



2013 Montcalm County General Plan

Montcalm County GENERAL PLAN

Prepared Under the Direction of the

Montcalm County Planning Commission

Franz Mogdis, Chairman (Business & Industry, Stanton)

Pete Haines (Education, Greenville)

John M. Johansen (County Commission, Gowen)

Tom Porter (Citizen-at-Large, Coral)

Bruce Noll (Agriculture, Sheridan)

S. Michael Scott (Village & Cities, Howard City)

Lonnie Smith (Environment & Human Services, Sand Lake)

Don Smucker (Townships, Stanton)

Charles Hill (Housing & Human Services, Greenville)

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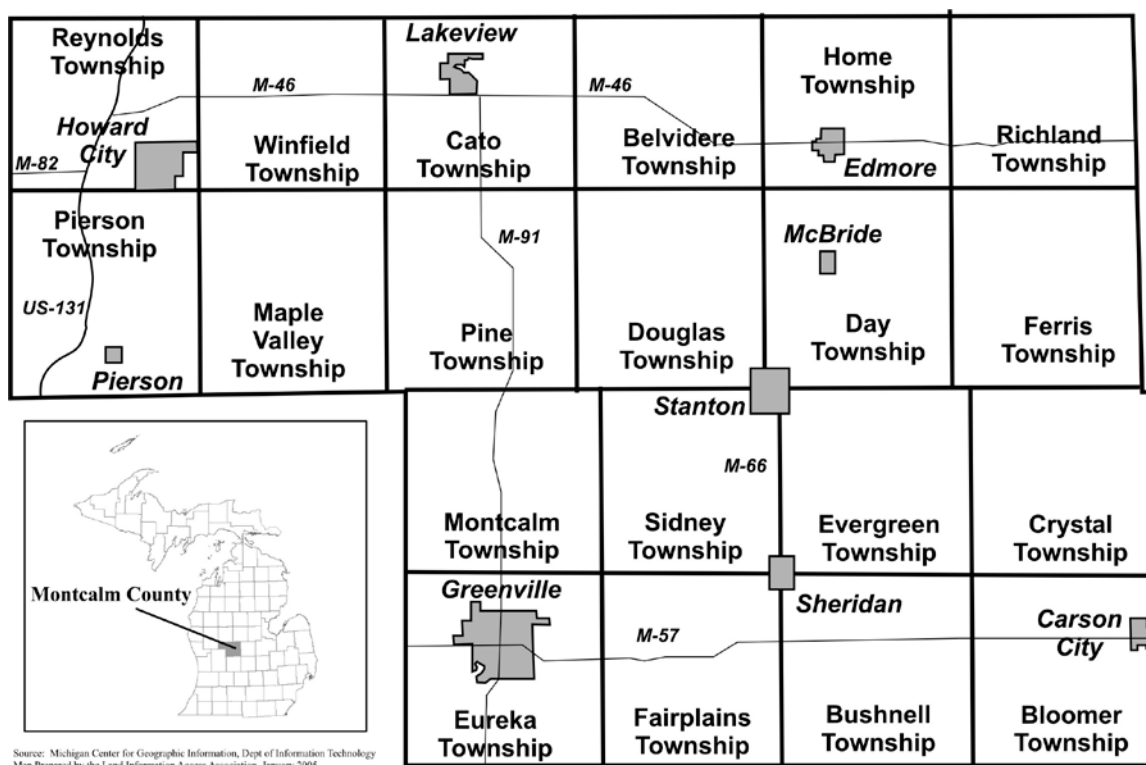
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Chapter 1 INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

Montcalm County is in the heart of mid-Michigan. It is located just north of the Grand Rapids and Lansing metropolitan areas, and south of the Big Rapids and Mt. Pleasant economic areas. Montcalm County is one-quarter larger than an average county and has 20 townships and 9 incorporated cities and villages. See Map 1-1. Montcalm County has long been the home of farms and 5 state game areas, traditional Michigan small towns and numerous manufacturers. While recent global economic changes have resulted in the loss of local manufacturing employment, the people of the county are resilient and looking for guidance on how to begin building a new future for the county. This Plan can be one of the foundation stones to that new future.

Map 1-1
Montcalm County Location and Local Jurisdictions



This chapter explains the purpose of the Montcalm County General Plan and describes the process by which the Plan was prepared. It also explains the relationship of the Plan to supplemental studies such as the Montcalm County Fact Book, the 2008-2013 Montcalm County Recreational Plan and other related studies.

This revised County Plan address land use and infrastructure on a countywide basis . Montcalm County is now in transition, economically, politically and from a land use

perspective. This Plan explains the importance of protecting the small town and rural character of Montcalm County as well as its agricultural economic base and gives guidance on how to do that. This Plan is based on the Ten Smart Growth Tenets and the Community Planning Principles of the Michigan Association of Planning (see Appendix A). These principles focus on conservation of renewable resources for their economic development and rural character values, and contiguous compact development around small towns because of the economic efficiency of public services, and social benefits a compact land use pattern offers. This Plan has a key policies map in Chapter Five with a description of generalized future land use. The Plan largely relies on the informed action of the local units of government and property owners in the county for its effective implementation.

This Plan is based on the authority granted to County Planning Commissions in P.A. 33 of 2008, as amended (the Michigan Planning Enabling Act, M.C.L. 125.3801 *et seq.*). Generally, the purpose of this General Plan is to provide policy that guides decision making for future land and infrastructure development within Montcalm County. Specifically, a vision, goals, objectives and strategies are outlined; key planning issues in the context of best practices and economic development are identified; community character, existing and future land uses are described; transportation and other public infrastructure policies are identified and specific implementation measures are recommended.

Overview of the Plan and its Uses

This Plan is of the General Plan variety. Montcalm County does not have county zoning, and this Plan has not yet recommended that the County adopt zoning.

This plan recognizes the limitations inherent to General Plans with respect to attainment of the goals and objectives outlined within this plan. This General Plan takes a county-wide view, in contrast to local plans which tend to only look inward. As a result, this Plan looks at the whole county from the standpoint of land use, economic development, infrastructure and intergovernmental cooperation. It proposes compatible land uses along jurisdiction borders. Local governments are encouraged to prepare local plans and zoning ordinances consistent with this Plan. Detailed local plans and local zoning should guide site specific decisions in every local unit of government in the County.

This Plan is adopted by the Montcalm County Planning Commission to promote public health, safety, and welfare through planning for the appropriate use of land and water resources and the provision of adequate public facilities and services. Although this Plan states specific land use and development policy and proposes specific land use arrangements, it has no regulatory power. It will be implemented by local zoning decisions, public facility and infrastructure improvements and the actions of private property owners consistent with the Plan.

However, this plan encourages units of government to work cooperatively to achieve the common vision for Montcalm County described in this Plan. To help this vision to be implemented, the Planning Commission is engaged in the ongoing process of reviewing existing zoning regulations across the county, noting patterns and common regulations as well as pointing out where adjacent jurisdictions may have incompatible regulations. The Planning Commission also is involved in providing recommended model regulations for consideration by all townships and municipalities.

The Planning Commission is also interested in encouraging local governments to explore areas where they could cooperate to provide services on multi-jurisdictional basis. The Planning Commission is interested in helping municipalities to explore these possibilities by facilitating the collaboration between county, township, city and village governments. This process is to be done only through direct conversation with the officials in the municipalities under consideration in such a manner that the County Planning Commission will support the consensus of the process.

The land area covered by this Plan includes the entire area of Montcalm County and all 29 incorporated units of local government in the county. It is intended to promote sensible and sustainable inter-jurisdictional land use planning. It is hoped that this Plan will guide the formation of township, city and village plans consistent with it and that subsequent local zoning and infrastructure decisions will also be made consistent with it.

This Plan has a time orientation of twenty years into the future (through 2033). It is heavily influenced by the “Concept of Sustainability” that a community should make decisions today that meet the needs of the present without undermining the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

Photo 1-1
Flat River in Montcalm County



Photo provided by the Montcalm Alliance

Specific Purposes of the Montcalm County General Plan

- To prepare a plan that is consistent with the County Planning Act, P.A. 33 of 2008, as amended;
- To provide the framework for the Montcalm County Planning Commission to serve in a proactive, coordinating capacity for all land use and infrastructure planning committees and commissions within the county;
- To prepare a plan that is technically sound, internally consistent, and that focuses on

- current issues and future needs;
- To provide a legal basis for County Planning Commission review of local master plans, and county park and recreation plans (a mandatory responsibility);
- To provide a legal basis for County Planning Commission review of township zoning ordinances and zoning amendments (a mandatory responsibility);
- To provide a legal basis for County Planning Commission review of proposed PA 116 (Farmland and Open Space Preservation) contracts (a mandatory responsibility);
- To provide a basis for County Planning Commission review of future County infrastructure proposals (a mandatory responsibility);
- To provide a basis for future county grant requests;
- To provide a countywide economic development/infrastructure development framework for local planning (a valuable asset when seeking grant assistance and encouraging new business development in the county);
- To provide an incentive for joint local planning;
- To serve as an educational tool to assist with education of local government officials and citizens on smart growth;
- To provide a basis for provision of technical assistance to local governments on contemporary local planning and zoning tools (such as those related to farmland protection and provision of affordable housing);
- To provide a means for county residents to participate in determining the future of their county;
- To provide a broad framework for the county's decision-makers to assist them in both long-term and day-to-day matters;
- To minimize land use conflicts and inappropriate uses of land;
- To designate areas of land for uses in keeping with the natural soil properties, vegetation, terrain and availability of public sewer and water in anticipation of future development;
- To provide for an improved system of public services according to current and projected needs.

In early 2003, Michigan's Governor, with the assistance of the head of the House and Senate appointed a 30+ member Michigan Land Use Leadership Council comprised of heads of all the major state departments and representatives of the major stakeholder groups. Their challenge was to prepare a set of recommendations on ways to improve land use policy and decisions in Michigan. Early in the process, the Council settled on the following Ten Smart Growth Tenets as critical to guiding future land use in Michigan. Those tenets are incorporated into this Plan as important to guiding future land use in Montcalm County.

Ten Smart Growth Tenets

1. *Encourage community and stakeholder collaboration;*
2. *Foster distinctive, attractive communities with a strong sense of place;*
3. *Preserve farmland, open space, natural beauty and critical environmental areas;*
4. *Make development decisions predictable, fair, and cost-effective;*
5. *Strengthen and direct development towards existing communities;*
6. *Create a range of housing opportunities and choices;*
7. *Provide a variety of transportation choices;*
8. *Create walkable neighborhoods;*

9. *Mix land uses;*
10. *Take advantage of compact development design.*

Source: Michigan Land Use Leadership Council Final Report, Aug. 2003

Smart Growth Definition

Smart Growth is a term that may not be familiar to all readers.

Smart Growth means using comprehensive planning to guide, design, develop, revitalize and build communities for all that:

- *have a unique sense of community and place;*
- *preserve and enhance valuable natural and cultural resources;*
- *equitably distribute the costs and benefits of development;*
- *expand the range of transportation, employment and housing choices in a fiscally responsible manner;*
- *value long-range, regional considerations of sustainability over short term incremental geographically isolated actions; and*
- *promotes public health and healthy communities.*

Smart Growth is characterized by compact, transit accessible, pedestrian-oriented, mixed use development patterns and land (re)use which epitomizes the application of the principles of smart growth.

In contrast to prevalent development practices, Smart Growth refocuses a larger share of regional growth within central cities, urbanized areas, inner suburbs,[small towns], and areas that are already served by infrastructure. Smart Growth reduces the share of growth that occurs on newly urbanizing land, existing farmlands, and in environmentally sensitive areas. In areas with intense growth pressure, development in newly urbanizing areas should be planned and developed according to Smart Growth principles.

Adapted from American Planning Association Smart Growth Policy 2002

<http://www.planning.org/policyguides/smartgrowth.htm>

Vision-Based Plan

This Plan is vision-based, with strategies intended to guide future county actions and decisions. It is not intended to establish precise boundaries of land use areas or exact locations of future types of developments. Maps should be considered as general guides, and the Plan's function is to guide growth toward long-range, broad-based goals, and only generally indicate the location of future development. Site specific decisions are left to local units of government.

A primary challenge of a vision-based General Plan is to combine the needs and desires of the citizenry with the land's suitability and capability for sustaining those needs and desires, as matched by the ability of a municipality to provide public services throughout its jurisdiction. Such planning will minimize the potential for land use conflicts and inappropriate uses of land, for the long term betterment of all residents. This is a very substantial challenge given the over zoning for low density residential development revealed in the buildout analysis of existing zoning ordinances and published in the most current **Montcalm County Fact Book**. Most local units of government in the County have zoned land at a density far greater than current use, and far beyond the ability of existing public services to meet the need inherent in the thousands of new dwellings

permitted by existing zoning. It is hoped the alternative future vision and land use pattern in this Plan will help guide changes to local zoning that are more realistic than existing zoning as reflected in the buildout analysis.

Legal Basis

The Michigan Planning Enabling Act (Act 33 of the Public Acts of 2008), states, in part, that:

- *“Sec 7. (1) A local unit of government may adopt, amend, and implement a master plan as provided in this act.”*
- *“Sec 31. (1) A planning commission shall make and approve a master plan as a guide for development within the planning jurisdiction subject to section 81 and the following;
(a) For a County, the master plan may include planning in cooperation with constituted authorities for incorporated areas in whole or to the extent to which, in the planning commission’s judgment, they are related to the planning of the of the unincorporated area of the county as a whole.”*

OVERVIEW OF PLANNING PROCESS

The planning process followed to prepare this Plan carried on a Montcalm County tradition of providing broad public input opportunities. Stratified random sample opinion surveys of residents were conducted in 1999 and 2002. A survey of local leaders was conducted in 2004 and three “visioning” town meetings were held in 2005 at the Tri-County High School outside Howard City, at the Community Room in the Central Services Facility of the Greenville Public Schools, and at the Montcalm Community College. Notices of each meeting were announced in the *Greenville Daily News*, and posted locally. These town meetings allowed citizens an opportunity to identify points of pride “prouds” and regrets “sorries” and images of the future that they would like to see become a reality. The planning process also included many meetings of the County Planning Commission, presentations to the Montcalm County Townships Association and to the Montcalm County Board of Commissioners.

As part of the planning process, the Montcalm County Fact Book was prepared in order to update demographic, economic, natural resources, transportation, and public facilities information. The Montcalm County Fact Book includes data, tables, charts and maps that provide a snapshot view of the county in 2005 that serves as the basis for formulating goals, policy and strategies for the future. It is available on the County website at www.montcalm.org.

In 2013 the Planning Commission reviewed this document and made revisions to the plan’s present status.

HOW TO USE THE PLAN

There are seven critical components to using this Plan as a decision making guide.

- First is the background information in the Montcalm County Fact Book, as a separate document that provides basic information and trends in demographic, economic, land use, natural resources, tax base, transportation and public facilities of the county.
- The second component is the vision, goals, objectives and strategies in Chapter Two. These are based on public input, and reflect where citizens want their county to be over the next twenty years.

- Third are the best practices available to local governments to implement the Plan in Chapter Three.
- Fourth are the ten guidelines for effective county economic development in Chapter Four.
- Fifth are the future land use policies in Chapter Five necessary to achieve coordinated land use decisions in Montcalm County.
- Sixth is the discussion of transportation and other infrastructure in Chapter Six. The importance of improving roads, sewer, water and other infrastructure over the next 20 years is emphasized.
- Seventh are the implementation strategies and inter-jurisdictional coordination steps found in Chapter Seven. They outline the roles and responsibilities of the county, townships, cities and villages in carrying out the recommendations of this Plan.

This Plan is a statement by the County Planning Commission regarding the present and desired future character of the county and strategies to assure that character. As a formal and tangible document, this Plan is intended to instill a sense of stability and direction for county, city, village and township officials, and for Montcalm County citizens and businesses.

Every effort has been made to present factually correct and up-to-date information in this Plan and the accompanying Montcalm County Fact Book. Information was obtained from local, state and federal sources. Ultimately though, this Plan is a general document, and any site-specific decisions should be thoroughly investigated with original research materials before proceeding. The Plan is not regulatory like zoning. It is a policy guide to give direction to many future actions, including changes to local plans and zoning ordinances.

Chapter 2

VISION, GOALS, OBJECTIVES, & STRATEGIES

VISION STATEMENT

Introduction

Montcalm County residents, businesses, and visitors have diverse needs, wishes, and dreams, and satisfying them is a big challenge for any community. This chapter describes those needs, wishes, and dreams in a vision for the future of Montcalm County, and includes goals, objectives, and strategies to reach that vision.

The vision statement that follows describes Montcalm County as residents at several town meetings held in 2005 countywide wanted it to be in the year 2025. The results of the 1999 Montcalm County Citizen Survey and a follow-up 2002 survey were also considered. The vision has been extended to 2035 and is organized into topic areas that separately focus on key elements of the county. What emerges when all sections are read together, is a complete image of Montcalm County, as residents would like it to be in 2035 and beyond. The vision statement was the basis for goals, objectives, and strategies of this Plan.

When reading this vision, it is necessary to mentally “transport” yourself into the future to the year 2035. Thus, there are references “back” to the early 2000’s.

21st Century Montcalm County

Montcalm County residents and businesses enjoy a high quality of life and are reaping the benefits of commitments to future generations made years ago. Beginning in the early 2000s, proactive policies and initiatives, economic development plans, and resource preservation plans were undertaken which went well beyond common practice of the day. These initiatives improved the quality of life, and retained and attracted people and businesses to the county. The results of this hard work are obvious to visitors and residents alike.

Montcalm County has become a true reflection of sustainability (meeting the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet and/or adapt to their own needs). Businesses, neighborhoods, parks, schools, local government, agricultural and natural resources are healthy and self-sustaining in 2035. Montcalm County is home to the largest renewable energy installation in Michigan, comprised of the City of Greenville and Greenville Public Schools. It is significant that this system, combining solar PV and wind generation technology, is largely publically owned.

When asked about Montcalm County, residents use terms like “prosperous,” “successful,” “safe,” “rural,” “clean,” “healthy,” and “well-educated.” Residents are also quick to say that Montcalm County is an outdoor recreation paradise and a great place to raise families or retire.

Economic Development - A County of Opportunity

The cities, villages, townships and county continue to work together on an aggressive economic development program aimed at retention, expansion, and attraction of business and industry within the county. The primary objective is to create and maintain a healthy and growing economy in Montcalm County with high paying jobs. To appreciate the success of this initiative one needs only to visit the county's clean, harmonious, and compact industrial and business districts, and successful farms.

A high quality-of-life, a sense of security, and strong community values are part of the attraction of new jobs to the county. By continually reinvesting in schools, transportation, health care, police and emergency services, compact and efficient sewer and water systems, and utilities, communities within the county satisfy basic industry requirements rivaling any community in Michigan. A marketing program which proactively solicits business and industry as well as tourism, is a significant factor in the economic success of the county.

Revitalized older neighborhoods provide affordable housing opportunities for families of various sizes and ages. This is due to significant reinvestment by owners, but also to strict enforcement of the local building, housing, and rental codes. Many of the county's least expensive neighborhoods are some of the most popular for first time homebuyers. New subdivisions are located close to existing cities and villages and, through clustering and conservation principles, sensitive environments, natural scenery and prime agricultural lands are protected.

Where the visual character, sounds, dust, smells, and level of activity of commercial and industrial development are not compatible with residential neighborhoods or other noise sensitive land uses, they are separated or buffered. Where commercial development can serve residential needs, it is built adjacent to residential neighborhoods with an architectural design and layout that fits the character of the neighborhoods.

Scenic Natural and Agricultural Landscape Character Preserved

The most common landscape view in Montcalm County continues to be a mix of farm fields, meadows, wetlands, river and lakeshores, and woods. Rather than succumbing to sprawl and the attendant loss of natural visual character that is occurring throughout the rest of the State, the alluring characteristics that initially attracted residents and businesses to the county have been maintained, and in some cases enhanced. (The visual character of a community is set by the style, size and upkeep of its homes, businesses and civic places such as parks, stores, schools and government buildings. It is also set by the presence or absence of water and vegetation, hills and highways.)

The rural landscape does more than simply provide scenery. The benefits of nature to residents' mental well-being and the attraction for visitors are important. Montcalm County is recognized as having a unique combination of soils, climate, and water resources that enable its innovative farmers to grow diverse, high quality, high-yielding crops which are managed in a sustainable

manner that continues to make agriculture a vital sector of the economy. Woods and fields help with water infiltration, maintaining biological diversity, and providing habitat for wildlife. Property owners have coordinated the retention of green space connections to create ecological corridors, enhance recreation, and provide a more continuous natural scenic view. Streams and lakes have buffer plantings that help protect water quality.

New growth and development have occurred in compact form and in locations that retain ample open space throughout the county, reinforcing the scenic visual character rather than detracting from it. In Montcalm County, large-scale changes to the landscape (especially of vegetation, views, open spaces, and the water's edge), are minimized by encouraging thoughtfully designed and buffered new development, and redevelopment, in select locations. Places that were unattractive or lacked scenic character in 2005 were improved. This philosophy was applied to both residential and non-residential development. Existing and new development, particularly along transportation and scenic corridors is screened with buffer plantings in character with a rural, nature-oriented landscape. Parking lots, big buildings, and outside storage areas are buffered by landscaping and natural vegetation. The number of signs has been reduced and remaining signs are well designed to enhance commerce and direction-finding without detracting from scenic views.

A public well-versed in land and water protection approaches is deeply involved in making decisions about preservation. Working with conservancies and the State Purchase of Development Rights Program, key parcels are preserved through development rights purchases, donations, and other approaches over the past two decades. As a result, wetlands, forests, farmland (particularly prime farmland), and green spaces that comprise the rural character and ecosystem of the county are permanently protected.

City and Village Centers

Montcalm residents have realized that to revitalize Michigan we must examine our communities and region through a new lens, taking into account the types of places where "New Economy" workers, entrepreneurs and businesses want to locate, invest and expand. This approach is commonly described as creating a "sense of place" and is based on a single principle – people choose to settle in places that offer the amenities, social and professional networks, resources and opportunities to support thriving lifestyles. Residents realize that we can attract and retain talent – especially young, knowledge-based talent – by focusing on how best to utilize our communities' unique placemaking assets. Citizens are working together to create, improve and maintain quality places in Montcalm county that have helped us reimagine our communities region and state for the 21st century.

Montcalm County citizens and officials have implemented "placemaking" by employing many appropriate practices. Structures and places of historical and architectural significance are protected and renewed and serve as reinforcing elements of visual character. City and village sidewalks are lined with shops and amenities and as a result are full of people. Community events make these centers the place to be on a regular basis. Parks and streets lined with stately trees welcome visitors and residents alike. Strip

commercial corridors are attractive and fit into the rural setting.

New developments complement existing transportation systems and serve the needs of pedestrians, cyclists, and automobile drivers safely and efficiently. The cities of Greenville, Stanton and Carson City, as well as the villages in the county are known as walkable communities, providing safe connections, separate from roads when practical, between residential areas and the many types of destinations within the community: shops, businesses, public buildings, churches, schools, parks and restaurants. As a result of its increased walkability, more active residents enjoy a greater level of health than in 2005.

Links continue to be established between residential neighborhoods and commercial and industrial development to provide safe, attractive and low cost pedestrian and bike routes as alternatives to automobile circulation. There are also links to greenways with paved trails that extend beyond Montcalm County into the surrounding region. These greenways serve both as recreational opportunities in themselves and to connect destinations such as communities, parks, and schools.

