

Chapter One

OVERVIEW

Introduction

This Chapter provides an overview of the Master Plan, its role and importance, how it should be used, and the process followed in its preparation. It presents the framework for what follows by defining what the Master Plan is and what it is intended to accomplish. Understanding the fundamentals of the Waterloo Township Master Plan will enable the residents and officials of the Township to appreciate the role it plays in assuring the future welfare of the Township, its residents and its resources. Embracing this Plan as a vital tool in preserving and enhancing the public health, safety, and welfare of the Township is essential if this Plan is to be effective.

What Is the Waterloo Township Master Plan ?

Purpose

Just as individuals and families plan for their future well being, so must municipalities. Just as individuals may open savings accounts in order to purchase new farm equipment five years in the future, or develop plans for a larger home for a growing family, municipalities must look to the future and take specific actions to address the current and future needs of the community. Such actions may involve improvements to the roadway network, improvements to the level of emergency services, and the pursuit of new local employment opportunities.

The Waterloo Township Master Plan is a policy document which identifies how growth within the Township, and associated land development and public services, should be guided to best assure the future welfare of the community. The Master Plan can generally be described by the following key words and phrases:

FUTURE ORIENTED: The plan concerns itself with long-range planning to guide and manage future growth and land use. The plan is not only a picture of the community today, but a guide to how the community should evolve over the next ten to twenty years in response to growth and community aspirations.

GENERAL: The plan establishes broad principles and policies to address future growth, land use, and public services.

COMPREHENSIVE: The Plan is comprehensive in that it addresses all principal types of land use and the practical geographic boundaries of each.

A PLAN: The Plan is a specific tangible document which consists of both text and maps, a key portion of which presents and illustrates the Township's policies regarding its planned future land use pattern and delivery of public services.

DYNAMIC: The Plan is intended to be continually evolving in light of the aspirations of local residents, changing conditions in the

Township, and new strategies to manage growth, land use, and public services.

The Waterloo Township Master Plan was prepared by the Waterloo Township Planning Commission, under the authority of the Michigan Township Planning Act, P.A. 168 of 1959, as amended. The Act provides for the development of plans by a Planning Commission for the purposes of, in part:

"...to promote public health, safety, and general welfare; to encourage the use of resources in accordance with their character and adaptability; to avoid the overcrowding of land by buildings or people; to lessen congestion on public roads and streets...and to consider the character of each Township and its suitability for particular uses judged in terms of such factors as the trend in land and population development."

This Master Plan is not a regulatory document, but a "policy plan" to be implemented through regulatory tools. For example, though the Master Plan is not a zoning ordinance, the Master Plan's recommendations and policies will serve as a basis for updating the current Waterloo Township Zoning Ordinance. In fact, the Michigan Township Rural Zoning Act which provides Waterloo Township with the statutory authority to adopt zoning regulations, stipulates that a municipality's zoning ordinance "shall be based upon a plan..." This Master Plan has been prepared, in part, to more clearly meet this statutory requirement and maintain a strong legal foundation for the Township's zoning regulations.

Elements of the Master Plan

In addition to this introductory chapter, the Waterloo Township Master Plan consists of four key components:

- 1) A discussion of important planning issues facing the Township today, and associated goals and objectives that address these issues (Chapter Two).
- 2) The planned future land use pattern for the Township (Chapter Three).
- 3) The planned future delivery of public services in the Township (Chapter Four).
- 4) Background studies that provide a review of existing conditions and trends in the Township (Appendix).

Importance and Application of the Master Plan

The importance and application of the Waterloo Township Master Plan are reflected in both the long term interests of the Township and the day-to-day administration of the Township's planning and zoning program.

Long Term Interests

There are a number of interests shared by residents and officials of Waterloo Township today that can be expected to continue for years to come and be similarly shared by new future residents and Township officials. Some of these key interests include:

- Minimizing increased tax burdens.
- Protecting open spaces, natural resources, and rural character.
- Assuring appropriate land use and adequate services to protect the public health, safety, and welfare of Township residents and visitors.

