

INTRODUCTION

The goals and objectives contained in this Plan establish the overall guidelines for future public and private decisions relating to the development of Ross Township. Issues, and their resolution, are the platform for formulating community goals and associated objectives. The issues described below were identified by analyzing data collected in the process of putting this Plan together, coupled with the results of the Leadership and Community surveys, the Brook Lodge charrette, and input from the Township Planning Commission.

PLANNING FRAMEWORK

Knowledgeable planning decisions about balancing development and preservation of the environment in rural bedroom communities such as Ross Township are based upon understanding interrelationships among the various social, economic, man-made and environmental components that make up the community.

Fully understanding the complexity of this system requires an understanding of each of its individual components and how actions that are taken relative to one component can impact one or more of the other elements of the community. In addition, local leaders and decision-makers have to be sensitive to the perceptions that residents have of the Township. Often, the popular perceptions associated with an issue do not necessarily reflect the reality of the situation. But in a political sense, perception is reality, and individuals and organizations will often pursue solutions to perceived issues which will ultimately have little or no positive impact and which could potentially make the situation worse. That is why the rational planning process, which incorporates objective analysis of the data collected, clarification of the issues through public discussion, and formation of significant goals, achievable objectives and realistic actions, is needed to guide the Township in its decision-making.



Issues

In the development of the Ross Township Master Plan, certain planning issues have emerged that will chart the future direction of Ross Township. These issues have been defined through analysis of “hard” data and information, and public input through surveys and discussions. They are presented within the categories of Social/Economic Issues, Land Use Issues, Natural Resource Issues and Public Facilities and Services Issues and are not listed in any particular order of importance.

Social/Economic

- The median age of the Township’s residents is substantially higher than the County in general (by an average of 9 years), and is projected to continue to go higher. Part of that trend has been a consistent decline in the number of 20-34 year old residents.
- Typical of other communities, the Township is experiencing a decline in its proportion of married couple households and an increase in single parent (female-headed) households, which tends to generally have an adverse effect on family stability and increase the need of social service assistance.
- While the average value of a home in the Township is higher than the County in general, such higher values often preclude those who desire to move into the Township from doing so. A number of residents expressed concern over the high cost of housing or high (inflated) property values. At the same time, housing value is directly related to property tax assessment. This is a problem that is implied by the reluctance of a majority of community survey respondents to pay additional property taxes for specified Township facilities or services.
- Future population growth is the most important issue that concerns Township residents. There are a number of implications – social, economic, and environmental – associated with new residents moving into the area.
- The fact that approximately 25 percent of the Township’s land area is non-taxable is of concern to residents. This has had a substantial impact on the Township’s potential revenue. While such land uses do not produce property tax revenue, they do help to maintain an open space environment.

Land Use

- There is a perception that land use management within the Township is a concern. That is tied to a number of factors identified in the community survey, including division of farmland for residential development and loss of open space.
- The high density of housing around Gull Lake is of concern to residents. Some feel the intensity of development around lakes is creating “overload,” exceeding the capacity of Township lakes to reasonably accommodate watercraft. The “Recreation Carrying Capacity Study” collaborates that perception.
- There is a concern among some residents that there are too many golf courses within the Township. While such land uses may not produce as much property tax revenue as other, more intense uses, they do help to maintain an open space environment. On the other hand, the chemicals and fertilizers used on golf courses create a greater potential for groundwater contamination.
- Overall, a substantial majority of residents desire to retain the rural character of the Township. While it is not possible to unreasonably preclude new residents from moving into the Township, rural character can be sustained through appropriate land use management techniques.



Natural Resources

- The rural character of the Township is dependent upon the character and quality of its natural resources, and there is a general concern that, as a result of new residential development (existing and future), those resources will be altered or lost forever.
- While the **loss of farmland and open space** are land use issues, they are also natural resource issues, as development typically depletes at least a portion of the



development area's natural vegetation, increases the amount of impermeable surface area (parking lots, roofs, sidewalks, streets, etc.), and changes the natural topography of an area with the potential of increasing soil erosion and surface water contamination.

