

# Watson Township Master Plan Summary

## What is the Master Plan?

The Michigan Planning Enabling Act, Public Act 33 of 2008, gives Townships the authority to prepare and adopt Master Plans.

- A Master Plan is a policy document aimed at encouraging orderly and efficient land use.
- It provides the legal basis for local zoning and for guiding the work of the Township Planning Commission and Township Board.
- It is a way of communicating to private individuals, adjacent communities and organizations how they might relate their development projects to official Township plans.
- The Watson Township Master Plan of was first adopted in June of 1990. The new “Plan” is the result of an evolutionary process that refined and built upon the previous Plan.

## The Planning Process

The planning process consists of four basic steps:

1. **Analysis of the Existing Situation** – An analysis of the assets, problems and potential of the community (natural features, demographics, existing land use, the transportation network and other community infrastructure).
2. **Plan Policies and Land Use arrangement** – An expression of community goals and objectives and of the form and allocation of land uses for the future.
  - The “Future Land Use Plan” illustrates how growth should be directed into a sound “pattern of development”.
3. **Plan Implementation** –What needs to be done to carry out the plan.
  - The first step in the implementation phase is the adoption of this plan by the Planning Commission.
  - Through, zoning and subdivision regulations, street improvements, public education and systematic utility extensions (potentially), the plan is implemented over a period of many years.
4. **Continued Planning** – Periodic review and updates of the Plan (such as this effort), are required for the Township’s planning to remain credible. While the current Master Plan had been reviewed several times, no updates or changes had occurred since its original adoption in June of 1990.
  - Comprehensive reviews of the Master Plan must be undertaken every five years.

**Summary of updates and Changes to the Proposed Master Plan**

**Chapter 2** “Natural Features and Community Description” contains a more in depth description of the township’s physical resources and incorporates a series of color resource maps depicting the Township’s topography, soils, and land use. Maps are included showing the suitability of soils for septic systems and buildings, prime farmland soils and farmland suitability, sand and gravel deposits, groundwater and wetland, and green space. Updated maps and analysis of existing land use is also provided

Among other things the analysis indicates that:

- Since 1996 approximately 260 acres of land has been converted to residential use. The total estimate for residential land now stands at approximately 1,400 acres.
- Lakefront development remains the most prevalent, but it is no longer the only factor that attracts people here.
- Wooded parcels, one to five acres in size, are the fastest growing type of “residential setting”.

**Chapter 3** “Community Facilities and Population Profile” provides a new overview of the Townships infrastructure and summarizes the emergency services and public facilities available to Township residents. It presents detailed demographic and economic profile of the Township based on the 2000 census.

**Chapter 4** “Planning Analysis: Population Trends and Projections” summarizes the analysis of the demographic growth and changes and provides projections to the year 2020. Highlights include:

- The Township has followed a steady increasing population trend over the past 35 years in reaching its current population, as illustrated in Figure 6. During that time the Township began the transition from a predominately agricultural community toward a predominately rural residential area. That trend continues today.

- Growth in Watson is similar to that in most of the surrounding Townships just not as fast. Over the next 25 years the Township’s population is likely to increase at rates similar to the historical rates. Watson Township's location, land use policies and lack of utilities, mean that growth will somewhat slower than that experienced in surrounding Township and the county as a whole.

- **Growth will be strongly impacted by trends experienced within the larger geographic region. The major determinants for the timing of future population and housing growth will include :**
  - The availability or lack of public utilities.
  - The success of the planned casino development in nearby Wayland Township. The economic health of the nearby metropolitan areas.
  - The effectiveness of growth management in Watson.
  - Future gasoline/energy prices and quality of roads.
  - The availability (nearness) and quality of support services (fire protection, streets, parks and the quality schools and shopping opportunities).