The Waterloo Township Master Plan supports these long term interests by providing a future-oriented strategy which aggressively seeks to protect them. Intensive development without adequate public services to meet the demands of such development, as well as development which places excessive demands upon the Township's natural resources (on-site sewage disposal, potable water quality, etc.) can lead the Township into a future of tremendous social and environmental risks which will seriously threaten the public's health, safety, and welfare. Chapters Three and Four establish specific future land use and public services strategies to secure these and other long term interests.

Day-To-Day Administration

The Waterloo Township Master Plan plays an equally important role in the day-to-day planning and zoning efforts of the Township:

- Advisory Policies: The Plan is an official advisory policy statement which should be readily shared with existing and prospective landowners and developers to inform them of the long term intentions of the Township regarding land use and public services and, thus, more closely integrate development proposals with the policies of the Plan.

- Regulatory Programs: The Plan establishes a practical basis for the Township to revise, update, or otherwise prepare regulatory programs intended to assure that the policies of the Plan are implemented, including zoning and land division regulations.
- Review of Rezoning Requests: Chapter Two includes a list of Township goals and objectives which should be reviewed in light of future proposed rezoning requests to further establish a record upon which the rezoning request can be evaluated. Equally important, Chapters Three and Four provide policies regarding the planned future land use pattern and public services in the Township. These Chapters also provide valuable reference points upon which such rezoning requests should be evaluated.
- Public Services Improvements: The cost-effective use of Waterloo Township's tax dollars requires the identification of a planned future land use pattern in order to pinpoint future population centers in the Township and areas planned for commercial and/or industrial growth. While some areas in the Township may require future improvements to public services and infrastructure, such as roads and fire protection, population centers and commercial and industrial areas typically require higher levels of public services. This Plan provides the Township with the ability to prepare ahead and better pinpoint areas of future need, rather than always playing "catch-up" while the Township's health, safety, and welfare may be at risk. Chapters Three and Four are invaluable in this regard.
- Intergovernmental Coordination: This Plan provides the basis for Waterloo Township to communicate effectively with its neighbors regarding both the impact of neighboring planning and zoning issues and opportunities for mutual gain through coordinated efforts in the areas of land use and public services.

Township Overview

Following is a brief overview of the Township. A more detailed discussion of existing conditions and trends in the Township can be found in the Appendices.

Waterloo Township is located in the northeast corner of Jackson County in the far south-central area of Michigan. Regional access to Waterloo Township is provided primarily by Interstate 94 (I-94), M-52, and M-106. I-94 travels across the middle of Jackson County in an east-west direction linking Detroit to the east with Chicago to the west, and the numerous urban centers along this corridor including Ann Arbor, Jackson, Battle Creek and Kalamazoo. The interstate passes within 1 1/2 miles of Waterloo Township's southern border.

Waterloo Township's overall land use pattern reflects a very low level of development and expansive areas of open spaces. The vast majority of the Township is characterized by woodlands, wetlands, farmland, and other open spaces and water bodies. Much of the expansive open space is attributable to the Waterloo State Recreation Area which covers approximately one half of the Township area. Wetlands represent the largest portion of the natural vegetation and account for approximately one third of the total Township area. Approximately 5% of the Township area has been developed for residential, commercial, industrial, and/or related urban uses.

The 1990 U.S. Census reported 1,070 housing units in Waterloo Township. However, the Township identified approximately 1,400 dwelling units during its own field investigations in 1991, and a follow-up investigation in 1998 identified approximately 1,650. Residential development in Waterloo Township has two principle development patterns – individual lot splits of approximately two to ten acres in size, and mobile home park communities.