Quality of Life - A County of Education and Stimulation

The county has long held education as a critical element of quality of life. The public and private school systems including pre-school, K-12 plus the Montcalm Community College, provide excellent educational opportunities. Students are well disciplined, computer literate, and well prepared to actively participate in a changing world economy. Through the use of technology and collaborative partnerships between local school districts, Montcalm Intermediate School District, Montcalm Community College, and several regional four-year universities, citizens can continue higher education, obtain technical, job-related training, and can take adult enrichment courses in a wide variety of subjects without leaving our communities. Lifelong learning is a way of life in Montcalm County. Citizens know that inspiring works of art and innovative designs have the power to transform people's lives. The performing arts, cultural and museum events in many civic and private facilities continue to provide entertainment for all generations of Montcalm County citizens. As businesses, they directly contribute to the economy as they purchase materials and services in their communities and pay workers who in turn buy goods and services.

Quality of Life - Recreation

The county has long held recreational opportunities as an important aspect of quality of life. Montcalm County residents enjoy a variety of recreation opportunities at local and county parks, National Forest lands, State Game Areas, public access sites, golf courses, and other facilities. Trails link many parts of the county, extend beyond the county and provide opportunities for fitness and enjoyment of the outdoors. Boating, fishing and swimming on the inland lakes continues to be popular pastimes.

Montcalm County has established one of the most comprehensive regional recreation programs found in the State. The public schools provide ample indoor recreation opportunities during the winter months.

Friendly, Cooperative Community

County business and government leaders long ago recognized that working together is critical to the long-term economic and cultural vitality of the county. Many non-traditional collaborative partnerships have provided unique opportunities to grow our communities. Civic groups also play an important role, assisting in keeping Montcalm County clean, attractive, and healthy with a sustainable environment and positive community spirit. Participation in community events, music concerts, and festivals is high.

Montcalm County is a friendly and caring place to live and visitors feel the hospitality. The community is supportive of its citizens and helps provide mentoring and constructive guidance. Members of all generations of the community share in its identity. Both cultural and natural resources are preserved through wide community support by citizens who understand the value and principles of preservation.

Leaders work to encourage a high level of citizen involvement from both residents and nonresident property owners. In return, leadership is responsive to the direction expressed by citizens. Leaders hold the public's trust when enforcing regulations that protect the environment, implement the County General Plan, and otherwise ensure protection of public health, safety, and welfare.

Intergovernmental Cooperation/Coordination

A shared set of policies structured around a common vision of the future serves as a framework for decision making between all governmental entities in Montcalm County.

The common vision and related policies recognizes the autonomy of each unit of local government, but also establishes a mechanism for addressing issues of greater than local concern. Communities apply the dual principles of respect and cooperation on issues of mutual interest. Cooperation promotes achievement of area-wide interests and the uniqueness of each local government is celebrated.

Coordination of costs, timetables, responsibilities, and resources to continue upgrading the quality of life of the area are all included as an integral part of these cooperative policies. All county and local public services and facilities are coordinated, as are state, federal and private services and facilities when appropriate to do so.

The Planning Commission has benefited in the past from the services provided by a Land Use Educator staff position. Much of the past success of the Planning Commission in terms of cooperation and education between governmental entities is attributed to these services.

While local land use decisions are guided by local zoning standards, issues of greater than local concern are subject to input from surrounding local governments both within and outside the county before a final decision is made. Special ad hoc committees aid communication among county and local governments in this process and promote adequate public participation.

GOALS, OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGIES

The goals, objectives and strategies that follow were based on the results of a survey of local leaders and the visioning sessions held in Montcalm County in 2005. Having reviewed these goals and objectives and finding them still pertinent, the Planning Commission recommends repeating this process again in 2015.

Goal: Goals are broad-based statements of intent and establish the direction for the Montcalm County General Plan. Goals could generally be thought of as the desired "ends" of successful implementation of the County General Plan.

Objective: Objectives are the stated "means" of achieving each goal, or the tasks to be carried out in the process of realizing goals.

Strategies: Strategies are action statements in order to accomplish the goal and objective.

I. GOAL – INCREASE OPPORTUNITIES FOR BUSINESS AND COMPETITION IN THE COUNTY.

- A. Objective – Ensure land suitable for commercial and industrial development is adequately served with public sewer, water, and other essential public services and facilities.**
- B. Objective – Increase awareness of available land and strengths of area businesses.**
- C. Objective – Promote involvement of county and local governmental units in economic development decisions.**
- D. Objective – Encourage the establishment of businesses that provide year-round employment and other quality jobs.**
- E. Objective – Promote measures and activities which result in diversification of the economy.**
 - 1. Strategy – Encourage the county's Economic Development function to prepare a 5-year countywide economic development plan and update the plan on a regular basis in partnership with the Michigan Economic Development Corporation, the Right Place and the West Michigan Regional Planning Commission, and other appropriate entities.
 - 2. Strategy – Allow for publicly funded economic development activity based on the following criteria:
 - a) Development will either persevere or create jobs according to ratios endorsed by the Economic Development Administration, U.S. Department of Commerce.
 - b) Development will accompany or result in a significant amount of private sector leverage using brownfields, tax abatement and related tools.
 - c) Development will result in a significant return on the investment of public funds.
 - 3. Strategy – Enhance the future viability of agriculture and natural resources enterprises by working toward ensuring that further processing of agricultural and natural resource products harvested from the county will, where feasible, be undertaken within the county and region.

4. Strategy – Establish a Convention and Visitors Bureau or similar organization, which in cooperation with existing Chambers of Commerce, promote Montcalm County tourism attractions for day visitors from the surrounding counties.

II. GOAL – VILLAGE AND CITY CENTERS HAVE AN ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL VITALITY.

A. Objective – Create vibrant and bustling villages and cities that are functional, people-oriented, and the center of cultural activity within the county.

1. Strategy – Existing civic and cultural facilities are retained in village and city centers and new or expanded civic and cultural facilities are placed in or very close to village and city centers.
2. Strategy – Maximize existing public infrastructure by utilizing brownfield redevelopment strategies to revitalize areas of the county.
3. Strategy – Encourage revision of city, village and township zoning ordinances, if necessary, to permit mixed use development in city and village downtowns and other important nodes in order to increase the base population near businesses and cultural facilities.
4. Strategy – Encourage the preservation of historic structures through maintenance and renovation that retains historic character.
5. Strategy – Encourage pedestrian activity in cities and villages through the design and construction of sidewalks and small public spaces that are safe and filled with art and other amenities.
6. Strategy – Promote voluntary participation in community and cultural activities.
7. Strategy – Encourage businesses and institutions to install public art, flowers, trees, benches and fountains.
8. Strategy – Expand the number and type of festivals and fairs and participation in community events.
9. Strategy – Support use of housing programs to assist with new housing or rehabilitation of housing in cities and villages in the county.
10. Strategy – Evaluate and support where appropriate, new tools and incentives to facilitate economic development in cities, villages and townships.

III. GOAL – GUIDE THE TYPE AND AMOUNT OF GROWTH

A. Objective – Encourage county and citizen understanding of, and involvement in the growth management process.

1. Strategy – Provide educational opportunities and leadership on planning and zoning techniques to manage growth in general, and the specifics of this Plan as may be available from MSU Extension, the West Michigan Regional Planning Commission, the Michigan Association of Planning and related organizations.
2. Strategy – The County Planning Commission and local jurisdictions meet annually to discuss growth and land use issues.
3. Strategy – Review the General Plan every five years and update as necessary.

IV. GOAL – ESTABLISH A SET OF LOCAL REGULATIONS AND A PROGRAM OF LOCAL ENFORCEMENT THAT PROTECTS QUALITY OF LIFE AND IS FAIR AND CONSISTENT FOR PROPERTY OWNERS.

A. Objective – Explore the options to ensure that every local jurisdiction which has zoning does so consistent with this County General Plan and any adopted city, village or township plan.

1. Strategy – Educate officials and the public about the benefits, attributes, powers and limitation of zoning.
2. Strategy – Work with local authorities to ensure local zoning in all areas of the county that prevents over-crowding of land, loss of prime agricultural land, overuse of natural resources and promotion of economic development where there are adequate public services as this Plan indicates.
3. Strategy – Through coordination of local authorities with county and state authorities, ensure that areas with limitations for development are protected if they possess any of the following conditions:
 - a) Flooding, as determined by National Flood Hazard maps
 - b) Inadequate drainage as determined by county Drain Commissioner
 - c) Soil formations with contra-indications for development as determined by the National Resource Conservation Service (formerly the Soil Conservation Service)
 - d) Topography with steep slopes as determined by the Natural Resource Conservation Service
 - e) Inadequate water supply and sewage disposal capabilities as determined by the District Health Department and/or the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ)
 - f) Wetlands as determined by the MDEQ
 - g) Prime and unique farmlands as determined by the Natural Resources Conservation service
4. Strategy – Encourage the development and maintenance of formal site plan review procedures and standards in city, village and township zoning ordinances for environmental protection of each of the environmental features listed above, and for groundwater protection in rural areas of the county.
5. Strategy – Urge adoption where they do not exist and promote fair and effective administration of junk and related ordinances at the township, city, and village level.
6. Strategy – Promote the fair and effective administration of the County construction

B. Objective – Encourage city, village and township zoning ordinances to be consistent with this Plan, kept up-to-date and enforced in a professional, fair and consistent manner.

1. Strategy – Encourage local officials to stay abreast of changing laws and regulations regarding planning and zoning and implement changes when necessary.
2. Strategy – Identify and if possible provide locally, opportunities for annual training for city, village and township planning and zoning commissioners on basic and advanced principles, procedures, laws, cases, tools and techniques to guide quality community development.

3. Strategy – More clearly define terms in local zoning ordinances to avoid confusion.
4. Strategy – Encourage city, village and township zoning ordinances to be enforced in a consistent and fair manner.
5. Strategy – Modernize and utilize clearly defined procedures for granting or denying variances and rezoning efforts in an objective measurable manner consistent with the County General Plan.
6. Strategy – Encourage cities, villages and townships to make zoning variances the exception rather than the rule.
7. Strategy – Educate the public regarding the role of the city, village and township planning commission, zoning board of appeals and the zoning procedures outlined above.

V. GOAL – REVIEW EXISTING AGRICULTURAL PRACTICES AS THEY RELATE TO NON-FARM RESIDENCES.

A. Objective – Preserve Montcalm County’s unique agricultural sector and promote mutually healthy relationships between farm and non-farm residential neighbors.

1. Strategy – Encourage farming operations that utilize the Michigan Right-to-Farm Act to solicit dialog and input from local communities and governing bodies.
2. Strategy – Encourage those farm practices that minimize odor, noise, and environmental risk and maximize natural resource conservation.
3. Strategy – Encourage farmers to participate in the Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program (MAEAP).

B. Objective – Assure the substantial use of the unique combination of soils, climate, and water resources that characterize Montcalm County.

1. Strategy – Encourage the development and use of sustainable cropping systems that preserve and enhance the quality of agricultural soils.
2. Strategy – Manage irrigation systems according to Generally Accepted Agricultural and Management Practices for Irrigation Water Use.
3. Strategy – Encourage continuing sustainable production practices for the diverse high quality, high yielding crops of which Montcalm County has a unique position in U.S. Agriculture.

VI. GOAL – PRESERVE MONTCALM COUNTY’S NATURAL RESOURCES AND THE BEAUTY OF ITS LANDSCAPE.

A. Objective – Provide for planning mechanisms and regulatory techniques that will preserve forests, wetlands, and other natural resources as well as farms and other vegetated landscapes.

1. Strategy – Encourage city, village and township and the county to support applications of agricultural land owners to enroll in agricultural land preservation programs like PA 116, Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) and Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) programs.
2. Strategy – City, village and township planning commissions are encouraged to work with the County Planning Commission to develop design guidelines for small parcels and large parcel development that promote voluntary approaches to the protection of natural resources and scenic quality.

3. Strategy – The county and local governments encourage the creation of conservancies and land trusts to acquire or obtain development rights to natural resource and scenic parcels that have been identified as important to preserve.
 4. Strategy – The county and local governments support the voluntary donation of conservation easements for important natural resources and scenic areas, especially roadside areas along scenic corridors.
 5. Strategy – Encourage careful land use management on the part of county officials and landowners alike.
 6. Strategy – Encourage cluster zoning and open space preservation techniques in rural areas and compact settlement patterns in villages, cities, and in townships with urbanized areas where the proper infrastructure is available.
 7. Strategy – Further develop and refine local greenbelt zoning techniques via maps and other tools to consistently project and preserve sensitive environmental areas.
 8. Strategy – Work with individual jurisdictions to establish uniform floodplain protection ordinances.
 9. Strategy – Work with the County Road Commission, Michigan Department of Transportation, and local jurisdictions to refine private road standards to limit construction on steep slopes and to restrict private roads that contribute to erosion.
 10. Strategy – Urge cities, villages and townships to adopt ordinances that limit construction on steeper slopes.
 11. Strategy – Develop design guidelines that illustrate the least damaging building approaches for slopes.
- B. Objective – A greenspace system of interconnected, undeveloped land, buffers, ecological corridors, forests, floodplains, wetlands, and other open space in private and public ownership is identified and protected in Montcalm County.**
1. Strategy – Develop guidelines for property owners, developers, communities, and business owners on how to preserve or sensitively develop near wildlife corridors.
 2. Strategy – Adopt conservation subdivision (a subdivision that groups lots together on a portion of a property in order to save large blocks of open space) and cluster ordinances and promote the use of these techniques for new development of both residential and commercial development.
 3. Strategy – Develop educational materials and programs for residential and commercial property owners on how to foster wildlife while protecting properties from wildlife damage.
- C. Objective – The identity and location of threatened and endangered species is documented and plans for their protection are drafted and implemented.**
1. Strategy – Urge volunteer groups to document the identity and location of threatened and endangered species and develop protection plans.
 2. Strategy – Urge volunteer groups to provide educational programs for the public regarding the value of preserving wildlife habitat and alternative preservation methods.
 3. Strategy – Urge volunteer groups to develop and implement preservation plans for areas of threatened and endangered species.

4. Strategy – As the above strategies are implemented, an effort should be made to include the Conservation District, County Farm Bureau and related organizations.

VII. GOAL – PROVIDE HOUSING OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL CITIZENS OF THE COUNTY.

- A. Objective – Ensure a wide range of housing choices.**
- B. Objective – Allow for reasonable and fair low to moderate-income housing where compatible with other housing types.**
- C. Objective – Priority should be given to meeting the most urgent unmet housing needs of the physically and developmentally disabled, those with low and moderate incomes, the elderly, and those who are on public assistance.**
- D. Objective – Continue to provide for compatibility among and between housing types for neighborhood stability.**
- E. Objective – Encourage senior-friendly housing.**
 1. Strategy – Encourage local governments to allow for mobile home parks and manufactured homes in local zoning districts that are appropriately sited for those uses.
 2. Strategy – New housing developments/subdivisions should occur only in areas where soils are suitable for on-site sewage treatment and for adequate and protected on-site water supply; and/or public sewer and water are available or economically feasible.
 3. Strategy – New housing developments should be compatible with existing and planned, neighboring land uses.
 4. Strategy – Senior-friendly housing should be available in all cities and villages in the county.
 5. Strategy – In the downtown area, encourage development of mixed-use housing, especially above retail establishments.

VIII. GOAL – PROVIDE AN ATMOSPHERE WHEREBY AREA YOUTH HAVE A STAKE IN THE COMMUNITY.

- A. Objective – Develop and promote area recreational and cultural opportunities targeted to meeting the needs of youth.**
- B. Objective – Encourage continuation/expansion and better awareness of the local recreational and cultural opportunities.**
- C. Objective – Encourage involvement of youth in their community.**
 1. Strategy – Provide direction and policy assistance so that entities like Montcalm Community College can attract the best students, faculty , and facilities in conjunction with the state-wide network of 4-year institutions.
 2. Strategy – Involve youth, whenever and wherever possible, in local governing, planning and collateral activities.
 3. Strategy – Utilize existing recreational centers.
 4. Strategy – Utilize existing cultural centers such as Montcalm Community College to expand and enhance the diversity of cultural information available.
 5. Strategy – Support Community College/Public School System collaboration on educational initiatives such as the Tech-Prep Partnership.

6. Strategy – Support and expand the activities of Montcalm’s 4-H community.

IX. GOAL – MAINTAIN THE VIABILITY OF THE PRIMARY LAKE RESIDENTIAL COMMUNITIES IN THE COUNTY.

- A. Objective – Support local planning and zoning mechanisms to maintain current levels of attractiveness and availability of the inland lakes in the county.**
- B. Objective – Execute steps necessary to achieve improvement and enhancement of overall water quality for these lakes and connecting waterways.**
 1. Strategy – Encourage strict enforcement of local lakefront zoning that protects water quality and minimizes risk of overuse of lake resources.
 2. Strategy – Utilize and promote lake boards and other forums to educate lake residents regarding fertilizer practices and other actions that could affect water quality.
 3. Strategy – Utilize and promote lake boards and property associations to implement best management practices as recommended in lake studies including the importance of watershed management and sanitary sewers.
 4. Strategy – Encourage the development of appropriately sited access sites/board launches for all citizens.
 5. Strategy – Develop increased waterfront access opportunities for all of Montcalm residents.

X. GOAL – PROVIDE UPGRADED TRANSPORTATION FACILITIES AND BETTER MANAGED ACCESS WHERE SUCH FACILITIES WILL PROVIDE THE GREATEST BENEFIT TO THE PEOPLE, BUSINESSES, AND TOURISTS IN THE COUNTY AS A WHOLE.

- A. Objective – Safe and efficient movement of people and goods with a variety of transportation modes.**
 1. Strategy – Prepare a countywide transportation plan addressing all transportation modes.
 2. Strategy – Encourage the expansion of Greenville’s dial-a-ride transit service to a countywide demand responsive transit system utilizing existing resources such as EightCAP.
- B. Objective – Provide reasonable access by all segments of the population to jobs, services, recreation, and other opportunities.**
 1. Strategy – Encourage transportation infrastructure development that complements anticipated future land use patterns.
 2. Strategy – Encourage MDOT to finance access management plans along each state highway in the county, and promote a uniform approach to access management regulations across the county so as to insure that future commercial and manufacturing transportation needs are met.
 3. Strategy – Pave or improve only those roads where soils and other natural features will support increased development.
 4. Strategy – Facilitate a coordinated approach to transportation planning and financing among responsible government units.
 5. Strategy – Encourage planning and zoning for only noise compatible land uses along state highways.

6. Strategy – Utilize where feasible, the resources of the West Michigan Regional Planning Commission.

XI. GOAL – PROVIDE A RANGE OF PUBLIC FACILITIES AND SERVICES CONSISTENT WITH THE RURAL CHARACTER OF THE COUNTY, WHICH MEETS PRESENT AND FUTURE NEEDS OF EXISTING COMMUNITIES AND SUPPORTS THE PUBLIC HEALTH, SAFETY, AND WELFARE OF RESIDENTS AND VISITORS.

- A. Objective – Public sewer and water is provided to businesses and residents efficiently and in locations in which development does not negatively affect natural resources and community character.
- B. Objective – Public facilities, services, and programs provide for the health and safety needs of Montcalm County citizens, workers, and visitors.
- C. Objective – Police, fire, and emergency services are consistent with public need and the ability to finance improvements in the most cost-effective manner.
- D. Objective – Solid waste, recyclable and hazardous materials are disposed of safely, effectively, and efficiently according to the adopted Solid Waste Management Plan.
- E. Objective – Cities, villages and townships should detail when, and under what circumstances sewer and water service will be extended to new areas consistent with the goals and objectives of this Plan and any relevant local plan.
- F. Objective – Police, fire, and emergency services respond as rapidly and effectively as possible in a largely rural county.
- G. Objective – Residential development without public sewer or water service is limited to locations within the county where construction of on-site septic systems is not limited by soils and on-site wells is not limited by contamination.
- H. Objective – Review sale of public land for possible public uses prior to sale.
 1. Strategy – Encourage expansion of sewer and water into an area only when consistent with the planned intensity of land use for that area and scheduled as to affordability as determined by the respective city, village or township.
 2. Strategy – Encourage county participation in regional management of solid waste and recycling.
 3. Strategy – Cities, village and townships in the county should adopt site plan review regulations to protect groundwater and septic system inspection programs to protect the quality of groundwater, inland lakes, and streams.
 4. Strategy – Expansion of public facilities (especially sewer and water) should be timed to guide future development into particular areas consistent with the demand for additional service.
 5. Strategy – Encourage the District Health Department in cooperation with the MDEQ to develop a program to maintain the quality of water wells by establishing wellhead protection zones around municipal water wells.

6. Strategy – A county capital improvement plan should be annually prepared and updated listing proposed public improvements by location, cost, and means of financing for the next six years. All proposed county facilities should be reviewed and approved by the County Planning Commission as consistent with this Plan prior to final approval and construction (as is provided by Article 4 of the Michigan Planning Enabling Act, P.A. 33 of 2008, as amended).
7. Strategy – Every five years, if feasible, assess the future land use and facility needs of governmental offices, schools, hospitals, parks and cemeteries to provide adequate services without harming the quality of surrounding areas.
8. Strategy – Develop a map for the whole county that indicates the appropriate location of new public facilities, extensions of sewer and waters service, and new development.
9. Strategy – Review the county's ability to satisfy long-term solid waste disposal needs in a cost effective manner and expand recycling services through five-year reviews of the County Solid Waste Plan.
10. Strategy – Coordinate infrastructure construction, repair, or maintenance with road construction, repair, and maintenance.
11. Strategy – Cooperate regionally in the provision of public safety and emergency services, community facilities, and programs.
12. Strategy – Provide educational opportunities to residents regarding emergency, social and health services, and self-help actions to reduce risk.
13. Strategy – Coordinate service provision with other interested public agencies such as schools.
14. Strategy – Encourage notification of the County Planning Commission prior to the sale of public land, so the Commission can ensure that local governments have the first opportunity to consider acquiring it.

XII. GOAL – ENCOURAGE COOPERATION BETWEEN LOCAL UNITS OF GOVERNMENT IN THE DEVELOPMENTAL OF INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENTS ACROSS JURISDICTIONAL BOUNDARIES.

A. Objective – Provide for better living conditions and business opportunities for the largest contiguous area possible.

1. Strategy – Encourage the involvement and cooperation of local governments, citizens, businesses, and public educational institutions in the development and construction of sanitary sewer and water systems as appropriate for future growth.
2. Strategy – From advisory boards and (where possible) unified operational boards to more cost effectively deliver public services across multiple jurisdictions where feasible.
3. Strategy – Educate local leaders on local land use issues/economic issues/economic development programs.
4. Strategy – Encourage local leaders in jurisdictions that are adjacent to one another to work with each other on planning and zoning issues (to promote continuity between these jurisdictions).

XIII. GOAL – PRIVATE AND PUBLIC PARK AND RECREATIONAL FACILITIES SERVE PRESENT AND FUTURE NEEDS WHILE CONTRIBUTING TO THE AREA ECONOMY.

- A. Objective – Maintain and periodically update a County Recreation Plan.**
- B. Objective – Coordinate efforts with local jurisdictions and the Michigan Department of Natural Resources to implement the recommendations of the County Recreation Plan.**
- C. Objective – Identify and explore new opportunities for recreational projects with local jurisdictions as a means of better serving residents and enhancing tourism.**
- D. Objective – Link new and existing recreation facilities with non-motorized trails.**
- E. Objective – Improve youth recreational opportunities throughout the county including indoor and outdoor sports activities.**
- F. Objective – Expand recreation opportunities to include heritage, ecological, and agricultural experiences.**
- G. Objective – The parks and state game areas are protected and expanded where appropriate.**
 - 1. Strategy – Support coordinated recreation planning at the state, county, and local level and involve private partners and the schools.
 - 2. Strategy – Develop a funding program for the purchase of recreational lands in planned areas where a need has been determined or where special opportunity exists.
 - 3. Strategy – Develop a funding program for enhancing recreational programs and facilities throughout the county.
 - 4. Strategy – Give priority to funding recreational projects that utilize existing facilities, underutilized facilities, and those locations that do not generate increased traffic in light traffic areas.
 - 5. Strategy – Support development of a Montcalm County Heritage Trail which links cultural and historic attractions across the county.
 - 6. Strategy – Promote opportunities for eco-tourism and agri-tourism.
 - 7. Strategy – Support trail links throughout the county with a special focus on preservation of abandoned railroad right-of-way.
 - 8. Strategy – The county parks system is expanded and developed to provide quality facilities to all residents in all areas of the county.
 - 9. Strategy – A county trail authority is established as part of the county park system to oversee and maintain the county's trail system.
 - 10. Strategy – A variety of recreational opportunities are made available to all county residents in locations that are accessible in all parts of the county.

