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MEMORANDUM

To: Robinson Township Planning Commission
From: Gregory L. Ransford, MPA
Date: October 26, 2020
Re: Comprehensive Review of the Robinson Township Master Plan

Pursuant to the Master Plan Timeframe Flow Chart, this memorandum serves as our comprehensive review of the current master plan documents. Those documents include the:

- 2008 Master Plan and related maps
- 2019 Board of Trustees Master Plan Correction Resolution
- M-231 Sub-Area Plan
- 1997 Agricultural Census
- 1998 Community Land Use Survey
- E-1 Lowland Zoning District

In addition, we reviewed the following relevant documents included with our copy of the Master Plan booklet, however, we do not address these within this memorandum.

- Water Supply System Master Plan, June 2004
- Wastewater Master Plan, March 2014
- OCRC Robinson Township Michigan Water Supply System Master Plan, December 2014

The purpose of this review is to ensure compliance with the Michigan Planning Enabling Act (MPEA), Act 33 of 2008, as amended, as well as gain an understanding of the current language, and identify any unnecessary or antiquated provisions. In addition, the review serves to create the basis of each land use classification chapter by capturing relevant language to combine with the outcomes of the public workshops and Planning Commission direction.

Further, this memorandum serves as an organizational guide with the Planning Commission.

Suggested Revisions

We have organized our most significant comments further below by section of the existing master plan documents. For simplicity, we have not included reference within this memorandum to any grammatical errors, punctuation errors, writing format needs, or other minor errors that require revision within the plan. We will perform those changes without your direction and immediate oversight as you progress through the chapters.

Simplistic Master Plan Structure

All too often, we review master plans containing numerous pages of community history, demographics, and other statistical data within the first half of the document prior to reaching any significantly relevant information. In fact, the Robinson Township Master Plan (RTMP) contains approximately 15 pages of studies and related data, demographic statistics, and other census data before any significant goals and objectives are presented. We find this structure unnecessary and a deterrent to regular use of the document by residents, developers, township officials, and the like. While most of this information is useful, we believe it is more appropriately located within the Appendix, with the exception of applicable introduction and

public participation to establish the general basis of the plan content.

Typically, a reader of this structure of a master plan is required to examine every page of the document to find relevant information regarding a residential development proposal, for example. This amount of effort can result in an incomplete examination of the plan. We prefer that the master plan is organized into land use classification chapters (which is partially present in Chapter 4 – Development Goals and Objectives of the RTMP) where all of the residential information, for example, is codified in its own chapter. This structure will greatly lessen the amount of time a user needs to find relevant information. It is important to keep this structure in mind as you review our recommendations below.

Pursuant to our response to your Request for Proposals and as outlined in the Master Plan Timeframe Flow Chart, we will highlight the proposed changes we note herein, once they are completed, within each of the related land use classification chapters and provide them at the appropriate meeting for your review, direction, and approval. The ultimate design is to establish goals for each land use, recommendations to achieve those goals, and strategies to accomplish the recommendations. Consequently, it is important to keep this format in mind as well, as we provide recommendations below.

Further, it is important to note that a master plan is a policy document and the zoning ordinance is law. Considering this, a master plan should not contain provisions specific to types of land uses permitted, dimensional requirements, density, and the like. As you will review in our comments below, we note several occurrences in this regard and recommend that they are removed from the plan.

2008 Master Plan

Chapter 1 - Introduction

- (Page 1)
 - We recommend combining this chapter with Chapter 2 – The Planning Process to streamline the beginning of the document.
 - Overall, we believe a significant amount of this content should remain but suggest future discussion of certain terminology and its intent.
 - Reference (update) to the Michigan Planning Enabling Act and “Master Plan” shall be provided throughout the language. In addition, other required legal references should be included.
- How to Use This Plan
 - We recommend that the aforementioned land use classification chapters are organized with Goals, Recommendations, and Strategies, which we outline further below in the Chapter 4 section of this memorandum. The Introduction chapter would contain instructions on How to Use This Plan, which describes the purpose of the Goals, Recommendations, and Strategies.

Chapter 2 – The Planning Process

- (Pages 2-3)
 - We recommend updating purpose and process provisions, and combining this chapter with Chapter 1, as aforementioned.
 - We recommend relocation of some provisions to individual land use classification chapters.

Chapter 3 – Basic Studies

- (Pages 4-17)
 - The population language and community survey results provided in this Chapter should be updated (through more recent United States Census data and the new community survey) and relocated to the Appendix for reference.
- (Pages 18-28)
 - Physical characteristics – we recommend reorganizing these provisions into the individual land use classification chapters.
 - Table 3 – we recommend relocating this table to the Appendix for reference.