Commercial and industrial development is limited. Except for the east side of Main Street in Munith and a convenience store in Waterloo, it is restricted to the M-52 and M-106 corridors. M-106, in and approaching Munith, includes such facilities as a hardware store, restaurant, and steel and metal fabricators. The east side of Main Street in Munith falls within the Township's limits and includes a bank and bakery. Several commercial facilities are situated along M-52 including a motel, convenience store, and propane gas supplier.

Public facilities are limited. There is no public sewer or water service in the Township. Much of the road network is of gravel surface. Police protection is provided by the Waterloo Township Police Department, consisting of a police chief and several deputies. Fire protection is provided by neighboring fire departments. Waterloo Township is served by four separate public school districts although there are no public school facilities within the Township.

Waterloo Township's population has risen from 908 in 1940 to 2,830 in 1990. The Township has more than tripled the growth rate of Jackson County as a whole during three of the past four decades and, during the 1980's, exhibited a 15.8% population growth rate compared to the County's negative 1.1% growth. No other municipality in the County exceeded a 10% growth rate during this period. The Michigan Department of Management and Budget estimated Waterloo Township's 1996 population to be 2,919, reflecting a 3.1% growth rate since 1990. This rate is comparable to the County's 3.2% rate during the same period, and somewhat less than the State's 4.3% rate.

Community Attitudes

This Plan is based, in part, upon an opinion survey. Waterloo Township administered a mail survey in July of 1998 for the purposes of gaining information about the attitudes of local residents regarding land use and public services issues. Approximately 310 surveys were completed and returned. Generally, the majority of the respondents of the survey considered the Township to be rural in character and hope it maintains its current character in the years to come, including preservation of the Township's farmlands and other natural resources, dominance of single family dwellings in future residential development, and limited commercial and industrial development.

Following is a general summary of the results of the survey. References to a "strong majority" means that at least 70% of the respondents shared the same attitude.

1. A strong majority of residents feel the Township is generally "rural" in character, that its current character is important in making the Township a desirable place to live, and that they would like to see its current character continue into the future.
2. A strong majority of the respondents support land use regulations intended to control the amount of growth and development and protect the Township's natural resources.
3. A strong majority of the respondents feel the preservation of farmland should be encouraged and support land use regulations intended to limited the encroachment of residences into agricultural areas. Further, a strong majority of the respondents support residential development on smaller parcels (such as 2 acres) in association with agricultural areas and the balance of the agricultural parcel preserved as open space or farmland, rather than consuming large tracts of farmland (such as 10 acre parcels) for individual residences.
4. A strong majority of the respondents feel that future residential development should be of a single family dwelling character, and that such dwellings should gain access from new interior roads rather than be stripped along the existing county road frontage.
5. A strong majority of the respondents feel the number of commercial businesses in the Township today is about right for the community and any new future commercial businesses should be limited to one or two specific areas along M-106 and M-52 or other major thoroughfares in the Township.
6. Though it does not represent a majority of the respondents, the prevailing attitude (44.4%) among respondents regarding future new industry in Waterloo Township is that it should be discouraged.
7. A strong majority of the respondents feel that the quality of fire protection and public education in Waterloo Township has remained the same since establishing residency in the Township. While the same is true with police protection, approximately 23% feel the crime level has worsened.
8. Nearly two thirds (63%) of the respondents feel traffic levels have worsened although a strong majority of the respondents feel the condition of the Township roads has remained the same or has improved and that there is no traffic congestion problem. regarding whether bicycle traffic on the township roads is a concern.

9. The prevailing attitude among respondents is not to support an additional tax millage to improve road conditions, fire protection, police protection, ambulance services, or trash collection. This prevailing attitude represented a majority of the residents in the case of trash collection (71.2%), road conditions (68.7%), and ambulance service (55.0%).

10. A strong majority of the respondents do not support increased property taxes or special assessments for the paving of gravel roads. Approximately 48% of the respondents prefer to continually pay taxes to maintain gravel roads in a reasonable condition as opposed to the 32% of the respondents who support paving gravel roads if it results in lower maintenance costs and taxes (even though it may attract additional development).