Chapter 3 BEST PRACTICES

INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes 10 best land use practices and relates them to the Smart Growth Tenets in Chapter One and the Vision, Goals, Objectives and Strategies in Chapter Two. The County Planning Commission will work with local governments in the county to actively pursue use of these best practices over the next five years.

1. Protection of ground and surface water quality: develop watershed management plans for each watershed and promote a uniform set of local zoning standards (including for keyhole development).
2. Protection of the natural character of wetlands, floodplains, and wildlife habitat, especially along lakes, rivers, streams, creeks and drains in the county, and the preservation of public parkland, state game areas, and other special natural landscapes.
3. Protection of agricultural land as well as the agricultural character of the county.
4. Promote very low density residential development or clustering of homes on rural lands not protected for long-term agricultural use with more than 50% of each parcel permanently preserved for open space.
5. Protect rural character along county roads.
6. Pursue a compact settlement pattern in and around existing cities and villages while discouraging new scattered residential development in rural parts of the county.
7. Provide a wide range of affordable housing opportunities and choices, especially in and immediately adjacent to existing cities and villages.
8. Create walkable communities with a strong sense of place, which promote active living and encourage more mixed use development.
9. Increase the range of transportation options within and between cities and villages including the continued construction of non-motorized connections to public places and nearby communities.
10. Keep local plans and zoning ordinances up-to-date, predictable, fair and cost effective, as well as compatible with those in adjoining jurisdictions and with the County Plan.

TEN BEST PRACTICES

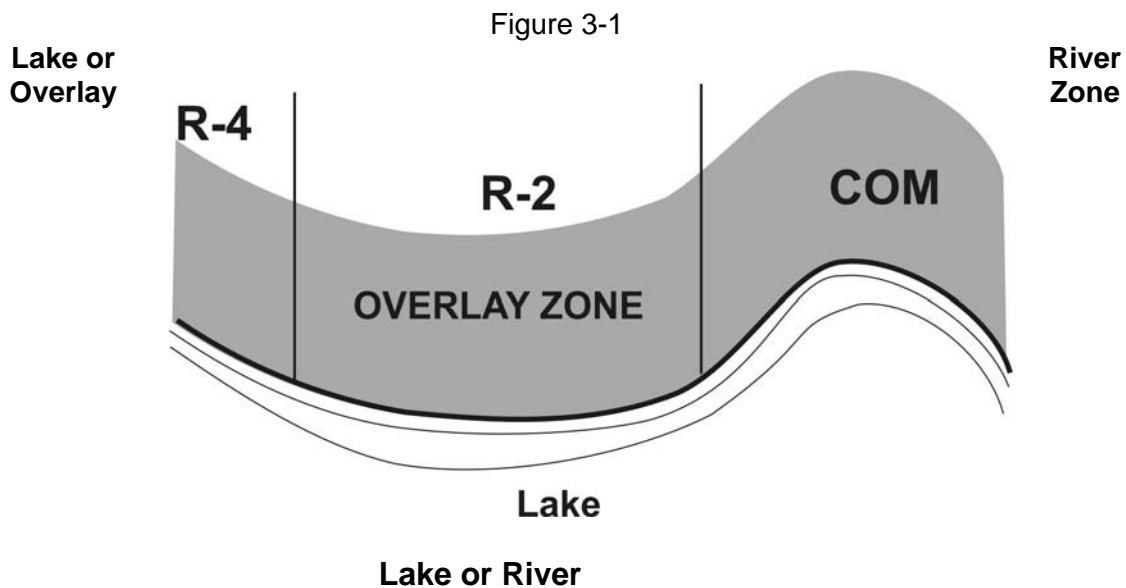
1. Protection of ground and surface water quality: develop watershed management plans for each watershed and promote a uniform set of local zoning standards (including for keyhole development). Quality ground and surface water (lakes, rivers, streams, drains and wetlands) is critical to attracting and keeping businesses in Montcalm County and to maintaining a high quality of life. A watershed is the land area that drains snow melt and rainfall runoff to the lowest point in the watershed, which may be a lake, wetland, stream or river. Drainage can occur across land or via county drains, creeks, streams and rivers. Generally, overland flow is collected by the drain and stream system and conveys it to larger bodies of water such as rivers and lakes. Water that infiltrates the ground usually reappears as stream flow at a lower elevation.

Watershed management plans provide a means for communities to focus attention on surface waters, such as rivers, streams, lakes and wetlands, and direction on how to

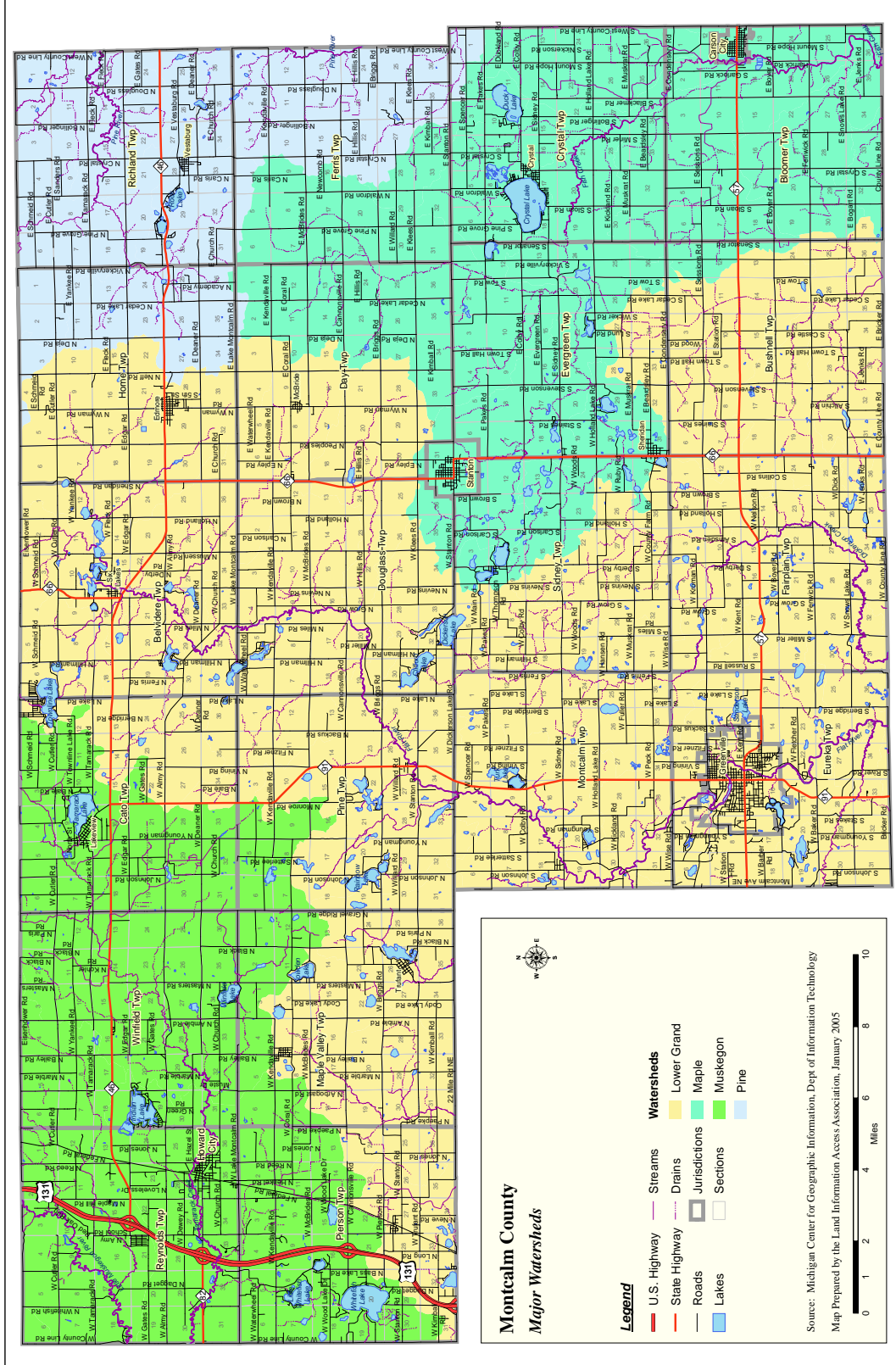
protect or improve the quality of those waters. An important component of a watershed plan is an inventory that describes the location, extent, and quality of waters in a watershed. A watershed plan should also describe threats to water quality and goals, objectives and strategies for overcoming those threats. Map 3-1 shows the watersheds in Montcalm County and a general description of each can be found in Chapter 4 of the Montcalm County Fact Book.

Because a watershed may cross many jurisdiction boundaries, a uniform set of standards and related water protection regulations should be adopted by each of the jurisdictions in each watershed. These standards and regulations should address the percent of impervious cover of new development, vegetative buffers along water bodies, building and septic system setbacks from water bodies, larger minimum lot sizes and widths, the disposal of hazardous wastes, fertilizer use, soil erosion and sedimentation control, and other factors affecting water quality.

An overlay zone is one regulatory approach to applying standards that apply to specific geographic area, such as those for protecting water quality, to the shoreline area of a water body. Underlying zoning standards in the city, village or township zoning ordinances still apply. Floodplains have long been protected by use of overlay zones. However, a waterfront overlay zone is also a good technique for applying any of the regulations listed in the previous paragraph. The Community Planning Handbook published by the former Michigan Society of Planning (now Michigan Association of Planning) and Filling the Gaps by the DEQ provide clear guidance and sample ordinance language for most of these standards. See Figure 3-1.



Map 3-1
Montcalm County Watersheds



2. Protection of the natural character of wetlands, floodplains, and wildlife habitat, especially along lakes, rivers, streams, creeks and drains in the county, and the preservation of public parkland, state game areas, and other special natural landscapes.

Montcalm County is rich in lakes, rivers, creeks and streams that provide a sense of naturalness. There are also five state game areas, national forest lands, county and local parks. Although some of these lands and waters are publicly owned, the vast majority are in private ownership. This combination of ownership requires county, state and federal agencies to become partners with private property owners to protect sensitive natural resources. This means that all county residents need to be provided educational opportunities about their role in the management of those resources. If they are owners of sensitive natural resource lands, there are best practices they can each implement. If they are not owners, but are park or game area users, or hunt on private lands, they should be provided with educational opportunities on management practices being applied, and how they can participate as stewards as well.

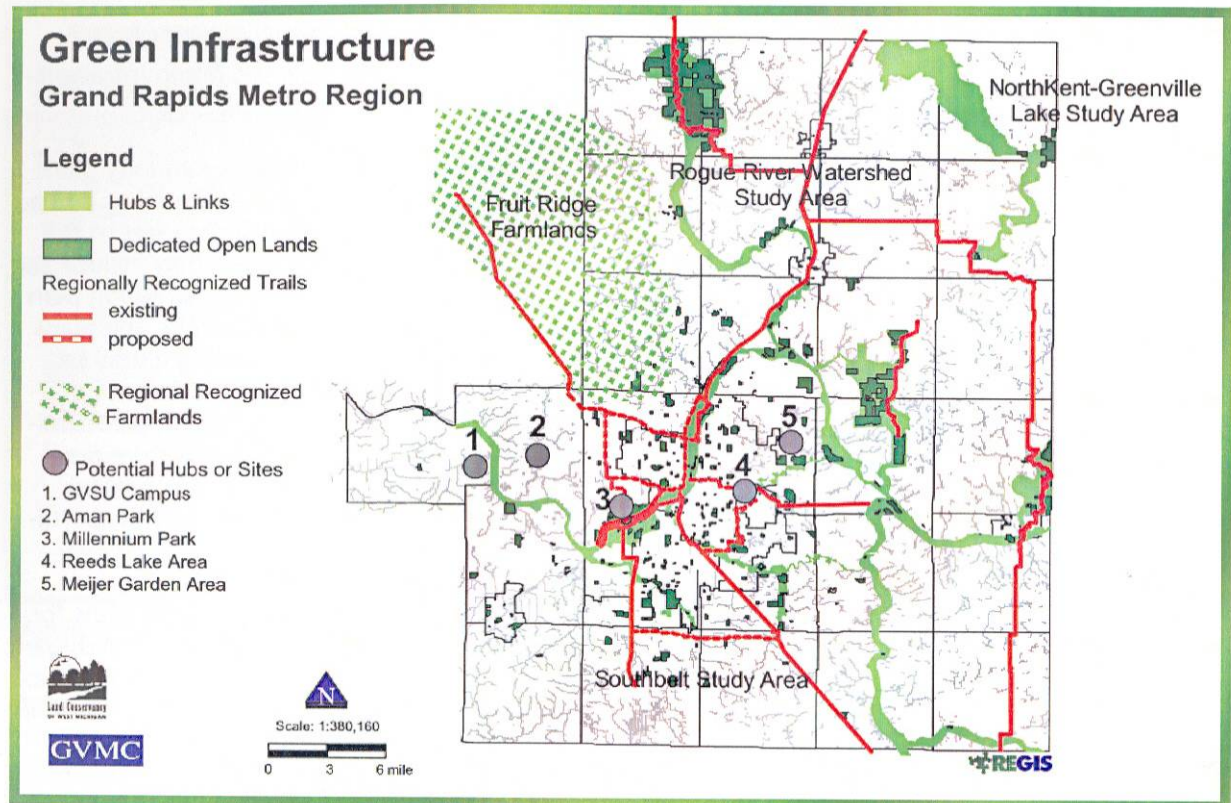
The county and local governments within the county can provide a structure for the protection of sensitive natural resources through a linked greenspace system. A greenspace system has two basic parts. One is a system of linked recreation facilities, such as greenway trails, bike routes, parks, game areas and other preserves. These should also be linked to cultural features such as libraries, schools and shopping nodes. Neighborhoods should also be linked to the system so people can use the greenspace system as an alternative to automobile transportation and for recreation. The second is corridors of linked undeveloped, natural areas. These include drains, creeks, streams, rivers, wetlands and lakes and blocks of natural vegetation such as a vegetative buffer zone along the shores of water bodies, woodlands and vegetative screens along roadways to provide both nature-oriented scenic beauty and wildlife corridors.

In addition to protecting these important natural features, a greenspace system adds immeasurably to the quality of life of people near any part of the system. A greenspace system can also be a powerful marketing tool for attracting employers and employees. Montcalm already has an excellent start on a greenspace system with the Fred Meijer Heartland Trail, White Pine State Park (a trail), the five State Game Areas, the Manistee National Forest land, numerous local parks, and abundant natural features. Once completed, the Fred Meijer Heartland Trail will connect walkers and bicyclists from Greenville to Edmore and Vestaburg and on to Alma in Gratiot County. The White Pine Trail already connects Comstock Park to Cadillac. A more extensive trail system that includes other off-road trails and marked bicycle routes along roads should be part of the greenspace system.

A greenspace system should be based on a public/private partnership to manage open space for natural resource protection, recreational benefit and the amenity value of connected natural elements such as woodlands, wetlands, other natural vegetation, wildlife habitat, parks and game areas. Public partners can cooperate by linking public parks, game areas and other public facilities to the greenspace system, and by managing county drains as natural corridors. Private partners can cooperate by granting easements for trails, dedicating space along trails and roads to be managed as natural habitat and managing creek, stream, river and lake shores as natural corridors. Map 3-2 illustrates green infrastructure in the Grand Rapids metro region. Mapping green infrastructure is the first step to preparing a plan for a greenspace system. Map 3-2 is from a recent publication, entitled West Michigan Tool Kit for Local Green Inventories published by the Land Conservancy of West Michigan. It lays out the initial steps for

preparing a greenspace plan and gives several examples from West Michigan communities.

Map 3-2
Green Infrastructure of the Grand Rapids Metro Region

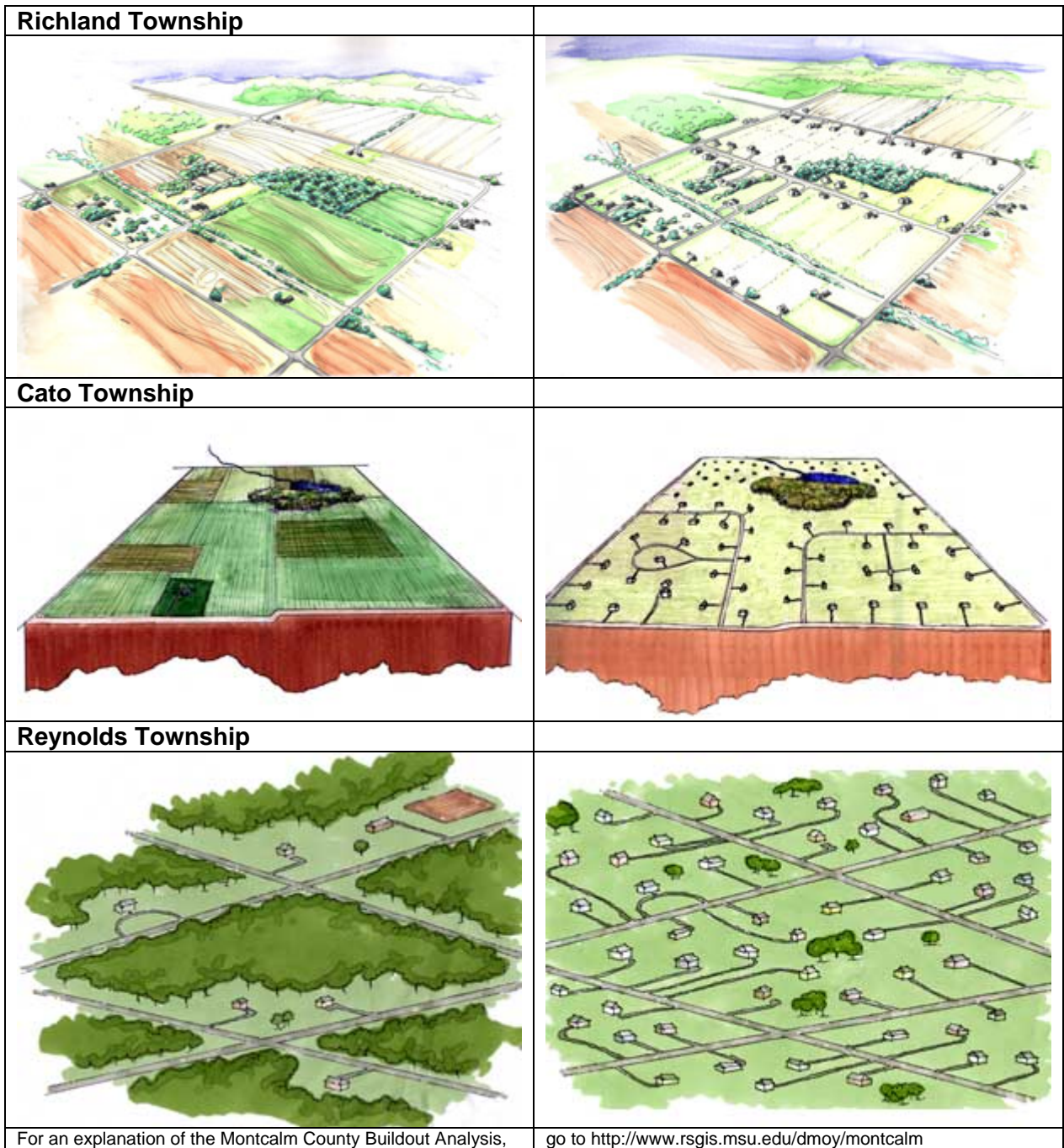


3. Protection of agricultural land as well as the agricultural character of the county. Agriculture is arguably the most important economic sector in Montcalm County, where as it is #2 in the state as a whole. While there are a number of international threats to the agricultural sector, in order to protect the long term viability of local farming, farmland needs to be protected. Montcalm County farmland is threatened by the rapid development of non-farm residences in farming areas. The division of farmland into 2-20 acre lots results in the rapid loss of farmland. This loss is aided by local zoning which often favors non-farm residences over farming. This is unfortunate since farmland typically generates more tax revenues than public service costs, while non-farm residences are the reverse. A buildout analysis performed by MSU students in 2006 graphically illustrated this problem. Some illustrated examples from that analysis are presented in Figure 3-2. One of the best solutions is for local governments to zone farmland for its agricultural value, not for its speculative development value. That is usually accomplished using a combination of quarter-quarter zoning, open space zoning, purchase of development rights and transfer of development rights. These techniques are discussed more fully over the next few pages.

Agriculture is also a key component of Montcalm County's quality of life. The low population, low density, farm field characteristic that agriculture provides is enjoyed by the non-farm population as an amenity. However, farmers essentially provide this

amenity for free. In order to continue to enjoy this amenity, Montcalm County communities in cooperation with its farmers will have to take steps to preserve farmland.

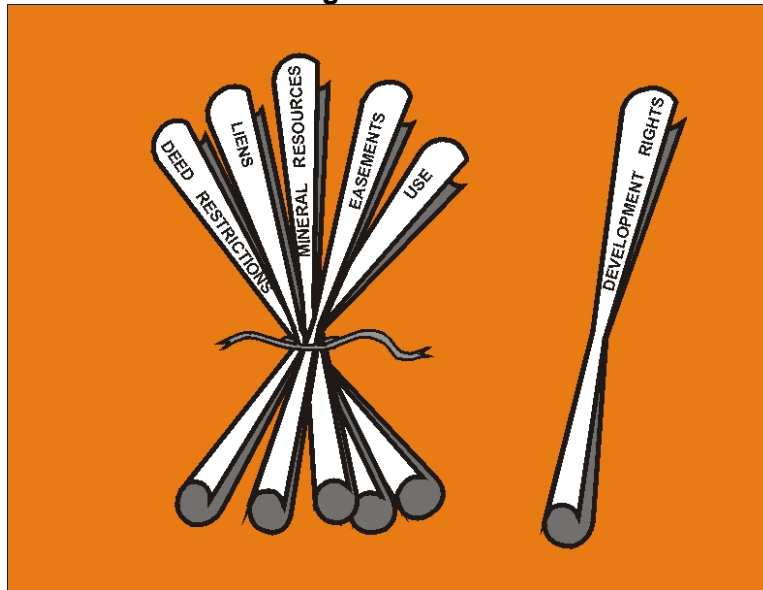
Figure 3-2
Before and After Buildout in Three Montcalm County Townships
 As Illustrated by MSU Landscape Architecture Students in 2005



Several thousand acres of farmland in the county is temporarily preserved through the

Michigan Farmland Development Rights Agreements Program (formerly the Farmland and Open Space Protection Program or PA 116 Program). The Farmland Development Rights Agreement Program enables a landowner to enter into a development rights easement (the owner agrees not to develop the land) in exchange for property tax relief. Development rights are severable, separately conveyable rights in land like an easement, or mineral rights (see Figure 3-3). The landowner can enter into this agreement for a specified length of time (10 to 90 years). If the owner decides to develop the land before the agreement expires, he/she is liable for repayment of abated taxes. A standard practice is to place a lien on the land for the amount due the state. Map 4-7 in the Montcalm County Fact Book displays the lands enrolled in the program as of 2010.

