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MEMORANDUM

To: Allendale Charter Township Planning Commission
From: Lindsay R. Mohr, MPA
Date: January 16, 2020
Re: Draft Master Plan Chapter Set

In accordance with our updated Master Plan Framework, attached for your review are drafts of the first set of chapters to update the Allendale Charter Township Master Plan. As you know, the chapters have been designed to streamline the existing content, incorporate public contributions, eliminate unnecessary information, and revamp the format of the Plan into a denser and more useful document that is easy to reference.

The first set of chapters included for your review include the Introduction & Community Profile chapter and the Agricultural Uses Chapter. As you will recall at the beginning of our Master Plan process, we recommended that the Plan is organized into land use classification chapters for residential, agricultural, commercial, industrial, transportation, utilities, recreation, etc. We believe this approach makes it easier for the user to reference the document. Within each land use classification chapter, we recommend a substructure which identifies Goals, Recommendations, and Strategies for that specific land use classification. Additionally, following the data collected from the 2019 Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) workshop, we incorporated the feedback received into each respective chapter.

Please note as you review our recommended revisions that proposed additions are shown in bold text, proposed deletions are shown in strikethrough text, and parentheses are used for references from the current text. The revisions document is a different layout from the existing Master Plan, however if preferred, we can show the revisions on the 2013 Master Plan layout as well. Additionally, a clean copy of the language is attached for your convenience. Below is a synopsis of each chapter.

Introduction and Community Profile

As you know, the beginning of Master Plans tend to contain numerous pages regarding community history, demographics, and other statistical data, before reaching any significantly relevant information. While most of this information is useful, we believe a majority of this information is more appropriately located in the Appendix. Alternatively, we believe it is important that the introduction establishes the basis for which the Master plan was designed with a clear explanation of findings that create its core content. Given this, we restructured the first chapter of the master plan to contain a simplified introduction and community profile, which outlines the foundation of the Master Plan, contributions from the public, and how to ultimately use the Plan.

As you will note in the proposed Introduction and Community Profile chapter, we eliminated a significant portion of the introduction of the existing Master Plan language that is no longer relevant and condensed, and updated the remaining language. In addition, we relocated portions of Chapter 1 – Community Description and Chapter 2 – Community Participation to the Appendix which will be reviewed at our 10th Master Plan meeting session, currently scheduled for June 2020. One item to note in regard to community participation in development of this Plan, is that while we relocated the existing Master Plan's notations of community participation to the Appendix, we did include the results of the 2019 Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) public workshop in the findings section of the

proposed introduction. We found that these results were very similar to what was indicated in the 2013 Master Plan community participation data but was more succinct.

Additionally, while the 2013 Master Plan provided language that seemed to contemplate the intent of rural character and open spaces, we replaced that language with a more definitive set of terms to clearly convey the meaning of those characteristics. This language is designed not only to assist the reader to better understand the basis of the Plan content, but to ensure that the resulting chapters possess point of references, when needed.

Chapter One – Agricultural Uses

As you will note within the proposed agricultural chapter, the existing Master Plan document does not contain significant amounts of information to include within the language. However, the Goals, Recommendations, and Strategies were based on the feedback we received from the SWOT public workshop and the agricultural goals and strategies identified in Chapters 3, 4, and 5 of the existing Plan. As you will note, we provided several suggested Goals, Recommendations, and Strategies which we believe are relevant, but may be reduced if you desire.

Planning Commission Considerations

As the Planning Commission deliberates regarding the workshop results and the proposed Master Plan chapters, and while we understand this is your first examination and reaction to the materials, we believe the following warrant your review and consideration. They are listed in no particular order:

- Introduction & Community Profile
 - Is the community workshop data that was used to create the 2013 Master Plan still relevant? Should more of this data be incorporated into the proposed Plan, or is it appropriate for it to be located in the Appendix as supplemental information?
- Chapter One – Agricultural Uses
 - Is there a desire to include language to require minimum open space as an element of rural character?
 - Strategy bullet point five – is there a desire to create new zoning regulations to restrict the number of new lots that could be created for non-farm dwellings? According to public workshop meetings for the 2013 Master Plan, there was not a clear direction if the public felt there should be stricter regulations to preserve long-term farming.

We will be prepared to discuss these items further at your January 20, 2020 meeting. If you have any questions, please let us know.

