

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 were identified in 2002 by analyzing data collected in the process of putting the Plan together, coupled with the results of the Leadership and Community surveys, the Brook Lodge charrette, and input from the Township Planning Commission. Those same Issues have since been validated and refined, both through the Master Plan review and update process that occurred in 2011, as well as through the current update effort. The Issues are detailed in this Section and continue to provide the basis for the strategies of the Master Plan.

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, update and use 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 1) “hard” data and information; 2) local and regional patterns of use/activity; 3) public input; and 4) new laws and funding parameters. 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 14 years), and is projected to continue to go higher. Part of that trend has been a consistent decline in the number of residents under the age of 9 and steady increases of all age groups over 55 over the past 20 years.
- Typical of other communities, the Township is experiencing a decline in its proportion of married couple households and an increase in one-parent households, which tends to shape the role that local organizations and school programs play in the community.
- The number of one-person households in the Township continues to increase, introducing the potential for elevated interest in varying housing types and densities not characteristic of the Township.
- 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. Increasing home values may also limit relocation options within the Township for those one-person households that desire to downsize.
- Future population growth continues to be an issue of primary importance to Township residents. There are a number of implications – social, economic, and environmental – associated with new residents moving into the area.

Land Use

- 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, a highly valued asset in the Township.

- Land use management is a priority within the Township, specifically as it relates to the loss of farmland and open space, and land division and density implications of residential growth.



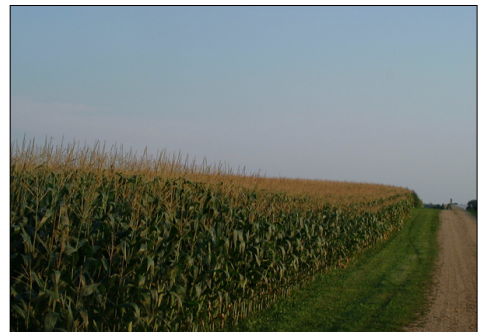
- The high density of housing around Gull Lake is of concern to residents.

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” supports that perception.

- The shift in the utility sector from centralized power generation to accessory energy systems means Ross Township must meet the challenge of becoming solar-ready by addressing solar energy systems with planning policies and zoning regulations.
- 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 a continuing issue among residents. Since public roads within the Township are under the jurisdiction of the Kalamazoo County Road Commission, that agency shares in the responsibility for resolving this concern.
- In 2017, the Township Board worked with the Kalamazoo County Road Commission in defining the road system's needs and developing a comprehensive improvement plan. The Township then created a special assessment district known as the Ross Township Road Improvements Special Assessment District No. 1 for a recovery of part of the costs for the improvement of nearly all of the public roads within the Township. Of special note was the extent to which the Township and Road Commission involved the public in plans. The Township was subsequently recognized with the Transportation



Asset Management Council (TAMC) Organization Award for 2019 acknowledging the collaborative partnership between Ross Township and the Kalamazoo County Road Commission for their efforts and leadership in responding to the needs of the transportation network. Ross Township was also awarded the 2018 Road Warrior Award from the Kalamazoo County Road Commission for the 'largest improvement in average pavement surface evaluation and rating', with a recognized rating increase from 4.31 to 6.02.

- 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.

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. Support the active conservation of large parcels within areas of prime farmland.
- b. Establish the 'purchase of development rights' as a viable option in the Zoning Ordinance.

- c. Provide zoning incentives for active farms to retain large parcels for agricultural production.
- d. Adopt zoning standards that support viable agri-business land use opportunities.
- e. Market the agricultural base of the Township as part of the local tourism trade.
- f. Provide for natural vegetation buffers separating active farmland from encroaching development on adjacent parcels.

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. Establish both land use regulations and development incentives that facilitate open space preservation. These should range from open space standards for individual developments to the use of open space zoning in areas of sensitive natural features.
- b. Establish the site plan review process as an effective mechanism through which to achieve open space preservation and enhancement.
- c. Educate property owners and developers on the value of open space enhancement and how to achieve quality open space preservation through site design and construction.
- d. Promote the establishment of conservation easements in the Township through education.
- e. Establish the 'purchase of development rights' as a viable option in the Zoning Ordinance.

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 the Township's natural resources, including viewsheds, woodlands, steeper slopes, surface water and groundwater, through Township development standards.
- b. Establish the site plan review process as an effective mechanism through which to achieve natural feature preservation.
- c. Encourage and support innovative site design measures that will optimize protection and enhancement of natural resources.
- d. Facilitate access to local resources for technical assistance in natural resource protection techniques and practices.