Figure 3-3
The Bundle of Rights Associated with Land



A companion state program that is funded by repayment of PA 116 liens is called the Farmland Development Rights Purchase Program. This program permanently protects certain parcels of land from future development. This purchase of development rights (PDR) program involves farmers willing to sell development rights. It provides a payment to the land owner of the value of the development rights on the land. An advantage of the PDR program for the farmer is that he/she captures the development value now without developing the land, and then later can still sell the farmland for its farming value to a nearby farmer. In the meantime, the property is taxed only on its farmland value.

Some land owners donate some or all of the development rights to agricultural land, which amounts to the donation of an agricultural easement. This is done in order to gain tax benefits and in some cases, the satisfaction of preserving the land in an undeveloped state. The donation could be to a land conservancy or a public entity.

In order for Montcalm County farmers to participate in the state PDR program, the county or townships within the county will have to have an agricultural protection plan. This could be a separate plan or an amendment to this General Plan. A farmland protection plan would identify the types of land the county wants to protect and a means

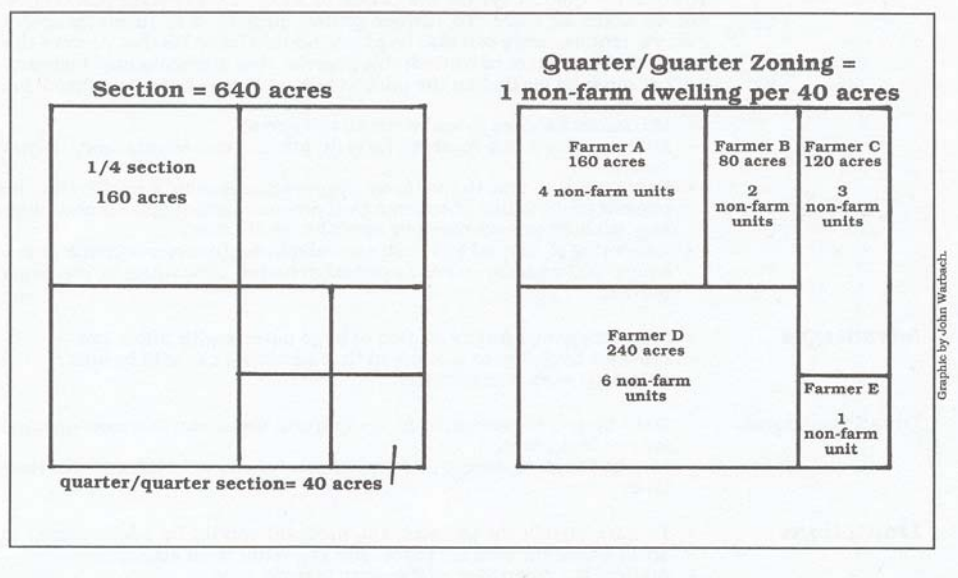
of prioritizing the selection of that land. A local funding match is required for participation in the state PDR program. This match can come from local general funds, a millage or from participating farmers.

Development rights can also be transferred. In a transfer of development rights (TDR) program, development rights are purchased in an area the community has determined should not receive substantial development (called a sending zone), and transferred to an area less sensitive to development (called a receiving zone). In the receiving zone, development on land that has received a transfer of development rights can do so at an increase in density over current zoning. Farmland is usually in the sending zone and land in or adjacent to cities where there is adequate public sewer, water and roads, is usually in the receiving zone. See Figure 4-3 in Chapter 4 for an example.

Because a publicly financed PDR program can only preserve a limited number of acres of farmland, and farmers may opt out of PA 116 programs or choose not to participate in a PDR program, and TDR is difficult to do without county zoning, other means to protect farmland will be needed. Zoning for very low density non-farm and cluster developments can protect farmland and limit the number and impact of non-farm residences. These could be especially important tools as it could take more time to design a county PDR program and develop the political backing for it, than for the local application of certain zoning tools.

Montcalm County townships interested in protecting farming could rezone areas that are used for agricultural protection, and are presently zoned at densities that range from 1 dwelling unit per acre to one dwelling unit per 10 acres to a much lower density. Communities that are zoned at densities of from 1 dwelling unit per 1-10 acres generally find over time that it is difficult to efficiently and cost effectively provide public services, and the influx of scattered non-farm residences affect the ability of farmers to continue commonly accepted agricultural practices. Quarter-quarter zoning is a well-established farmland protection technique. Quarter-quarter zoning restricts the number of new non-farm residences to one dwelling per 40 acres and each dwelling is on a lot that is not more than 2-3 acres in size in order to preserve the maximum amount of farmland. Bloomer, Pine, Sidney and parts of Eureka Township use this technique. See Figure 3-4.

Quarter-Quarter Zoning

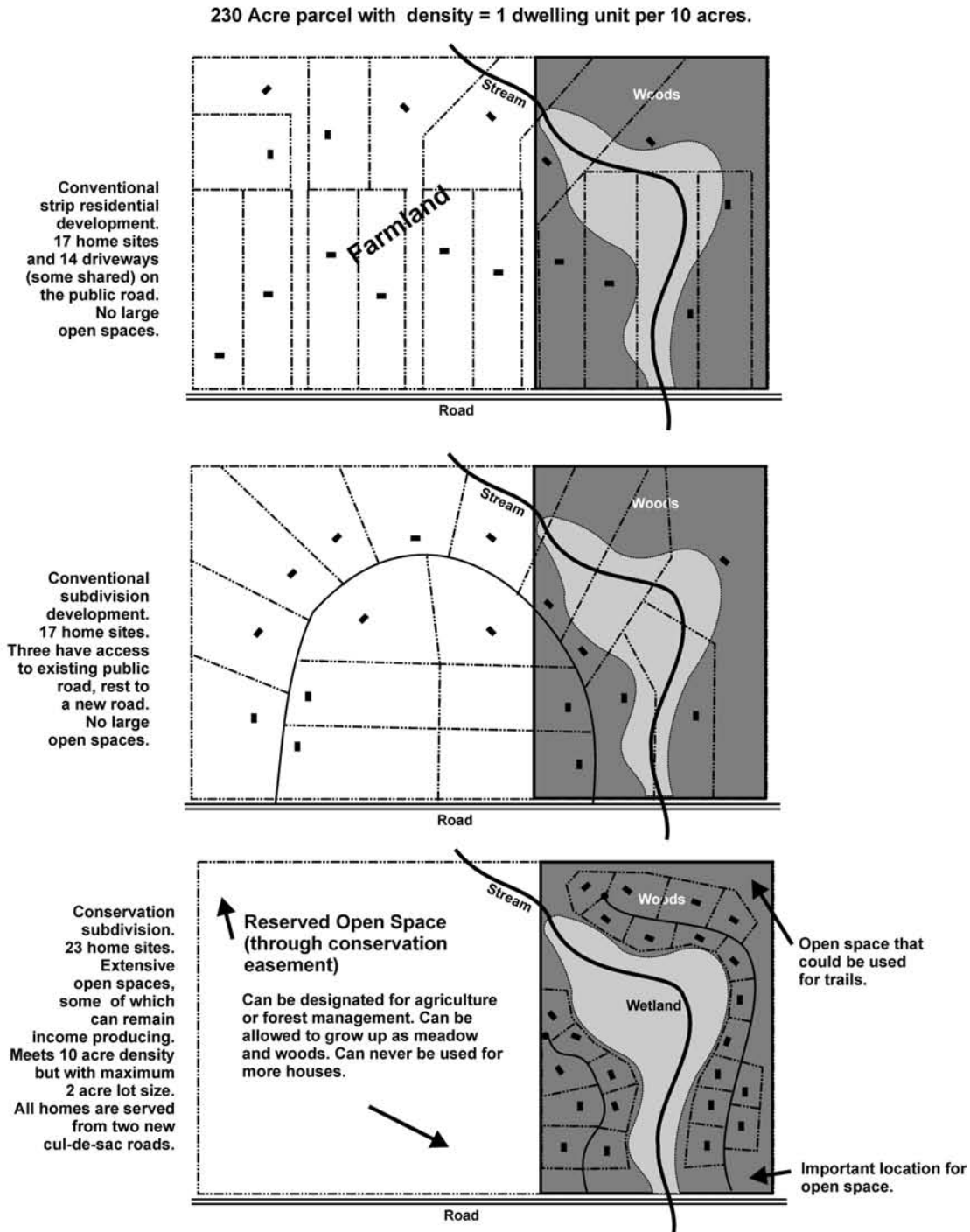


In determining where Montcalm County and its townships should prioritize its efforts to protect farmland, emphasis should be placed on land already in agriculture. Montcalm County farmers are successfully farming on all types of land, not just the land classified as “prime” farmland by the Natural Resource Conservation Service. Placing farmland protection efforts on all productive farmland will better reflect the investment land owners have made in their farms and help sustain the rural character of the county.

4. Promote very low density residential development or clustering of homes on rural lands not protected for long-term agricultural use with more than 50% of each parcel permanently preserved for open space. Rural lands in Montcalm County communities will not remain rural if they do not encourage very low density residential development and the preservation of open space.

Clustering of homes on rural lands that are not protected for long-term agricultural use can preserve undeveloped land for farming or use as amenity open space. All of the units allowed under quarter-quarter zoning could be clustered together, but clustering can also be used to preserve open space as well as it can be used for farmland protection. Clustering is an approach that places residences in a more compact form than in a strip residential or conventional subdivision development pattern. Clustering can be accomplished by means of a “conservation subdivision.” See Figure 3-5. For example, in a district zoned at a density of 1 dwelling unit per 10 acres, a 230 acre parcel could accommodate 23 homes. If that 230 acre parcel is developed with a maximum lot size for each dwelling of 2 acres, the 23 homes would require only 46 acres for development and 184 acres would remain undeveloped, and if suitable, available for farming. A conservation easement would be placed on the undeveloped portion so that it would never be developed, but it could still be used for farming. The 23 homes on 2 acre lots would have the benefit of 184 acres of surrounding open space. The size of lots should be determined in part on the size needed for an on-site septic system, as determined by the District Health Department. This technique works as well for farmland protection as forest land or open space protection.

Figure 3-5
Cluster Development in a Conservation Subdivision Compared to Strip Residential and a Conventional Subdivision



Since 2001, clustering is a required option for preservation of open space in communities with zoning (unless they are exempt communities) due to amendments to all three zoning enabling acts (City-Village Zoning Act, PA 207 of 1921 as amended;

Township Zoning Act, PA 184 of 1943 as amended); and the County Zoning Act, PA 183 of 1943 as amended. These amendments mandated that every non-exempted community with zoning must permit owners of certain residentially zoned property to have the option of developing all the permitted dwelling units on a portion of the property, if they left the balance of the property undeveloped. The undeveloped portion of the property must be permanently protected with a conservation easement or other legal restriction. In townships, this open space requirement is 50% of the total parcel area and in cities and villages it is 20%. Townships are exempt if their population is under 1,800, which exempts Bushnell, Day, Ferris, and Pine Townships in Montcalm County. See Planning & Zoning News, for more detailed information on this law at: <http://lu.msue.msu.edu/2004material/0MAIN3pz&n%202004%20lu%20legislation.pdf> Montcalm County communities that are not exempt were supposed to adopt open space zoning by 2003, unless they opted out through a referendum. Exempt Montcalm County communities would also benefit by adopting open space zoning. However, the law does not provide many details in how to set standards for an open space ordinance, and certain standards should be adopted by local jurisdictions as part of their ordinance.

These standards should include:

- A precise definition of “open space.”
- A standard of what lands should be excluded when meeting the open space percentage requirement, such as wetlands, steep slopes, floodplain and other unbuildable lands
- A review process
- A description of the submittal process
- Standards for permanent maintenance of preserved open space
- How open space can be used
- Whether density bonuses can apply
- Others.

Members of the Montcalm Township Association can go to this website: (<http://www.michigantownships.or>) and log on to look at sample ordinances.

A key consideration when designing clustered open space projects is the design standards for roads in the development. Montcalm County communities should either require all such roads to be public, or adopt private road standards that reflect public road standards. Private roads and driveways built to public road standards will better ensure fire trucks and emergency vehicles can use the roads when needed, and the Road Commission could accept the roads as part of the county road system at some future time if they were adequately built to begin with.

It is very important that as development occurs in Montcalm County that public health be protected in the disposal of human waste. The conventional approach in areas that are not served by public sewers is to use on-site septic systems. It is the responsibility of the District Health Department to ensure that an adequate space is available on residential lots for a septic drain field as well as for a replacement field in areas where the original drain field is expected to have a limited life span. Often cluster projects are not viable without alternative waste treatment systems that treat the waste of all dwellings in a small community system, rather than individual septic systems. It is important that communities work with the Health Department in the implementation of standards for alternative waste treatment systems.

5. Protect rural character along county roads. Montcalm County enjoys a rural visual character because of the extensive farm fields, hedgerows, pastures, meadows, forests, wetlands and long distances between houses in rural areas. Recent development trends and the buildout analysis suggest that the county's rural character will not last very long if those trends continue. Strip residential and commercial development will, over time, obliterate the scenic view of farms and natural vegetation.

It is possible to retain rural character along roads even as rural areas develop. In addition, areas that have lost rural character can regain it to an extent.

The secret to maintaining or recovering rural character involves two basic approaches. These are:

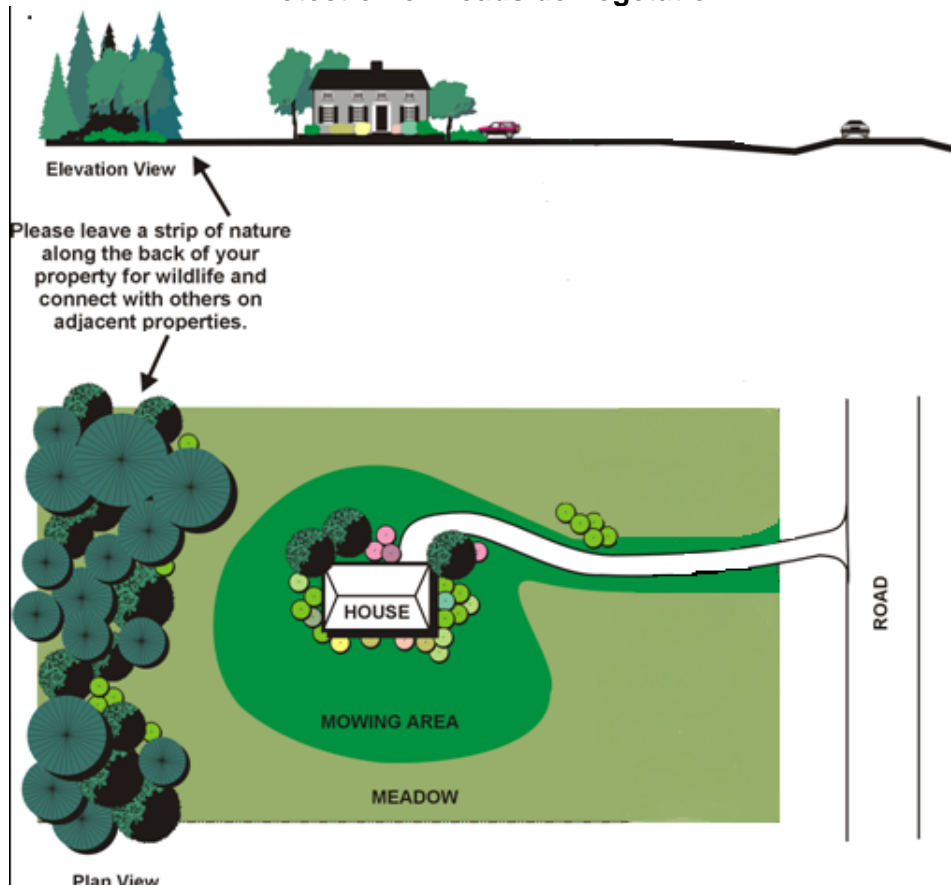
- Maintain natural vegetation along roadsides. By natural vegetation is meant trees, shrubs, wetland, meadow and prairie herbaceous plants and grasses, and groundcovers that are native to the area or naturally occurring (many plant species look like they are native, and grow in the landscape without humans planting them, but are not native to this continent). Herbaceous plants are not woody shrubs and trees, but include wildflowers, sedges, and similar plants. Vegetation that looks natural does not include ornamental vegetation. Ornamental plantings are those the horticulture industry has bred and cultivated for a more uniform, predictable, urban garden appearance. Ornamental plantings include lawns and regularly spaced shrubs and trees. Natural or native vegetation also has the advantage of requiring far less maintenance than ornamental plantings. Figure 3-6 illustrates this concept.
- Maintain or establish natural vegetation screening. In areas where development already exists or is anticipated, buffer plantings that effectively screen the development will reduce the visual impact of that development and give the community a more rural appearance. Where a rural character is important, the vegetation screening should utilize naturally occurring plants in a natural looking planting. In cities and villages where a more urban look is desired, ornamental plantings are appropriate. But when used along highways, be sure only salt tolerant species are planted.

In most communities, to achieve a natural appearing landscape, the landscaping requirements in the zoning ordinance need to be changed to avoid evenly spaced plantings, and to encourage more natural planting patterns in wider buffers. The retention of existing vegetation should be strongly encouraged. This may take notifying property owners and developers that the community does not want existing vegetation cleared until a site plan can be agreed upon.

There is a need for a strong education element regarding the maintenance of rural character. Widely circulated and promoted design guidelines are a helpful tool. One conventional development approach is for commercial land speculators to clear-cut parcels they are trying to market in order for potential buyers to better see the possibilities of the site. The conventional approach is also to clear vegetation from in front of commercial establishments so that business owners can use their facades as advertising. Residential subdivision developers often clear their site in order to showcase their homes. However, continuation of those approaches will lead to the elimination of rural character. Buyers of homes in subdivisions in rural areas may be happy with a clear-cut site when they first move in, especially when the surrounding properties remain undeveloped. However, when the adjacent developments are also clear-cut, large areas

of the county will lose rural character. A better approach is for subdivision developers to leave a vegetative buffer as part of their open space. That open space should also wrap around the subdivision to buffer it from adjacent developments and to provide a vegetative amenity to home owners.

Figure 3-6
Protection of Roadside Vegetation



In addition to vegetation management, other visual character factors, such as signs, need to be considered and good design principles encouraged. Signs are important in business and for way-finding. However, signs that are pleasing to the eye and not intrusively large in the landscape should be encouraged.

Regulations that deal with visual character need to be clear, reasonable and fairly administered. All property owners should be affected equally. Jurisdictions within the county need to cooperate, so one community with visual quality oriented regulations does not have to compete with adjacent communities without different regulations.

Another tool to encourage retention of rural character is the scenic easement. This is an agreement by a landowner to limit visually disruptive activities on the roadside strip of their land. It is a legally-binding, permanent agreement that prevents certain activities such as vegetation clearing, building structures above a small maximum size, building

signs above a small, maximum square footage or height and other conditions. If the landowner sells the land, the conditions spelled out in the scenic easement carry with the land. The width of the roadside scenic easement is negotiated and depends on various factors, such as the slope of the land, the view from the road, what is beyond the easement and other factors.

6. Pursue a compact settlement pattern in and around existing cities and villages while discouraging new scattered residential development in rural parts of the county.

Communities that accept scattered, strip residential development instead of directing new development in and around existing cities and villages in a compact pattern risk future difficulty in providing public services, a negative fiscal impact on the community and a loss of community character.

Strip residential development is characterized by the gradual development of residential lots along rural roads. Lot size will likely vary from one or two acres up to ten or twenty acres. However, these lots are often narrow along the road, and may include “flag lots,” which are parcels with narrow road frontage, but an expanded portion away from the road.

Strip residential development has many negative impacts on communities. With many closely spaced driveways on roads where people expect to be able to drive fast, conflicts arise from residents turning into and out of driveways. It extends the service area for public safety and emergency response and often makes it difficult for response teams to find people needing help. It increases the number of miles that road maintenance crews need to service quickly. It also dramatically changes the character of a community from rural to suburban.

Strip commercial development has many of the same negative impacts as strip residential development. An additional negative impact is that in most cases, strip commercial development requires shoppers to use their cars, as such developments are often located away from residential neighborhoods. This leads to many more trips for families to take and more cars on the road.

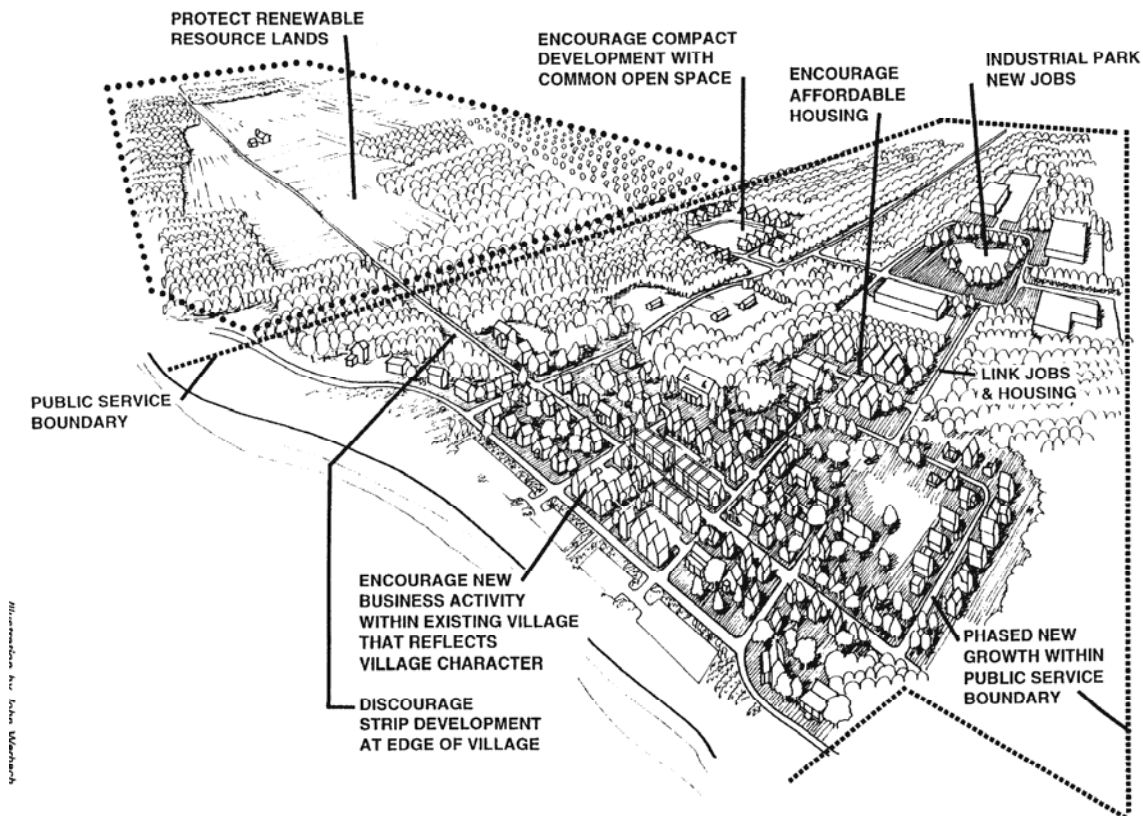
If new residential and commercial development occurs in a compact pattern, close to where people already live, and close to existing public facilities, the burdens on communities to extend public services and expanded transportation infrastructure will be less. There will also be less rural development pressure that could convert land with rural character to a suburban and urban character. It is important for cities and villages to maintain their unique character and strip commercial development outside of already developed areas is one of the most destructive changes to communities.

Compact settlements can still have natural elements, attractive character and recreational opportunities through greenway trails, design guidelines and land preserved as parks. Generally, if residential density is at least 4 dwelling units per acre, and extending as high as 12 units per acre in the most intensively developed residential neighborhoods close to commercial areas, public sewer and water can be cost effectively provided. Figure 3-7 illustrates the basic characteristics of a compact settlement pattern.

