

Chapter Two

PLANNING ISSUES, GOALS & OBJECTIVES

Introduction

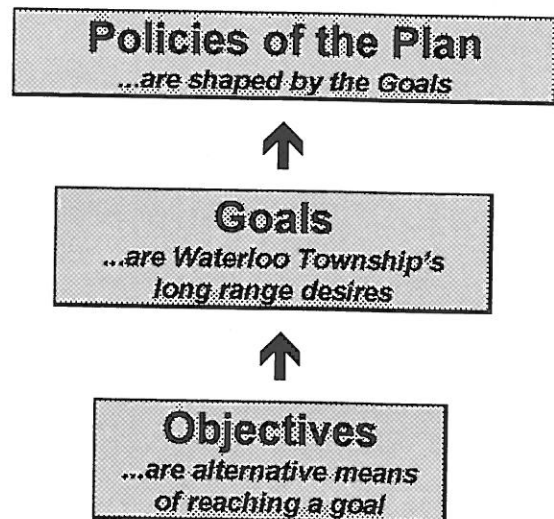
A fundamental purpose of this Plan is to establish a basis for future land use and public services in the Township. Waterloo Township wants to be actively involved in guiding and shaping future growth and development in the community and not allow the community to evolve merely by chance. To effectively plan for the Township's well being with regard to future land use and public services, it is necessary to identify important planning issues facing the Township and clarify the long term goals and objectives of the Township. Following is a presentation of these planning issues and related goals and objectives.

The goals and objectives presented in this Chapter are important for several reasons:

- The goals and objectives provide current and future residents of Waterloo Township with an overview of the intended future character of the Township.
- The goals and objectives identify and outline the basic parameters which should be used in guiding land use and public services policies in the Township.
- The goals and objectives serve as references upon which future rezonings and land development decisions can be evaluated.

Planning Issues, Goals & Objectives

A number of key planning issues are apparent today. These issues vary in scope and are clearly inter-related. The future quality of life and character of the Township will be largely shaped by the Township's strategy in dealing with these future land use and public services issues. Each planning issue presented in this Chapter is followed by a set of goal and objective statements. Planning goals are statements that express the Township's long range desires. Each goal has accompanying objectives which are general strategies that the Township can pursue to attain the specified goal. For example, a goal of the Workhard family may be a vacation in the Upper Peninsula while two of the family's objectives may be to make additional savings deposits for the trip and visit a travel agent for suggestions and information.



Goals, Objectives, and Policies of the Plan

The planning issues, and associated goals and objectives, are divided into the following major categories:

- Growth Management
- Community Character and Environment
- Waterloo State Recreation Area
- Farmland Protection
- Residential Development
- Commercial & Industrial Development
- Roads
- Limited Public Services and Tax Base

The planning issues presented in the following pages are not intended to be all inclusive. Rather, they are presented as the primary issues that the community must address as it establishes a future for itself. These issues can be expected to evolve over time and, accordingly, should be reexamined periodically and appropriate modifications be made.

Growth Management

Waterloo Township's population has grown more than 300% since 1950 and its estimated growth rate between 1990 and 1996 (3.1%) suggests the Township will continue to grow in the coming ten to twenty years. The future character and quality of life in the Township will be impacted by the way the Township chooses to manage future growth and development. Unmanaged growth can lead to unnecessary loss of natural resources including farmland resources; degradation of the Township's existing character and environmental integrity; haphazard and disorderly land development; undesirable and inefficient expansion of public services and expenditure of Township funds; and increased traffic hazards and nuisances.

Waterloo Township wants to provide reasonable opportunities for growth and development. Policies in this Plan must address accommodating growth and development and provide a strategy for effectively shaping and guiding future growth and development in a feasible manner, consistent with the aspirations of the Township's citizenry and the opportunities and constraints presented by its natural and cultural characteristics.

Individual properties and land uses exist within a network of adjoining and nearby properties and land uses. A township-wide land use pattern should strive to assure compatibility between land uses.

This can be accomplished by recommendations regarding the location of new land uses, development densities, and screening.