4. **Protect the Quality of the Township's Surface and Ground 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 for protection efforts.

- b. Preserve surface water quality by establishing waterfront zones and buffer regulations along rivers, streams, lakes and wetlands.
 - c. Engage in training on storm water management and groundwater protection best practices. Use the site plan review process and community outreach to educate property owners on acceptable storm water management, drainage, and secondary containment designs.
 - e. 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.
 - f. When demand requires, consider a wellhead protection program for potential municipal wells.
 - g. Develop a watershed protection strategy that will create the big picture framework for water quality protection through land use management.
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 within the watershed, 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. Engage 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 townships are encouraged to communicate with planners in other watershed communities to provide additional professional resources to the Planning Commission.
- e. Incorporate groundwater protection provisions in the zoning ordinance or other applicable regulations.
- f. Incorporate best management practices for storm water management design in the zoning ordinance or other applicable regulations.
- g. Employ watershed protection techniques through zoning, including but not limited to:
 - Use of an overlay zone, planned unit development or open space development approach to sensitive properties.
 - 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 near the lake, drainage ways and wetlands in new developments.
- Where appropriate, allow developers to restrict the use of property through conditional rezoning 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 positively 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 innovative approaches such as the use of residential street designs with reduced rights-of-way.
- b. Adopt flexible development metrics that allow overall development and individual site designs to respond to the natural environment and topography of the property.
- c. Allow cluster-/open space-/conservation-based residential development concepts in all residential districts in the Township.
- d. Enhance the awareness of residents about the benefits of conservation-oriented design.
- e. Protect the Township from residential 'sprawl' and reduce conventional plat and land division development through the use of flexible land management techniques that will encourage creative design, concentrated (clustered) development, maximum preservation of natural areas and use of open space.

- f. Concentrate high density residential development in designated locations and promote site designs that fit into the rural character of the Township. Investigate land use mechanisms for introducing desired housing types currently lacking in the Township, such as accessory dwelling units (ADUs) or cottage developments.
- g. 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.

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.

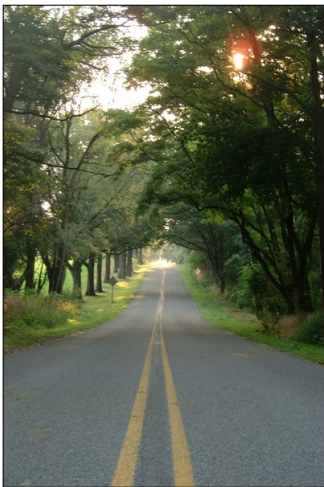
8. Assure a Safe and Efficient Network of Streets and Roads

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. Work together to ensure that adequate funding is available for proper maintenance of roads within the Township.
- b. Maintain the natural beauty and rural character of roads within the Township - - visually narrow corridor, tight hills, overhead tree canopy, etc. - - as they are improved. Work with the Kalamazoo County Road Commission to establish Natural Beauty Roads on designated County roads within the Township.
- c. Develop regulations for private roads that ensure desired land use patterns result and roads meet appropriate construction and maintenance standards.
- d. Establish setback and natural buffer standards along County roads in the agricultural and rural residential districts to enhance and preserve the Township's rural character.
- e. In recognition of Michigan's Complete Streets policies, actively support the establishment of bike lanes along Township roads that connect community activity centers.
- f. Promote 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.



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. 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.)

- c. Require electric, communications, and cable utilities for all new residential and nonresidential developments to be placed underground.
- d. Encourage underground utilities where practical to enhance rural character.

- e. Direct solar energy development that provides power to the utility grid to industrial areas in recognition of the Township's agricultural and rural conservation goals and objectives.
- f. Allow accessory solar energy development (building-mounted and ground-mounted solar panels) throughout the Township with locational controls that ensure consistency with the character of the landscape.
- g. Increase the use of technology in the day-to-day operations of the Township.
- h. Acquire "state-of-the-art" equipment when determined to be cost-effective to facilitate improved operations.
- i. Retain high skill levels among Township staff and committees through adequate and appropriate continuing education efforts.

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 specific areas suitable for commercial and industrial development, and restrict development to such areas.
- b. Restrict commercial development to planned, concentrated clusters and discourage strip "sprawl" commercial development.

- c. Integrate commercial and industrial land uses into their surrounding environment through appropriate and attractive architecture and signage, setbacks, site design, and sensitivity to the natural environment.
- d. Incorporate site design standards into the Zoning Ordinance that will facilitate aesthetic and functional commercial and industrial developments.
- e. Maintain up-to-date and appropriate signage requirements.