

INTRODUCTION

Public participation takes many forms. Surveys, phone interviews, monthly public meetings and community issue forums are all effective means to get a better unified and representative community vision from residents, business owners and community activists.

A successful planning effort requires community participation. Community reports and surveys were prepared specifically for the Township in previous planning efforts. Those include the Strategic Water Resource Management Planning Committee Final Report (1998), "Convening Our Community" – a random survey of Kalamazoo County residents, including Ross Township (1999), and previous Ross Township community surveys conducted in 1992, 1995 and 1996. Information and recommendations from the "Four Township Recreation Carrying Capacity Study" and the "Four Township Environmental Carrying Capacity Study" are also included in this Plan. In addition, the Four Township Water Resources Council Water Resources Paper was published in 2001. The findings and recommendations of these efforts are in Appendix A.

Community input efforts were also specifically completed in the development of the 2002 Plan and consisted of a Community Leader's Questionnaire, a Household Survey/Questionnaire and a Brook Lodge Community Vision Charrette. The results of these extensive and varied public engagement activities are described below and remain the foundation of the current Plan.

ROSS TOWNSHIP COMMUNITY LEADERS' QUESTIONNAIRE

The following information is a compiled summary of the important contact persons the Ross Township Planning Commission recommended Gove Associates interview to garner insight from known community leaders and activists. Of the 20 mailed out, 12 were returned. Additional follow-up on non-returned questionnaires provided further answers. The following reflects the responses to each open-ended question and the associated ranking (1,2,3) given for each response:

Q1: "What do you feel are the top three community strengths that currently exist in Ross Township?"

1. School System
Open space
Honest, approachable government

Gull Lake
Natural beauty

2. Sherman Lake
Scenic terrain
Rural quality of area
Country environment
Recreational amenities
Rural character
3. Good economics mix and good mix of rural and populated areas
Plentiful water
Wetlands and lake quality
Relative flexibility in direction of future development/good schools

Q2: "What do you feel are the top three community weaknesses that currently exist in Ross Township?"

1. Roads in bad repair (some)
Public access to lake is way too busy
Low tax base, high amount of non-taxable land
Too much building
Lack of trash and recycling services
Township management
2. Lack of sewers around Sherman Lake
Taxpayer reluctance to support millages for schools and other services
Tax base declining due to all non-taxable properties in Ross Township
Roads need work
Too many golf courses
3. Township office should be open 5 days a week, not 4 days a week.
Too many loopholes in the zoning code
Inability to control watercraft on Gull Lake
Poor infrastructure
Suspicion that inhabitants of Kalamazoo and Battle Creek are trying to "take advantage of us"
Zoning laws can be too restrictive on commercial sites

Q3: "What do you believe will be the top three opportunities that will influence Ross Township in the next 10 years?"

1. Land use management
 - Writing and enforcing building and zoning codes
 - Increased land values
 - Development will occur. Ross Township has the opportunity to direct this in a positive manner
2. Use of informed, strategic planning
 - Population growth for increased property tax revenue
 - Purchase of development rights of farmland by Ross Township
3. Writing and enforcing regulations protecting wetlands and water quality
 - Having specific land use requirements

Q4: "What do you believe will be the top three problems that will influence/effect Ross Township in the next 10 years?"

1. Land use management
 - Land use requirements, land use regulations and the competition for land
 - Declining tax base
 - Too many people
 - Lack of sewage infrastructure, and water supply for fire protection
2. Cheap houses crowded together
 - Increased traffic, both auto and boat. (especially when Township roads increase in "thru traffic" and cannot be fixed with County funds)
 - Police and Fire protection
 - Overcrowding causing environmental problems around and in Gull Lake
3. Inflated land values
 - Lake congestion and enforcement of boating rules
 - Housing expansion taking advantage of weak zoning ordinances/flexible variances
 - Loss of rural character and environmental concerns

Q5: "Are there any other comments or concerns that you think the Ross Township Planning Commission should be aware of and/or address concerning the current Master Plan project?" These additional responses are noted below.