LRM
Planner

Attachments

cc: Adam Elenbaas, Supervisor

Introduction & Community Profile

~~NEED TO CREATE A NEW PLAN~~

~~The Allendale Township Community Strategic Plan 2015 was adopted in November of 2003 but the planning process began in 2002 so in 2013 the Plan became a ten year old document. Given the population growth which occurred during that time, the new buildings and roads which changed the physical makeup of the Township and with new leaders on Township boards and commissions the Plan needed to be revised and updated to reflect these changes in order to serve as an effective and relevant tool to guide Township growth.~~

~~Several key elements guided the preparation of the 2013 Plan:-~~

- ~~• The Plan should be based on broad community involvement so the planning process was designed to solicit comments and opinions from a variety of interest groups.-~~
- ~~• The Town Center concept which was the centerpiece of the 2003 Community Strategic Plan needed to be re-evaluated to determine if this was still valued by Allendale Township citizens.-~~
- ~~• A more specific Future Land Use Map with rationale should be prepared to better guide land use decisions.-~~
- ~~• The 2013 Plan should address the student housing issue relative to location, density and type.-~~

~~SIGNIFICANT CHANGES SINCE THE 2003 PLAN~~

- ~~• The population of Allendale Township including Grand Valley State University students increased from 13,042 per the 2000 Census to 20,708 a jump of 58.7% or 7,666 people.-~~
- ~~• Through 2011 691 new single family dwellings have been constructed.-~~
- ~~• 906 multi-family dwelling units including townhouses and duplexes have been built since 2003, an average of 90 per year.-~~
- ~~• A number of new commercial projects were constructed along Lake Michigan Drive including Family Fare Shopping Center, the Heritage Square Town Center, Metro Health Clinic and three sit down restaurants.-~~
- ~~• Other projects completed during this time period include the Ceglarek Fine Arts Center on the Allendale High School campus, the Allendale Middle School and Intermediate School, the expansion of LePrino Foods, and the Placid Waters, Dewpoint West and Hidden Forest PUD's-~~

~~AUTHORITY TO CREATE THE PLAN~~

Preface

The Allendale Township Master Plan has been prepared by the Township Planning Commission under the provisions of the Michigan Planning Enabling Act, Public Act 33 of 2008 **as amended**. ~~The 2013 Plan replaces the 2003 Plan.~~ **This Plan is a policy guide that is used by township officials to guide future development and growth.** The Michigan Planning Enabling Act authorizes municipalities to prepare and adopt a plan for the following purposes:

- To promote the public health, safety, and general welfare;
- To encourage the use of resources in accordance with their character and adaptability;
- To avoid overcrowding of the land by buildings and people;
- To lessen congestion on public roads and streets;
- To facilitate a transportation system, sewage disposal, safe and adequate water supply, recreation and other public improvements; and,
- To consider the character and suitability of land for particular uses.

Although the Master Plan has no regulatory power, it states specific land development and preservation goals. **The Master Plan assists Township officials to guide both the Planning Commission and the Township Board in making both day- to-day and long-range land use decisions. Some of these instances include but are not limited to:**

- **Review of rezoning and special use permits (moved from 2013 Master Plan, page 3)**
- **Review of public improvement projects (moved from 2013 Master Plan, page 3)**
- **Review of plats and site condominiums (moved from 2013 Master Plan, page 4)**
- **Providing a legal framework for zoning actions (moved from 2013 Master Plan (page 4)**
- **Managing growth while maintaining the character of the Allendale community (moved from 2013 Master Plan, page 4)**
- **Providing consistency to decision-making (moved from 2013 Master Plan, page 4).**

This Master Plan has been developed based upon several factors: the existing natural and cultural resources of the Township; current land use trends; the need for different types of land use including industrial and commercial uses; and the desired community character as expressed through work sessions with local officials, ~~a community values workshops, meetings with large land owners and multi-family developments and a community wide survey and a~~ **Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) workshop with the public.**

Despite its purpose as a policy document, it is important to recognize that the Master Plan is general in scope. It is not always intended to establish the precise boundaries of land use areas or exact locations of future uses. Rather, the Master Plan is an organized approach to analyzing development issues and proposing recommendations to address these issues. Its function is to guide growth and provide a framework to ensure that future detailed decisions can be made based on a community-wide perspective. Given that the needs and desires of the community change over time, the Master Plan must be regularly reviewed and periodically updated.