**Population Projections  
Watson Township and Allegan County**

	<u>2000</u>	<u>2008</u>	<u>2010</u>	<u>2015</u>	<u>2020</u>	<u>2030</u>	<b>Projected 2000 to 2030 _ increase</b>
Watson Twp.	2,086	2,275	2,346	2,484	2,629	2900	39.0%
Allegan County	105,665	113,918	122,993	133,045	144,266	163566	54.8%

Source: The Watson Twp. and Allegan County 2010, 2015, and 2020 projections are a combination of percentage and arithmetic projections published by WMRPC. 2008 and 2030 projections have been extrapolated from those projections.

**Development Implications**

Following are some of the key planning issues or concerns that the Future land use plan must address:

1. Developing solutions to balance the need and desire to preserve farmland while not squelching private property rights and desirable economic development. Restrictive zoning and voluntary preservation options such as the Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) and the Transfer of

Development Rights (TDR), and other farmland preservation techniques must be recognized as methods by which to preserve farmland. In cooperation with Allegan County's farmland preservation initiatives, the Township is in a good position to facilitate the implementation of one or both of these voluntary methods.

2. The Township's farmland and its rural character are its most identifiable features. That "open space" may be its own worst enemy. As a result of society's desire for elbow room and clean air, farmland is lost and the countryside is converted to homes and other uses.
3. By requiring higher density residential development to be clustered and or located in strategic areas around the Township, farmland and open space can be preserved elsewhere in the Township. This will help to meet housing needs of the area while giving priority to preserving open space and farmland and creating an ability to one day provide economically feasible public utilities.
4. The region's transition from an agricultural and industrial based economy to a service base economy will increase pressures for more affordable housing. Cluster development or conservation subdivision and open space preservation are constructive growth management tools designed to protect important natural features and better position to manage its rural resources.
5. Good locations for future industrial development have been identified but they lack critical infrastructure. Coupled with the general economic shift away from industry to a service based economy major employment opportunities are not likely to develop locally. However, there is likely to be pressure to adopt land use policies that will help to foster small-scale "incubator" service uses and industries in the rural areas.
6. As in all communities, a full range of housing styles and opportunities should exist in the Township.

## **Chapter 5 Goals And Policies**

Planning goals and policies are strategic statements that express and define the community's future. They provide long-range direction for virtually all planning activities.

The following Goals and Policies build upon the goals and objectives included in the previous Master Plan.

### **GOAL #1**

#### ***The Environment***

*To insure that new development takes place in an environmentally consistent and sound manner and that the potential for flood hazard, soil erosion, disturbances to the natural drainage network and surface and groundwater contamination are minimized, thereby protecting natural resources and preserving scenic and environmental quality, as well as minimizing the public burden.*

#### ***Policies***

- Encourage approaches to land development that take natural features such soils, topography, steep slopes, hydrology, and natural vegetation into account in the process of site design.
- Implement Low impact design standards for development.
- Conduct detailed natural features inventory and rank “high”, “medium”, and “low” priorities for preservation. Adjust development regulations accordingly.

### **GOAL #2**

#### ***Agriculture and Rural Character***

*To conserve agricultural land, promote the agricultural economic base of the Township and preserve the rural character of the community.*

#### ***Policies***

- Support the Farmland and Open Space Preservation Act, P.A. 116 of 1974.
- Consider allowing “value added” land uses like agri-tourism businesses. Reevaluate A-1 District boundaries and ensure adequate rural buffers
- Enable local farmers to participate in the County PDR program.
- Monitor the effectiveness of existing provisions.

### **GOAL #3**

#### ***Housing and Residential Development***

*Provide for a wide range of housing opportunities within the township while encouraging a general low*

*density pattern of residential development consistent with the rural/agricultural character found in most areas of the township. Encourage higher densities to occur in areas most appropriate for such development*

***Policies***

- Promote clustering as the favored form of development.
- Improve policies and standards for public and private community utility systems.
- Adopt “concurrency” as an overarching principal pertaining to new, large residential and business developments.