GOAL: *Guide future development in a manner which is consistent with the natural limitations of the land, the preservation of natural resources and rural character, the availability of necessary public facilities and services including road infrastructure and emergency services, and the cost-effective use of tax dollars.*

Objectives

- 1) Preserve the Township's natural resources through a coordinated future land use strategy and related regulations which permit reasonable use of land while discouraging unnecessary destruction or loss of natural resources, including farmland resources, wetlands, woodlands, and streams.
- 2) Discourage the introduction or expansion of public sewer or water except where the intensity of existing or planned development requires such services, or where the public health, safety, or welfare is at risk.
- 3) Guide development into areas where public facilities and services have adequate capacity to accommodate growth and increased development intensities, and where the provision or expansion of public facilities is cost-effective.
- 4) Prohibit new growth and development that requires levels of public facilities and services unavailable in the Township, until the time such levels of services become available.
- 5) Wherever legally permissible, local regulations should require new developments to pay for the direct and indirect public services costs to the Township associated with that development. These costs should not be imposed on existing residents. Exceptions should be made where public interests and benefits may be at stake.
- 6) In recognition that the Township is a critical link in a regional network of communities, the Township should develop a meaningful communication program with area municipalities and county agencies to discuss local and area-wide public facilities and services needs, land use conditions and trends, contemporary planning issues, and mutually beneficial strategies to address short and long term needs and issues.

- 7) Provide regular opportunities for substantive public input on growth and development issues facing the Township and the future character of the Township.
- 8) Maintain effective land development review procedures to assure new land uses are designed to minimize negative impacts upon existing uses, protect important natural resources, and assure public health, safety, and welfare.

Community Character and the Environment

Protection of the Township's rural character is extremely important to the residents of Waterloo Township. "Rural character" is a subjective quality, but is typically associated with an overall perception of limited urban development, and open spaces comprised of farmland and/or other open landscapes including woodlands, wetlands, and fields. Not only are these elements important in shaping the character of the Township, but also provide vital environmental roles including wildlife habitats, flood control, water purification, groundwater recharge, and air quality. The Township has abundant natural resources and sensitive environmental features. Preservation of these resources can be very difficult because the process of encroachment can occur slowly. Substantial damage to an entire ecosystem frequently occurs over a long period of time.

Effective protection of rural character and natural resources does not require the prohibition of growth and development. Managed growth and development encourages the continuation of the Township's overall rural character. The preservation of rural character and natural resources in the face of growth and development, such as platted subdivisions, condominium subdivisions and non-residential development, is dependent upon site development practices which purposely incorporate the protection of open spaces, natural resources and environmental ecosystems into the development plan.

Increased environmental knowledge, awareness, and education, when incorporated into a comprehensive planning strategy, can minimize the potential for environmental degradation. Establishment and protection of interconnected systems of natural/environmental areas, including wetlands, woodlands, stream corridors, and open fields will provide a diverse and viable habitat for wildlife and native plants. Zoning regulations should encourage

substantive protection of the Township's natural resources and rural character where large scale residential development is permitted.

GOAL: *Preserve the dominant rural character of Waterloo Township and its environmental resources and integrity.*

Objectives

- 1) Assure that future land development be designed in scale with existing developed areas and respect the existing surroundings, through reasonable standards addressing density, building size, height, and other development features.
- 2) Encourage land development which actively strives to preserve open spaces as part of a development project (such as on-site woodlands, wetlands, lakes, and fields), including the use of such tools as conservation easements, land trusts, and density bonuses.
- 3) Encourage the maintenance of historically significant structures and a structurally sound housing stock, and the rehabilitation or removal of blighted structures and yard areas.
- 4) Separate incompatible land uses by distance, natural features, or man-made landscape buffers which adequately screen or mitigate adverse impacts.
- 5) Assure that the quantity and quality of new development does not unreasonably create increases in air, noise, land, and water pollution, or the degradation of land and water resource environments including groundwater.
- 6) Development densities and intensities in environmentally sensitive areas should be limited and all development should be in compliance with applicable local, county, state, and federal regulations.
- 7) Review proposed development in light of its potential impact upon wetlands, woodlands, and other natural resource areas.
- 8) Educate the public about waste management and the Township's fundamental reliance upon groundwater resources for potable water supplies and the potential detrimental effects of irresponsible land use and development practices.

Waterloo State Recreation Area

The Waterloo State Recreation Area occupies nearly one half of the total Township area. The recreation area is managed for the purposes of providing outdoor resource-based recreation opportunities including hiking, fishing, hunting, camping, picnicking, and skiing. Much of the recreation area is characterized by expansive areas of woodlands and wetlands. In addition to providing opportunities for outdoor recreation, these resources provide important environmental benefits including habitats for wildlife, flood control, groundwater recharge and discharge, and surface water purification. The recreation area helps to establish the strong rural character of the Township and provides the Township with increased economic stability both through the tourist dollars that it generates and the limited demands it places on public services.