~~State law requires that each community review its Master Plan every five years, and determine whether the plan should be amended or a new plan adopted. The Allendale Charter Township Board and Planning Commission have chosen to adopt a new Master Plan to replace the 2003 Plan.~~

~~USE OF THE PLAN~~

~~The Master Plan serves as a tool for decision making by providing information and rationale for land use decisions. The Master Plan does not contain a specific time frame or timetable for the development of Township lands as recommended on the Future Land Use Map. Development takes place as land owners seek rezoning and as developers request approval of plans for residential, commercial, and industrial projects in response to market demands.~~

~~The Master Plan does not dictate the timing of development but rather the Plan sets forth recommendations for what type of land uses can be established in the Township, where they can be established and under what conditions they can be established.~~

~~In particular, the Plan will assist local officials in the following:~~

- ~~Review of rezonings and special use permits. Applications for rezonings and special use permits should be evaluated not only in terms of specific ordinance standards but also in terms of how well the proposed action will be consistent with the goals and objectives of the Master Plan.~~

• Review of public improvement projects. All future public improvement projects, including the construction of new facilities, utilities, or buildings must first be reviewed by the Planning Commission for consistency with the Master Plan, according to PA 33 of 2008. In particular, any public improvement project must be reviewed to see whether it is consistent with the planned future land use pattern in the Township. Public improvements projects include roads, public safety facilities, parks and recreation facilities, utilities, and any other public space, building, or structure.

• Review of plats and site condominiums. Site condominium divisions and traditional land divisions have a profound impact upon the character of a community and future public service needs. The Master Plan provides policies to assist the Planning Commission with decisions as to location and design of subdivisions, and the adequacy of public services to meet the increase in demand placed upon the community by the land use intensity of site condominiums and platted subdivisions. Policies for subdivision of land apply not only to residential land use, but to commercial and industrial land use as well.

• Maintaining community character while managing growth. Each community has a vision for its future, and a sense for the desired character. However, growth is inevitable in a thriving community. The Master Plan, more than any other document, provides direction for Township officials in managing growth while retaining the desired community character, and providing the best quality of life possible for current and future residents.

• Providing a legal framework for zoning actions. The Michigan Zoning Enabling Act requires that zoning regulations be “based upon a plan.” (MCL 125.3203) A Township’s zoning actions and regulations are generally viewed favorably by the courts provided that such actions and regulations are not deemed to be “arbitrary and capricious.” By providing adequate support for zoning decisions, the Master Plan therefore serves as the legal backbone of the zoning ordinances and helps to protect zoning decisions made by the Planning Commission, the Township Board and the Zoning Board of Appeals.

• Providing consistency of process. This Plan is a very strong and visible statement by Township officials and residents regarding the intended future character of the community and strategies to assure that character. As a formal and tangible document this Plan instills a sense of stability and direction for Township officials, activities, and residents, and helps assure that each application for development is reviewed according to the same set of criteria.

PREPARATION OF THE MASTER PLAN The Master Plan process began on September 17, 2011 when the Downtown Development Authority (DDA) conducted a bus tour of that portion of the Township within the DDA boundaries in the morning. The Township Board and Planning Commission took a tour of the entire township in the afternoon. Following the afternoon tour the Board and Commission held a brainstorming session to determine the **Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT)** for the Township. This SWOT session constituted the beginning of identifying the community issues affecting preparation of the Plan. The issues and topics arising from the SWOT also were useful in preparing questions for the citizen survey. The results of this session are in Appendix A.

On September 21, 2011 DDA members met for their regular quarterly meeting and discussed their impressions of the bus tour and identified issues along the M-45 corridor.

Over the course of several meetings in October the Planning Commission prepared the community survey questions. The survey was posted on the Township web site in late October and remained available until November 18. Paper copies were also available at the Township Library and Township Offices. Survey results are described in Chapter 3. A total of 345 people took the on-line survey and 33 paper surveys were returned for a total return of 378 surveys.

Additional public input was obtained from a Community Values Workshop held at the Allendale Township Hall on November 16, 2011. Fifty people attended this workshop including a number of students from Grand Valley State University. Participants worked in small groups to discuss their version of the Allendale Township of 2011 and the Allendale Township of the future. Each group decided on a set of “Guiding Principles” which expressed their vision for the Township. Results are contained in Chapter 3. The session produced ideas and information useful in the preparation of the Master Plan.

Additional public involvement was obtained from a meeting with the owners and managers of the manufactured housing communities and apartment developments and a meeting with Township growers and large land owners in January of 2012. The results of these sessions are also described in Chapter 3.

Planning Commissioners continued preparing the Plan at their regular meetings throughout 2011, 2012 and 2013. Work sessions were held with the Township Board in September and October of 2012 to present and discuss the Draft Plan. The Draft Plan was then sent to adjoining communities for their comment in accordance with the Michigan Planning Enabling Act.