- Existing Land Use – we do not find existing land use inventories to be beneficial. Instead, we recommend that communities, on the basis of various manmade and geological attributes, figuratively “draw the line in the sand” (literally on the Master Plan Map) and establish areas of agriculture, residential, commercial, industrial, and etcetera, and protect those to the fullest extent of the provisions of their master plan and ordinances. Other than for the purpose of historical reference, we do not believe that existing land use documents need to be maintained.
 - That said, we believe some of this language could be revised and relocated to the Recreational & Facilities Chapter.
- Existing Transportation and Roadways – we recommend revising and relocating this language to the Transportation Chapter.
- Public Buildings and Services – we recommend revising and relocating this language to the Recreational and Facilities Chapter.
- Population Projects – we recommend revising and relocating this section to the Appendix for reference.

Chapter 4 – Development Goals and Objectives

- (Pages 29-33)
 - Consistent with our recommendations provided within the Simplistic Master Plan Structure portion of this memorandum, we believe it is beneficial to create land use classification chapters and relocate relevant provisions for residential, agricultural, commercial, industrial, transportation, utilities, recreation, etcetera, within their own chapters and eliminate this chapter.
 - In addition, as aforementioned we recommend that the land use chapters provide a better substructure and are more definitive in their direction. Specifically, we recommend identifying Goals, Recommendations, and Strategies for each land use classification. These goals, recommendations, and strategies can be found throughout the existing documents (with similar or no identifying title) and simply need reincorporation in appropriate locations. The premise of the goals, recommendations, and strategies are designed as follows. In addition, this premise serves as the instruction of how to use the master plan, which we provided within the introduction chapter of this memorandum.
 - 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 and/or police power ordinances.

Chapter 5 – Land Use Plan

- (Pages 34-40)
 - Consistent with our recommendations provided within the Simplistic Master Plan Structure portion of this memorandum, we believe it is beneficial to create land use classification chapters and relocate relevant provisions for residential, agricultural, commercial, industrial, transportation, utilities, recreation, etcetera, within their own chapters and eliminate this chapter.

Chapter 6 – Plan Implementation

- (Page 41)

- While we believe an implementation chapter is appropriate and is identified within the Master Plan Timeframe Flow Chart, the language within this page is/will be addressed within the Introduction Chapter given its introductory and legal character. As a result, this page can be eliminated.

1997 Census of Agriculture

While it is unclear to us the purpose of this document, since it does not appear to be referenced anywhere within the 2008 Master Plan, this document can be updated and relocated to the Appendix for reference as it appears to similarly exist within our booklet copy.

Master Plan Map

Public/Quasi-public Classification

The 2008 Proposed Land Use (Master Plan) Map appears to identify a “Public/Quasi-public” classification. While we did not find any reference to this classification within the text, we recommend that it is eliminated from the map. As you may know (since the Master Plan does not contain language explaining this classification), the Public/Quasi-public classification is generally intended for public lands, whether owned by a Township, County, State, or school district, and sometimes even religious institutions. These areas have historically been inappropriately identified for a public or quasi-public purpose within master plans based on the assumption that they will never be used for any other purpose. However, it is possible (and we have observed) that a public park or other public/quasi-public use could be sold. Further, if such a use is ever abandoned (or sold to a private party), it would render the property dormant since the classification does not support any other type of land use. Given that your zoning ordinance allows for public uses in various zoning districts, this removal does not cause any conflicts between the master plan and the zoning ordinance. Moreover, given that no language exists within the master Plan to explain this classification, its removal would be an appropriate correction to the plan.

2019 Board of Trustees Master Plan Correction Resolution

We understand that the Board of Trustees Resolution from 2019 regarding the Master Plan was intended to rezone certain properties within the Zoning Map but also reflect the same on the Master Plan Map. As a result, we have added this to the Timeframe Flow Chart line item to be addressed at the same time as the remainder of the Map. Further, based on our review of this resolution, it seems appropriate for the Planning Commission to consider a growth boundary to “avoid urban encroachment on agricultural lands and to preserve agricultural land” as identified within the resolution. We created similar growth boundaries within the master plans for Tallmadge Charter Township and Jamestown Charter Township.

