

Mission Statement

The mission of the Ross Township Board of Trustees is to preserve and enhance the quality of life in Ross Township by:

- ◆ Providing a safe environment in which to live
- ◆ Maintaining the rural character and quietude of our community
- ◆ Protecting the natural resources of our community
- ◆ Responding to the needs of the Township with respect and concern
- ◆ Upholding and enforcing the Local, State, and Federal laws

INTRODUCTION

What Is Community Planning?

Community planning is planning by municipal (Township) government. It is concerned with the solving of existing physical, social and economic problems as well as providing for the optimum environment for those components of the community over time. Community planning operates under the general objectives established by state enabling legislation. The Michigan Planning Enabling Act (Act 33 of 2008) provides for the creation of Township planning commissions, the development of comprehensive plans and the regulation of land. Under this Act, a Township may create a planning commission to make plans for the unincorporated areas of the Township. Such plans are intended to provide the framework for public capital improvements, zoning and other land use controls administered through the Township, County and State governments over the life of the plan. The aim of community planning is to achieve optimum compatibility and efficiency among the various elements that make up the community. Community planning can prevent duplication of effort among the various levels of government and avoid unnecessary competition for limited financial resources. Just as important, community planning can influence the stabilization, conservation and improvement of private property and natural resources.

What Is the Master Plan?

The Master Plan is a product of the planning process. Through text, maps and other graphic aids, it explains the philosophy and desires of the Township about its future. The Plan seeks to express an ideal community in terms of existing conditions, growth potential and accepted planning standards. Yet it is flexible enough so that changing conditions will allow Ross Township to adapt as necessary to accomplish the general precepts of the plan. To be most effective, the plan must reflect the joint participation of citizens, businesses and public officials in the orderly development of the Township.

Ross Township's proximity to Kalamazoo and Battle Creek, its rural atmosphere, and its institutional resources make it an ideal place for people to live. While land use issues are the central focus of the Plan, it also identifies issues related to public services, roads, community facilities, recreation, agriculture, institutional land holdings, and the area's natural environment. A good master plan should consider these factors and use the right planning tools to guide land use decisions so as to take advantage of the Township's strengths while still preserving its assets.

The Master Plan represents the efforts of the community to set goals and an overall vision for the Township. This Plan will guide Ross Township's development through 2040, when the Plan will require updating. The Township should frequently review the Plan (at a minimum, once every five years by law) to ensure the goals still match the community's desires and to ensure the responsible parties are following the established policies.

The Master Plan's Relationship to Zoning

The Michigan Zoning Enabling Act states that the 'zoning ordinance shall be based upon a plan designed to promote the public health, safety, and general welfare, (and) to encourage the use of land in accordance with their character and adaptability . . . '

The Master Plan is a policy document and serves as the basis for the Zoning Ordinance and Zoning Map. Zoning decisions found to be inconsistent with the Plan may be found to be invalid by the courts.

In other words, the Master Plan sets forth the vision for the Township, while the Zoning Ordinance establishes the land use regulations designed to implement that vision. The areas delineated on the Future Land Use Map are called 'land use classifications' and are not the same as zoning districts on the Zoning Map. The land use classification sets forth the desired land use, whereas the zoning district establishes what can happen under current conditions.

To that end, the Future Land Use Map will not directly match the Zoning Map or align with existing land uses. However, the Plan reflects the long-range desires for land development, and it is expected that future rezonings and land use decisions will conform to the Master Plan.

The Zoning Plan contained within the Master Plan describes how the land use classifications on the Future Land Use Map correlate to the zoning districts on the Zoning Map. The Zoning Plan will help determine how the Zoning Ordinance should be amended to implement the Master Plan.

Creating the Master Plan

The original Township Master Plan was adopted in 2002. Following receipt of significant public input and a comprehensive review of goal statements related to residential, commercial, industrial, agricultural, institutional, and open space land use, specific goals and policies were developed for the period of 2000 through 2020. The goals and policies set forth in the 2002 Master Plan were based on population projections, development trends, and anticipated land preservation activities.