- The **loss of wetlands** is a concern among residents. While the potential for losing large wetlands is diminished by the Michigan Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act (PA 451 Of 1994), there is the potential of eliminating smaller wetlands (under 5 acres) without a local wetlands protection ordinance.
- With the Township's relatively hilly topography, numerous streams, wetlands and lakes, excavation related to construction can create conditions leading to **soil erosion** if such excavation is not regulated to minimize erosion, as well as visual "scarring" of the landscape. Soil erosion can negatively impact surface waters as sediment, resulting from erosion, can build up in lakes and change the natural balance between water, nutrients and inorganic materials.
- There are larger expanses of woodlands within the Township, with the Kellogg Forest being the most predominant, and also the most managed. However, there is a concern that additional development will contribute to the **loss of some of the Township's existing woodlands**.
- Because there is no community water system within the Township, residents are sensitive to the need to prevent **contamination of groundwater**. As described in Section II, the natural cycle of groundwater recharge is aided by natural vegetation and wetlands acting as filters.
- The potential for runoff of fertilizers and chemicals from residential yards around lakes, as well as substantial use of motor driven watercraft, have created a concern about **surface water contamination**. This is also addressed in the Four Townships "Environmental Carrying Capacity" Study.
- Outside of Gull Lake, there are no lakes within the Township that are served by a community sewer system (although portions of Sherman Lake may be in the future). As lakes develop with additional residential units, each with its own private septic system, the potential for **surface water pollution** increases. Overuse of the shoreline, particularly with lawn



fertilizers and lake access lots, can also contribute to lake contamination or eutrophication. Increased shoreline density will also contribute to lake degradation through increased stormwater runoff resulting from an increase in impermeable surface areas.

Public Facilities/Services

- The ability of the Township to manage land use changes is closely tied to the requirements and standards established within its adopted zoning ordinance, as well as the ability of Township officials and staff to administer that ordinance, as well as other land use regulations. One of the concerns expressed in the community input section, in light of the land use changes that have more recently occurred in the Township, is the perceived **weakness in the enforcement of the zoning ordinance to effectively regulate land use.**
- **Road maintenance** is an issue among residents. Since public roads within the Township are under the jurisdiction of the Kalamazoo County Road Commission, that agency has the primary responsibility for resolving this concern.
- **Hiking and biking lanes along roadways as well as separate trails,** while not necessarily considered an issue of concern, are clearly desired by residents and consequently should be addressed as part of this Plan.
- **Most residents desire better yard waste pickup.**
- **Overuse of lakes** in the Township was cited as a concern by a number of residents (presumably those living on lakes). Previous studies have indicated that the Township's lakes have exceeded their maximum recreation carrying capacity. Associated with that concern is perception that there is too much public access to lakes. Management of public access and recreational use of lakes needs to be addressed.



GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The preceding description of current and future issues outlines the concerns and possibilities that the public, local leaders, and analysis of data have clarified. The next stage of the planning process is to establish guidelines to resolve those issues that are a concern and capitalize on the potentials for positive change. Those guidelines are reflected in defined **goals** (end-points) toward which this Plan will attempt to strive. In order to advance the potential to achieve these end-points, each goal contains a series of **objectives**, which are more detailed descriptions of the components of the goal and clarify the methods that will be used to achieve that goal.

OVERRIDING GOAL

Ross Township will preserve its rural character. Rural character is a quality that reflects a predominance of natural vegetation, open space (larger aggregations of undeveloped areas) or farmland, water resources and viewsheds, relatively undisturbed by man-made changes to the landscape.

Objectives:

- A. Designate areas for residential development close to existing "built-up" areas within close proximity to utilities and adjacent to main roadways.
- B. Identify areas for residential development in non-prime farmland areas; avoiding developmental impact upon existing wetlands, woodlands, prime farmlands and other rural open space areas.
- C. Conserve large parcels in prime farmland areas.
- D. Enhance existing commercial development in the 38th Street/M-89/Gull Lake Drive area, work with the Village of Augusta to promote compatible commercial development, and discourage scattered, sprawling strip development throughout the Township.
- E. Protect residential districts from urban sprawl by reducing conventional plat and land division development to an absolute minimum through the use of land use management techniques that will encourage creative



design and concentrated (clustered) development, maximum preservation of natural areas and use of open space.

- F. Integrate commercial and industrial land uses into their surrounding environment through appropriate and attractive architecture and signage, road setbacks, site design, and sensitivity to the natural environment, minimizing typical strip development layout.
- G. Enhance the awareness of residents about the benefits of conservation-oriented design.
- H. Apply development standards to protect the Township's natural resources, including lakes, rivers, streams, wetlands, groundwater, woodlands, and steeper slopes.

SUPPLEMENTARY GOALS

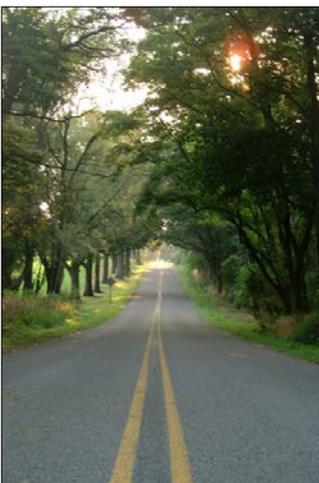
Ross Township will:

1. Conserve the Township's Farmland

Supporting Statement: *The Township understands that its land use patterns and economy are in a transition and that agriculture is no longer as predominant in the Township as it once was. At the same time, every effort will be made to accommodate those individual property owners and businesses that desire to continue to use their land for agricultural purposes.*

Objectives:

- a. Establish an inventory of inactive farmlands for potential preservation as open space.
- b. Zone active farms to retain large parcels for agricultural production.
- c. Provide for natural vegetation buffers separating active farmland from other activities on adjacent parcels.
- d. Initiate programs to address potential concerns regarding the impact of agricultural land use practices on adjacent non-agricultural land uses.



