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MEMORANDUM

To: Allendale Charter Township Planning Commission

From: Lindsay R. Mohr, MPA

Date: February 26, 2020

Re: Draft Master Plan – Residential Uses Chapter

In accordance with our updated Master Plan Framework, attached for your review is the draft of the Residential Uses chapter to update the Allendale Charter Township Master Plan. As you know, the chapter has 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.

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. Additionally, a clean copy of the language is attached for your convenience.

As you will note within the proposed Residential Uses 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 residential goals and strategies identified in Chapters 3, 4, and 5 of the existing Plan. In addition, we have proposed only one (1) chapter to address residential uses. That said, we intend to reexamine this chapter as you progress with the Master Plan and may conclude that more than one (1) residential chapter is necessary.

Planning Commission Considerations

As the Planning Commission deliberates regarding the proposed Master Plan chapter, we believe the following warrant your review and consideration. They are listed in no particular order:

- Whether stronger language to require public water and sanitary sewer in the R-1, R-2, and R-3 Districts should be recommended as a strategy, as presented. The Zoning Ordinance has specific provisions regarding the necessity for public water and sanitary sewer in Section 10.04 regarding the R-4 District, Section 23.06 - Design Standards for Major Residential Developments in relation to developments with twenty-five (25) dwelling units or more; Section 3.14 regarding Site Condominium developments; and Section 12.06 regarding Planned Unit Development projects. However, it is not described as a requirement in the R-1, R-2, and R-3 Zone Districts. This consideration is proposed because the 2013 Master Plan indicates that Low Density Residential classifications are located within the boundaries of the Township's public water and sanitary sewer areas, and recommends a continuation of this development pattern into areas that are either served or can be served by public water and sanitary sewer. The Moderate Density Residential, Medium Density Residential, and High Density Residential, classifications indicate that public water and sanitary sewer should be required. To ensure consistency between the goals of the Master Plan and Zoning Ordinance, we believe this consideration is appropriate.
- Whether any of the Strategies have been achieved and are no longer needed. Until you complete your review in this regard, we have revised the related Strategy language with "strengthen, as necessary."

Also attached for your review are the revised Introduction chapter and Agricultural Uses chapter, based upon the feedback received at your January 20, 2020 meeting. We have included a copy showing the changes as well as a clean copy of each.

We will be prepared to discuss these items further at your March 2, 2020 meeting. If you have any questions, please let us know.

LRM
Planner

Attachments

cc: Adam Elenbaas, Supervisor

Chapter Two Residential Uses

Introduction

While Allendale Charter Township still has a strong agricultural presence, residential uses continue to grow as the Township further develops. Much of this can be attributed to the semi-rural character of the Township, proximity to both Grand Rapids and the Lakeshore, general quality of life, and the continued growth of Grand Valley State University.

In the 2019 Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) workshop, the participants identified the growth of the residential population as one of the greatest strengths for the community. Over the years, there has been an increase in a variety of housing styles, ranging from single-family dwellings, multi-family dwellings, and student housing. While such growth is beneficial to the Allendale community, participants also identified a concern of managing the residential growth rate. Given this, there is a need to evaluate current residential development regulations to appropriately guide future development, while ensuring there will not be a negative impact on existing uses. In addition, in order to preserve the semi-rural character of the Township and quality of life that exists, there is a need for regulations to preserve open space and existing physical attributes.

As a result of the 2019 SWOT Workshop, as well as numerous planning meetings and other planning mechanisms, the following goals, recommendations, and strategies were developed.

Goals, Recommendations, and Strategies

Goals

- Build a sense of community (**Relocated from 2013 Master Plan, page 38**)
- Provide for strong neighborhoods with a range of residential styles and densities, which incorporate into the landscape of existing neighborhoods
- Concentrate the density of residential land uses to protect open spaces and rural character ~~The rural character and views of agricultural and wooded lands in the Township are important elements in the quality of life of all Township residents and need to be preserved and enhanced~~ (**Reworded and Relocated from 2013 Master Plan, page 53**)
- Development along M-45 should be designed to ~~achieve~~ **enhance** traffic safety, **establish** walkable access from adjacent neighborhoods and **be compatible** with existing and future land uses in these neighborhoods (**Relocated from 2013 Master Plan, page 53**)
- Protect and preserve, **to the extent practicable**, those elements which contribute to the rural character of the Township including woodlands, wetlands, **wildlife habitats**, farms ~~and farmlands~~, pastures, fields, open ~~spaces~~ **views**, ~~the dark night sky~~, architectural styles (**Relocated from 2013 Master Plan, page 36**) and other natural areas, particularly those that are useful as water retention and ground water discharge areas and which have important aesthetic and scenic value
- Create a walkable community (**Relocated from 2013 Master Plan, page 35**)
- Ensure that student housing is located and designed to avoid conflicts with existing and planned single family housing
- Ensure that multi-family housing is located and designed to avoid conflicts with existing and planned single-family housing (**Relocated from 2013 Master Plan, page 37**)