A Community Open House and public hearing on the Draft Plan was held at the Township Hall on February 5, 2013 to formally present the Draft Plan. The Planning Commission and Township Board also met in a joint session on March 5, 2013 to review the comments made at the public hearing. On March 18, 2013 the Planning Commission recommended approval to the Township Board. The Board subsequently requested that the Planning Commission re-consider the future land use designation for lands located in Sections 33 and 34. On July 15, 2015 the Planning Commission discussed the Board’s request and voted to amend the Future Land Use Map in accordance with the request of the Township Board and recommended that the Board adopt the Plan as amended. The Township Board formally adopted the Master Plan on July 22, 2013.

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CHAPTER 1 COMMUNITY DESCRIPTION (Update & Relocate to Appendix)

COMMUNITY

Physical and environmental conditions establish limitations on how some areas of the Township will develop. The physical and environmental makeup of the Township influences the population, housing, economic, and labor force composition of the community. Given the steady increase in population, demands will continue for additional infrastructure, for the conversion of farmland, and for the preservation of the natural environment to accommodate additional residential and commercial growth. The Master Plan must therefore provide for appropriate areas to be served by public sewer and water utilities as well as establish future residential, commercial, industrial, agricultural, and recreational areas within the township in order to adequately address the needs of the community as a whole and prevent incompatible uses.

Allendale Charter Township is located in the central portion of Ottawa County and has a total land area of 31 square miles (Moved from 2013 Master Plan, page 7). The largest single category of land use is Agricultural and Rural, however there has been an increase in single family residential development, planned unit developments, and commercial developments in recent years (Moved and reworded from 2013 Master Plan, page 1). Allendale Charter Township is also home to Grand Valley State University and the total enrollment for the 2019 academic year was 25,049 students. The area surrounding Grand Valley State University continues to grow and has been identified as an opportunity to increase the partnership between the community and University in creating a strong quality of life for its’ residents (Moved, and updated from 2013 Master Plan, pages 13 and 36).

One limitation to development has been in regard to wetlands that are regulated by the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes and Energy. Land containing regulated wetlands has limited development potential, due to natural development constraints as well as wetland protection regulations (Moved from 2013 Master Plan, page 10) and therefore it is vital for Township Officials to consider the rural character of the land and future land use. In addition, due to the overall growth in not only the Township, but Ottawa County as a whole, the Township should focus on groundwater preservation efforts in accordance with Ottawa County's Groundwater Sustainability Initiative.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are recognized and used within this Master Plan as defined below:

- *Rural Character*— is recognized as the natural features of the earth that minimize the visual exposure of buildings, structures, and 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 the findings derived from the 2019 Master Plan Update SWOT public workshop responses. The entirety of the results can be found within the Appendix:

- Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) Workshop (Summer 2019)
 - Participants found the library, school system, and quality of life to be the top strengths in Allendale Charter Township.
 - Participants found the high speed limits on the roadways to be the top weakness in Allendale Charter Township. The second top weakness identified in the Township is the lack of a Town

Center. Given that speeds are generally outside the authority of the Township, the lack of a Town Center was the primary weakness that the Township could directly impact.

- Providing pedestrian bridges was identified as the top priority. The second top opportunity identified was increased communication in partnership with Grand Valley State University.
- Overwhelmingly, public workshop participants identified the top threat to Allendale Charter Township as big box stores locating in the community.

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 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.

Introduction & Community Profile

Preface

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Although the Master Plan has no regulatory power, it states specific land development and preservation goals. The Master Plan assists Township Officials in making both day-to-day and long-range land use decisions. Some of these instances include but are not limited to:

- Review of rezoning and special use permits
- Review of public improvement projects
- Review of plats and site condominiums
- Providing a legal framework for zoning actions
- Managing growth while maintaining the character of the Allendale community
- Providing consistency to decision-making

The Master Plan has been developed based upon several factors: the existing natural and cultural resources of the Township; current land use trends; the need for different types of land use including industrial and commercial uses; and the desired community character as expressed through work sessions with local officials, and a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) workshop with the public.

Despite its purpose as a policy document, it is important to recognize that the Master Plan is general in scope. It is not always intended to establish the precise boundaries of land use areas or exact locations of future uses. Rather, the Master Plan is an organized approach to analyzing development issues and proposing recommendations to address these issues. Its function is to guide growth, provide a framework to ensure that future detailed decisions can be made based on a community-wide perspective. Given that the needs and desires of the community change over time, the Master Plan must be regularly reviewed and periodically updated.