Consistent with the Michigan Planning Enabling Act of 2008, the Planning Commission conducted a review of the Master Plan in 2010. It was determined that the Plan remained generally relevant on land use policies but received minor updates to incorporate goals and objectives specific to the quality of the Gull Lake watershed; strengthen and clarify established future land use classifications; and, incorporate a zoning plan.

The 2011 updated Master Plan was reviewed by the Ross Township Master Plan Review Committee in 2018. A minor update of the document was considered to be desirable so as to incorporate current demographic data; respond to new planning law and land use regulatory options; and, recognize recent development activity and changes in 'existing conditions'.

This update of the 2011 Master Plan was accomplished in three basic steps:

First, updated information about the Township was gathered related to demographics, land use, and public facilities and services. This information is presented in Sections I through IV. The updated information was then used to confirm/update the Goals and Objectives set forth in Section VI that serve as the foundation of the Plan. Lastly, using the confirmed Goals and Objectives as a guide, the Future Land Use Plan and Implementation Plan were updated for accuracy and relevance.

The Planning Commission then initiated the adoption process required by the Michigan Planning Enabling Act. The draft updated Plan was reviewed by the Township Board and then released for review by the surrounding communities and the Kalamazoo County Planning Commission. Following the mandated review/comment period, the Planning Commission held a public hearing on January 24, 2022 and the Plan was adopted by the Township Board on July 26, 2022. The resolution of adoption is copied on the inside back cover of this document, in accordance with the Act.

Pursuant to the recommendation of the Master Plan Review Committee, a full rewrite of the Master Plan will be considered following the release of the 2020 census information and will include a broad-based and meaningful public engagement element in the planning process.

How to Use This Plan

The Master Plan will have an impact on the future of your property. It is important that you become familiar with the Plan and what it may mean to you and your community.

What land use is proposed for your property or the area surrounding your property?

This information is set forth on the Future Land Use Map and described in Section VII. Find the land use classification in which your property is located and then read the description of the classification applied to your property. If you have a specific proposal that is inconsistent with the expectations of the Plan, you will want to review the Plan in more detail.

How does the Plan affect your property?

The future land use designation of your property indicates the planned use of your property. This does not mean that you cannot continue the use that you currently have. Land use within the Township is dictated by zoning. See the Zoning Ordinance for zoning standards specific to your property.

How does the Township view development in your area?

The Future Land Use Plan/Map indicate the type of development planned for your area; it may be specific or somewhat general. The Future Land Use Classifications set forth in Section VII and the goals/objectives for land use within the Township set forth in Section VI provide details on the direction of future land use within your general area.

Plan Summary

Ross Township is a community of rich and diverse natural resources. It is also home to almost 5,000 people who strongly value those resources and desire to protect and preserve them. At the same time, it is inevitable that change (physical, social and economic) will occur. With its close proximity to both Kalamazoo and Battle Creek, the Township is in a geographic location that is undergoing development pressures. The Township's population is substantially older than other townships in Kalamazoo County, has a higher level of income and in general is employed outside of the Township, making Ross Township a "bedroom" community – one where residents live, and commute elsewhere to work.

Historically, row crop and orchard farming have played an important role in defining the Township's character, as a number of large landholders engaged in farming as a full-time occupation. Over time, as the economics of agriculture have changed, farmers have retired, and transportation improvements have made people more mobile, the amount of land in agriculture production has been declining. Concurrently, the larger lakes in the Township, primarily Gull Lake, have traditionally been a summer vacation spot for people who lived in other communities. Within the past 20 years, as those summer residents became older and retired, many turned their summer home into a year-round residence.