- Preserve the natural resources and **groundwater quality of Allendale Charter Township** and ~~water quality of Allendale Township (Relocated from 2013 Master Plan, page 39)~~

Recommendations

- **Require housing development to utilize clustering techniques**
- **Require that development layouts blend with the natural features and existing physical attributes**
- Provide safe trails and sidewalks between destination land uses and along roadways for pedestrians, skaters, wheelchair users and all non-motorized users ~~in order to create a walkable and connected community an environment for social interaction, provide a physical link between Township land uses and the campus of GVSU, provide recreational and physical fitness opportunities, reduce vehicle trips and simply improve the quality of life for Allendale Township Residents (Relocated from 2013 Master Plan, page 35).~~
- **Require higher density housing on lands that have the capacity to support such development by means of adequate public roads, public water and public sanitary sewer, and other available infrastructure**
- **Integrate development into the landscape of existing neighborhoods by abutting open spaces, creating a connection of roads, linking pedestrian pathways, and appropriately blending other public amenities**
- **Encourage, where appropriate, light pollution regulations to preserve the night sky**
- **Encourage, where practicable, the preservation of farmhouses, barns, fence styles, and other architectural and landscaping forms, which symbolize the architectural heritage of the Township**
- **Require the preservation of existing trees along the rights-of-way for future development**
- **Rezoning to the R-1, R-2, R-3, or R-4 Zoning District shall not occur without public water and public sanitary sewer present at the property**
- **Encourage groundwater preservation regulations for new development that are in accordance with Ottawa County's Groundwater Sustainability Initiative**
- **Accommodate wildlife corridors within development**

Strategies

- ~~Review and Revise Zoning Ordinance regulations as necessary to preserve or enhance rural character, especially in regard to Planned Unit Developments (PUDs) (Relocated from 2013 Master Plan, page 36) to put into place development requirements which will contribute to keeping rural character~~
- Provide development incentives within the Zoning Ordinance which require the preservation of natural features and open space **accessible to all persons** ~~as the first step~~ in site development design **(Relocated from 2013 Master Plan, page 36)**
- ~~Review and Revise the Residential Open Space Development regulations of the Zoning Ordinance so that cluster open space is more appealing to developers than the traditional subdivision design pattern in order to preserve open space in the Township (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** ~~Essentially, it was determined that there was very little difference between the two zoning districts. Discussion centered on the need for both districts, if they should be combined or if the RE Zone should be changed to no longer allow farming. One fact was noted that the areas that were rezoned to the RE district in past years were developed as open space~~

subdivisions where farming was not practical or not permitted by private deed restrictions. Based on the above discussion the Master Plan recommends that farming no longer would be a permitted use in RE-zoned areas **(Reworded Relocated from 2013 Master Plan, page 56)**