***GOAL #4***

***Commercial Development***

*Provide for the basic service and shopping needs of the township's residents by directing commercial development to take place in suitable areas but in a manner which limits commercial strip development, minimizes conflicts with surrounding land uses and prevents unnecessary conflicts with the movement of traffic along major highways.*

***Policies***

- Anticipate the implications of the US-131 12th Ave. interchange and the Martin Speedway.
- Implement low impact and green approaches to site and building design.
- Evaluate using adaptive reuse of farm buildings for limited low impact service uses.

***GOAL #5***

***Industrial Development***

*Provide for limited light industrial development in areas that are easily accessible by major transportation facilities.*

***Policies***

- Evaluate using adaptive reuse of farm buildings for limited low impact industrial or service uses.
- Improve concurrency policies for infrastructure as related to intensive industrial uses and industrial processes involving significant traffic volumes and high volumes of water and wastewater.

***GOAL #6***

***Economic Development***

*Increase the nonresidential tax base of the township and the availability of jobs within the community,*

*thereby increasing the ability of the township to provide services, bettering the economic well being of residents and improving the overall quality of life in the area.*

***Policies***

- Coordinate economic development initiatives with Allegan County and nearby Martin, Allegan and Hopkins Townships.

***GOAL #7***

***Land Use Conflicts***

*Discourage and avoid conflicts between land uses.*

***Policies***

- In areas of higher density, provide for the separation between conflicting land uses by designating suitable transitional districts or requiring greenbelt or buffer areas.
- Institute or improve landscape and site location and design standards as needed for special uses that are identified as potentially problematic.

***GOAL #8***

***Streets and Transportation***

*Maximize the efficiency, safety and ease of maintenance of the road system. Make provisions for road improvements that will promote growth in a way that is consistent with adopted goals and policies relating to land use.*

***Policies***

- Encourage clustered development.
- Improve concurrency policies relative to the adequacy of roads prior to rezoning and development.
- Improve cooperation with the Allegan County Road Commission so that routes for future roads are planned and coordinated well in advance.

***GOAL #9***

***Quality of Life***

*Prevent the establishment of uses which, by their existence, tend to lower property values and the quality of life within the community.*

***Policies***

- Monitor and implement regulations aimed toward controlling outdoor storage of household equipment, household goods and other materials, where objectionable.
- Enforce regulations requiring the adequate siting and screening of those land uses which tend to have a blighting influence on the community.
- Provide necessary resources and expertise to enforce the provisions of the zoning ordinance.
- Encourage separation between conflicting adjacent land uses.

**GOAL #10**

***Recreation***

*Provide for diverse recreational opportunities for all resident population groups.*

***Policies***

- Develop a recreation plan which identifies the recreational needs of the community and sets forth a strategy for the acquisition and development of recreational facilities.
- Work closely with Allegan County, adjacent townships and the school districts in the provision of recreational facilities that can be used by area wide residents.

**GOAL #12**

***Public and Private utilities***

*Common private community sized water wastewater systems are to be designed in a manner that permits the common distribution and collection lines to be easily connected to public systems should they become available in the future.*

***Policies***

- Subject to plan approval and administrative details, the Township may assume ultimate responsibility of each common wastewater or water system.
- User associations shall be responsible for daily operations, cost of service and normal maintenance but major long term capital replacement, if needed may create the necessary assessment vehicles for financing required capital improvements. .
- Deed Restrictions shall be placed on each common wastewater or water system notifying all owners that the system may be required to connect to, or otherwise be made public in the future.
- Where feasible private collection and distribution lines and appurtenances of a private common



water and waste-water treatment system to be designed and built to municipal standards adopted by the Township.

## **Chapter 6 Future Land Use**

The Master Plan and Future Land Use Map serve as a guide for future growth. The Future Land Use Map is a graphic manifestation of the goals and policies and the ideals of managed growth and physical resource protection. It takes into consideration many factors including existing land use, land use trends and development issues, public input, demographics, environmental resources and physical limitations and a variety of transportation and infrastructure influences.