In light of the critical role that the W.S.R.A. plays within the Township, and the benefits it provides to other communities and residents outside of Waterloo Township, measures should be taken to encourage the long term viability of this resource. These measures should address both the use of land in proximity to the W.S.R.A. as well as site development practices that may impact the W.S.R.A.

GOAL: Encourage the long term viability of the Waterloo State Recreation Area through the management of land uses and site development practices.

Objectives

- 1) Establish building setback requirements to minimize the impact of development adjacent to public holdings in the recreation area.
- 2) Encourage open space uses and development of limited density within the boundaries of, and abutting the Recreation Area.
- 3) Discourage the establishment of commercial or similar uses within the Recreation Area that would encourage traffic and other disturbances within the Recreation Area.
- 4) Require special review procedures for all projects in proximity to the Recreation Area to assure such development minimizes impacts upon the Recreation Area.

Farmland Resources

Waterloo Township has, historically, been a strong farming community. Today, however, there is a lessening commitment to agriculture by the farming community. The number of farms in the Township has declined over the years as has the total acreage devoted to farming. The decline of farming in Waterloo Township follows similar trends in other areas of southeast Michigan. Factors encouraging the disinvestment in farming include the economic environment and the fewer number of younger persons interested in continuing in their parents' footsteps. Cumulative consumption of farmland for residential purposes and conflicts with nearby non-farm residences further encourages disinvestment. Only portions of Waterloo Township's farmland is considered to be "prime" by the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

The Township's farmland resources provide important food and fiber to both local and regional populations, are an important source of income, and contribute to the stability of the local economy. Still, it is important that the Plan's recommendations recognize the challenges facing the local farming community. The Plan should actively encourage the continuation of farming operations and the long term protection of farmland resources while similarly providing landowners the option to convert farm acreage into alternative uses when compatible with the overall future land use strategy of the Township.

GOAL: Encourage the continuation of local farming operations and the long-term protection of farmland resources.

Objectives

- 1) Designate areas which support long term farming and encourage the continuation of agricultural operations through complimentary zoning provisions.
- 2) Discourage large acreage lots that unnecessarily consume and accelerate the loss of farmland acreage, while, at the same time, place limits on development densities in agricultural areas.
- 3) To the extent that residential development occurs in agricultural areas, encourage such development to be placed on less productive farmland.
- 4) Assure that new development minimizes disturbances to, and premature destruction of, farmland areas through responsible and innovative development and site planning.

- 5) Encourage landowners to set aside farmland resources on a permanent basis in turn for special density bonuses available to certain portions of the farm acreage.
- 6) Encourage clustered development on only a portion of the farm parcel and maintain the balance of the parcel in open space, rather than splitting up the entire farm acreage into lots.
- 7) Support and maintain P.A. 116 farmland preservation agreements.
- 8) Explore the establishment of a purchase of development rights program as a means of allowing a farmer to continue farming operations while receiving a reasonable financial return on the development potential of the farmland property, and consider the adoption of local regulations to facilitate these programs.

Residential Development

Residential development will be the major land use change in the coming ten to twenty years. Waterloo Township is a very attractive place to live for many prospective residents. The Township has abundant natural resources and open spaces, an overall rural character, close proximity to desirable urban services and retail centers, and excellent regional access to near and distant employment centers. Principal limitations to new residential development are largely related to environmentally sensitive areas, the ability of area soils to accommodate septic drain fields, limited public services and the ability of the Township to assure adequate public services to meet the demands of the increased residential development, and balancing residential growth with farmland resources protection.

The primary concern in regard to future housing is that it be accommodated in a manner that will support the Township's desire to preserve the community's rural character, and that development densities respect local natural and cultural conditions. The average population projection for Waterloo Township of approximately 3,788 persons in year 2020 will require only approximately 1,357 acres of undeveloped land to be converted to residential use (based on an average lot size of one acre and a household size of 2.8 persons). However, the Township may witness an accelerated rate of growth if market conditions dictate.

Large residential lots, such as five to ten acres or more in size, can dramatically accelerate the rate at which farmland and other undeveloped lands are converted to residential use. When these lot splits occur throughout the Township, one by one, the

cumulative impact upon the Township's agricultural and other open spaces can be devastating. On the other hand, smaller acreage zoning across the Township, such as one acre zoning, can lead to a population of 24,000 persons or more. Such a growth pattern will have dramatic effects on farming, community character, taxes, and public services demands.