- **Rezoning to the R-1, R-2, R-3, or R-4 Zoning District shall not occur without public water and public sanitary sewer present at the property**
- **Require the lot layout, open space, roads, pedestrian pathways, and other site features of new residential developments to be extensions of existing neighborhoods, where practicable, to reduce curb cuts, provide for greater emergency access, and result in a better neighborhood design and public safety**
- **Require new residential developments to incorporate a pedestrian sidewalk system that ultimately connects with abutting developments to produce a walkable and connected community**
- **Utilize the Planned Unit Development concept as an incentive tool for development, as a means of preserving the natural character of sites, and to encourage the provision of structured, usable open space**
- ~~New zoning regulations could also place a limit on the number of dwellings in a building.~~ **Strengthen as necessary, zoning regulations limiting the number of residential units in a multi-family building in order to lessen the visual impact of such buildings (Relocated from 2013 Master Plan, page 58)**
- ~~Strengthen as necessary, zoning regulations to reduce the minimum square footage required for a dwelling in the R-3 Zoning District. The Plan recognizes that the lot size of 6500 sq.ft. proposed for a single family dwelling might make it difficult to accommodate a 1200 sq.ft. single story house which is the minimum dwelling unit size in the R-1 and R-2 zones. Consideration should be given to reducing the minimum square footage for a dwelling in developing the new R-3 zoning district requirements.~~ **(Reworded and Relocated from 2013 Master Plan, page 60)**
- ~~Strengthen as necessary, adopt new zoning regulations to restrict the construction of new multi-family housing intended specifically for college students to not extend west of 52nd Avenue. Locate student rental housing close to the University for easier and safer pedestrian access or close to bus lines and require that on-site security be provided. Ideally, multi-family housing which is intended specifically for college students should not be located west of 52nd.~~ **(Reworded and Relocated from the 2013 Master Plan, page 60)**
- **Adopt new zoning regulations to restrict light pollution to protect the night sky of open spaces**
- ~~Strengthen as necessary, zoning regulations which create greater building setbacks, limitations on building height and size and other development standards to reduce the impact of apartments on single-family neighborhoods. Consideration should be given to requiring that multifamily buildings be setback a minimum of 100 feet when abutting or across the street from single family residential zoning districts as well as limiting the height and orientation so that balconies do not face single family areas.~~ **(Relocated from 2013 Master Plan page 61)**
- **Adopt a Low Impact Development Ordinance which gives incentives for site design that incorporates green storm water management techniques (Relocated from 2013 Master Plan, page 39)**
- ~~Strengthen as necessary, locate zoning regulations that require student housing is located close to Grand Valley State University for easier and safer pedestrian access or close to bus lines and require that on-site security be provided. Ideally multi-family housing which is intended specifically for college students should not be located west of 52nd.~~ **(Relocated from 2013 Master Plan, page 38)**
- ~~Strengthen as necessary, zoning regulations determine if current regulations should be changed to allow an increase in multi-family density and to allow taller buildings in order to allow a greater concentration of students closer to the GVSU.~~ **Grand Valley State University's campus and reduce**

the need to extend student housing **west of 52nd Avenue (Relocated from 2013 Master Plan, page 38)**

- ~~Given this goal development of these parcels must be designed to reduce the visual and social impact on residents to the west of 52nd Avenue through~~ **Require** appropriate landscaping, building setbacks, placement and design, exterior lighting, ~~ensuring~~ safe driveway locations, and **safety measures for pedestrian transportation** ~~providing for safe movement of pedestrians and bicyclists~~ (Relocated from 2013 Master Plan, page 60)
- Consider adoption of regulations which require Wildlife Corridors within development

Chapter Two

Residential Uses

Introduction

While Allendale Charter Township still has a strong agricultural presence, residential uses continue to grow as the Township further develops. Much of this can be attributed to the semi-rural character of the Township, proximity to both Grand Rapids and the Lakeshore, general quality of life, and the continued growth of Grand Valley State University.

In the 2019 Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) workshop, the participants identified the growth of the residential population as one of the greatest strengths for the community. Over the years, there has been an increase in a variety of housing styles, ranging from single-family dwellings, multi-family dwellings, and student housing. While such growth is beneficial to the Allendale community, participants also identified a concern of managing the residential growth rate. Given this, there is a need to evaluate current residential development regulations to appropriately guide future development, while ensuring there will not be a negative impact on existing uses. In addition, in order to preserve the semi-rural character of the Township and quality of life that exists, there is a need for regulations to preserve open space and existing physical attributes.

As a result of the 2019 SWOT Workshop, as well as numerous planning meetings and other planning mechanisms, the following goals, recommendations, and strategies were developed.

Goals, Recommendations, and Strategies

Goals

- Build a sense of community
- Provide for strong neighborhoods with a range of residential styles and densities, which incorporate into the landscape of existing neighborhoods
- Concentrate the density of residential land uses to protect open spaces and rural character
- Development along M-45 should be designed to enhance traffic safety, establish walkable access from adjacent neighborhoods and be compatible with existing and future land uses in these neighborhoods
- Protect and preserve, to the extent practicable, those elements which contribute to the rural character of the Township including woodlands, wetlands, wildlife habitats, farms, pastures, fields, open spaces and other natural areas, particularly those that are useful as water retention and ground water discharge areas and which have important aesthetic and scenic value
- Create a walkable community
- Ensure that student housing is located and designed to avoid conflicts with existing and planned single family housing
- Ensure that multi-family housing is located and designed to avoid conflicts with existing and planned single-family housing
- Preserve the natural resources and groundwater quality of Allendale Charter Township