Montcalm County cities and villages should encourage infill development first on land presently served by public sewer and water, then support incremental expansion of

public sewer and water around existing cities and villages to accommodate new residential and jobs development (this utilizes the investment already made in public infrastructure and keeps public service costs as low as they can be when accommodating new users). It also promotes a strong sense of community and leads to broader support for a variety of cultural activities which greatly enhance quality of life and improve the attractiveness of communities for economic development.

Figure 3-7
Encourage Compact Settlement Pattern in and near Existing Cities and Villages



7. Provide a wide range of affordable housing opportunities and choices, especially in and immediately adjacent to existing cities and villages. Montcalm County communities should be developing ways to ensure a greater provision of affordable housing. This is important in meeting not only the needs of existing residents, but also to let future businesses know that future workers have a wide variety of housing choices in the county. Affordable housing is defined as housing that costs no more than 30% of the occupant's income. There is a range in the price of affordable housing depending on a family's income, but generally, the provision of affordable housing is targeted toward low and moderate income families. Affordable housing types include manufactured and mobile homes, older homes in established neighborhoods, new homes priced to fit the budgets of low and moderate income families, apartments, condominiums and others. Communities should ensure a mix of affordable housing types that includes both older and newer homes. An effort should also be made to build housing that is elderly-friendly to both allow residents new housing options in the communities they have long lived in

as they age, and so that former residents can come home to be with family as they age.

Manufactured home parks provide one affordable housing alternative. However, such parks should only be located in or near existing cities and villages where public sewer and water are available and roads are adequate to handle increased traffic. Inter-jurisdictional coordination on local planning and zoning is necessary to achieve this result.

Older existing neighborhoods can be an excellent source of affordable housing, if gentrification has not occurred on a large scale. To ensure the housing stock, it is important that homes and yards be properly maintained and that housing and blight codes be enforced.

According to the Affordable Housing Network (www.nahn.com), new high performance, energy efficient infill housing is a good way to provide affordable housing. Such homes can not only be built within an affordable budget, they remain affordable to heat and cool. Many existing neighborhoods in Montcalm County cities and villages have vacant residential lots where infill housing could be placed.

Volunteer groups, such as Habitat for Humanity are also available to help families reach home ownership and self-sufficiency. Support for these valuable organizations should remain strong.

Photo 3-1

Older, Existing Neighborhoods can be a Source of Affordable Housing



Photo by Franz Mogdis

The federal government has programs for states and local communities to cost share efforts to provide affordable housing. Many of these programs are most cost effective to administer at the county level. US Housing and Urban Development programs include:

- *HOME Investments Partnership Program*. HOME provides formula grants to States and localities that communities use—often in partnership with local nonprofit groups—to fund a wide range of activities that build, buy, and/or rehabilitate

affordable housing for rent or homeownership or provide direct rental assistance to low-income people.

- *Self-help Home Ownership Program (SHOP)*. SHOP provides funds for eligible national and regional non-profit organizations and consortia to purchase home sites and develop or improve the infrastructure needed to set the stage for sweat equity and volunteer-based homeownership programs for low-income persons and families. Eligible homebuyers are low-income families that cannot afford to buy homes at market rates but will provide a significant amount of sweat equity or volunteer labor to build one. The only eligible expenses for SHOP funds are land acquisition and infrastructure improvements that, taken together, may not exceed an average of \$15,000 in assistance per home. Administration, planning and management development costs are eligible expenses, but may not exceed 20% of the grant amount.
- *The Homeownership Zone Initiative (HOZ)*. HOZ allows communities to reclaim vacant and blighted properties, increase homeownership, and promote economic revitalization by creating entire neighborhoods of new, single-family homes, called Homeownership Zones. Communities are encouraged to use New Urbanist design principals by providing for a pedestrian-friendly environment, a mix of incomes and compatible uses, defined neighborhood boundaries and access to jobs and mass transit.

For more information on these federal programs, go to <http://www.hud.gov/offices/cpd/affordablehousing/index.cfm>.

8. Create walkable communities with a strong sense of place, which promote active living and encourage more mixed use development. According to Walkable Communities Inc., *“Walkability is the cornerstone and key to an urban area's efficient ground transportation. Every trip begins and ends with walking. Walking remains the cheapest form of transport for all people, and the construction of a walkable community provides the most affordable transportation system any community can plan, design, construct and maintain. Walkable communities put urban environments back on a scale for sustainability of resources (both natural and economic) and lead to more social interaction, physical fitness and diminished crime and other social problems. Walkable communities are more liveable communities and lead to whole, happy, healthy lives for the people who live in them.”*

Walkability has become one of the quality of life features that helps attract employers and employees to a community. All the cities and villages in Montcalm County communities would benefit from walkability and bikability in order to elevate the quality of life and economic sustainability of the community.

Walkable communities are characterized by convenient, safe and attractive walking and biking connections to the places people live and the destinations they frequent. Typical destinations include schools, libraries, neighborhood shopping, local government buildings, job centers and parks. Sidewalks are appropriate for walking connections if they are located on both sides of the street, are at least 5' wide, kept in good condition, do not have dead ends, are separated from automobile driving lanes by lawn, street trees or other vegetation and can be monitored by the public.

Bicycle lanes should be in the street, and properly marked by road striping and signs. National accident data indicates that it is safer for cyclists to ride in the street than on

sidewalks. If there are very few driveways along a segment of road, or if the pedestrian and bicycling route is completely separate from the automobile route, then a shared use pathway, which should be at least 10' wide is acceptable.

Michigan communities are increasingly concerned about the health of their citizens and more and more are encouraging an active lifestyle. An active lifestyle is facilitated by opportunities to walk and bike both for recreation and for everyday activities, such as commuting to work, or going to lunch from work, returning rental movies, or going to the library. These activities become very difficult or even unsafe if the pedestrian and bicycle connections are incomplete or non-existent, unsafe, indirect or poorly maintained. For more information visit www.walkable.org.

Photo 3-2
Fred Meijer Heartland Trail



Photo provided by the Montcalm Alliance

9. Increase the range of transportation options within and between cities and villages including the continued construction of non-motorized connections to public places and nearby communities. Montcalm County is primarily served by automobile transportation, although, general aviation, limited public transit and two long, but unconnected trails are also available.

Giving Montcalm County a competitive advantage and giving residents a high quality of life means maintaining existing transportation infrastructure in excellent condition, improving it where needed and enhancing or expanding other, more limited elements of the transportation system. As the population ages, there will be a growing need to improve and expand public transportation options between communities, as well as non-motorized connections between neighborhoods and places people frequent.

All Montcalm County communities should cooperate in the coordination and prioritization of transportation improvements. A coordinated approach can help ensure that citizens get the most “bang for their buck.”

One of the easiest approaches to increasing non-motorized connections between neighborhoods and popular destinations is for Montcalm County communities to require every new development and redevelopment to include sidewalks and bicycle paths. Over time, the new segments installed incrementally will connect. Where there are gaps, the communities can provide connections as funding permits. Creating a connecting system incrementally requires communities to plan for a system of non-motorized pathways by establishing standards for size and location. Where the communities need to supplement pathways constructed during new development and redevelopment, priority should be given to locations that serve the most dense development, connecting to the most important facilities. The communities need to decide for themselves which are the most important, but facilities that communities typically find important include parks, libraries, schools, churches and neighborhood shopping.

Photo 3-3
**More Sidewalk Connections such as
This One are Needed in Montcalm County**



Photo by Franz Mogdis

10. Keep local plans and zoning ordinances up-to-date, predictable, fair and cost effective, as well as compatible with those in adjoining jurisdictions and with the County General Plan. Because Montcalm County and the communities within the county are experiencing many changes, the county and individual communities need to be proactive in dealing with that change. This requires the county to review its plan and the communities within the county to review their comprehensive plans and zoning ordinances on a regular basis. Failure to do so will result in land use change becoming unmanageable. Local units of government in the county without an up-to-date future land use plan and zoning ordinance should create one, but should first explore the opportunity of doing so jointly using the new joint planning option provided by PA 226 of 2003.

The regular review of plans and ordinances should include an evaluation of the impacts on, and compatibility with plans and ordinances of adjoining communities, both within and outside the county. Special attention needs to focus on compatible land uses along jurisdiction borders. There needs to be coordination of permitted land uses from one

jurisdiction to the next, so that incompatible land use relationships do not develop.

Local comprehensive plans, zoning ordinances and how they are administered are important factors affecting the economy of a county. One of the most important criteria for economic development is that the process for those who invest in development projects is predictable in terms of the regulations to which they must adhere and the time span of the permitting process, and that they will be treated fairly by government. The development community will generally support and follow regulations that promote a high quality of life if governments judge them fairly on their conformance with those regulations. Governments should make sure that their regulations match the community's goals and objectives. Conflicts in the development review process can arise when a community applies a different set of principles than planning and regulatory documents express.

One way to make sure that all planning and regulatory documents reflect current community thought is to make sure they are up-to-date, and that all elected and appointed officials are clear on their intent and how they should be applied.

Figure 3-8
Plans and Ordinances Should be Updated Regularly



Chapter 4

ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

INTRODUCTION

This chapter identifies some of the key elements for successful economic and community development in the County and the relationship of those elements to other parts of the General Plan. Economic and community development are terms that mean different things to different people. Some of the common definitions are listed below:

- *“Efforts to increase the number of jobs and income circulating in a community.”* The Handbook for Community Economic Development, U.S. Dept. of Commerce, 1979, pg. 2.
- *“The process of intervening in the normal economic cycle in order to achieve a specific goal. Although the goal may vary, it is usually aimed at stimulating private investment within a specific area in order to generate employment, increase the tax base or increase the commercial viability of the area.”* Encyclopedia of Community Planning and Environmental Management, Facts on File Publications, New York, 1984, pg. 117.
- *“The preparation of land, tools, and capital required to make an area attractive to new industry and to enhance the capability of existing industry to expand.”* The Language of Open Space, City of Duluth, MN, 1975, pg. 59.
- *“A development that provides a service, produces a good, retails a commodity, or emerges in any other use or activity for the purpose of making financial gain.”* Or, *“Any change in a community that enables greater production, increased employment, and a better distribution of goods and services.”* A Planners Dictionary, APA PAS #5xx/5xx, 2004, pg. 157.
- *“The attempt to attract investment within a government’s jurisdiction.”* It can include measures *“focused on outside business investment exclusively,”* to *“locally initiated projects and efforts to diversify [local] economies,”* to measures designed to retain existing businesses, or combinations. The Urban Politics Dictionary, 1990, pg.172.

Contemporary economic development initiatives usually involve elements of each of the definitions above. All such efforts are ultimately targeted at maintaining and improving the quality of life for residents in the community. Where there are plentiful jobs with wages sufficient to sustain families, communities are not merely viable, they are prosperous. Citizens expect government to do what it can to help ensure plentiful jobs and a sustainable future, but in a democracy like America where capitalism is the basis for the economic system, and where free trade laws permit products to be cheaply prepared by workers in other nations, and sold for low prices elsewhere, it is hard for government to consistently provide the elements for a changing economy that is increasingly defined by global forces.

That of course is no reason for the federal, state, county or local government to not do all it can to help support a local sustainable economy. But at the county and local level, opportunities to directly and successfully intervene when a business is in trouble, or closing are often extremely limited—as was amply demonstrated with the Electrolux, Hitachi and Tower plant closings and job losses in Greenville as well as the rest of the County. These cases are examples of global free trade at work. It is much cheaper to pay workers in third world countries.

RELATIONSHIP OF REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES TO THE MONTCALM COUNTY GENERAL PLAN

Michigan and the Montcalm county area are facing challenging economic times. This is in significant part due to a change the economy has made to a global economy just discussed. Some call it the new economy. Characteristics of the new economy are:

- \$ Global – with world-wide competition, where regions (not towns or municipalities) must be the player (strong regional dimension and pooling of resources).
- \$ Entrepreneurial – Innovative small business start-ups with community support, and, help: Education, Networks, Culture of Entrepreneurship, Resources, Business Incubators.
- \$ Knowledge-based – where skills, creativity, and talent are highly valued and abundant. (Quality of life, green special areas, assets.)
- \$ Success comes from: ability to incorporate knowledge, technology, creativity, innovation, and cooperative public-private-nonprofit, cooperative regional relationships.

Table 4-1
Old Economy vs. New Economy

It may help to compare the old economy with the new economy. The following table presents a comparison:¹

Old Economy	New Economy
Inexpensive place to do business was the key.	Being rich in talent and ideas is the key.
A high-quality physical environment was a luxury , in the way of attracting cost-conscious businesses.	Physical and cultural amenities are key in attracting knowledge workers.
Success = fixed competitive advantage in some resource or skill.	Success = organizations and individuals with the ability to learn and adapt .
Economic development was government-led .	Partnerships with business, government and nonprofit sector lead change.
Industrial sector (manufacturing) focus.	Sector diversity is desired, and clustering of related sectors is targeted .
Fossil fuel dependent manufacturing.	Communications dependent .
People followed jobs .	Talented, well-educated people choose location first , then look for a job.
Location mattered .	Quality places with a high quality of life matter more.

¹ Adelaja, Adesoji “Soji” O., Wyckoff, Mark A., and others; *New Economy 101: Fundamentals of the New Economy*, Spring 2010; part three, PowerPoint™ slides 44-45.

Old Economy	New Economy
Dirty, ugly, and a poor quality environment were common outcomes that did not prevent growth.	Clean, green environment and proximity to open space and quality recreational opportunities are critical.

A deeply rooted fundamental for economic development and economic development planning in the New Economy is **regionalism** and **regional strategies**. This is important because in the new economy, we are not competing with our neighbors; we are competing with other regions across the globe. On a smaller scale, it might be that West Michigan is competing with Northern Indiana. But on a much larger scale it is the entire Great Lakes Basin might be competing with northern India, eastern China, or Brazil. It is this larger scale has a much greater affect on our prosperity and the success of economic development for Montcalm County.

As a result it is important to leverage local assets and align local strategies with those in the region and sub region. It is important to leverage those assets and align strategies with the state's economic planning, and for Michigan to do that with the Great Lakes Region.

Each region (the minimum size area for economic development – often multiple counties in size– need to have plans that build on unique regional assets and opportunities. That is so a region, and each of the counties and municipalities in that region, can capitalize on regional comparative advantage in building regional and global uniqueness and competitiveness. Dr. Soji Adelaja, Director of the MSU Land Policy Institute developed the concept of Regional Strategic Growth in 2007 around four principles:

- \$ Regionalism
- \$ Urban-Rural Interdependency
- \$ Strategic Assets Assessment & Strategic Growth Plan
- \$ Targeting of Resources
- \$ Importance of Regional Plans

This General Plan is prepared with the intent to complement and work with in Montcalm county's subregion, the West Michigan Regional Planning Commission, which in turn complements and works within Michigan Economic Development Corporation.

Montcalm County is not able to be everything to everybody. But because Montcalm County is part of a region that can be. When coordinating with sub region and region plans, the process in preparation of this plan was to determine which parts of those sub region and region plans should link to specifics for this Montcalm County. For example an analysis was done looking at various planning maps, such as special and unique areas, to identify features who's spacial extent includes territory in this county and beyond, and features who's spacial extent is completely with in Montcalm county, but raises to a subregion or regional importance. This review was done across all aspects of planning for: *[edit this list so it includes only those items germane to your master plan]*

- \$ Economic development,
- \$ Attraction of talent and population,
- \$ Diversify our economy.
- \$ Expand our markets.
- \$ Embrace the Green Economy & its focus on alternative energy.

- \$ Promote and support entrepreneurialism.
- \$ Focus on talent retention and attraction.
- \$ Focus on population retention and attraction.
- \$ Focus on effective placemaking and place-based strategies.
- \$ Maintain adequate infrastructure.
- \$ Continue workforce development and increase participation in lifelong education.
- \$ Create regional asset-based economic development strategies.
- \$ Work cooperatively to target resources to implement regional strategies.
- \$ Reform financing of public services and investments in our future.
- \$ Use Strategic Growth Plans to attract federal and other resources.
- \$ Foster distinctive, attractive places with a strong sense of place.
- \$ Create walkable neighborhoods.
- \$ Create a range of housing opportunities and choices.
- \$ Mix land uses.
- \$ Provide a variety of transportation choices.
- \$ Preserve open space, farmland, natural beauty, and critical environmental areas.
- \$ Strengthen and direct development toward existing communities.
- \$ Take advantage of compact building design.
- \$ Encourage community and stakeholder collaboration.
- \$ Make development decisions predictable, fair and cost-effective.
- \$ Complete Streets
- \$ New Urbanism
- \$ LEED for Neighborhood Development
- \$ Livable Communities
- \$ Healthy Communities
- \$ Green Communities
- \$ Sustainable Communities (economic, environmental and social sustainability)
- \$

To the extent that these features are germane to Montcalm county those portions of the West Michigan Planning Commission Plan and Michigan Economic Development Corporation are adopted by this reference, and made a part of this General Plan.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT BASED ON SMART GROWTH PRINCIPLES

So what can a county and local units of government do to help retain existing and attract new businesses and build a sustainable economy? First, the county can continue to take the lead through its economic and community development arm, the Montcalm Alliance. Second, ten Smart Growth measures are listed below. These are all based on the principles of sustainable development. *Sustainable development accommodates needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs.*

1. Develop a common, countywide vision of a sustainable future that is shared by local governments and widely supported by businesses and citizens in the county. Everyone needs to understand “*We are all in this together.*” Losing jobs in Greenville, Edmore and elsewhere in the county hurts quality of life in the whole county, not just in those jurisdictions. Inter-jurisdictional coordination and cooperation is essential to successfully implementing a common vision of the future. Recommended actions include:
 - Understand the county economy better—that includes its strengths, weaknesses

and emerging threats. Work together to create a countywide 5-year strategic economic and community development plan which doles out responsibility for implementation to a wide range of individuals and groups who work cooperatively together.

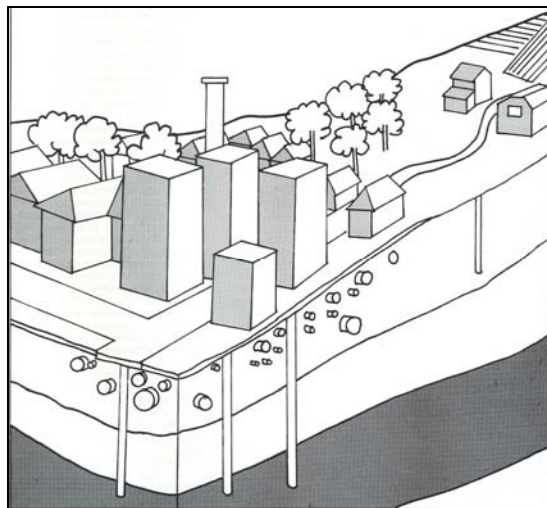
- Link the strategic plan to basic land use and infrastructure considerations as addressed in this Plan.
- Recognize that manufacturing continues to be a key component of the local economy and continue to promote strategies to maintain and strengthen this sector.
- Recognize that service and manufacturing activities yield significantly better return with respect to employment and income. Explore service and manufacturing activities that are synergistic with the asset base of Montcalm County's communities and its more rural character.
- Recognize the structural disadvantage faced by rural communities and the possibility that certain types of economic growth maybe more favorable to urban areas.
- Recognize the more limited impacts of growth drivers in the New Economy, such as knowledge workers, college graduates, 25-to35-year-olds and colleges in rural areas. Identify and employ other creative strategies.
- Recognize that rural communities are generally more dependent on traditional industries, such as agriculture; nurture such industries in order to maintain the economic base they currently afford.
- While what agriculture can offer may be limited in terms of potential for significant additional employment and income growth, the projected effect of intensifying agricultural activities is still positive. The county should recognize the fact that agriculture needs an infrastructure of support, which could include favorable policies, agricultural development strategies, agricultural rights protection, industry marketing and favorable zoning provisions.
- It is not likely there will be more agricultural lands in Montcalm county. The areas currently suitable for farming and forestry are already put to that use.
- Working lands (agricultural, forestry, mining) should be zoned in a way to allow for its continued use as working lands, and not tempered, reduced, or restricted by incompatible land uses, such as residential development.
- It is important to allow for a maximum amount of innovation in the farming sector of the county, and as such local regulation should be minimal, in terms of allowing farm and farm operations to change and modify their operations, crops, products, to the maximum extent possible. Agriculture, like every sector of the economy in today's world will need to be able to modify, change, and innovate how it does business to remain competitive or to experience economic growth.
- Maximizing the amount of innovation and retention of the county's working lands are both strategic measures to make possible growth in agricultural sector jobs.
- Recognize that the New Economy may be more difficult to leverage in rural areas, and explore the concept of "New Agriculture". For example, agriculture can be better tied to emerging opportunities in information technology, financing services and renewable energy.
- Connect the rural economy to those of nearby metro areas. Rural bed and breakfasts, farm based recreational facilities, outdoor recreational facilities hunting and fishing facilities, well advertised roadside stands, fairs and festivals, prepared packaged food production on farms, and assisted living facilities have been pursued successfully by many.

- Recognize that the infrastructure needs of rural areas are different than urban areas.
 - Set aside parochial considerations and be willing to cooperate night and day when the opportunity is presented for new jobs. That is how the Lansing area got selected for two new General Motors plants several years ago, and why they escaped with just one small plant closing in the most recent round of cuts.
 - Identify and provide incentives for joint local planning and zoning between two or more units of local government.
 - Consider the benefits of combining local governments, cooperating on more shared services, and/or consolidating more governmental services in the County to improve economic competitiveness by more efficient use of taxes and eliminating duplication of services.
 - Promote the use of placemaking strategies as an economic development tool:
 - Recognize that it is even more important to have placemaking strategies in place in the cities and villages in the county, supplemented by similar strategies and cooperation by townships and the county.
 - Recognize that placemaking is needed to create attractive, vibrant places which are very desirable places in which to live, raise families and retire.
 - Recognize that these placemaking strategies are important as a means to attract population to move and locate in Montcalm county.
 - Placemaking strategies should also be combined with tourist promotion efforts, because what is done to attract tourists to our area will also work to attract new residents to our area.
 - Explore ways to combine sources of funds used for tourist promotion along with funds used for business promotion for both economies of scale, and more resources for both.
2. Protect the natural resource base and quality of the natural environment. Natural resources serve as the primary basis for the Montcalm County economy. A healthy economy and healthy environment go hand-in-hand. In particular, adopt policies to prevent premature land fragmentation, because that leads to land conversion, especially for single family homes on large lots in the country. Land fragmentation undermines the long-term viability of agriculture in a county that consistently ranks in the top 10 counties in Michigan for at least four agricultural products. Actions to take include adopting local policies and programs to protect:
- Farmland (as described in Chapter 3)
 - Forestland (same approach as for farmland)
 - Mineral resources
 - Inland lake/stream water quality (as described in Chapter 3)
 - Sensitive environments (e.g. wetlands and floodplains)
 - Groundwater.
3. Protect existing income sources, wealth generators, and the existing tax base through strong business retention and entrepreneurial support policies. The income existing businesses have provided to their workers has supported the local economy for decades. It may well be the actions of budding entrepreneurs in the county, can't provide future growth and support. Actions that could be taken include:
- Find out what the needs of existing businesses are and work hard to do what can be done locally to retain existing jobs and businesses.
 - Better educate the public on the uniqueness and importance of agriculture in

Montcalm County, and on the important role that sustainable use of irrigation water resources plays in making this diverse and productive agriculture industry possible. Use available measures to protect existing farms, the use of irrigation water and agricultural support and processing industries. Work to attract value-added agricultural industries.