2. Preserve the Township's Open Space

Supporting Statement: *Open space (including agriculture) is still the predominant feature of the Township and thus defines the character of the Township that makes it attractive to those who live here.*

Objectives:

- a. Institute both land use regulations and development incentives to encourage open space preservation.
- b. Promote the establishment of conservation easements in appropriate locations.
- c. Inform property owners and developers of the value of preservation and enhancement of open space in site design and construction.
- d. Provide for public purchase of development rights as appropriate.

3. Protect the Township's Natural Resources

Supporting Statement: *The natural features of the Township are held in high regard by local residents and officials and are major attributes that comprise the Township's "quality of life." These features cannot be sacrificed for development.*

Objectives:

- a. Incorporate measures to protect viewsheds, surface soils, woodlots, natural vegetation, lakes, rivers, streams and groundwater through Township development regulations.
- b. Encourage innovative site design measures that will optimize protection and enhancement of natural resources.
- c. Promote access to local resources for technical assistance in techniques and practices for resource protection.

4. Protect the Quality of the Township's Ground and Surface Waters

Supporting Statement: *The highest intensity of land uses within the Township occurs around its major bodies of water. At the same time, individual wells provide the source of water for residents and businesses. The quality of both of these resources must be protected to sustain the viability of the Township for living, working, and recreation.*

Objectives:

- a. Identify environmentally sensitive areas along the Kalamazoo River, Augusta Creek and Township lakes, ponds, tributaries and wetlands to preserve for plant, wildlife and fish habitat.
- b. Preserve surface water quality by establishing buffer regulations along rivers, streams, lakes and wetlands.
- c. Work with private watershed groups and community organizations to establish a comprehensive approach to water resource protection.
- d. Continue to be an active member in the Four Township Water Resources Council, and support its mission of Farmland, Open Space and Water Quality Protection.
- e. Promote storm water management practices throughout the Township.
- f. Prevent potential groundwater contamination from individual septic systems, agricultural activities and industrial/commercial processes
- g. When demand requires, consider wellhead protection program for potential municipal wells.
- h. Establish measures that will preclude over-utilization of the Township's lakes.

5. **Protect the quality of the Gull Lake watershed to preserve the health of Gull Lake as a natural resource and to sustain the viability of the surrounding area for living, working and recreation.**

Supporting Statement: *Wetlands and drainage systems within the Gull Lake watershed will be protected in recognition of their role in preserving the health of the watershed. Care will be taken to not exceed the carrying capacity of the watershed, both ecologically and recreationally. With each site plan review or other land use decision, natural feature and water quality protection will be a consideration while recognizing and honoring the importance of the watershed in the local economy and in its impact on property values.*

Objectives:

- a. Coordinate watershed protection efforts among Barry, Prairieville, Richland and Ross townships through local zoning ordinances and master plans.
- b. Establish the site plan review process as an effective mechanism to implement watershed protection techniques.
- c. Engages in joint, advanced site plan review training that incorporates natural features and water quality protection. This training should be ongoing. As watershed technology advances and new members are appointed to applicable boards and commissions.
- d. Employ water quality protection techniques at the watershed level through planning and zoning, especially through the site plan review process. For larger scale projects, the planners in the affected township are encouraged to communicate with planners in other watershed communities to provide additional professional resources to the Planning Commission.
- e. Incorporate groundwater protection programs in the zoning ordinance and other applicable regulations.

- f. Incorporate best management practices for storm water management techniques in the zoning ordinance and other applicable regulations.
- g. Employ watershed protection techniques through zoning, including but not limited to:
 - *use of overlay zones, planned unit development or open space development for sensitive parcels*
 - *use of conservation easements in open space and planned unit developments to protect open space areas in perpetuity.*
 - *use of noncontiguous planned unit developments to place a higher density development away from sensitive natural features.*
 - *use of natural buffers neat the lake, drainage ways and wetlands in new developments.*
 - *where appropriate, allow developers to restrict the use of property through conditional rezoning when necessary to protect natural features.*

6. Facilitate Residential Development That Will Maintain the Rural Character of the Township

Supporting Statement: *Residential development is the predominant man-made development pattern in the Township. While construction of new residences will naturally reduce the amount of open space, the design and character of residential land use can impact positive or negatively upon the character of the remaining open space. The Township desires to integrate open spaces and residential development within a compatible framework that enhances both.*

Objectives:

- a. Institute incentives for providing and sustaining open spaces within residential development, including ample road setbacks.



