systems
- Pollution prevention efforts
- Drainage
- Flood prevention and the maintaining of water levels
- Public utilities and structures

A Master Plan shall provide recommendations regarding the above cornerstone components, as applicable, as well as provide strategies to implement its proposals. Further, a Master Plan shall provide recommendations regarding the redevelopment or rehabilitation of blighted areas and the management of streets, grounds, open spaces, buildings, utilities or other facilities, as applicable.

Composition

The Laketown Township Master Plan is designed based on two simplistic, yet imperative principles;

1. Constant public input

It is through public participation and contributions that we established the foundation and direction of this Master Plan, as they are the core of the community. Derived from three public workshops as well as various planning meetings, this Master Plan benefited from and was shaped by public involvement. [The focus of public workshops included Northern Laketown held on June 25, 2018, Blue Star Highway held on July 12, 2018, and Agricultural lands held on July 23, 2018.](#)

and;

2. Professional support

Accompanied by the expertise and direction of professional municipal planners, ~~County departments that serve on behalf of the township~~ as well as other consultants, the desires of

the public have been incorporated within the Master Plan and balanced with the socioeconomic attributes of the community by the direction of the Planning Commission.

Boards and Staff Involvement

The creation of a Master Plan includes contributions and direction from the Township Planning Commission, Board of Trustees, and Township Planning Consultant, as well as additional staff. The role of each township board and staff person is unique and imperative to the process, which are summarized below.

- Planning Commission
 - Organizes public involvement, public meetings, and provides direction to staff to draft Master Plan language, maps and other related components. Recommends the Master Plan to the Board of Trustees, holds the public hearing, and approves the Master Plan.
- Board of Trustees
 - Reviews, requests modification, if necessary, and approves the Master Plan for distribution to neighboring municipalities and other entities as required by the Michigan Planning Enabling Act.
- Planning Consultant
 - Provides professional support, drafts language, compiles maps, and other Master Plan components for review by the Planning Commission.

Final Document

This design is intended to create the most comprehensive and effective Master Plan for Laketown Township. Its ultimate pursuit is to ensure the health, safety, and welfare of the residents, property and business owners, as well as visitors to this township.

How to Use this Plan

For each land use or attribute chapter, the Plan identifies goals, recommendations, and strategies, which are the basis for future development. The goals, recommendations, and strategies are designed as follows:

- Goals – These are community ~~ideals~~ objectives derived from significant public input and Planning Commission oversight
 - These are applied most frequently during land use review to ensure a proposed development meets and is consistent with the core values of the Master Plan
- Recommendations – These are pointed direction to achieve the goals
 - These are applied the strongest during land use review to ensure proposed development is consistent with the intent of the Master Plan

- Strategies – In an effort to accomplish the goals and recommendations of the Master Plan, the strategies are the legislative methods to mandate certain physical form, through zoning ordinance or police power ordinances.

Chapter One

Community Preferences

Introduction

Important to the residents and property owners of Laketown Township are the preferences by which they envision or define the appearance, character, and values of their community.

As provided in its entirety within the appendix, Laketown Township completed three community workshops with the public to gauge the pulse of its property owners. While the workshop areas generally encompassed the entirety of the township, with the exception of the lakeshore directly, the discussions were focused on Northern Laketown (which is generally 145th Avenue north), agricultural lands, and the Blue Star Highway. Among other interests of the community, the workshops provided the following values, preferences, attributes, and design mechanisms, which are used to develop the foundation on which some of the goals, recommendations, and strategies within this Master Plan are based.

Definition of Terms

In order to streamline the content of the workshop results, the following terms are recognized as defined below.

- *Rural Character* – is recognized as the natural features of the earth that minimize the visual exposure of buildings, structures, or other man-made features and which create scenic character. It is also recognized as the natural features of the earth that provide environmental buffers and/or habitat that is characteristic of the Township. Features are found to include:
 - Woods, woodlots, forest areas, and trees
 - Wetlands
 - Natural vegetation
 - Wildlife habitat
 - Natural field areas
 - Scenic vistas

Rural Character also includes farmland, which is recognized as natural features that are organized and managed by man.

- *Open Space* – is recognized as areas of land unoccupied by buildings, structures, or other man-made features, that are preserved to be unoccupied by buildings, structures, or other man-made features within a project. Open Space is not intended to include displays of art or other cultural features; bridges, signage, utilities, and other essential service structures; or grade level features such as ponds.

Findings

Below is a summary of findings derived from the workshop results.

