

Chapter 1

The Master Plan

Why Plan? _____

Paw Paw Township is responsible for considering the long-range consequences of their zoning and land use-related decisions. Those decisions should be guided by a big-picture view of the future of the Township that includes a variety of scenarios. Such an approach to the future of Paw Paw Township is provided through the Master Plan.

Protecting the local agricultural assets, supporting 'small farm' opportunities, the community's position in the region to serve as a key wine route and fresh food corridor, and a desire to move forward as a 'community' with the Village of Paw Paw have surfaced as critical land use issues for the Township. Community leaders and residents want to encourage economic vitality by promoting the Township's strengths while also protecting against sprawl.

Both supporters of growth and those of conservation have a common goal of 'good planning'. Both hold that a 'good plan' requires that the interests of land owners with aspirations to develop their property be balanced with maintaining the very assets that first attracted growth of the community.

The proximity of the Township to the variety and quality of local services provided in the Village of Paw Paw, the numerous local special events, and the advancing regional railway system

extending through the area give Paw Paw Township unique agri-business and tourism opportunities. 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 Michigan Planning Enabling Act (Public Act 33 of 2008) gives communities the authority to adopt a Master Plan to 'address land use and infrastructure issues and may project 20 years or more into the future.' This Plan will provide direction for the use of land within the Township for the next 20 years, based upon the visions and desires of its residents.

What is a Master Plan? _____

The Master Plan can be a very effective tool for a community if there is a willingness to support and implement the vision and goals set forth in the Plan.

Consistent and deliberate use of the Plan's policies and strategies will provide the necessary foundation for land use decisions within the Township and give validity to the Township's zoning standards. A well-constructed Plan will also provide the guidance necessary to keep the community moving forward toward achieving its vision.

The Master Plan is recognized as:

1. . . . a general statement of the vision, goals and policies for the Township. It sets forth a single and comprehensive view of the Township's desires for the future.
2. . . . providing assistance in daily land use decision-making. The policies

set forth in the Plan should be used by the Planning Commission and the Township Board in their daily consideration of zoning regulations, subdivisions, capital improvements, and other land use-related issues.

3. . . . providing the statutory basis upon which zoning decisions are based. The Michigan Zoning Enabling Act (Public Act 110 of 2006) requires that ‘the Zoning Ordinance be based upon a plan designed to promote the public health, safety, and general welfare.’
4. . . . providing direction for decisions about public services. New infrastructure or services should correspond with the Plan to give the Township control over new growth, to coordinate public improvements with private development, and to provide for fiscal responsibility.
5. . . . lending credibility in implementing controversial land use/zoning decisions.
6. . . . an educational tool. It provides the mechanism to clearly set forth the Township’s direction for the future to residents, property owners, developers, and surrounding communities.

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 lands 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.

Can the Master Plan be Changed? _____

The Master Plan provides a guide for the future. As such, changing conditions can affect its original intentions. Over time, established goals will be achieved and new goals will be developed, certain zoning decisions may change the direction of development in a particular area of the Township, or decisions may be made that are contrary to the Plan. All of these changes should be acknowledged and addressed through amendments to the Master Plan.

Further, the Planning Act requires communities to review their current Master Plan every five years to determine whether amendments to the Plan are needed, or if a new Plan should be developed. The Planning Commission may elect to review the Plan on an annual basis to ensure that changes in the area are considered and that amendments are made responsive to current Township philosophies. An annual Planning Commission review will not only fulfill the five-year statutory review requirement, but will also guarantee that the Plan continues to provide relevant guidance on Township issues.

Creating the Master Plan _____

The original Township Master Land Use Plan was adopted in 1978. In 1994, the Planning Commission completed preparation of the Master Plan for Land Use for Paw Paw Township, the Township's first update of the Master Plan.

In 2002, the Planning Commission determined that a complete update of the

Master Plan was in order based on an identified increase in demand for residential home sites and a change in commercial and industrial land use patterns in the area.

Significant public input was received during the 2002/2003 review process, including contributions through a comprehensive township resident/property owner survey. Interestingly, the concerns voiced in the survey and public comment were very similar to those identified by the Planning Commission in determining the need for an update of the Master Plan.

Following a comprehensive review of goal statements related to residential, commercial, industrial, agricultural and open space land use, specific goals and policies were developed for the period of 2003 through 2023. The new goals and policies set forth in the 2003 Master Land Use Plan Update were based on population projections, commercial and industrial 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 2015. It was determined that the Plan remains generally relevant on land use policies and continues to respond to the desires of the Township citizenry. A general update of the document was considered to be desirable, however, so as to incorporate current demographic data; respond to new planning law and land use regulatory options; and, recognize recent development activity in the Village of Paw Paw and land use trends within the region.

The Planning Commission and Township Board hired a planning consultant (Rebecca Harvey of Harvey Consulting) to assist them

in the update of the Master Plan for the Township. The 2020 Master Plan update was accomplished in four basic steps.

First, updated information about the community was gathered – demographics, land use, and other background material. This information is presented in Chapter 2 - Community Snapshot. The data set forth in the Community Snapshot was used by the Planning Commission to identify preliminary issues (strengths, concerns, opportunities) for the Township.

Through the use of public meetings, the public had an opportunity to consider the community profile and participate in confirming the values important to them. A summary of the results of the public participation process and the identified land use issues are set forth in Chapter 3 - Planning Issues.

The third step involved the development of Planning Principles. These Principles consist of a Vision, Goals, and Objectives/Strategies that serve as the foundation for the Plan. The Planning Principles are described in Chapter 4.

Lastly, using the Planning Principles as a guide, a Future Land Use Plan and Future Land Use Map were prepared (Chapter 5). The Implementation Plan was developed (Chapter 6) to guide this Plan into action.

The Planning Commission then initiated the adoption process required by the Michigan Planning Enabling Act. The draft Master Plan was reviewed by the Township Board and then released for review by the surrounding communities and the Van Buren County Planning Commission. Following the mandated review/comment period, the Planning Commission held a

public hearing on September 29, 2016 and the Plan was adopted by the Township Board on January 13, 2020. The resolution of adoption is copied on the inside back cover of this document, in accordance with the Michigan Planning Enabling Act.



How To Use This Plan _____

- ✓ If you are a *property owner*, you may have several interests, including the future identified for your property, as well as for other properties similarly designated.
- ✓ As a *homeowner*, you may be interested in the properties in your immediate neighborhood, including uses proposed for vacant land.
- ✓ As a *resident*, you may be interested in the overall vision for the Township as expressed in the Goals and Objectives. These statements should give you an indication of the view of the Township now, and in the future.

Generally, your use of the Plan should follow these steps:

Step 1 - 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 the Future Land Use Plan in Chapter 5. Find the land use classification in which your property is located and then read the description of the land use classification applied to your property.

Depending on the nature of your interest, this may be as far as you want to go. 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.

Step 2 - 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 or call the Township Office for zoning standards specific to your property.

Step 3 - How does the Township view development in your area?

The Future Land Use Plan and Map indicate the type of development planned for your area; it may be specific or somewhat general. The Future Land Use Classification descriptions set forth in Chapter 5 and the Goals and Objectives for future land use within the Township set forth in Chapter 6 provide details on the direction of future land use within your general area

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.