A number of other related factors have contributed to the changing character of the Township. Those factors are allied to the "push-pull" model of community change. There has been a long-term trend among households to move out of urban areas for a variety of reasons (traffic congestion; small, older homes; crime; taxes) to more rural areas that appear more attractive because those conditions either don't exist or are substantially less pervasive in those areas. The negative conditions create a "push" factor. The attractive conditions create a "pull" factor. Ross Township's rural character, relatively low density of development, variety of natural resources (especially lakes, wetlands and woodlands) and overall natural beauty combine to attract new residents. At the same time, Township representatives and residents understand that the very environment that makes the area an attractive place to live is always in danger of being diminished unless the resources that make up that environment are protected. Ross Township is in an envious position in one sense because about 20 percent of its land area is owned and managed by institutions and nonprofit organizations, the great majority whose focus is the preservation of open space, forests, wetlands and agricultural lands for research, education and recreation. On the other hand, such a large amount of land in tax-exempt status substantially limits local property tax revenues.

That is the focus of this Plan – to prepare for changes that are likely to occur in the man-made environment while providing the means to protect, and even enhance, the natural environment. The Plan is essentially divided into two major parts. Sections I through V pertain to existing conditions and the public's perceptions of those conditions, as well as their preferences about the future of the Township. Sections VI through VIII contain the Township's aspirations for the future, as reflected in its adopted goals and objectives, the description of how land uses are proposed to be distributed within the future, and recommended policies and activities that are intended to enable the Township and its residents to implement this Plan.

The Ross Township Master Plan is intended to provide a framework for managing change within the Township to the year 2040. That consists of providing for development while preserving and protecting the environment that could otherwise be easily diminished through uncontrolled development.

The following goals were adopted as part of this Plan:

Overriding Goal – Ross Township will preserve its rural character.

Supplementary Goals – Ross Township will:

- Conserve the Township's Farmland
- Preserve the Township's Open Space
- Protect the Township's Natural Resources
- Protect the Quality of the Township's Ground and Surface Waters
- Facilitate Residential Development That Will Maintain the Rural Character of the Township
- Develop and Apply Innovative Development Standards and Techniques
- Assure a Safe and Efficient Network of Streets and Roads
- Provide Adequate Public Services and Facilities
- Assure a Planned, Concentrated Approach to Commercial and Industrial Development

The following are highlights of the elements of the Plan that are contained in Section VII Future Land Use.

- The Township estimates a population of 5,800-6,000 by the year 2040.
- Based upon that estimated population, it is anticipated that an additional 500 households will be living within the Township by the year 2040.
- Those households will require approximately 500 additional housing units, of which 92% will be single family, 4% will be duplex and 4% will be multiple-family, similar to the distribution existing in the year 2000.
- Seventy percent of the new single-family residential development will be within cluster/open space configurations, encompassing 546 acres.
- Thirty percent of new single-family development will occur in traditional single lot or plat configurations along, or within close proximity to, County roads. These will encompass 147 acres at an average density of one unit per acre.
- New duplex and multiple-family housing will occupy about 14 acres.
- In total, approximately 707 acres should be set aside for new residential development.
- New single-family residential development (particularly cluster/open space development) will be focused on currently undeveloped areas within the eastern and southern portions of the Township. Duplex and multiple-family housing will be concentrated around the Village of Augusta.
- New commercial activity will be focused around the M-89/38th Street area on the south side of the lake. A "village center" concept with mixed use/pedestrian oriented commercial uses is called for.
- Industrial development will be limited to an area north of Custer Road in sections 35 and 36. It is not the intention of the Township to actively promote industrial development.
- Residential, commercial and industrial development will be encouraged, through land use control standards in local ordinances, to adopt site design elements that minimize impacts upon the natural and scenic environment.

These components are in keeping with the overriding goal of preserving the Township's rural character. That is to be accomplished through the preservation of its natural resources (lakes, wetlands, woodlands, and viewsheds), the conservation of its agricultural lands, and the retention of as much of open space as possible while accommodating new development within a managed growth framework.