### **General Overview**

The general pattern of development envisioned for the Township is one of continued dominance by agriculture, especially in the southwest and west and by very low density rural development. Overall, the gross density of residential development is not expected to exceed one dwelling unit per five acres. Ample, contiguous areas of open space that will enable the conservation of farmland and preservation of natural systems of woodland and wetlands will be encouraged. An obvious aspect of the Future Land Use Map is also the focusing of moderate commercial and industrial development and the highest potential densities of residential growth in the US-131/M-222 intersection area. It is noteworthy that while the extent of the proposed commercial and light industrial areas in the immediate intersection area has not been expanded from the previous plan, two additional commercial or mixed use areas are now indicated. These include the interchange commercial planning district in the northeast at the 124<sup>th</sup> Ave. /US-131 interchange and an area the southeast, roughly coinciding with the US-131 Drag Strip and Motor Park that is located in adjacent Martin Township. The M-222 corridor west from US-131 is also now recognized as a location where very low intensity service uses may be able to locate in a controlled fashion.

The timing of a rezoning to allow for business or low density residential development in an area now zoned for agriculture use will be dependent upon a number of factors, the most important of which is the availability infrastructure which includes public utilities, adequate roadways and public services such as a police and fire protection and the availability of land that is already zoned and serviced in the vicinity.

### **FUTURE LAND USE CATEGORIES**

The following headings indicate key Future land Use Plan elements. New elements of the Master Plan that are not included in the previous Plan are described in more detail.

#### **Agriculture Conservation Planning District (A-1)**

The Agricultural Conservation Planning District coincides with the A-1 Agricultural Zoning District and its boundaries are intended to define the ultimate boundaries of A-1 Zoning District.

**Rural Preservation Planning District (A-2)**

The intent of this planning district is to define areas where the overall long term character remains predominantly rural, regardless of the uses that might occur there. The district corresponds to the A-2 Rural Conservation Zoning District. Farming operations are expected to continue and development will occur in the form of individual lot splits and multi-lot subdivision developments.

**Voluntary Farmland and Rural Preservation Efforts**

In addition to the regulatory efforts employed by the Township to conserve farmland and rural character within the Agricultural/Open Space district and very Low Density Residential Districts the Plan suggests a number of ways that property owners can insure that parcels of land will remain undeveloped or reserved for specific purposes.

**Low and Medium Density Single Family Residential**

The current zoning map of the Township indicates various areas of R-1 Low density Residential and R-2 Medium Density Residential. Existing R-1 and R-2 Districts will remain but that no new R-1 or R-2 Districts would be created unless they are located within an Residential Transition Area (RTA).

**Lake Residential (LR)**

The Lake Residential area is a Medium Density Residential District devoted exclusively to Single Family Residential use in the waterfront and outdoor recreation environment afforded by School Section Lake, Big Lake, Miller Lake and Schnable Lake. The planning district corresponds with the LR Lake Residential Zoning District.

**Commercial Land Use**

The Master Plan recognizes that the demand for development property will continue to be greatest along the along M-222, and near the expressway interchanges. Commercial development areas are accommodated in these areas within the Mixed Use Transitional Areas (MUTA) through the designation of a commercial node at the intersection of M-222 and 24<sup>th</sup> St. and through the use of a limited “Rural Arterial Small Businesses Overlay District”. Farmland preservation

**Rural Arterial Small Businesses Overlay District**

The land use concepts to be used along the M-222 corridor includes:

- The allowance of limited commercial nodes adjacent to key high traffic intersections where local service and “heavy” types of commercial business could be located.
- Utilization of a corridor overlay policy to allow limited forms of service and retail businesses to locate within the corridor under stringent location and performance standards.

### **Industrial Land Use**

While industry is important to a diversified tax base and for providing local employment opportunities, good planning dictates that industrial areas have good highway access and are situated to minimize potential conflicts with residential uses. Because of accessibility and infrastructure limits the only industrial area indicated on the Future Land Use Map is the existing industrial zone found in Sections 24. If justified, industrial district expansions will be expected to occur within the Mixed Use Transitional Area designation nearest the M-222/US-131 interchange.