Community

Physical and environmental conditions establish limitations on how some areas of the Township will develop. The physical and environmental makeup of the Township influences the population, housing, economic, and labor force composition of the community. Given the steady increase in population, demands will continue for additional infrastructure, for the conversion of farmland, and for the preservation of the natural environment to accommodate additional residential and commercial growth. The Master Plan must therefore provide for appropriate areas to be served by public sewer and water utilities as well as establish future residential, commercial, industrial, agricultural, and recreational areas within the township in order to adequately address the needs of the community as a whole and prevent incompatible uses.

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One limitation to development has been in regard to wetlands that are regulated by the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes & Energy. Land containing regulated wetlands has limited development potential, due to natural development constraints as well as wetland protection regulations and therefore it is vital for Township Officials to consider the rural character of the land and future land use. In addition, due to the overall growth in not only the Township, but Ottawa County as a whole, the Township should focus on groundwater preservation efforts in accordance with Ottawa County's Groundwater Sustainability Initiative

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Chapter One Agricultural Uses

Introduction

Although Allendale Charter Township continues to grow and develop, the community maintains its strong agricultural presence. Many active farms still exist and farming is a prevalent component of the economy and heritage of the Township (Relocated from 2013 Master Plan, Page 42). However, as generations and attributes continue to change throughout the Township, the agricultural community must evolve and recognize increasing residential, commercial, and industrial development that was attracted to the Township by the very character agriculture provides.

The Prime Farmland Soils Map classifies areas of the Township on the basis of soil suitability for general agricultural crop production. It shows the location of soils classified as prime farmland in their natural state and those that are considered prime when altered to improve drainage characteristics. It also shows those, which for a variety of reasons, are not considered prime as rated on a relative scale, by the United States Department of Agriculture. Prime farmlands are naturally endowed with the soil qualities, growing season, and moisture content necessary to sustain high crop yields under average farming practices.

As illustrated by the Prime Farmland soils map, provided in the Appendix, the highest concentration of prime agriculture lands is located within the eastern portion of the Township, however prime farmland is also scattered throughout the central and northern portions of the Township (Referenced Prime Farmland Soils Map from 2013 Master Plan). The southeastern area has experienced significant growth, due to the expansion of Grand Valley State University and the development of non-farm single family dwellings. However, there is still a significant number of parcels that are at least 40 acres in size, that are used for agricultural use. It is envisioned that through a combination of improved state farmland preservation policies, market conditions, and local land use policies, farming will continue throughout the Township and therefore continue to represent a significant part of the economic and social fabric of the Township. In order to continue to provide an environment in which our agricultural character can thrive, the following goals, recommendations, and strategies were developed. It is important to note that the implementation of these goals, recommendations, and strategies is subject to the Michigan Right to Farm Act and may restrict the totality of their intent.

Goals, Recommendations, and Strategies

Goals

- Obtain a balance between development and agriculture by anticipating and planning for the gradual transition of certain agricultural and open space lands into planned developments while minimizing the impacts of such development on ongoing farming operations
- Support agricultural operations
- Protect and preserve those elements which contribute to the rural character of the Township including woodlands, wetlands, farms and farmlands, pastures, fields, open views, the dark night sky, and architectural styles (Relocated from 2013 Master Plan, Page 36)
- Prevent residential or commercial developments that are isolated from compatible zoning districts and uses as well as necessary utilities, transportation networks and other public services, which are

designed to provide interconnection between developments, to protect premature development of farmland

Recommendations

- Incorporate the preservation of natural features into site development design as a function of site plan review (Relocated from 2013 Master Plan, page 39)
- 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 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.
- Require clustering of housing

Strategies

- Support private conservation efforts such as county and state level farmland preservation program initiatives (e.g. purchase of development rights (PDR) and transfer development rights (TDR) programs) to assist long term farming operations
- Continue to support the enrollment of agricultural lands into the PA 116 Program. (Relocated from page 36)
- Encourage soil conservation practices, the prudent use of fertilizers and pesticides and other means of conserving wildlife habitat, wetlands and woodlands
- Require the clustering of parcel divisions
- Create new zoning regulations to restrict the number of new lots that could be created for non-farm dwellings
- Review and revise Zoning Ordinance regulations as necessary to put into place development requirements which will contribute to keeping rural character (Relocated from 2013 Master Plan, page 36)
- Review the Agricultural and Rural Zone (AG) and Rural Estate Zone (RE) Districts and **allow farming only in areas where appropriate** (Reworded and Relocated from 2013 Master Plan, page 44)
- Require more compact residential developments in order to maintain open lands in the Township
- Develop open space incentives for developers to both help maintain the rural character of the Township and provide a buffer area between residential development and farmland
- Create development boundary that protects prime farmland soil by generally restricting residential neighborhood development, commercial development, and industrial development within that area
- Adopt a Low Impact Development Ordinance that gives incentives for site design that incorporates green storm water management techniques (Relocated from 2013 Master Plan, page 39)
- Consider adoption of regulations which require the preservation of a natural vegetation filtration strip along lakes, rivers, and streams (Relocated from 2013 Master Plan, page 39)