- *Core Values* – the following attributes have been identified as core values for the township:
 - Preserve and maintain rural character, open space, and sand dunes from development
 - Protect farmland from development
 - Provide pedestrian connectivity throughout the township
 - Provide for a high quality of commercial and industrial building and site design to improve aesthetics and compatibility with adjacent land uses
- *Agricultural Characteristics* – the following have been identified as the top strength, opportunity, weakness, and threat to agricultural land:
 - Strength – Rural Character
 - Opportunity – Farmland preservation programs
 - Weakness – Encroachment of residential development
 - Threat – Encroachment of Rresidential encroachment

Additionally, agricultural preferences include:

- A mixture of large lots and a clustering of residential development to preserve rural character, farmland, and open spaces
 - Higher quality building materials to improve aesthetics
 - Installation and connectivity of pedestrian pathways
- *Residential Characteristics* – the following have been identified as the top strength, opportunity, weakness, and threat to Northern Laketown (145th Avenue north):
 - Strength – Rural Character
 - Opportunity – Preserve rural character and greenspace
 - Weakness – Inappropriate residential development density
 - Threat – Loss of rural character to development

Additionally, residential preferences include:

- Clustering of residential development to preserve rural character, farmland, and open spaces
- *Blue Star Highway Commercial and Industrial Characteristics* – the following have been identified as the top strength, opportunity, weakness, and threat to Blue Star Highway properties:
 - Strength – Rural Character
 - Opportunity – High quality building and site design through landscaping and facade materials
 - Weakness – Lack of Ppublic utility expansion
 - Threat – Loss of rural character

Additionally, Blue Star Highway preferences include:

- Smaller scale development of buildings and related signage
- Preservation of trees along the right-of-way corridor
- A mixture of higher quality (not only metal) building material
- Use of building accents and other physical elements
- Require pedestrian pathways as a part of development proposals

Chapter Two

Agricultural Classification

Introduction

The amount of land which is vacant or used for agriculture has played a significant role in the development of the character of the township. The large, open areas create a feeling of spaciousness and provide a tranquil surrounding. Agriculture is one of the major reasons that many of the current residents moved to the township and continues to be a factor in attracting new residents.

Although agriculture is not the ~~dominate~~ dominant use of land within the township, there are significant areas where soils and drainage characteristics make agricultural preservation appropriate. Some communities and property owners tend to view farming as a temporary use until the land is converted to residential, commercial, or industrial uses. This may be appropriate in some areas where public utilities, land prices, property divisions, and growth pressures have made farming difficult, or impractical, or where marginal conditions exist for productive agriculture. However, it must be recognized that farming is as much of an industry as manufacturing. Farming provides jobs and a product for sale in the marketplace and creates a significant portion of income for Michigan residents. Viewing farming as an essential industry can have a profound effect on the programs developed for its preservation and continuation. The agricultural resources of Allegan and Ottawa Counties are particularly significant in Michigan.

As a result of the Agricultural Lands public workshop, ~~and~~ various planning meetings, ~~and coupled with modern planning principles,~~ we have concluded that the following goals are paramount for agricultural uses in Laketown Township. In addition, through the use of modern planning principles, where applicable, recommendations regarding these goals as well as strategies, accompanied by an illustration example, to achieve success are provided below.

Goals, Recommendations and Strategies

Goals

- Preserve rural character
- Protect natural features
- ~~Concentrate higher density residential land uses to protect open spaces and farmland, and to reduce conflict between uses~~
- Preserve woodlands and wetlands which are useful as water retention and ground water discharge areas and which have important aesthetic and scenic value
- Support agricultural operations

Recommendations

- Encourage crop production and livestock use to minimally impact existing open spaces
- Encourage all farm building construction to be designed in a central or same location within an agricultural property to preserve the most farmland as possible and minimally impact existing open spaces
- ~~• Design a “no cut” zone along right of ways to protect the natural landscape, maintain open space and rural character, as well as preserve the native drainage system and reduce flooding~~
- ~~• Limit the orientation of parcel development to protect the rural image and blend development with the natural landscape~~
- ~~• Encourage development at very low densities where soil conditions, topography, and vegetation preclude higher intensities of development~~
- ~~• Require clustering of housing~~