- b. Encourage planned residential developments including road setbacks that will incorporate the natural environment and topography into the design of building sites.
- c. Concentrate multiple-family residential development in designated locations and promote multiple-family site design that fits into the rural character of the Township.
- d. Utilize cluster/open space residential development concepts.

7. Develop and Apply Innovative Development Standards and techniques

Supporting Statement: *An important aspect of achieving compatibility between the built environment and the Township's natural environment is the application of innovative and creative site design and building techniques that fit well with the Township's desire to retain its rural character.*

Objectives:

- a. Provide continuous opportunities for the Planning Commission Zoning Board of Appeals and Township Board to be informed and educated about "state-of-the-art" planning and zoning techniques.
- b. Establish a pro-active approach to implementing the programs and recommendations set forth in this Plan.
- c. Encourage creative development patterns that accommodate and enhance natural features while providing for efficient circulation and aesthetic design within site plan review standards.

8. Assure a Safe and Efficient Network of Streets and Roads

Supporting Statement: *Transportation patterns and land use are interdependent. The Township desires to ensure that its network of streets and*



roads is established in conjunction with the placement of residential, commercial, industrial and recreational activities in a cost-effective and environmentally sensitive manner. Additionally, the Township does not want to establish a standard or process whereby the construction or enhancement of new streets and roads will lead to unforeseen or unwanted development.

Objectives:

- a. Work with the Kalamazoo County Road Commission to identify existing and anticipated future transportation needs on County-maintained facilities and ensure that adequate funding is available for proper maintenance of Township roads.
- b. Develop regulations for private roads to ensure they meet appropriate construction and maintenance standards.
- c. Correct poorly marked intersections and blind spots in Ross Township using appropriate signage.
- d. Promote bike lanes along Township roads and a coordinated hiking/biking/cross-country skiing trail system, including enhancement of the North Country Trail and coordination with large institutional property owners, as well as County and State transportation agencies.
- e. Establish ample setback standards for buildings and signs along roadways to enhance and preserve the Township's rural character.

9. Provide Adequate Public Services and Facilities

Supporting Statement: *“Adequate” public services are those that will meet or exceed the expectations of the Township’s residents and businesses within the financial resources of the Township’s government. That includes public safety, recreation, building and zoning administration and clerical operations and other services and facilities that will add to the satisfaction of living or working within the Township.*

Objectives:

- a. Adopt levels of service standards that best fit the needs of the Township and continue to monitor and amend those levels of service as development occurs (avoid providing enhanced levels of service that will promote undesirable development).
- b. Increase the use of technology in the day-to-day operations of the Township.
- c. Encourage buried utilities where practical to enhance rural character (e.g. buried electrical and phone lines).
- d. Acquire “state-of-the-art” equipment when determined to be cost-effective to facilitate improved operations.
- e. Retain high skill levels among Township staff and committees through adequate and appropriate continuing education efforts.
- f. Require the provision of utilities on the basis of “concurrency” where public utilities are necessary for any particular development within the Township.

(Concurrency is an approach that ensures that public facilities and services are provided at the same time development occurs. These services are planned well in the future within a phased approach and are constructed on a “pay as you go” basis. If public utilities are not scheduled for an area proposed for development, the development cannot occur, unless the development pays for the extension of utilities.)

- g. Require electric, telephone, and cable utilities for all new residential and nonresidential developments to be placed underground.

10. Assure a Planned, Concentrated Approach to Commercial and Industrial Development

Supporting Statement: *Because of the overriding goal of sustaining the rural character of the Township, it is important to ensure that commercial and industrial development fit within that goal. It is logical, then, to establish standards that will ensure that commercial and industrial land uses do not fall into a “sprawl” pattern but rather respect the natural, open space character of the Township through efficient and aesthetic concentrated development.*

Objectives:

- a. Identify and address the impact of commercial and industrial development upon the environment and overall rural character. The intent will be to ensure that the impact of commercial and industrial development will not be at the expense of Ross Township's residents, environment and tax base.
- b. Identify specific areas suitable for commercial and industrial development, and restrict development to such areas.
- c. Restrict commercial development to planned, concentrated clusters and discourage strip “sprawl” commercial development.
- d. Incorporate site design standards into the Township Zoning Ordinance that will facilitate aesthetic and functional commercial and industrial developments.
- e. Establish appropriate signage requirements.