- I feel our present Township officials are doing a good job
- Enforce zoning and don't make exceptions
- Suggest the DNR be asked to re-study public access sites in terms of use, congestion, violation of fast boat rules, and fish quality and quantity

Summary Review of the Ross Township Community Leaders' Questionnaire

Overall, there appeared to be an agreement that Ross Township's natural resources (open space, lakes, scenic terrain and rural quality of life) were valued community strengths. Land use management was seen as an important component in efforts to ensure the Township will develop appropriately. That can be interpreted to include accommodating any new development that will occur within the context of preserving the Township's resources. Common concerns, also shared in the 1992, 1995 and 1996 community surveys, included road quality, controlling development, (including overcrowding of lakes) and tax revenue concerns, especially the loss of revenue due to non-taxable properties. Furthermore, the need for "fair" land use regulation, the problems associated with higher land value and the desire of consistent enforcement of the Township's zoning ordinance were concerns expressed by many of the community leaders who responded to the questionnaire.

ROSS TOWNSHIP COMMUNITY SURVEY OVERVIEW

In order to create a plan that reflects the desires of the area's residents, it was necessary to determine how people feel about a variety of topics. One of the mechanisms used to identify community issues and preferences was a household survey. This was accomplished through the distribution, tabulation and analysis of a community-wide questionnaire.

Ross Township Questionnaire Results

During June and July of 2000, a planning survey questionnaire was developed, distributed, collected, tabulated and analyzed. The questionnaire was mailed using the Ross Township Property Appraiser's property list of homeowners. 808

surveys were mailed, and 235 were returned - a strong return rate of 29%. Detailed survey responses can be found in Appendix B.

Summary of Findings

Responses were well received from throughout the Township. However, over 61% (144 surveys) of respondents came from Quadrant I (see page IV-2). The lowest percent of total respondents came from Quadrant IV, with only 6% (14 surveys) representing the 235 total surveys.

Responses by Years of Residency indicated a strong representation of respondents calling Ross Township home for 10 or more years. Specifically, 165 respondents (or 70% of 235 total respondents) have lived in Ross Township for 10 or more years. Eighteen respondents, or about 7%, also worked in Ross Township, with 84 respondents (approximately 36%) indicating they were retired or not employed.

Responses to annual household income indicated a diversity of income levels. Of the total 235 respondents, 200 (around 85%) answered this question. Almost 10% of respondents had an annual household income of \$24,999 or less, 22.5% had an annual household income between \$25,000 and \$50,999, and approximately 53% had an annual household income of \$51,000 or more.

Questions were asked regarding key issues/conditions and whether or not they were problems. The following depicts the responses:

	NP	PP	SP	MP	SP	NO
Pollution of surface water	18%	22%	15%	16%	16%	8%
Division of farmland for residential development	12%	12%	8%	18%	38%	9%
Loss of open space	12%	13%	11%	19%	37%	6%
Loss of wetlands	14%	15%	11%	15%	35%	8%
Soil erosion	17%	15%	18%	13%	14%	19%
Traffic congestion on Township roads	27%	13%	15%	18%	18%	6%
Cost of single-family homes	9%	11%	16%	23%	34%	4%
Density of water uses on lakes	26%	8%	12%	17%	15%	19%

NP = Not a problem; PP = Possible Problem; SP = Slight Problem; MP = Moderate Problem; SP = Serious Problem; NO = No Opinion

In general, residents who responded to the questionnaire do not believe pollution of lakes is an imminent threat. They are, however, concerned about breaking up farmland for residential development. Similarly, the loss of wetlands and open space are also a concern. Soil erosion is not perceived to be a major concern while respondents appear to be split over whether or not traffic congestion is an issue to be concerned about. The cost of single-family homes is also considered to be a significant problem while there is a wide distribution of opinion on the importance of the density of recreational use on the lakes.