GOAL: *Accommodate new residential development in a manner which recognizes the opportunities and constraints of the Township's public services, infrastructure, and natural features; preserves the overall rural character of the Township and its farmland resources, and accommodates a range of densities and lifestyles.*

Objectives:

- 1) Encourage the continued dominance of low density housing as the principal housing option in the Township and identify land areas, through planning and zoning, most appropriate for such housing.
- 2) While maintaining low density housing as the primary housing option, provide opportunities for other alternative housing options to meet the varying housing preferences of current and future residents, including small lot single family dwellings.
- 3) Determine whether high density residential development can be adequately accommodated in the Township and, if so, identify limited locations for such development.
- 4) Land capacity should be an important consideration when determining the appropriate density of development, and development densities should not undermine important environmental features.
- 5) Discourage strip residential development along the frontage of existing state and county roads, to minimize traffic safety hazards and the "land-locking" of interior acreage.
- 6) Encourage innovative residential development which incorporates the preservation of natural resource systems and open spaces, and the preservation of the Township's rural character, within the site planning process. One such initiative, where multiple lots or dwelling units are created, should include the development of only a portion of the original parcel and placing the balance of the parcel in a permanent open space status.

- 7) Prohibit residential development densities in areas where public services and/or natural conditions are inadequate to support the proposed density.

Roadway Network

As new residential and non-residential land uses are introduced into the Township, demands upon the roadway network will increase. Even low density residential development can significantly increase local traffic levels. This increased traffic may lessen the level of service along some of the Township's roads. This is particularly true of the Township's many miles of unpaved road. Conversely, it must be recognized that road improvements may well attract new development which, in turn, will place additional demands on the roadway network. This Plan must seek to assure that the Township's roads are adequately maintained and improvements are coordinated with the planned future land use pattern and the designated growth and development areas.

The Plan must recognize the opportunities presented by the Township's improved thoroughfares and strive to maximize their potential through appropriate land use management. The extent to which higher density and intensity land uses, including commercial and industrial land uses, are in comparatively close proximity to these key thoroughfares will minimize future maintenance costs and traffic levels along the Township's other roads.

The future pattern of residential lot splits and subdivisions within Waterloo Township will have an important impact upon the future quality of life within the Township. Much of the residential development in the Township today is of a strip pattern – residences are “stripped” along the existing county road frontages. This pattern of lot splits can be debilitating to Waterloo Township because: 1) the increased number of driveways directly accessing the county roads increases the level of congestion and safety hazards along these corridors; 2) travel times are increased; and 3) the Township's previously rich rural panoramic views of woodlands, fields, and other open spaces, as experienced from the roadway, are reduced to images of never ending driveways, cars, garages, and front yards. Zoning regulations should be designed to support the effectiveness and character of the Township's roadway network.

Accordingly, the Plan should encourage future residential lot split patterns which maintain the integrity of the Township's roadway network and rural character.

GOAL: *Maintain a transportation network throughout the Township which moves vehicular traffic in an efficient and safe fashion, utilizes road segments specifically designed to accommodate higher traffic flows where higher traffic levels are being generated, and is coordinated with the planned future land use pattern.*

Objectives

- 1) Identify priority road segments for maintenance and improvement, based upon the planned future land use pattern in the Township and existing and projected traffic patterns, and systematically undertake these projects.
- 2) Discourage high traffic generating land uses and development patterns along the Township's secondary roads until the time when such roads have been improved to accommodate such development.
- 3) Adopt land use and/or other regulations which minimize the potential for traffic congestion and safety hazards along adjacent roadways, including limitations on the number, size, and shape of new land divisions along county roads and the discouragement of "strip" development.
- 4) Discourage the paving of gravel roads in low density residential areas.
- 5) Road improvements, including the paving of gravel roads, which will heighten growth and development pressures in areas of the Township not specified for such growth, should be strongly discouraged.

Commercial and Industrial Development

Waterloo Township has limited commercial development and industrial development. Constraints toward the establishment of such uses in the Township are significant, including the lack of public water and sewer, a comparatively small population base, and the competition from nearby urban centers such as Stockbridge and Jackson. These and other nearby cities also address many of the day-to-day consumer needs of area residents as well as providing opportunities for comparative shopping and professional services. Perhaps the principal opportunities for new commercial development are those presented by the improved road infrastructure of M-52 and M-106 and the targeted growth areas of the Township.