- - Locally support the State of Michigan Good Food Initiative through support for policies and programs to develop a food system that is equitable and sustainable and is rooted in local communities and centered on “good food”. The aim is to move toward a system to where, to a significant extent, Michigan farmers and processors profitably sell their products in-state, Michigan institutions buy food in-state, Michigan consumers have access to healthy local food and Michigan distributors and other agri-business facilitate these local exchanges.
 - Support entrepreneurial internet based business starts through local zoning that permits home occupations, provided adequate safeguards are in place to prevent incompatibilities with abutting property.
4. Maintain quality physical infrastructure. This is roads, sewer, water, storm drains, fire halls, police stations, schools and similar government buildings. This infrastructure is the skeleton around which businesses can grow new jobs and workers can be gainfully employed.
- Maintaining quality physical infrastructure is so important and so directly tied to land use decisions that Chapter 6 focuses on transportation and other infrastructure. But in addition, other steps should be taken:
 - Support high speed internet countywide as way to promote economic development; and
 - Support expansion of natural gas service and 3 phase electric power to attract new agricultural industry in targeted locations in the county (preferably if it is a factory, within community service areas as described in Chapter 5). Irrigation wells need the 3 phase electric power and natural gas is cheaper than LP gas where available.

Figure 4-1
Quality Infrastructure is Essential to Economic Development

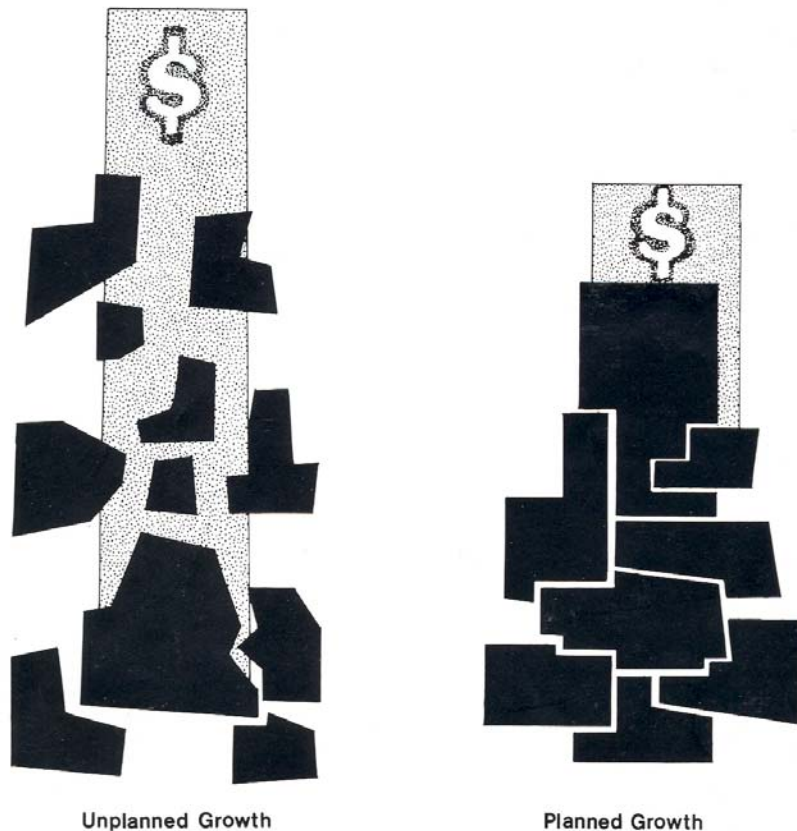


5. Provide land properly planned, zoned, and serviced with utilities and quality roads to accommodate new businesses and affordable housing. Actions to take include the following:
- Economic development should take place only within community service areas where public sewer, water, and paved roads are available, except for certain agricultural industries described above.
 - Plan and construct industrial parks that meet the certification requirements of the State of Michigan. Greenville has already done so, now it just needs help to fill it. Howard City and Edmore should follow Greenville's example and obtain certification for their industrial parks.
 - Assist local governments with efforts to improve the availability of and wider choice in affordable housing (ownership and rental). Affordable housing is a key economic and community development tool in areas with a well skilled workforce. Options are offered in Chapter 3. Intergovernmental cooperation is often critically important when expanding housing opportunities.
 - Promote development in the Montcalm County Tax Free Renaissance Sub-Zones in Carson City, Stanton, Howard City, Edmore and Pierson and Montcalm Townships.
 - Reclaim brownfields after cleanup for redevelopment that helps the community achieve sustainability by reusing existing land and infrastructure.
 - Take advantage of the countywide brownfield development authority and the opportunities it provides..
6. Provide a quality education and wide variety of cultural opportunities. A well-trained workforce has long been a precursor to successful economic development. All local school districts need to focus on producing quality graduates with the skills to join the workforce or go on for further education. No child should be left behind. Actions that could be taken include the following:
- Encourage local businesses to take an even greater role in helping shape the quality of education in local schools.
 - Continue to expand support for Montcalm Community College and the Montcalm Intermediate School District as tools for economic and community development.
7. Protect and enhance the unique aspects of each community in the county. Focus on those aspects which define its character and contribute to local quality of life. Protect indigenous visual character and set high standards for the visual and structural quality of all new job producing development. Some techniques are presented in Chapter 3, but the end result should be:
- Retain small town and village character (do not turn small towns and villages into suburban looking strips)
 - Protect agrarian character (do not turn farm fields into large lot farmettes)
 - Protect scenic character (protect key viewsheds, keep buildings low, protect important open spaces and sensitive natural areas)
 - Protect lakes, stream and river corridors and link public access to them
 - Develop/protect/enhance good school systems.
 - Develop/nurture/protect/enhance cultural facilities (theaters, music and dance schools, museums, etc.)

- Fight homogenization. Corporate businesses look the same from one community to the next, and while it is good for that business identity, it robs the local community of its own identity.
8. Better understand the relationship between public service costs and new development and be careful what local governments subsidize. For example:
- New development should always pay its own way except where the community consciously decides to subsidize it (as in elderly housing, or for a major new employer). Otherwise the rest of the community ends out paying for the services to the new development, while also paying for all the services to existing development.
 - Many Michigan communities have granted long tax abatements only to have the benefited industry go bankrupt or leave before the tax abatement period is up. Tax breaks should be sparingly used, and only when the benefits are clear and do not undermine the integrity of existing businesses.
 - Beware that when public services are initially installed (or upgraded), new development exploits excess capacity (such as a paved road, or a sewer line). Once excess capacity is gone, significant new public service costs will appear—who pays then? It is important to stay ahead of public service demands and use infrastructure to guide future development rather than react to it.
 - The true public costs of new residential development are rarely borne entirely by the development unless it has a very high value relative to the services used. This is often not apparent because not all the public service costs are borne by the local government that has the power to approve the development. Most retail businesses also cost more to service than the revenues they generate when all public service costs are included. In contrast, most office and industrial development does pay its own way, as do 1-2 unit apartments and condominiums. Open space usually is a break-even proposition.
 - Be sure you know the infrastructure impacts of new development and who is to pay, before adopting new plans or approving new development proposals.
 - In the late 1990's a SEMCOG/Rutgers/MSU study revealed that compact growth in 18 of Michigan's rapidly growing communities which diverts half of the new development outside of easily serviced areas at only a 10% increase in density in the area expected and desired to attract new growth, will save: 12.7% of developable land (8164 acres); 13.2% of the agricultural land (5651 acres); 11.9 % of fragile land (2198 acres); 11.9% on local roads (189 lane miles); 15.1% and 18.1% respectively on water and sewer; as well as 6.4% on housing costs and 3.2% on local government operating costs. See Figure 4-2.
9. Do not let proposed increases to the tax base drive new development approvals, unless the development is located where all necessary public services are adequate, and the land is planned and zoned for that use. For example:
- In many communities, diversification of the tax base is desirable (or even necessary to take some of the burden off existing taxpayers). However, if doing so increases public service costs more than tax revenues to pay for them, there may be a net loss in the community quality of life over time.

- Diversification of the tax base in an agricultural township is almost certain to destroy the resource base and existing rural character, unless it is for a resource-based industry that must site close to the raw materials that feed it.
- Nonfarm residences in rural areas usually require far more in services than they typically pay for in taxes. In contrast, cornfields usually generate more in tax revenues than they demand in the way of public services. The sustainable option is farms.

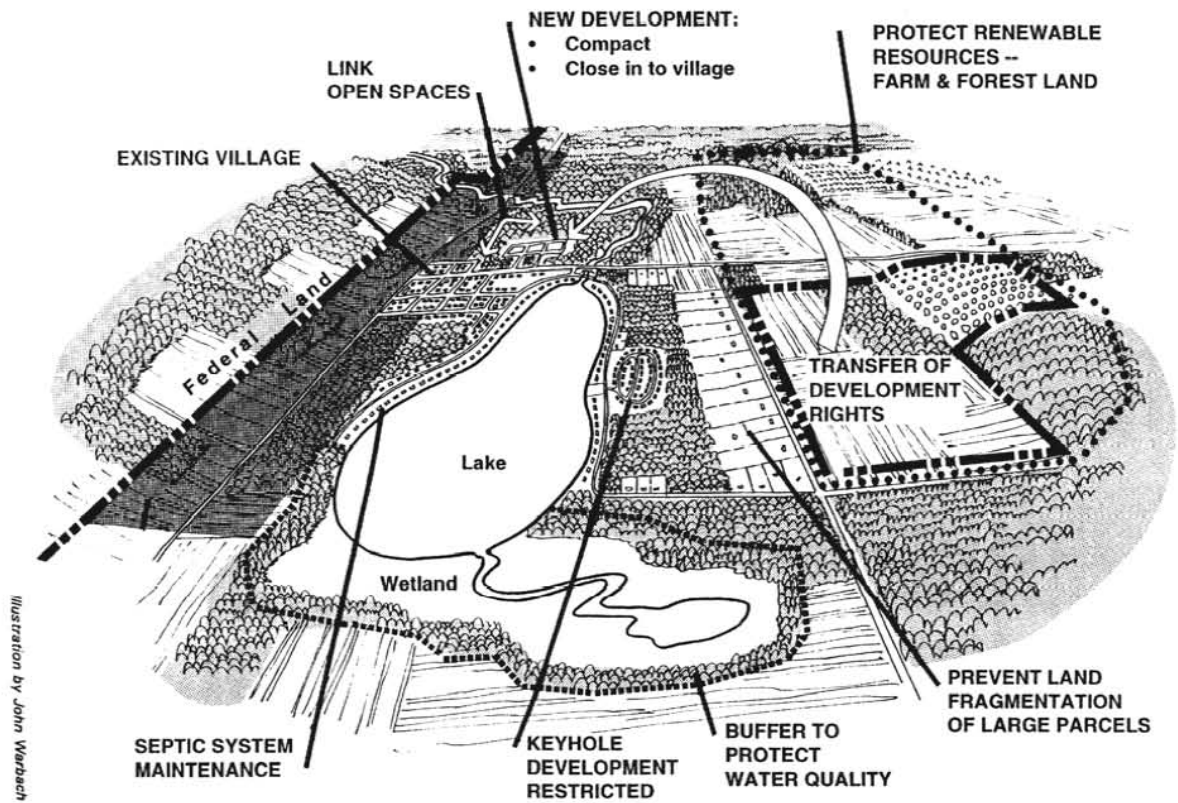
Figure 4-2
Planned Compact Settlement Patterns Cost Less in Public Services



10. Consider the impacts of all plans and incremental land use decisions on adjacent jurisdictions and on future generations. Ask yourself:
 - Is the decision consistent with the golden rule?
 - What future choices are being limited or future problems would be created?
 - The decision is not sustainable if it robs future generations of the ability to meet their needs.

Many of the ten Smart Growth measures discussed in this chapter are illustrated in Figure 4-3 which is from the Leelanau County General Plan.

Figure 4-3
Smart Growth Techniques to Build Sustainable Communities



Chapter 5

FUTURE LAND USE

INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes a future land use pattern for Montcalm County and key policies to achieve that pattern. It examines existing zoning as shown on Map 5-1 the Composite Zoning Map, future land use plans of jurisdictions in the county and local plans and zoning ordinances of jurisdictions of communities abutting Montcalm County.

Compatibility of land uses between jurisdictions is discussed as well as consistency with the Smart Growth Tenets (see Chapter 1), Vision, Goals, Objectives and Strategies (see Chapter 2) and Best Planning Practices (see Chapter 3). The planned overall future arrangement of land use along with a description of those land uses, and the future arrangement of land use by sector of the county are discussed. Policies Montcalm County and communities within the county should follow in order to achieve the desired future vision are discussed in order to sustain the quality of land and water resources, to provide public services in the most efficient and cost effective manner, to provide for the highest quality of life and to grow and sustain the economy.

EXISTING PLANNING AND ZONING

Eighteen communities in Montcalm County have their own zoning ordinance. Map 5-1 is a composite of those ordinances and shows the effective zoning for Montcalm County. Six townships are shown as blank on the Composite Zoning Map as those communities do not have a zoning ordinance. Montcalm County does not have a zoning ordinance and all cities, villages and townships are encouraged to adopt and maintain local zoning that is consistent with a local master plan and this County General Plan.

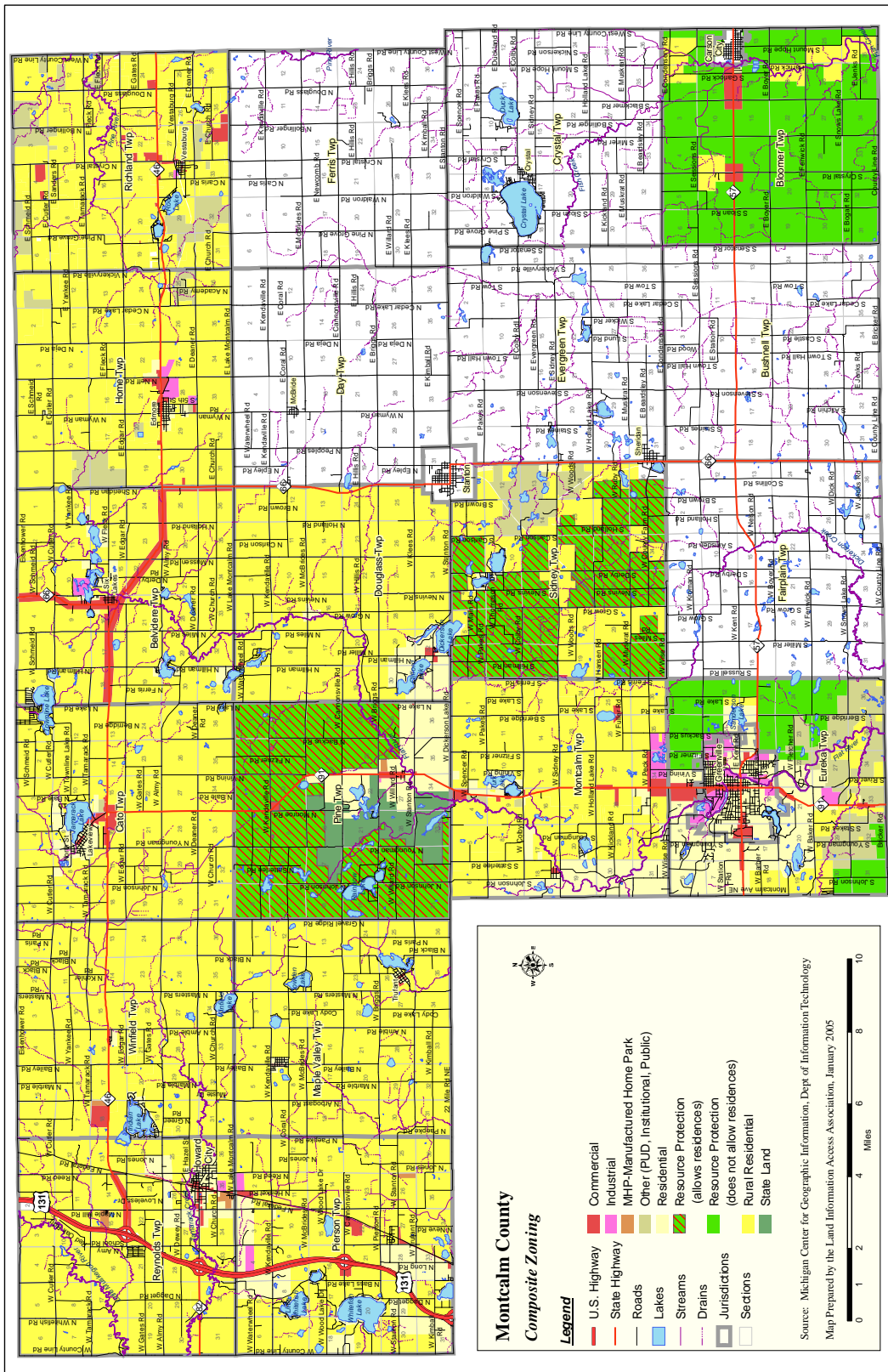
Existing Local Plans

Only some jurisdictions within the county indicated they have a future land use plan (also known as a master plan or comprehensive plan). This suggests that some communities in the county have zoning without planning first (a legal prerequisite), and thus are exposed to unnecessary legal risks if their zoning ordinances were challenged.

Existing Zoning

Large areas of Montcalm County are zoned for rural residential use, the bright yellow on Map 5-1. The density of this zoning district for most of the county is from one dwelling unit per acre to one dwelling unit per 10 acres. This permits extensive residential development that can result in the loss of the agricultural economy of those townships and of the rural quality of life. Incremental, scattered development, over time, can have a profound negative effect on agricultural businesses, the capacity of the road network, the capacity of communities to efficiently and cost-effectively provide public services, the quality of water resources (such as streams, rivers and lakes), and the extent of woodlands and undeveloped spaces that provide rural character and contribute to a high quality of life. This is evident in the buildout illustrations on Figure 3-2 in Chapter 3.

Map 5-1 Montcalm County Composite Zoning



Three townships, Pine, Sidney and Eureka, have large areas zoned for resource protection, a classification that generally permits residences at a density of one dwelling unit per 40 acres. About one third of Eureka Township is zoned resource protection, while the rest of the township is either in public land ownership (Flat River State Game Area) or a residential use in and around the City of Greenville. About 90% of Bloomer Township is zoned Resource Protection, with residences permitted at one dwelling unit per 40 acres.

The corridors of several roads are zoned for strip commercial development, such as M-46 in Belvidere Township, Cato Township and Reynolds Township, M-82 in Reynolds Township, M-66 in Belvidere Township, M-91 in Pine, Montcalm and Eureka Townships and M-57 in Eureka and Bloomer Townships. This promotes narrow lot commercial development, as well as a proliferation of driveways, congestion and unsafe driving conditions. Those road segments could develop in a way that is destructive of the economic vitality and character of those existing cities and villages. Strip development can also force communities to extend public services in an inefficient and costly manner.

The total buildout population for Montcalm County ranges from 279,458 to 759,476 persons, depending on the density at which each zoning district builds out. Many districts permit a wide range of densities. This is between four and thirteen times the existing population of the county. As discussed in the Montcalm County Fact Book, this represents serious over-zoning and only serves to attract non-farm residences to the county in an unplanned pattern.

With so few communities having master plans, there is little planning guidance for communities within the Montcalm County to guide growth and public investment in the future. This Plan will help provide guidance for those communities that choose to follow it, by adopting new plans, or amendments to existing plans and zoning ordinances to reflect the vision of this Plan.

Plans and Zoning Ordinances of Communities Abutting Montcalm County

How one community develops at its borders affects the communities on the other side of that border and vice versa. It is important for Montcalm County to understand the potential affect of adjacent community plans and ordinances while developing its own plan. The proposed arrangement of future land uses described in this chapter and the policies proposed to support that arrangement are compatible with existing plans in adjoining jurisdictions. Of the adjacent counties that share at least a dozen or more miles of common border, information was obtained from Mecosta County, Gratiot County, and Ionia County, but not from Newaygo County, Isabella County or Kent County.

Gratiot County (the county east of Montcalm County), is largely agricultural in the four townships that border Montcalm County (Seville Township, Sumner Township, New Haven Township and North Shade Township). Gratiot County's 2002 Strategic Plan places its focus on economic development rather than land use, but does propose to retain a rural character. However, its 2002 Strategic Plan also proposes to encourage growth away from the highways, which could lead to a conversion of agricultural land to other uses in areas such as along the border with Montcalm County.

Gratiot County exercises zoning authority over six townships, only one of which (Sumner Township) is adjacent to Montcalm County. In Sumner Township (which is opposite Ferris Township in Montcalm County), minimum lot size for the agricultural district is 40 acres, which should help preserve agricultural use there. Zoning for the other three Gratiot County townships along the Montcalm County border is unknown. To the extent that agriculture is supported in Gratiot County along the border with Montcalm County, it is a compatible land use.

Ionia County (directly south of Montcalm County) has an agricultural area in the eastern part of its border with Montcalm County, and in the western border section a combination of developed area in the city of Belding, undeveloped Flat River State Game Area and agriculture in Otisco Township. Ionia County has a Comprehensive Land Use Plan (2002). A Zoning Ordinance was adopted in 2004 by the Planning Commission and Board of Commissioners, but then rejected by voters in a referendum.

Otisco Township, which is opposite Eureka Township in Montcalm County has zoning (2002). While much of the border area in Otisco Township is zoned rural conservation or agricultural conservation, the minimum lot size of these districts is 1 acre. If there is substantial development pressure, which is possible as Otisco Township surrounds Belding, is only about 4 miles south of Greenville and can serve as a bedroom community for Grand Rapids, about 20 miles away, Otisco Township could develop in a sprawling, low density pattern.

The Flat River State Game Area straddles the Montcalm and Ionia County line south of Greenville and north of Belding in Ionia County. The game area will help retain substantial open space in this area, but will also serve as an attraction to rural development, which may substantially fill the privately owned lands at a density that is not efficient or cost-effective to provide many public services.

Mecosta County is directly north of Montcalm County. Mecosta County administers zoning for the four townships directly opposite Montcalm County. The Mecosta County Zoning Ordinance was last updated substantially in 2002. The entire border area on the Mecosta County side is zoned either Agricultural/Forestry (roughly 75%) and Agricultural (25%). While these districts are intended to preserve agricultural and forestry resource production, minimum lot size is only 1 acre. Thus portions can develop in a sprawling pattern that would be difficult to efficiently and cost effectively provide public services to. It may also over time, serve to create a large population across the border from Montcalm County that will pass through Montcalm County and create demands on its transportation system.

Because these counties all have rural populations, incompatible land uses are not common now, nor likely in the next 20 years. However, northeast Kent County is rapidly growing and more incompatibilities are likely there. Unfortunately none of the jurisdictions in northeast Kent County responded to Montcalm County's request for a copy of the local plan and zoning ordinance, so compatibility of land uses could not be analyzed.

FUTURE LAND USE AND POLICIES

The future land use pattern envisioned in Chapter 2 is based on a sustainable economy (especially in the agricultural sector), the preservation of rural character, the provision of a variety of residential opportunities, protection of natural, visual and cultural resources, the provision of an efficient and diverse transportation network, and all the key infrastructure needed to support job development in the nine incorporated cities and villages in the county. The text below describes the existing and future land use pattern in Montcalm County. Existing land use/land cover in 2001 is illustrated on Map 5-2. Policies to achieve a desired future land use pattern are illustrated on Map 5-3. Floodplains and wetlands are illustrated on Map 5-4.