General quality of life in Ross Township was rated as Good by almost 70% of respondents. A concern within Ross Township appears to be zoning code enforcement (61 Poor or Very Poor responses, or 26%), building code enforcement (53 Poor or Very Poor responses, or 22%), communication facilities (91 Poor or Very Poor responses, or 38%) and road maintenance (107 Poor or Very Poor responses, or 45%).

Respondents ranked future issues and concerns on a scale from 1 to 6; 1 being most important, 6 being least important. The following represents the order of importance of those issues:

1. Population growth
2. Loss of open fields, pastures, farms
3. Commercial, Industrial development
4. Quality of lakes, wetlands
5. Loss of woodlands
6. The selection labeled "Other" weighed heavily towards minimizing properties that are non-taxable (9 responses), road maintenance (6 responses) and zoning ordinance enforcement (4 responses).

When asked to address future development options, respondents provided the following. Of note, the following issues appear to be important to questionnaire respondents:

- 64% AGREED or STRONGLY AGREED about having more single-family housing in Ross Township. Another 18% were NEUTRAL, and 12% DISAGREED or STRONGLY DISAGREED with this policy.
- Encouraging apartment housing in the Township drew a DISAGREED or STRONGLY DISAGREED response by 62% of respondents, while 52% DISAGREED or STRONGLY DISAGREED that new retail or other services business development should be encouraged.
- 67% of those responding were against encouraging industrial development. Accordingly, 75% were also against the use of public funding to attract new businesses.
- A majority (62%) were in favor of biking/hiking trails, also agreeing that trails should be designed along roads in the Township. Slightly fewer respondents, but still a majority (52%), believed that separate hiking/biking trails should be located in Ross Township.
- There were mixed opinions regarding development of more parks and recreation facilities with less than half (41%) AGREEING or STRONGLY AGREEING to that policy.
- Preservation of natural areas in Ross Township earned a strong 82% AGREED or STRONGLY AGREED response.
- Farmland preservation was supported by 74% of those who responded while the desire for open space preservation was affirmed by 78%.
- Strict sign regulations in the Township were not considered an important issue, as evidenced by a combined Agree/Strongly Agree response of 45%.
- Over 65% do not believe that public funds should be used to attract new business.
- Slightly more than half (52%) felt that there should be a limit on the number of domestic animals permitted at a non-farm residence.

- A plurality (40%) had no preference about placing street lighting in all existing subdivisions. Similarly, residents appeared to be ambivalent about placing street lighting in all new subdivisions.
- A strong majority (72%) desired better road maintenance in the Township.
- A plurality of respondents (46%) did not believe there is a need of more police protection.
- A slightly higher proportion (51%) did not believe there is a need of more fire protection.
- Similarly, 51% did not perceive there is a need for faster/better ambulance service.
- A majority (57%) were in favor of better yard waste pickup.
- Slightly less than half of all respondents (49%) support recycling services.
- Only a little more than 1/3 of respondents believed the Township should promote expanded water and sewer facilities. Over half were either neutral or disagreed.
- A plurality (47%) was ambivalent about keeping public access on cable TV.
- Almost 2/3 or those responding did not believe more traffic lights or stop signs were needed within the Township.
- Among the minority who felt additional traffic lights or stop signs were needed, many identified traffic lights at M-89 and 37th Street, and the M-89/M-43 Intersection. ~~was noted.~~
- A majority were ambivalent about improving illumination at major street intersections.
- Among those who favored increased intersection illumination, M-89 and 40th Street was the preferred intersection.

When asked to identify the 5 most important items that should be dealt with in the Township, respondents established the following priority:

1. Road maintenance
2. Loss of open space/natural areas
3. Loss of farmland
4. Groundwater protection
5. Loss of wetlands

Slightly less than half (49%) indicated they would be willing to pay additional taxes to address one or all of the five issues.