Recommendations

- Require housing development to utilize clustering techniques
- Require that development layouts blend with the natural features and existing physical attributes
- Provide safe trails and sidewalks between destination land uses and along roadways for pedestrians, skaters, wheelchair users and all non-motorized users to create a walkable and connected community
- Require higher density housing on lands that have the capacity to support such development by means of adequate public roads, public water and public sanitary sewer, and other available infrastructure
- Integrate development into the landscape of existing neighborhoods by abutting open spaces, creating a connection of roads, linking pedestrian pathways, and appropriately blending other public amenities
- Encourage, where appropriate, light pollution regulations to preserve the night sky
- Encourage, where practicable, the preservation of farmhouses, barns, fence styles, and other architectural and landscaping forms, which symbolize the architectural heritage of the Township
- Require the preservation of existing trees along the rights-of-way for future development
- Rezoning to the R-1, R-2, R-3, or R-4 Zoning District shall not occur without public water and public sanitary sewer present at the property
- Encourage groundwater preservation regulations for new development that are in accordance with Ottawa County's Groundwater Sustainability Initiative
- Accommodate wildlife corridors within development

Strategies

- Revise Zoning Ordinance regulations as necessary to preserve or enhance rural character, especially in regard to Planned Unit Developments (PUDs)
- Provide development incentives within the Zoning Ordinance which require the preservation of natural features and open space accessible to all persons in site development design
- Revise the Residential Open Space Development regulations of the Zoning Ordinance so that cluster open space is more appealing to developers than the traditional subdivision design pattern in order to preserve open space in the Township
- Review the Agricultural and Rural Zone (AG) and Rural Estate Zone (RE) Districts and allow farming only in areas where appropriate
- Rezoning to the R-1, R-2, R-3, or R-4 Zoning District shall not occur without public water and public sanitary sewer present at the property
- Require the lot layout, open space, roads, pedestrian pathways, and other site features of new residential developments to be extensions of existing neighborhoods, where practicable, to reduce curb cuts, provide for greater emergency access, and result in a better neighborhood design and public safety
- Require new residential developments to incorporate a pedestrian sidewalk system that ultimately connects with abutting developments to produce a walkable and connected community
- Utilize the Planned Unit Development concept as an incentive tool for development, as a means of preserving the natural character of sites, and to encourage the provision of structured, usable open space
- Strengthen as necessary, zoning regulations limiting the number of residential units in a multi-family building to lessen the visual impact of such buildings

- Strengthen as necessary, zoning regulations to reduce the minimum square footage required for a dwelling in the R-3 Zoning District
- Strengthen as necessary, zoning regulations to restrict the construction of new multi-family housing intended specifically for college students to not extend west of 52nd Avenue
- Adopt new zoning regulations to restrict light pollution to protect the night sky of open spaces
- Strengthen as necessary, zoning regulations which create greater building setbacks, limitations on building height and size and other development standards to reduce the impact of apartments on single-family neighborhoods
- Adopt a Low Impact Development Ordinance which gives incentives for site design that incorporates green storm water management techniques
- Strengthen as necessary, zoning regulations that require student housing is located close to Grand Valley State University for easier and safer pedestrian access
- Strengthen as necessary, zoning regulations to allow an increase in multi-family density and to allow taller buildings in order to allow a greater concentration of students closer to Grand Valley State University's campus and reduce the need to extend student housing west of 52nd Avenue
- Require appropriate landscaping, building setbacks, placement and design, exterior lighting, safe driveway locations, and safety measures for pedestrian transportation
- Consider adoption of regulations which require Wildlife Corridors within development

Introduction & Community Profile

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. 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 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

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, 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.

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. 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. 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.

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 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 **native** 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.

Wildlife Corridor - An asymmetrical area of natural habitat that provides passage for wildlife, colonization, and the breeding of plants and animals, throughout a development and across artificial obstacles such as dams, roads, pedestrian pathways, and railways.

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.

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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:

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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.

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

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- 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

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
- **Accommodate wildlife corridors within development**

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
- **Adopt Zoning Ordinance regulations that require minimum open space requirements for Planned Unit Developments (PUD)**
- **Require open spaces which are accessible to all persons in developments**
- 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
- **Consider adoption of regulations which require Wildlife Corridors within development**

Chapter One

Agricultural Uses

Introduction

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