Future Land Use Policy

If the vision, goals, objectives and strategies recommended in this Plan are implemented, then over the next twenty years, the landscape of Montcalm County will change little except in and contiguous to the existing cities and villages in the county. In fact, future land use will look much like Map 5-2, Existing Land Use/Land Cover. More specifically:

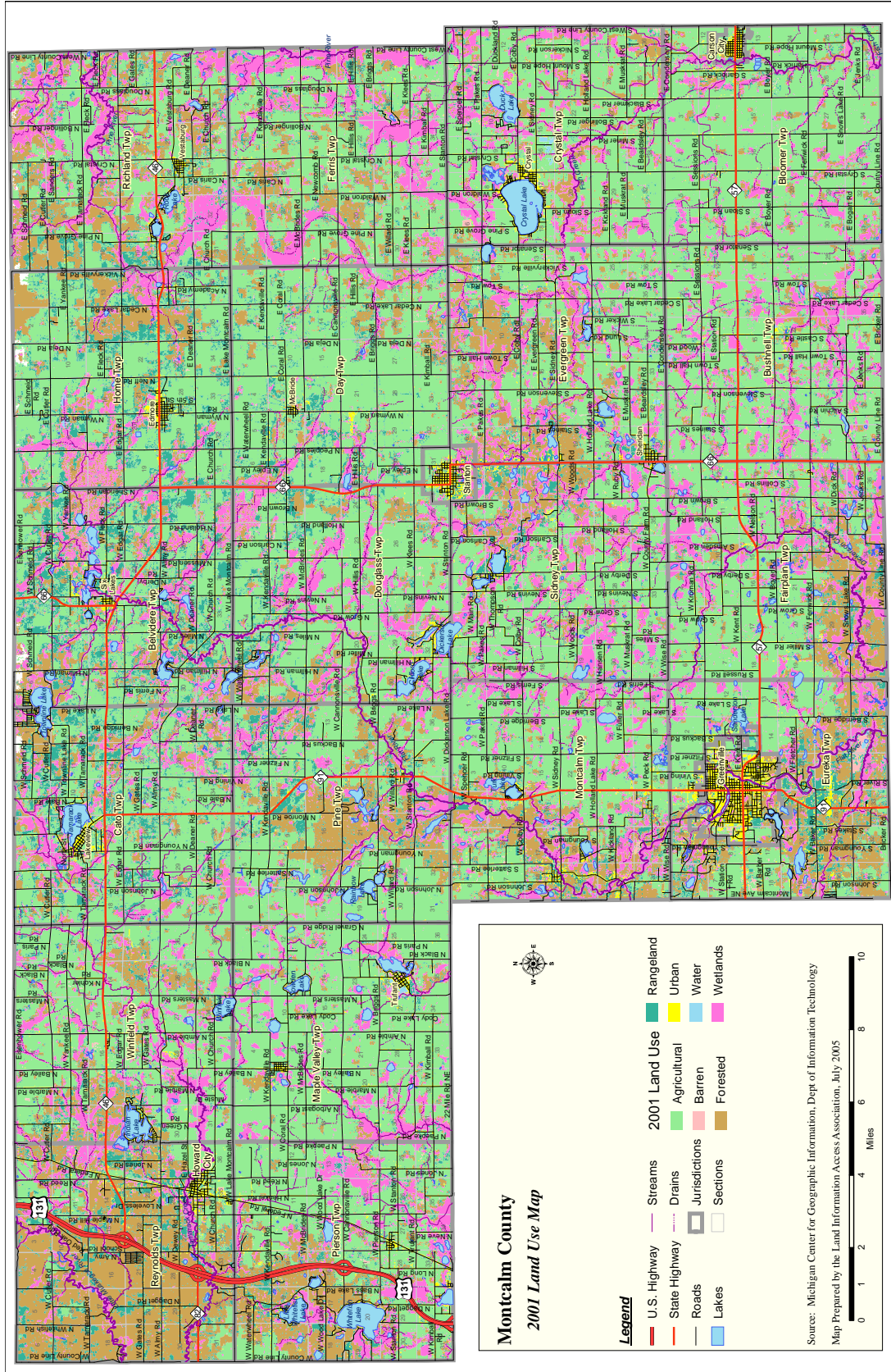
- Farms and forest land will remain the predominate land use;
- Existing cities, villages and parts of adjoining townships will develop within compact community service areas;
- Rural character, especially along the major road corridors, will be preserved;
- Sensitive resources, especially streams, rivers, lakes, floodplains and wetlands will be protected;
- Compact job centers and economic renaissance zones will continue to be developed in appropriate locations;
- Commercial centers will be encouraged to expand where existing commercial use is established, and where attractively designed and in a compact pattern;
- Single and multiple family development will largely occur in platted subdivisions served by public sewer and water;
- Rural residential development will be limited, and not in a pattern that places the agricultural economy at risk; and when it does occur, it will do so consistent with best practices that protect natural resources and rural character.

Key Future Land Use Policies Map

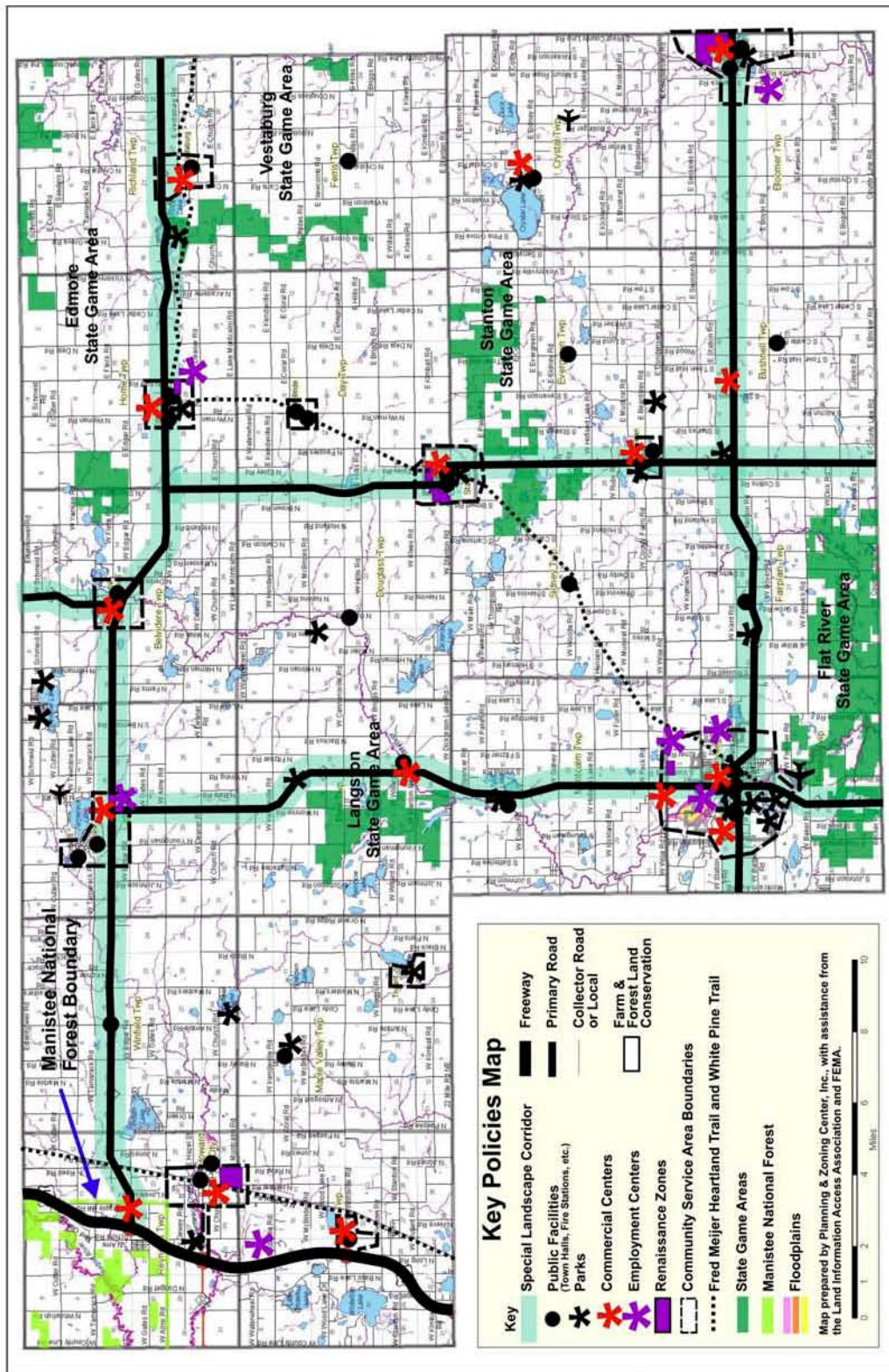
Map 5-3 summarizes the key land use policies in this Plan. Key features of this map include the following:

1. Community Service Area Boundaries. These areas illustrate the maximum extent of dense residential development at 4-12 units per acre and intense job-based non-residential development. Infill, brownfield redevelopment and incremental expansion of urban services (especially sewer, water, storm drains and paved roads) is the desired primary order of development within these areas. Local planning and zoning that respects compatibility between land uses should guide the specific location and timing of development within these community service area boundaries.

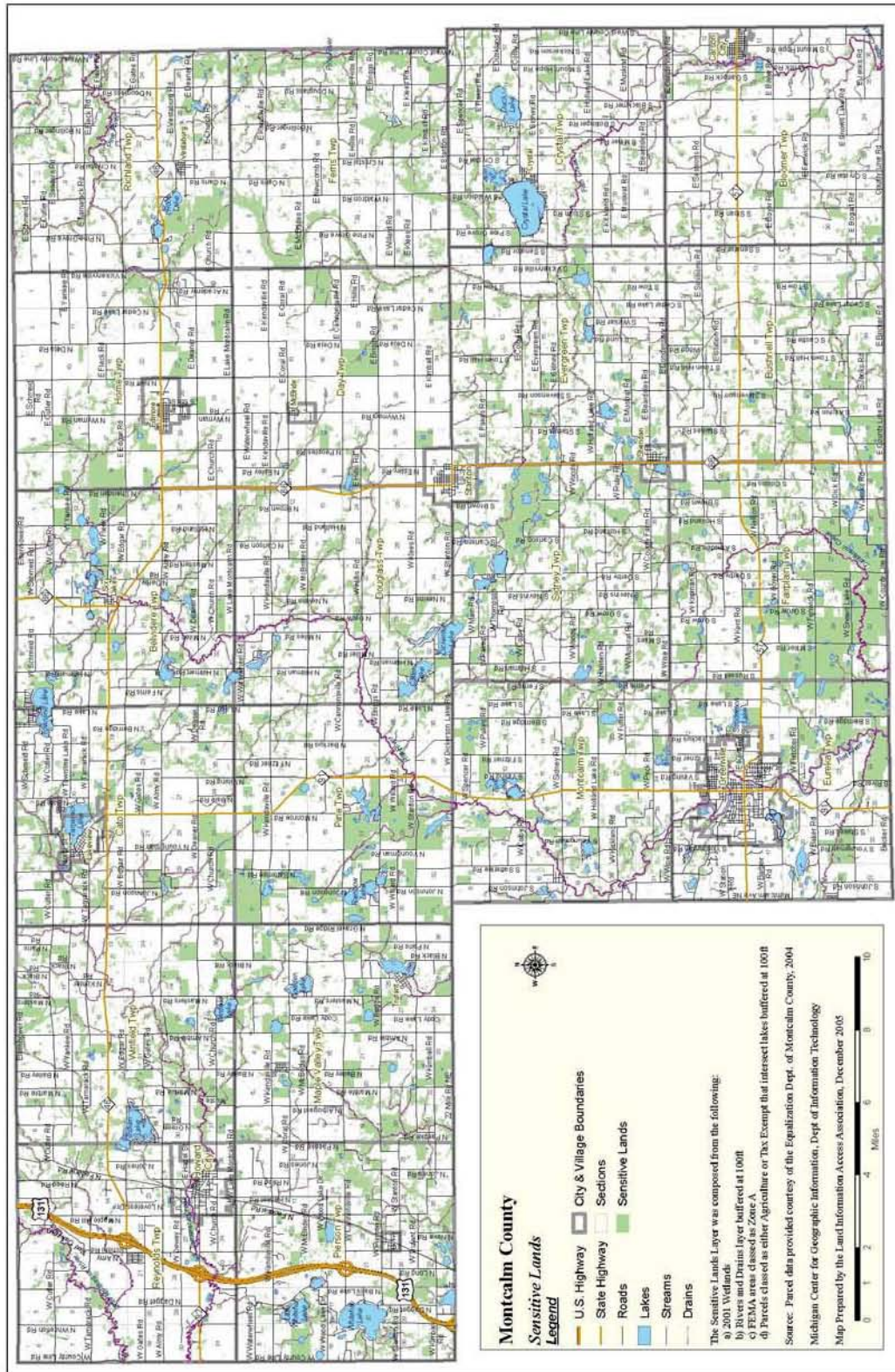
Map 5-2
Existing Land Use/Land Cover



Map 5-3
Key Future Land Use Policies



Map 5-4
Montcalm County Sensitive Lands



2. Farm and Forest Conservation. In contrast, outside of Community Service Areas, future land development should be very limited (the white areas on Map 5-3). In farm and forest areas, the density of future residential development should not exceed 1 dwelling unit per 40 acres, although allowed units are encouraged to be clustered on small lots on a portion of the property, to minimize negative impacts from typical agricultural activities. It may be necessary to site limited agricultural related industrial facilities in this area, but generally speaking, such facilities should only locate in or adjacent to cities or villages with public sewer and water.
3. Commercial Centers. The red asterisk generally represents existing commercial centers in the county. In most cases these are in existing cities and villages or other rural settlements. Some are very small, but important service locations for residents in the area. All new commercial development should take place contiguous to these existing commercial centers and not in new locations as that only contributes to sprawl and strip development.
4. Employment Centers and Renaissance Zones. The purple asterisks and purple shaded locations are the existing home to many jobs, or the planned location for many new jobs. With the possible exception of certain new agricultural related industries, new job producing industries should be located inside Community Service Area boundaries or contiguous to existing employment centers. They should be located so as to not contribute to sprawl or strip development.
5. Roads and Highways. The dark black lines on the map are the state and interstate highways in the county. These are the backbone for efficient commerce and daily life. Every effort should be made to ensure their proper maintenance and improvement.
6. Trails. The Fred Meijer Heartland Trail, the Fred Meijer Flat River Trail and the White Pine State Park Trail are Montcalm County jewels. They provide important recreational opportunities that should be built upon as the recreational part of a greenspace system throughout the county.
7. State Game Areas, National Forest and Local Parks. The other key skeletal pieces to a county greenspace system are the public lands. Lands in dark green are the five State Game Areas, while light green lands are part of the Manistee National Forest. Black asterisks are scattered local parks. The county should initiate preparation of a greenspace plan that over time links these facilities wherever possible by passive and active green spaces, while at the same time expanding the county parks to serve all areas of the county.
8. Special Landscape Corridors. The land alongside all the state highways is designated as special landscape corridors since the visual images most people have of the beautiful rural scenes in the county come almost exclusively from the view from the road. If the primary roads become lined with strip development (residential or commercial), with billboards and poorly maintained property, then the unique rural character of Montcalm County will be eroded, and with it much of what makes the county special to those who live there.
9. Other Public Facilities. While most of the key public facilities in the county are in the cities and villages, there are many township halls and fire barns in the most rural parts of the county that provide essential services and a community centerpiece (for a century or more in some cases). Many of these are historic structures that deserve to be well maintained as part of the history of Montcalm County.
10. Floodplains and wetlands. Map 5-3 includes floodplains in three light orange and

yellow patterns. At the scale of the map they are hard to spot, but still very important. As circumstances in other parts of the nation have illustrated several times in the last few years, floodplains are dangerous places to live and they should be protected for the water storage and wildlife habitat benefits they provide. Only a few floodplains in Montcalm County have been mapped. FEMA should be requested to map the floodplains on all rivers and creeks in the county. Wetlands also provide these benefits and should similarly be protected. Map 5-4 illustrates all the “sensitive” lands in Montcalm County. This includes floodplains and wetlands in the county.

LAND USE BY SUB-AREA OF THE COUNTY

Map 5-5 illustrates six sub-areas of the county with a physical and community character somewhat distinct from the others. Boundaries were purposely selected to coincide with township boundaries and they are not distinct locations on the ground. Following is a brief description of existing and proposed future land use in each of these sub-areas. Readers will want to periodically refer to Maps 5-2, 5-3 and 5-4.

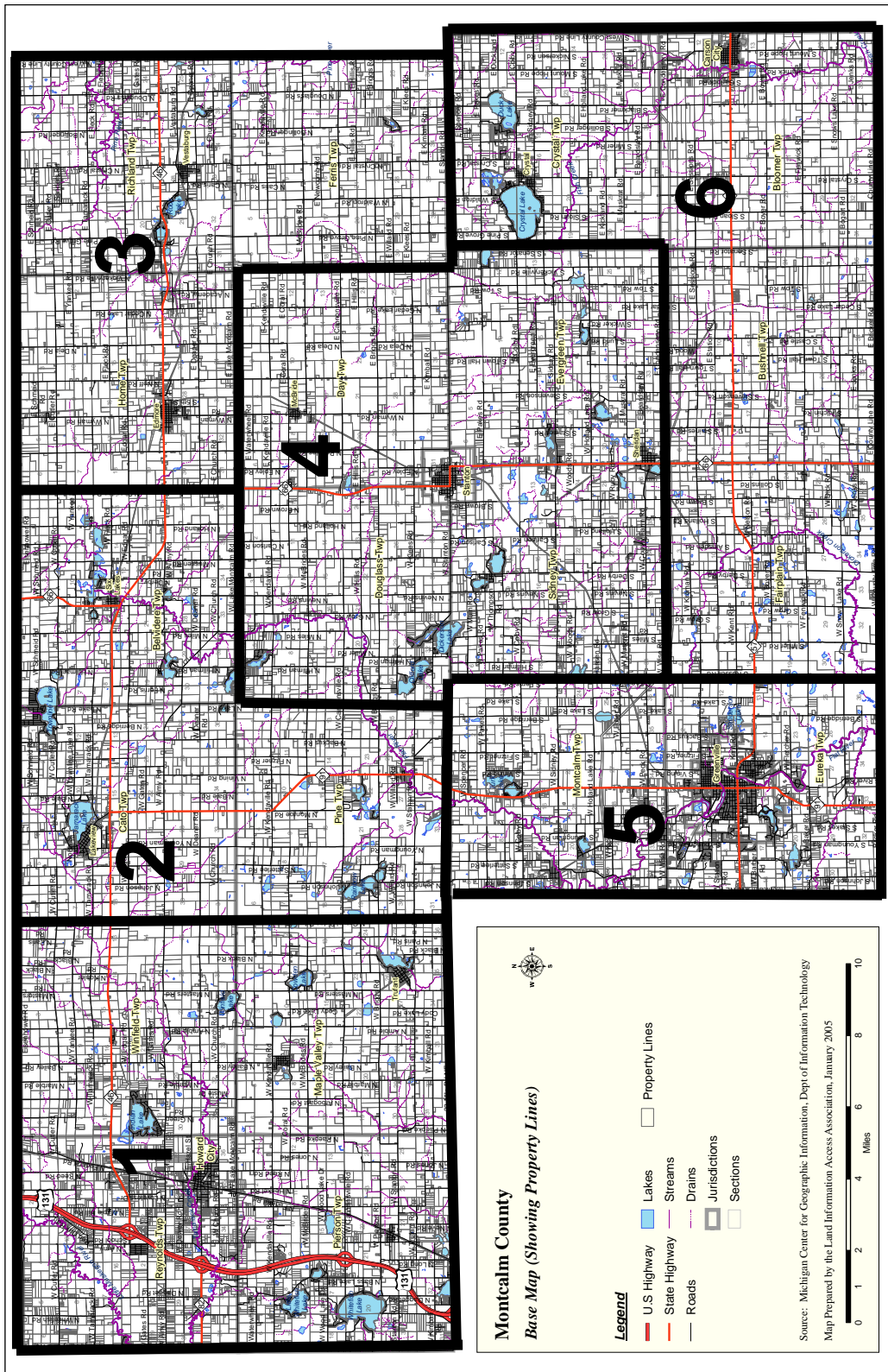
All proposed future land use arrangements and policies presented in this chapter were developed based on a blending of:

- The natural capacity of the land to sustain certain types of development and the important natural functions played by unique land and water resources in the area.
- The relative future need for residential, commercial and industrial uses; as well as the existing land use distribution.
- The relationship of agricultural and undeveloped lands to existing community character and the economic base of the county.
- The capabilities of the transportation network to sustain different types of development in different areas of the county.
- The compatibilities of various land uses when sited adjacent to one another.
- The desires of local residents and public officials as expressed through their participation in visioning sessions and public Planning Commission meetings.

Sub-Area One

Sub-area one is in the far northwestern part of the county, and includes Reynolds, Winfield, Pierson and Maple Valley Townships, as well as Howard City, the village of Pierson and the unincorporated areas of Coral and Trufant. This sub-area is physically diverse. The western part of this sub-area, in Reynolds and Pierson Townships generally has very droughty, sandy soils. Farming in this area was attempted when it was originally settled, but few farms exist today. Forest growth succeeded farming, and there are extensive Manistee National Forest lands in Reynolds Township. US-131 provides excellent access to Grand Rapids and Big Rapids, and has resulted in rapid population growth. Streams and lakes have attracted home construction, and this development pressure places stresses on water quality. The Muskegon River flows through the northwestern part of Reynolds Township. Winfield Township, the township east of Reynolds has more productive soils with active farms, although ponding water can be a problem for both farming and building.

Map 5-5
Montcalm County Sub-Areas



It is a scenic township, with lakes and rolling hills. Pierson Township, which is south of Reynolds Township also has a number of lakes, making resorts and lakefront living popular. Recreational opportunities are also provided by the White Pine State Park Trail and runs from Comstock Park to Cadillac and extends roughly north-south through the sub-area parallel to and east of US-131. Associated with several of the lakes in this sub-area are parks, such as Krampe Park and Trufant Petersen Park. Pierson Township also is served by US-131, putting pressure on it as a bedroom community for Grand Rapids. Maple Valley Township, which is south of Winfield Township has highly productive soils and good permeability except in its far western and northwestern parts. In those parts where soils have good permeability, the land is valuable for both agriculture and building homes. Where soils in this sub-area have poor permeability, land is poor for both agriculture and residential building. Homes need to be on very large parcels in order to have a better chance to find an appropriate place for a septic system. Maple Valley Township also has natural lakes and ponds, which provide groundwater storage. However, these are also sensitive and care must be taken to protect groundwater from pollutants.

Future land use in this sub-area is expected to include many more single-family residences whose residents commute to jobs north or south of the county. There will be a mix of residential along with some agriculture, highway commercial at freeway interchanges, a small amount of industrial and abundant recreation. It will be important to retain rural character as development occurs. Because of the high development pressure, this will require the application of best planning practices discussed in Chapter 3, such as clustering, and vegetative screening.

The village of Howard City, the village of Pierson and the settlement areas of Coral and Trufant are encouraged to develop within compact community service areas. Howard City has public sewer and water, while Pierson has public sewer. The extension of sewer and water should only occur in support of a pattern that retains the capacity of those communities to efficiently utilizes public investment. Howard City will likely receive the most opportunity for new businesses and should take the opportunity to insist on quality new development that is not only well constructed and looks good, but contributes to improved quality of life in the city and surrounding area.

Future land use in the eastern part of this sub-area should stay primarily in agriculture and rural residential development. Townships are encouraged to adopt a density of one dwelling unit per forty acres for agricultural areas in order to help ensure a sustainable agricultural economy.

Sub-area Two

This sub-area includes Cato, Belvidere and Pine Townships, the village of Lakeview and the unincorporated area of Six Lakes. This is an important farming area, with productive soils distributed throughout the sub-area. Several lakes, such as Townline Lake, Six Lakes, Tamarack Lake and Rainbow Lake attract resort, seasonal and year around residences. The Flat River begins its journey to the Grand River in this area. The Langston State Game Area provides land for hiking, bird watching and hunting.