When presented with a proposed assessed property tax payment program to support the setting aside of agricultural or open space land for preservation, respondents gave the following answers:

- 9% would pay \$125.00 per year for 10 years for a \$100,000 market value home.
- 27% would pay \$83.00 per year for 15 years for a \$100,000 market value home.
- 53% would not pay an assessment at all and not agree to purchase the land.
- 11% did not respond to this question.

A number of population growth estimates for Ross Township for the year 2020 (excluding the Village of Augusta) were defined and respondents were requested to select a preferred target.

The choices noted were as follows:

- Less than 6,000.....49%
- 6,001 - 8,000.....22%
- 8,001 - 10,000.....11%
- 10,001 - 12,000.....2%
- over 12,000.....0%
- did not respond to this question.....16%

ROSS TOWNSHIP LAND USE PLANNING CHARRETTE, BROOK LODGE, OCTOBER 25TH, 2000

Approximately 60 people attended this important October community forum. The key objective was to assess concerns related to the Township's existing land uses and develop (using five smaller work groups) a map to address desired future land use development.

The term "charrette" is derived from the French term for "little cart" and refers to the final intense work effort expended by architects to meet a project deadline. In Paris, during the 19th Century, professors at the Ecole de Beaux Arts circulated with little carts to collect final drawings from their students. Students would jump on the "charrette" to put finishing touches on their minutes before the deadline.

Ultimately, the purpose of the Ross Township Land Use Planning Charrette was to give those concerned with their community the opportunity to provide insight and ideas which will aid in developing appropriate goals, objectives and proposals for the Ross Township Master Plan.

Members of the Ross Township Planning Commission, Township staff and planners from Gove Associates helped lead the public forum and five work groups.

BROOK LODGE CHARRETTE FORMAT**Introduction to the Community Charrette**

The meeting began at 7:30 p.m. An introductory presentation provided a summary of the efforts completed up to the Charrette meeting concerning the Ross Township Master Plan; provided an explanation of the work groups' responsibilities and objectives; answered questions from the audience; and, finally, divided those participating into five work groups.

Work Groups Get to Work

The five work groups consisted of 10-11 people each. Planning Commission members were in each of the groups and provided valuable group leadership. Work groups first discussed concerns regarding specific community issues, such as the environment, transportation/roads, public utilities, as well as residential, commercial and industrial land use development. The work groups were active for

approximately two hours, reviewing existing land use maps, discussing land use concerns and creating future land use maps for Ross Township.

Results from the Five Work Groups

One member from each work group presented the findings of their work group. Their findings were as follows:

Group One, after a long discussion regarding land use concerns, decided future land use development should be concentrated around the Village of Augusta. Specifically, future residential development should occur in medium- to high-density around Augusta, with a recreational area to the east of the Village in Fort Custer (located in southeastern Ross Township). Group One also supported the existing location of industrial land use along Custer Road. Future expansion of commercial development should be located along M-89, from just west of 37th Street to 40th Street, with a concentration at 38th Street. Group One supported the preservation of existing agricultural land use, and identified specific agricultural areas on their future land use map.

Group Two was active in their discussion of existing and future land use concerns. The preservation of agricultural land, open space and wetlands were key concerns of Group Two. Their map identified areas where development should not take place, especially along wetlands and Augusta Creek. Future residential development was supported north of Augusta Drive in the 44th Street area. Their future land use map also included a small area along M-89 at 40th Street for commercial development. However, Group Two preferred that future commercial development be located in the Village of Augusta. They felt commercial development in the Ross Township area should first take advantage of the Village's existing empty storefronts and available commercial parcels. Future industrial development should be located in the currently designated area along Custer Road in the southeastern portion of the Township.