Strategies

- Adopt or enhance appropriate ordinances to preserve natural features
- Encourage the use of the Michigan Farmland and Open Space Preservation Act, Public Act 116 of 1974, to protect farmland and significant or important open space
- Investigate opportunity for Purchase of Development Rights and Transfer of Development Rights programs
- ~~• Require development to utilize open space preservation techniques, clustered housing techniques, and other amenities and features to preserve rural character~~
- Reduce or eliminate the minimum setback for all farm buildings, so as to protect the greatest amount of open space and or farmland as possible, while avoiding conflict with adjacent uses
- ~~• Require the preservation of any trees within the right of way and within 30 feet of the right of way, so as to protect the natural vegetation (any naturally deceased trees may be removed) and drainage system~~
- Prohibit private roads in the Agricultural Zoning District
- Investigate a millage or alternative township program for land acquisition to provide for the preservation of rural character and or open space in perpetuity

Chapter Three Residential Uses

Introduction

Housing within the township is in sound condition, with only occasional homes found in disrepair. Homes of high quality can be found throughout the township, though the most expensive and elaborate home sites are built along or near the Lake Michigan shoreline. Development of homes in this area is being affected by the critical dunes designation established by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources.

Given that the dune areas possess some of the most sought after properties for residential development, the township will likely continue to feel pressure for development in these sensitive areas. Much of the development that has already occurred does not conform to the current regulations. The township must continue to work with property owners and developers to preserve these valuable natural resources.

Coupled with these shoreline area properties, the northern portion of the township faces increasing residential development pressure as a result of available public utilities, proximity to neighboring Park Township and the City of Holland. Given this, and while Laketown Township is generally a rural community and residential uses comprise a relatively small percentage of the total land area, the township recognizes the need to accommodate residential development concurrently with the preservation and protection of its rural heritage.

As a result of the Northern Laketown public workshop, ~~and~~ various planning meetings, ~~and coupled with modern planning principles,~~ we have concluded that the following goals are paramount for residential uses. In addition, ~~through the use of modern planning principles, where applicable,~~ recommendations regarding these goals as well as strategies, accompanied by an illustration example, to achieve success are provided below.

Goals, Recommendations and Strategies

Goals

- Protect environmental resources, such as sand dunes and other natural features, from the negative impacts of new development
- Land use shall preserve rural character
- Provide adequate protection of groundwater sources
- Concentrate the density of residential land uses to protect rural character and open spaces
- Provide more pedestrian pathway connections between residential uses
- Preserve woodlands and wetlands which are useful as water retention and ground water discharge areas and which have important aesthetic and scenic value

- Realize strong neighborhoods with a predominantly single-family residential and rural open space character while conscientiously integrating developments into the landscape of existing neighborhoods by abutting preserved open spaces, creating a connection of roads, linking pedestrian pathways, and appropriately blending other public amenities

Recommendations

- Require clustering of housing
- Utilize the incorporation of existing vegetation, topography, and other natural features into the design of new residential developments and between residential developments
- Require new residential developments to be sited in a manner that protects the rural character and scenic views by maintaining proper setbacks and providing landscaping screening as appropriate
- Require new residential developments to incorporate a pedestrian pathway system that ultimately connects with abutting developments to produce a walkable and connected community
- Require new residential developments to create connections of roadways at property lines that ultimately extend into abutting developments to reduce curb cuts, provide for greater emergency access, and result in better neighborhood design
- Require the preservation of existing trees between the public street and dwellings
- A compatible balance of protection of natural assets and reasonable residential land use should be achieved between low density residential development and the preservation of the township's unique critical dune areas-
- Rezoning for LDR or MDR density projects should not be permitted until public water and sanitary sewer is provided-
- Consideration should be given to delaying LDR or MDR density rezonings unless such proposed changes are contiguous to or nearly contiguous to developments of similar density to reduce the potential conflict of uses

Strategies

- Adopt or enhance appropriate ordinances to preserve natural features
- Improve ordinance controls for hazardous material storage and outdoor uses that could negatively impact groundwater
- Conduct a groundwater aquifer quality study, if existing evidence reveals water quality concerns
- Establish density standards that are consistent with the natural capacity of soils to handle on-site septic systems and which promote the preservation of the rural character of the Township
- Require development to utilize open space preservation techniques, clustered housing techniques, and other amenities and features to preserve rural character and protect the environment

- Require the layout of new residential developments to be extensions of existing neighborhoods, where possible. This should ~~minimally~~ apply, at minimum, to lot layout, road extensions, pedestrian pathways, and open space plans
- Investigate a millage or alternative township program for land acquisition to provide for the preservation of rural character and or open space in perpetuity