### **Transitional Planning Districts**

The Future Land Use Map identifies several transitional areas where land use change will ultimately be facilitated should infrastructure improvements capable of supporting more intensive economic development come about.

The primary function of the Transitional Areas illustrated on the Future Land Use Map is to identify “holding zones” for lands that may ultimately be the most suitable for more intensive development. The transitional area planning districts are thus aimed at establishing “land banks” for land uses that may ultimately be allowed to occur when the Township determines that more intensive structural development is appropriate and when the necessary utility, street infrastructure and emergency and protective services are in place to support it.

Following are general descriptions and rationale for each of the identified Sub-areas. Included is a listing of the range of uses contemplated within each sub-area.

### **Mixed Use Transitional Areas (MUTA)**

Both US-131 interchanges have been included within a mixed use MUTA sub-area. These sub-areas encompass most of the existing commercial and industrial zoning within the township and each are sized to accommodate fairly substantial amounts of economic development in the future. In the north MUTA at 124<sup>th</sup> Ave. and US-131, only the area in the immediate vicinity of the interchange is programmed for change. Once the infrastructure is in place the following range of uses will be considered.

- General, neighborhood and regional oriented businesses
- Light industrial
- Hospitality service business (hotels, restaurants)

The US-131/M-222 MUTA sub-area holds the potential for accommodating the majority of the future commercial and industrial concentrations in the township. The following range of uses will be considered in the southern MUTA.

- General, neighborhood and regional oriented businesses

- Light industrial
- Hospitality service business (hotels, restaurants)
- Manufactured home community (40 to 80 acres)
- Multi-family residential

The third MUTA is located along 12<sup>th</sup> Street, across the road from the US-131 Motorsports Park. The Master Plan recognizes that over time, many of the existing residential properties fronting 12<sup>th</sup> St. between 112<sup>th</sup> Ave. and 114<sup>th</sup> Ave. will transition to local service type business uses.

**Residential Transitional Area (RTA)**

The RTA area is located in the US-131/M-222 interchange area west of the Mixed Use Transition Area and extends southward. The intent is to allocate an area capable of supporting medium density home styles such as senior citizen housing, attached three-plexes, four-plexes and multi-family residences and/or a manufactured home community. in areas close to other areas of planned higher land use intensity and potential utility extensions..

**Public/Semi Public (Various Zoning Districts)**

This category includes areas and facilities such as schools, government buildings, parks and golf courses which are available for use by the general public. At this time the Future Land Use Map does not include any specific locations for these uses. Future locations should however be considerate of compatibility with adjacent land uses and the extent to which neighborhood character will be maintained.

**Transportation**

The Master Plan. Several generalized recommendatuons for managing and controlling traffic are included.

**Natural Systems Plan: Sensitive Environment Overlay Districts**

The Master Plan is intended to give policy support for the preservation of natural resources. Farmers will generally be exempt from the zoning regulations but implementation measures will also include educational efforts to encourage farmers to use best management practices near watercourses.

The major elements of the environment that could be protected in overlay fashion along with suggested parameters of regulation include:

**Wetlands**

Land development adjacent to wetlands should be discouraged from making earth and drainage changes that impair the wetlands. Boundaries of wetland areas in each development should be clearly defined.

**Shorelines:**

- Protecting the remaining undeveloped shoreline of the township's several inland lakes is

an important objective.

***Unique Habitats:***

Development on sites where there is evidence of unique animal habitat or protected flora and fauna should be preceded by a professional habitat survey and Areas in which unique animal habitat or protected flora and fauna exists should be excluded from the development project.

***Woodlands:***

Sites with five or more acres of contiguous woodland will be addressed using the following policies:

- Plans should depict boundaries of existing woodlots and proposed tree clearing clearing should not exceed fifty percent of the total area of the woodlands.
- The preservation of woodlands should be included in the proposed deed restrictions.