Group Three expressed concern about the impact of future development upon the area's wetlands. The southwestern quarter of Ross Township was specifically identified as an area where wetlands should be preserved and future residential development should be low density to minimize environmental impact. The location of future low-density housing was also promoted in the northeastern area of the Township. Cluster residential development using a medium density designation was proposed along C Avenue, between 44th Street and 45th Street. Additional land for medium density residential development was identified in an area defined by C Avenue on the north, M-89 on the south, 42nd Street on the east and Gull Lake Drive on the west. A Planned Unit Development (PUD) area with a golf course was proposed north of Augusta Drive, west of 46th Street. Future industrial development was promoted in the Fort Custer area in southeastern Ross Township. Commercial development was also encouraged in this industrial area, along M-96 just east of the Village of Augusta. Additional future commercial development was identified along M-89, between 37th Street and 38th Street, complementing existing commercial uses in the area.

Group Four identified general areas for future residential, commercial and industrial development. Future residential development was encouraged along 43rd Street, north of C Avenue. Additional areas for future residential development were located off 41st Street and west of 46th Street (just north of Augusta Drive). New commercial development should be located in the M-89/38th Street area, as well as the D Avenue/37th Street intersection. Industrial development should remain as it currently is, located along Custer Road in southeastern Ross Township.

Group Five did not encourage any new commercial development, desiring instead to keep commercial land use "as is." Future residential development was located along the southern side of M-89, from the western border of Ross Township to 41st Street. An additional site for future residential development was identified north of Augusta Drive, between 44th Street and 46th Street. Additional land for future industrial development was placed in the Fort Custer complex, south of Custer Road.

Summary of Ross Township's Brook Lodge Charrette

The meeting ended around 11 p.m. Many people from the five work groups stayed to hear a summary review of each group's efforts. What was discovered was a common concern to preserve open space, wetlands and the rural environment of Ross Township. The charrette groups uniformly placed industrial development adjacent to, or in, the Fort Custer Complex in the southeast portion of the Township. Work groups encouraged future commercial development around the existing commercial enterprises at M-89 and 38th Street. New residential development included some work groups supporting higher density, clustered development to preserve open space, and the placement of residential development directly adjacent to the Village of Augusta.

The Brook Lodge Charrette was a successful community forum which facilitated public dialog and direction for Ross Township officials. It was a positive exercise in helping to formulate future land use, natural resource protection, recreation and infrastructure strategies.

The findings of all three public engagement efforts informed the framework and emphasis of the 2002 Master Plan. The strength of that framework realized continued support in both the 2011 and 2022 updates of the Master Plan.

ROSS TOWNSHIP 2022 MASTER PLAN UPDATE

The 2022 Master Plan Update was guided by the planning issues identified through the 2002 public input process; the 2011 public review process; and, the public feedback received during the 2022 update process.

Public Participation

The Ross Township Planning Commission welcomed the residents and property owners of Ross Township in the process of updating the Master Plan. From the informal group settings of Planning Commission work sessions to the publicized and structured setting of the public hearing, community members were afforded the opportunity to provide input and participate at a meaningful level in the planning process.

Planning Commission Work Sessions - The Planning Commission hosted occasional Master Plan Update Work Sessions during the course of the update process. These work sessions were open to all community members and were publicized on the Township's web site agenda postings. Through the work sessions the Planning Commission received additional public comment and direction on the Plan.

Public Hearing - The public hearing held on the draft Master Plan Update by the Planning Commission offered an additional opportunity for public input in the planning process. The public hearing was held on January 24, 2022 at the Township Hall. The positive comments received on the Plan are a testimony to the value of public participation throughout the process and the importance of having a Master Plan that reflects the priorities and planning values of the community.

Collaboration

An important theme in this Master Plan Update is the desire for collaboration, at both the local and regional levels. Ross Township understands that collaboration with the Villages of Richland and Augusta, and Richland Township, on important local issues is essential in driving economic prosperity and resource protection in the community. Further, an expanded partnership with Kalamazoo County and the Southwest Michigan Prosperity Region 8 will allow for an alignment of shared assets and movement forward on projects that are important to the prosperity of the region.

This Master Plan embraces the notion of local and regional collaboration as a means of ensuring that available resources are targeted where they will have the greatest impact possible for residents.