To the extent that Waterloo Township accommodates future commercial or industrial development, such development should: 1) not be permitted to locate randomly throughout the Township; 2) be compatible with available public services and facilities, including police protection and road infrastructure; and 3) minimize negative impacts upon the enjoyment and use of nearby lands. In light of the existing and planned character of the Township and its limited public services, large commercial facilities which draw from a regional market should be generally discouraged. The lack of extensive public services and infrastructure need not prohibit the introduction of future industrial operations which are geared more to the assembly of pre-manufactured materials rather than manufacturing operations relying upon raw materials. These "light" industrial uses, and commercial development, could improve the economic stability of the Township through increased tax revenues and employment opportunities.

GOAL: *Provide opportunities for limited expansion of commercial and industrial uses that minimize negative impacts upon adjacent land uses, respond to the predominant rural character of the community, and is compatible with available public services and infrastructure.*

Objectives

- 1) Identify locations in the Township, through planning and zoning, considered appropriate for commercial and industrial land uses, taking into account the constraints and opportunities presented by the Township's natural features, such as topography and soils, and the avail-

ability of public facilities and services, including road infrastructure.

- 2) Recognize the significance of M-106 and M-52 as potential opportunities for the location of new commercial and industrial uses.
- 3) Provide opportunities for new commercial and industrial land uses which assure such uses are in scale with surrounding land uses, including such features and building size and height, setbacks, and open space areas.
- 4) Future commercial and industrial land uses should not be permitted to indiscriminately encroach into residential and agricultural areas but rather be clustered in appropriately identified locations.
- 5) Encourage consolidated commercial centers rather than strip commercial development patterns.
- 6) Provide opportunities for a mix of commercial uses that predominantly target local day-to-day consumer needs.
- 7) Require landscaping and screening measures to assure commercial and industrial uses do not adversely impact the normal use and enjoyment of adjoining land uses.
- 8) Limit industrial uses to those which are predominately characterized by assembly activities and similar "light" operations that do not require heightened levels of public services or otherwise negatively impact surrounding land uses or the community as a whole.
- 9) Provide opportunities for home-based occupations within residential dwelling units under conditions which will support the residential character, appearance, and quality of life experienced by surrounding residential properties and neighborhoods.

Limited Public Services and Tax Base

Tax revenues dictate, in part, the extent and quality of public services. Residents do not readily support increases in taxes. Though new development can be expected to increase the Township's tax base, the new development will place additional demands upon public services. Contrary to traditional planning wisdom and thought, recent research has shown that new development does not necessarily "pay its way," particularly as it applies to single family residential development. Development patterns which minimize new public costs should be sought where practical.

To this end, it is advantageous to maintain a compact form of growth and development and, to the extent it is practical, locate higher density and intensity development near or adjacent to areas currently being served with higher levels of public services or anticipated to be served by such services in the future. Current police and fire protection services, and the roadway network, appear to be meeting the current needs of area residents. This is due, in large part, to the limited population of the Township. High growth rates which may be brought on by market conditions and zoning provisions will necessitate the expenditure of increased levels of Township funds much sooner just to maintain the current quality of public services, let alone pursue improvements.

GOAL: Maintain and expand public facilities and services in support of the planned future land use pattern and as necessary to assure public health, safety, and welfare in a cost-effective manner.

Objectives

- 1) Identify those areas of the Township which, due to existing conditions and the planned future land use pattern presented in this Plan, may be in need or will be in need of improved public services including police and fire protection.
- 2) Discourage public services improvements that will have the affect of encouraging excessive growth and development, or encouraging growth and development at a rate that the Township can not assure adequate public health, safety, and welfare.
- 3) Discourage public services improvements that will have the affect of encouraging growth and development in areas of the Township not designated for such growth.
- 4) Continually monitor local attitudes toward recreational facilities in the Township and take appropriate planning and capital improvement actions to acquire and develop local park land and/or recreational programs should a demonstrated need arise.
- 5) Maintain a regular meaningful communications program with adjoining municipalities and regional agencies to discuss and investigate public facilities and services needs, opportunities for new or additional shared facilities and services, and alternative strategies for improving local public services, including contracted services, shared services, and Township-operated services.
- 6) Discourage the introduction of pubic water, and the expansion of public sewer, except in coordination with existing or planned development areas.