The Plan also includes guidelines for use in establishing site development standards for the protection of natural systems.

***Mineral Resources***

Whenever a mining extraction operation is proposed or an existing operation is expanded, adjacent lands are impacted. Extraction uses have high nuisance characteristics and as such, they create negative conditions that tend to discourage new development nearby. Siting issues, including the location of access, relative grades, sight lines, buffer areas, the size and intensity of the operation, and the duration of the operation are all significant matters that must be addressed to help minimize potential impacts on surroundings. The includes several suggested guidelines for use when evaluating mining operations.

***Wind Energy***

Wind Energy Systems (WES). There are some areas of Allegan County where the development of large scale WES appears to be fairly well suited. There are two major factors that could favor their development. The most important factor is of course wind availability (steady, relatively high winds) and the second is the absence of extensive development such as is found in agricultural areas. Where the two factors are found in concert, the potential for WES development is highest.

The Master Plan recommends that the Township adopt a basic set of standards and regulations governing both larges scale WES and small scale WES. Utility -scale systems development should be focus to the less developed AC and RP planning Districts where land use compatibility will be less of an issue. Small scale systems should be permitted only in settings where large lots can be used to insure adequate setbacks from homes and other neighboring uses that are sensitive to noise and visual impacts.

**Chapter 7 Implementation**

The Master Plan itself is not a regulatory device. The implementation of the plan must occur as the result of regulatory, policy and capital improvement decisions of the Township Board and Planning Commission relative to land use and public land acquisition.

***Zoning and Related Land Development Regulations***

Zoning is a legal mechanism used to regulate private property for the purpose of achieving orderly land use relationships. Zoning is the process most commonly used to implement community master plans.

Specific implementation measures, including several changes to the Zoning Ordinance and Zoning Map are eluded to in the Goals and Policies Chapter of the plan and the revisions will be needed if the recommendations of the Plan are carried out. Subsequent to the adoption of this Plan, the Township Planning Commission and Township Board will be charged with making the appropriate revisions to the Township's zoning regulations and to other development standards.

***Prepare and a Adopt Capital Improvements Program***

Capital Improvements Programming (CIP) is the first step in a comprehensive management system designed to match capital improvement priorities and other Township sponsored programs to community's goals and objectives. The CIP is useful to the Township, private utilities, citizens and investors, since it allows or encourages coordination in activities and it provides the public with a view of future expectations.

***Recreation Plan***

The Master Plan recommends that the Township adopt a recreation plan in order to be eligible for state recreation funding programs such as the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) and Michigan Department of Natural Resources Trust Fund (MNRTF). Assistance under these programs is available for planning, acquiring land and developing a wide range of outdoor recreation areas and facilities.

***Planning Education***

Planning Commissions should attend planning seminars and/or enroll in specialized planning commissioner training programs to keep themselves informed of planning issues and learn how to better carry out their duties and responsibilities as Planning Commissioners. There are also several useful planning publications for Planning Commissioners.

***Inter-Governmental Cooperation***

Inter-governmental cooperation on certain land use issues and utility issues can pay dividends to all involved. In an effort to manage growth properly, the Township desires to establish goals and

regulations consistent with those of its neighbors so that the immediate area develops in an efficient and compatibly manner, without over development. Watson Township hopes to minimize incompatible land uses across municipal boundaries and to manage growth in such a way that the strengths of each community are taken advantages of and that competition between communities for tax base and economic development dollars is minimized.

***Public Information***

It is important that the proposals of this Plan be discussed and understood by the citizens of Watson Township. Acceptance of this Plan by the public is essential to its successful implementation. Steps should therefore be taken to make Township residents aware of the Master Plan and the continuing activities of the Planning Commission.

***Revisions to the Master Plan***

Under Michigan statute, the Master Plan must be reviewed annually and updated every five years. This will keep the plan responsive to new growth trends and current Township citizen attitudes. In the annual and five year review processes the planning goals, land use information, population projections and other pertinent data should be revised as necessary.