Chapter One

Agricultural Uses

Introduction

Although Allendale Charter Township continues to grow and develop, the community maintains its strong agricultural presence. Many active farms still exist, and farming is a prevalent component of the economy and heritage of the Township. However, as generations and attributes continue to change throughout the Township, the agricultural community must evolve and recognize increasing residential, commercial, and industrial development that was attracted to the Township by the very character agriculture provides.

The Prime Farmland Soils Map classifies areas of the Township on the basis of soil suitability for general agricultural crop production. It shows the location of soils classified as prime farmland in their natural state and those that are considered prime when altered to improve drainage characteristics. It also shows those, which for a variety of reasons, are not considered prime as rated on a relative scale, by the United States Department of Agriculture. Prime farmlands are naturally endowed with the soil qualities, growing season, and moisture content necessary to sustain high crop yields under average farming practices.

As illustrated by the Prime Farmland soils map, provided in the Appendix, the highest concentration of prime agriculture lands is located within the eastern portion of the Township, however prime farmland is also scattered throughout the central and northern portions of the Township. The southeastern area has experienced significant growth, due to the expansion of Grand Valley State University and the development of non-farm single family dwellings. However, there is still a significant number of parcels that are at least 40 acres in size, that are used for agricultural use. It is envisioned that through a combination of improved state farmland preservation policies, market conditions, and local land use policies, farming will continue throughout the Township and therefore continue to represent a significant part of the economic and social fabric of the Township. In order to continue to provide an environment in which our agricultural character can thrive, the following goals, recommendations, and strategies were developed. It is important to note that the implementation of these goals, recommendations, and strategies is subject to the Michigan Right to Farm Act and may restrict the totality of their intent.

Goals, Recommendations, and Strategies

Goals

- Obtain a balance between development and agriculture by anticipating and planning for the gradual transition of certain agricultural and open space lands into planned developments while minimizing the impacts of such development on ongoing farming operations
- Support agricultural operations
- Protect and preserve those elements which contribute to the rural character of the Township including woodlands, wetlands, farms and farmlands, pastures, fields, open views, the dark night sky, and architectural styles
- Prevent residential or commercial developments that are isolated from compatible zoning districts and uses as well as necessary utilities, transportation networks and other public services, which are designed to provide interconnection between developments, to protect premature development of farmland

Recommendations

- Incorporate the preservation of natural features into site development design as a function of site plan review
- 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 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
- Require clustering of housing
- Periodically consider review of the minimum setback for all farm buildings, so as to protect the greatest amount of open space and on farmland as possible

Strategies

- Support private conservation efforts such as county and state level farmland preservation program initiatives (e.g. purchase of development rights (PDR) and transfer development rights (TDR) programs) to assist long term farming operations
- Continue to support the enrollment of agricultural lands into the PA 116 Program
- Encourage soil conservation practices, the prudent use of fertilizers and pesticides and other means of conserving wildlife habitat, wetlands and woodlands
- Require the clustering of parcel divisions
- Create new zoning regulations to restrict the number of new lots that could be created for non-farm dwellings
- Review and revise Zoning Ordinance regulations as necessary to put into place development requirements which will contribute to keeping rural character
- Review the Agricultural and Rural Zone (AG) and Rural Estate Zone (RE) Districts and allow farming only in areas where appropriate
- Require more compact residential developments in order to maintain open lands in the Township.
- Develop open space incentives for developers to both help maintain the rural character of the Township and provide a buffer area between residential development and farmland
- Create development boundary that protects prime farmland soil by generally restricting residential neighborhood development, commercial development, and industrial development within that area
- Adopt a Low Impact Development Ordinance that gives incentives for site design that incorporates green storm water management techniques
- Consider adoption of regulations which require the preservation of a natural vegetation filtration strip along lakes, rivers, and streams