M-231 Sub-Area Plan

Overall, we believe there is a significant amount of valuable language within this Sub-area Plan. In short, we propose to:

1. Reorganize the language with the Goals, Recommendations, and Strategies simplicity structure
2. Relocate some provisions to the Appendix (such as traffic data, boundary findings, and demographics)
3. Relocate minimal language to the Introduction Chapter
4. Update provisions, where appropriate (such as references that indicate M-231 “will be” constructed)
5. Relocation and expansion of the Zoning Plan within the future Implementation Chapter

In addition, and most importantly, we propose to remove specific uses and dimensional requirements identified for the Highway Commercial, Community Commercial, Industrial, and Neighborhood Business classifications because they are functions of Zoning Ordinance law. Alternatively, these classifications should be broad regarding the types of intended uses, or more so, the type of industry to avoid any degree of language similar to a use. In addition, rather than providing dimensional specifics, the language should be broad about the size of the

character, setback, height, and the like intended in the classification. Subsequently, those specific uses and dimensional requirements should be adopted within the Zoning Ordinance.

E-1 Lowland Zoning District

As you know, Zoning Ordinance language is required to be based on the master plan. While we applaud the E-1 Lowland Zoning District within the Zoning Ordinance, we recommend that existing environmental language within the master plan is reorganized into a related classification Chapter to fully legitimize the E-1 Lowland Zoning District.

Needed Components within the Master Plan

Complete Streets Plan

As you will note within the Master Plan Timeframe Flow Chart, we propose addressing the required complete streets plan within the Transportation Chapter. While the township does not own any of its roads, the basis for the legislation that requires a street plan is to ensure that communities consider “complete streets,” which address motor vehicles, pedestrians, bicyclists, and the like. The related language will likely be brief to satisfy the MPEA.

Master Plan Terms (Land Use Classification) and Master Plan Chapters

While not part of the zoning plan nor required by the MPEA, we believe it is also appropriate to provide an association between the master plan terms and the master plan chapters as it assists the reader to understand the document. We recommend, following the reorganization of the master plan by creating individual land use classification chapters, to incorporate similar language together with the zoning plan. Below is an example of Master Plan Map section content we drafted for Olive Township.

Terminology

Relationship of Master Plan Map Terms to Master Plan Chapters

Several Chapters of this Master Plan identify the interests, recommendations and strategies regarding future land uses in the township. While the interests, recommendations and strategies will likely always evolve, the intended uses related to the chapter titles will remain the same. Those chapter titles can generally be related to the Master Plan map terms as provided in the table below.

Master Plan Map Terms	Master Plan Chapters
Agricultural Preservation	Agricultural Uses
Rural Residential	Residential Uses
Town/Neighborhood Center	Borculo
Medium Density Residential A	Residential Uses
Commercial	Commercial (& Industrial) Uses
Light Industrial	(Commercial) & Industrial Uses
General Industrial	(Commercial) & Industrial Uses
Parks, Recreation, Natural Areas	Recreation
Sensitive Areas	-

Public Workshops

While the Master Plan Timeframe Flow Chart identifies at least three public workshops early in the process, after discussion with Chairperson Martinie, it appears apparent that these workshops should be scheduled later in the process as a result of Covid-19 and the weather. At a minimum, we suggest public workshops for the following areas:

- Commercial Overlay District Area
- Residential Neighborhoods
- Agricultural Areas

While we have identified these areas on the basis of the Robinson Township Request for Proposals, we seek to discuss additional areas of interest the Planning Commission may have to include in additional public workshop formats.

Community Survey Interests

As you are aware, the most recent community survey within the master plan is from 1998. We believe it is important to conduct a new community survey, which is included within our cost estimate for the Master Plan project. We encourage the Planning Commission to direct us to conduct this survey. While we have template questions to ask for a community like Robinson Township, we seek your feedback of any interests you may have to include with the survey.

Timeframe Flow Chart

Lastly, for your convenience, attached is a copy of the Timeframe Flow Chart. As a result of our aforementioned discussion with Chairperson Martinie, the separation of the community survey component from a public workshop line item, as well as our findings regarding the E-1 Lowland Zoning District as it relates to an Environmental classification chapter, we reworked the Timeframe Flow Chart since our original proposal to the Township.

It is important to note that while the Timeframe Flow Chart appears to suggest a total project time of 15 months, the public workshops will add approximately two to three months to the entire project schedule for a more likely schedule of 18 months.

Planning Commission Considerations & Direction

While additional revisions to the master plan may be appropriate, we believe the aforementioned are minimally necessary to adequately provide an update to the plan and prepare the text for the incorporation of public contributions.

As the Planning Commission deliberates regarding our memorandum, we minimally seek your feedback on the following. They are listed in no particular order.

- Consideration of a Growth Boundary
- Additional workshops
- Community Survey interests

We will be prepared to discuss these items further at your November 10, 2020 meeting. If you have any questions, please let us know.

GLR
Principal Planner

Attachment

cc: Kathy Kuck, Supervisor