This sub-area is served by M-46, which runs east and west, and M-91, which extends from the Lakeview area south to Greenville and into Ionia County. The M-46 corridor in

the Lakeview area is relatively developed with residences, businesses and small industrial uses along a nearly one-mile segment.

Most of Cato Township, Belvidere Township and Pine Township have productive soils, and potato, dairy and cash crops are successful there. In south-central Pine Township there is an area of very droughty, sandy soils where the Langston State Game Area is located. There are also oil and gas fields (including a huge underground natural gas storage facility) and gravel pits.

Future land use of this area should remain primarily agricultural and rural residential. Lakefront residential and resort uses will continue around the several lakes in this sub-area, but overbuilding should be resisted. The townships should encourage agricultural use on the productive soils that are distributed throughout this sub-area. This can be done through 40 acre minimum density zoning, conservation subdivisions, open space zoning, the purchase of development rights and other related techniques.

The village of Lakeview is encouraged to continue to develop within a compact community service area, with incremental expansions of public sewer and water. This will be a much more efficient and attractive development pattern than to spread out along M-46. It will also make M-46 safer and less congested.

M-46 and M-91 are identified as special landscape corridors. In order for these roads to maintain their rural character, townships and the Village of Lakeview should work with property owners along the corridors to utilize the best practices principles in Chapter 3, such as encouraging them to preserve or establish natural vegetative screening along the roads, limit the number of driveways by clustering new development, designing attractive signs and other steps to preserve rural character. The preservation of agriculture will also contribute greatly to protecting the rural character of this area.

Sub-area Three

Sub-area Three is in the northeast corner of Montcalm County and includes Home, Richland and Ferris Townships. The villages of Edmore and Vestaburg are in this sub-area. This is also a productive farming area, with suitable soils when drained. There are numerous wetlands. The Edmore and Vestaburg State Game Areas are in this sub-area, on lands less suitable for farming. They provide recreational opportunities, such as walking, bird watching and hunting. The paving of the Fred Meijer Heartland Trail through this sub-area from Edmore east to Vestaburg and into Gratiot County to the City of Alma provides significant new recreational opportunities for many.

Productive soils are distributed throughout this sub-area, and farming remains very active in much of Sub-area Three. However, here there are more wetlands and poorly drained soils here than in some other areas of Montcalm County.

The future land use of this sub-area should be primarily agricultural and rural residential. The townships are encouraged to help sustain the agricultural economy by instituting 40 acre minimum density zoning, open space zoning, clustering, conservation subdivisions and where warranted, purchase of development rights. Areas of eastern Richland and Ferris Townships are more conducive to a rural residential use than to farming. However, due to the lack of public sewers in this area, residential development needs to

be on large lots, with a minimum size that should be determined in cooperation with the District Health Department. Sprawling, large-lot rural development can make the provision of public services less efficient and more costly for rural communities, so the application of best practices such as clustering can reduce some negative impacts on the community.

The village of Edmore is encouraged to continue to develop in a compact pattern to efficiently utilize its investment in public sewer and water. The village of Vestaburg is encouraged to develop within a compact community service area when public sewer and water can be provided.

M-46 runs east and west through this sub-area, and is designated as a special landscape corridor. M-66, which enters this sub-area from the south and ends at M-46 along the western edge of this sub-area, is also a special landscape corridor. In order for these roads to maintain their rural landscape character, townships and villages should work with property owners along the corridors to utilize the principles in Chapter 3 to preserve rural character, such as encouraging them to preserve or establish natural vegetative screening along the roads, limit the number of driveways by clustering new development, designing attractive signs and other steps to preserve rural character.

In order to protect agriculture and rural character in Ferris Township, a zoning ordinance should be considered that is consistent with the policies in this Plan, as the township does not currently have zoning. The township should give consideration to entering into an agreement with adjoining townships and creating a joint planning commission with a single zoning ordinance instead of a separate plan and zoning ordinance.

Sub-area Four

Sub-area four is in the center of the county. It includes Douglas, Day, Sidney and Evergreen Townships, the Villages of Sheridan and McBride, the City of Stanton and the unincorporated area of Sidney. M-66 is the main road serving this sub-area. M-66 runs north and south, connecting M-46 which runs east and west to the north of this sub-area and M-57, which runs east and west to the south of this area, and Ionia County to the south of Montcalm County. Montcalm Community College is in Sidney Township.

Soils in the Douglass and Day Townships are generally productive, with artificial draining seldom needed. Sidney and especially Evergreen Townships have extensive areas of poorly drained soils and wetlands, as well as some areas of productive soils. Large areas of these two townships are in the Stanton State Game Area, which provides opportunities for hiking, bird watching, other nature study and hunting. Productivity varies greatly in the southern part of this sub-area, with some pasturing taking place. The terrain is often rolling, and where slopes are steep, the risk of erosion is high.

The paved Fred Meijer Heartland Trail runs diagonally southwest to northeast through this sub-area and links Greenville to Stanton and then it continues on to Edmore. Future land use in this sub-area includes agriculture where soil is productive, rural residential where soils are not productive, and developed uses within the Stanton and Sheridan Community Service Areas.

Existing farming can be used as a guide to selecting areas in which to promote

agricultural sustainability. Townships should be encouraged to promote the agricultural economic sector by establishing 40 acre minimum density (only Sidney Township already has it), open space zoning, clustering and conservation subdivision design.

Where agriculture does not have a history of success, rural residential uses should be permitted. However, due to problems associated with drainage, minimum lot sizes should be set in consultation with the District Health Department. Open space zoning, clustering and conservation subdivision design should also be encouraged in order to preserve rural character, undeveloped open space and wildlife habitat.

The City of Stanton and Village of Sheridan should fully develop in an efficient, compact pattern within a defined Community Service Area in order to take advantage of the investment in public sewer and water before any extensions are considered. While the Village of Sheridan has a large capacity water system, it should consider extensions carefully, in order to make the most cost-effective use of its investment, retain its character and protect nearby farmland.

In order to protect agriculture and rural character in Day and Evergreen Townships, plans and zoning that are consistent with the policies in this Plan should be considered as these townships do not currently have zoning. However, they are encouraged to consider a joint planning commission with one or more adjoining townships.

Sub-area Five

Sub-area five includes the City of Greenville, Montcalm Township and Eureka Township. It is served by M-57, which runs east and west and connects Greenville with Carson City to the east and Kent County and US-131 to the west. M-91 runs north and south through Greenville and connects it to Lakeview and Mecosta County to the north, and the City of Belding in Ionia County to the south.

This is the most densely populated sub-area because of Greenville and the surrounding development in Eureka and Montcalm Townships associated with Greenville. Development also extends north along M-91 and east and west along M-57. The Greenville Airport is south of the city. This area of the county along with the US-131 corridor in the panhandle area are expected to receive the most new development over the next 20 years.

There are productive soils in the area east of Greenville, in northern Fairplains Township, and eastern Montcalm Township. Nearly the entire southern part of this sub-area has poor soils for either agriculture or development, and most of it is in the Flat River State Game Area. This State Game Area serves as a partial barrier to development south of Greenville, so any new interest in new development in the rural areas around Greenville will be forced north into Montcalm Township or will skip into Fairplain Township. Eureka Township, which surrounds Greenville, is zoned for resource protection in the areas east of Greenville and to the west and northwest of the city.

Future land uses in this sub-area include a wide mixture of agriculture, rural residential, and built uses. Agriculture should be encouraged in those areas where it is productive, which generally is in portions of Montcalm and eastern Eureka Townships. Rural residential use should be encouraged in rural areas that are not productive farmland.

However, many of the non-productive farmlands are also not suitable for residential use unless the lot size is very large due to soil suitability problems in siting septic systems.

New residential, commercial and industrial uses should be developed in a compact pattern within the Community Services Area that encompasses Greenville. This includes existing commercial, industrial and residential areas. Greenville already provides public sewer and water, and it should fully take advantage of its investment in this infrastructure before extending services elsewhere. If the Electrolux factory is ultimately unmarketable, it should be leveled, the site cleaned of any contaminants and reused in a manner planned by Greenville citizens. The existing industrial parks should be filled before new land is committed to that purpose.

Agriculture and rural character should be protected by establishing a 40 acre minimum density in the most productive farming areas and in resource protection areas. Open space ordinances, clustering, and conservation subdivision design should be used as appropriate.

Immediate efforts to preserve visual character along M-57 and M-91 should be taken as these are important routes that contribute to the collective sense of the rural character of the area, and hence to quality of life. Protecting or enhancing quality of life is important, both for the happiness of existing residents and for the economy—attracting new business and retaining existing businesses. There are many signs, billboards and cluttered properties along these corridors that deserve attention.

This sub-area is already rich in recreational opportunity. However, providing connections between residential areas and existing parks, the State Game Area and recreation facilities outside the sub-area should be pursued.

Sub-area Six

Sub-area Six includes Bushnell Township, Bloomer Township, Crystal Township, Fairplain Township and Carson City and the unincorporated area of Crystal in the southeast corner of the county. M-57 connects this sub-area to Greenville to the west and Gratiot County immediately east of Carson City. M-66 is a north-south route through the sub-area. Carson City is at the eastern edge of the study area and the county. The Carson City Correctional Facility is located in Bloomer Township, southwest of Carson City, and serves as a regional job center. Oil production occurs in this sub-area.

The soils in this area are generally productive when drained, but are highly diverse. Dairy farming is still active in the area. Large portions of Bushnell, Bloomer, Crystal and Fairplain townships are farmed.

Crystal Lake is the largest lake in the county (over 700 acres), and attracts seasonal and year around residential development. Protection of water quality is especially important as much of the shoreline is sandy and shallow. Best practices for shoreline development should be pursued including limiting use of lawn fertilizers and preservation of a natural vegetative strip along the shore.

The primary future land uses are expected to be agriculture and rural residential. Quarter-quarter zoning or 40 acre minimum lot size zoning should be pursued like Bloomer Township to help preserve agricultural land. However, Crystal and Bushnell Townships do not currently have zoning and Fairplain Township's is very limited. In order to protect agriculture and rural character, zoning that is consistent with the policies in this Plan should be considered by Bushnell, Crystal and Fairplain Townships. Establishing a joint planning commission with one or more neighboring jurisdictions, also, is strongly encouraged.

THE MANAGEMENT OF DIFFERENT LAND USES IN THE FUTURE

This section discusses how different land use/land cover types should be managed in the future in order to meet the vision, goals and objectives of this Plan. This section is intended to expand upon the descriptions in the last section, and help communities within Montcalm County when developing or updating their comprehensive plans and zoning ordinances consistent with this Plan.

Agricultural, Forest and Rural Land Conservation

Map 5-2, Existing Land Use/Land Cover (see also Maps 4-4 and 4-5 in Chapter 4 of the Montcalm County Fact Book) show that agriculture is by far the land use with the largest total area in Montcalm County. It occurs in large blocks and on many scattered parcels throughout the county. The exception to this pattern is in the far northwestern portion of the county, where forest is the dominant land use/cover type. On a county basis, about one-quarter of the land in Montcalm County is forest. Forests contribute to the county's rural character, provide raw materials for forest products, enhance biodiversity, provide wildlife habitat, slow stormwater runoff, improve water quality, and provide recreational opportunities. Much of Montcalm County's forest land is already in public ownership (either the Manistee National Forest or State Game Areas), and thus are protected.

Farmland, forestry and related agricultural and forestry businesses should be protected through 2035 and probably far beyond. Together they occupy the largest area of any of the proposed land uses. The principal strategies to protect farms and forest land include:

- Quarter-Quarter Zoning. Individual communities with extensive farmland and forests are encouraged to adopt quarter-quarter zoning. This means one dwelling per quarter-quarter section (about 40 acres) would be permitted. The dwelling would be placed on a new separate lot of not more than 1-3 acres in order to leave 37-39 acres still owned by the farmer for continued agriculture. If a farmer owned more than one quarter-quarter section, he could cluster the permitted dwelling units in one place to leave more contiguous land in farming. For example, if a farmer owned 120 acres, that is 3 quarter-quarter sections. Three two-acre lots could be placed in a cluster of lots on six acres leaving 114 acres in agriculture. Quarter-quarter zoning is used in areas where farmers are committed to farming. If a farmer wanted to stop farming, he or she would request rezoning out of the quarter-quarter district and into another zoning district, such as a rural residential district with a lot size of usually 2-10 acres/parcel. A landowner with less than a quarter-quarter section in a quarter-quarter zone, would have a nonconforming parcel that could still be used for a single homesite, but could not be split for other homesites unless it were rezoned into a zoning classification that permitted smaller lots.

Adopting a minimum density of one dwelling unit per 40 acres would be especially important in the intensively farmed areas from the middle of Sub-Area 1 through Sub-Area 2, into the western part of Sub-Area 3, the top half of Sub-Area 4, the southwest part of Sub-Area 4, the upper northeastern and eastern part of Sub-Area 5 and nearly all of Sub-Area 6. Bloomer, Eureka, Pine, and Sidney Townships already have this density for large portions of their townships. Winfield, Cato, Belvidere, Home, Maple Valley, Evergreen, Douglass, Day, Montcalm, Fairplain and Bushnell Townships should adopt one unit per 40 acre minimum density for large portions of their townships. Quarter/quarter zoning is the best way to do this. This would require Day, Evergreen, Fairplain and Bushnell Townships to create their own zoning ordinances or create joint planning commissions with neighboring jurisdictions.

- PDR and TDR. Purchase of development rights (PDR) and transfer of development rights (TDR) are two techniques described in Chapter 3 that are even more effective than local zoning at preserving farm and forest land. Each involves paying the landowner for the value of the development rights on the land while ensuring its long term preservation as farm or forest land. Of course this is expensive. In PDR, government or a land conservancy purchases the development rights. In TDR, a developer does in return for the right to build at a higher density inside a Community Service Area. In TDR, the highest quality farm and forest lands in the county would be designated as sending zones and the land that could be served with public sewer and water the receiving area. This is largely land in existing cities and villages in the county, or land adjacent to those communities in abutting townships. In order for farmers to be eligible to participate in the state PDR program or a TDR program, the county would have to adopt a county farmland preservation plan, or every unit of government would have to do so separately and then enter into joint agreements for implementation.

Rural Residential

This area is intended to provide low density housing opportunities. Conservation subdivision design and zoning would be the governing principle. New development would be clustered on a small portion of the lot in order to preserve the balance for farm, forestry or other open space use. Chapter 3 illustrates how this is done. Development of this type would be limited in farm and forest areas, and on soils not well suited for farms or forest management; otherwise there will be too many dwellings in these sustainable resource areas. Densities would range from about 1 dwelling unit per 10 to 20 acres. There would be no minimum lot size smaller than ¼ acre and there would be maximum lot sizes of 1 to 3 acres, so that open space would be preserved. Homes should be clustered with a single access drive to limit the frequency of driveways on rural roads. Communities with sewer and water would not extend these services into the rural residential district. Design guidelines should be adopted to guide property owners in helping to preserve rural character. This area is not intended for long term agricultural protection, but there would be no overt actions to restrict agriculture.

Residential

These areas would primarily occur within the community service area boundaries of the small towns in the county. This would include manufactured home communities and

single family residential development at a density from 3 to 4 dwelling units up to 8 to 12 per acre. Residential development at this density would have an urban character. It is expected that these areas would be served by public sewer and water. There would be limited requirements for open space, relying, instead on public parks, except where the land were a planned unit development, or sensitive lands like wetlands were protected as part of the development. Design guidelines should be adopted to guide the residential development so that it is compatible with adjacent land uses.

Commercial

Commercial uses include neighborhood and regional stores, gas stations, specialty stores, offices and similar uses. Commercial uses should primarily occur within community service area boundaries and in identified commercial centers or in a few highway service areas. Commercial uses should be clustered in nodes instead of stripped along a highway and their layouts designed in order to manage access for safety and efficiency. Commercial uses should also be attractively designed in order to stimulate business activity and contribute to the quality of life of the county.

Industrial

Industrial uses include facilities for assembly and fabrication, materials storage, oil and gas processing and storage and agricultural and forestry processing. It also includes mineral extraction and airports. In general these uses should be located within community service areas where public sewer and water are required, in designated job centers and renaissance zones. Care should be taken to adequately protect sensitive natural resources from damage or pollution, and to adequately buffer adjacent uses (especially residential) or establish transitional uses between industries and incompatible land uses. Some agriculture-related industries may need to be established outside of community service areas, and in agriculture areas, but they should have adequate protections for water resources, rural character and adjacent land uses.

Waterfront Residential

There are many lakes and rivers in Montcalm County that are extensively developed with resorts, seasonal and year around homes. It is important for long term water quality in these lakes and rivers that waterfront home owners be good stewards of those waters. It is likely that waterfront properties will be developed and redeveloped over the next twenty years. The trend for waterfront development in Michigan is for much larger homes to be built. Good stewardship of Montcalm County waters means that land owners need to build on and manage waterfront properties with the least possible impact on water quality. That means keeping impervious area low. The Flat River Natural Country-Scenic River regulations can help guide waterfront protection standards for other rivers and lakes in the county, and watershed protection groups identified in Chapter 4 of the Montcalm County Fact Book can also assist townships in adopting standards for water quality protection.

Sensitive Lands and Water Quality Protection

Drains, streams, rivers, floodplains and wetlands are among the sensitive lands in Montcalm County that should be protected. These are shown on Map 5-4.

Land adjacent to lakes, rivers, streams and drains should receive protection. This would include vegetation buffers, principal structure setbacks, limits on imperviousness,

fertilizer limitations, livestock exclusion, restoration of riparian habitat, exclusion of sanitary sewer or septic system connections to storm drains, moderation of input flow rates, restrictions on development in floodplains and wetlands, and erosion and sedimentation control. Drains would still have to be managed to provide adequate flow.

The primary purpose of county storm drains is to prevent flooding and permit farming of wet fields. Historically this has been accomplished by periodic dredging and vegetation clearing. The measures listed above do not necessarily impede flow, if implemented correctly. Vegetation can be managed on the banks but not in the channel. Trees on the south bank can shade the stream bed to the point that flow impeding vegetation does not grow. These measures would help protect water quality, provide shade for fish and habitat for wildlife as well.

Parks and Recreation

The recreation system in the county consists of existing national forest land, county and local parks, the state game areas, and linear trails. Continued development of these recreation areas is important to the quality of life and competitive economic advantage of Montcalm County. The Montcalm County Recreational Plan should be updated every five years in a manner consistent with the vision, goals and objectives in this Plan.

Community Service Areas & Future Land Use

The exact location of the Community Service Area Boundaries on Map 5-3 should be determined by each local jurisdiction as new plans and updates to existing plans are made. A Community Services Area Boundary should be based on the principles and policies in this Plan, such as the Smart Growth Tenets and Best Planning Practices, and should be drawn in a manner compatible with plans of adjoining jurisdictions.

Similarly, the specific location of future land uses should be established by the cities, villages and townships in the county consistent with locally adopted master plans and zoning ordinances. Those ordinances should be prepared with active involvement of adjacent units of government, with an eye to ensuring compatibility between land uses within the jurisdiction and between those in neighboring jurisdictions, and in a manner that is consistent with the vision, goals, objectives, strategies, policies and best practices advocated in this Plan.

Chapter 6

TRANSPORTATION & OTHER INFRASTRUCTURE

INTRODUCTION

This chapter briefly examines the infrastructure policy necessary to implement the vision described in Chapter 2, the best practices described in Chapter 3, the economic and community development recommendations in Chapter 4, and the land use policies in Chapter 5. The word “infrastructure” is used broadly to refer to the large-scale public systems, services, and facilities within the county that are necessary for economic activity and improved quality of life, including: roads, airports, rail, public transportation, non-motorized transportation, public sewer and water, communications, power, schools, medical facilities, police and fire facilities, local government facilities, and parks and recreation facilities. For a description of existing Montcalm County infrastructure, see Chapter 6 Transportation and Chapter 7 Public Facilities and Services in the **Montcalm County Fact Book**.

TRANSPORTATION

Countywide Transportation Plan

A coordinated and well-integrated transportation system is the backbone of any economic and community development program. A quality system of interconnected city streets, county roads and state highways is critical for efficient commerce. . Alternative transportation options including public transit and an integrated non-motorized system are important options for workers, children and the elderly. These elements should all be carefully considered and addressed in a new county transportation plan. The plan should identify short and long range road connections, bypasses, lane additions, road closures, intersection and bridge improvements. It should focus first on maintenance of the existing paved road system and not on newly paving existing gravel roads, except where necessary to achieve other economic and community development objectives. It should support the preparation of access management plans for each state highway and necessary transportation improvements for new economic developments. It should be a top priority in 2013.

Roads

The road system in Montcalm County is well established, and largely in good condition. It is very important that this system be properly maintained and incrementally expanded according to a county transportation plan when the need for such expansion is evident. In most cases, road (as well as sewer and water) expansion costs should be borne by the private sector as each new business, subdivision or condominium development is constructed.

It is very important that new commercial development not simply strip along existing state highways and county primary roads. This usurps the road capacity for businesses that is paid for by all travelers. Two, much better alternatives, are commercial node development where commercial development builds back from a highway with its own internal street system. The second is that as each new strip commercial development takes place, it builds an increment of a parallel connecting road system, so that short trips can be taken between businesses without going back onto the major arterial. These alternatives will be most important to pursue on the state highways around Greenville,

Stanton, Edmore, Lakeview, Howard City and Carson City. It may be necessary for developers to build longer segments of these parallel roads and then enter into payback agreements with abutting property owners, or for the county to bond for some of the segments and be paid back by special assessment of the benefiting properties. These and other financing options should be explored at the appropriate time.

Access Management

Along the 2-5 lane state trunklines throughout Montcalm County (and in particular on M-57, M-91, M-66, and M-46), are hundreds of unnecessary existing driveways, poorly designed driveways, driveways that are too close to intersections and other driveways, unconnected parking lots and few service drives. This leads to unnecessary risks of traffic crashes, congestion and reduced traffic flow. Over time, these problems can all be corrected, or at least improved, and future problems can be prevented through a coordinated system of local access management regulations. That means vehicular crashes can be minimized, damage to vehicles reduced, and personal injuries and deaths can be prevented. Such a benefit cannot be readily calculated, but it is huge, well worth doing and well within the ability of local governments in the county to achieve. Montcalm County should work with local governments along M-91, M-46, M-57 and M-66 to lobby the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) to finance access management plans for each of these corridors. MDOT finances 6-8 such projects each year. MDOT requires local governments to agree to adopt uniform access management regulations (based on an MDOT model ordinance) at the completion of the corridor study. These studies are very effective at achieving intergovernmental cooperation and coordination as well as at saving lives and preventing future property damage. However, given the status of local zoning in the county (several townships do not have zoning), this means that only M-91, M-46 and M-57 from the Kent County line east to Greenville would presently be available for funds for such a project. Unzoned townships do not typically qualify for assistance. Often MDOT funds such studies for 15-30 mile segments, so local governments in adjoining counties may also need to be involved in order for such a project to receive funding priority for access management studies by MDOT. The former MDOT Transportation Center in Howard City (now located in Grand Rapids) is the office that would need to initiate a funding request for an access management plan in Montcalm County. The County Planning Commission should be alert to future opportunities to reduce the negative impacts of poorly designed highway access through various land use planning and access management techniques and share these with local governments so they can be incorporated into local zoning ordinances.

Highway Noise

A little considered, but very important future issue will be the impact of noise that comes from high speed highways—and in particular, the freeway portion of US-131. Currently, traffic volume on US-131 is fairly high for a rural freeway segment. Existing land use adjacent to the freeway is largely limited to farming, forest management, very low density residential—so few people are negatively affected by highway noise. But highway noise will rise as traffic volumes increase. While existing land uses are not proposed to be changed over the life of this Plan, it will be important to understand that if any new subdivisions are approved within 1/6 mile of the freeway portion of US-131, that those developments are not eligible for future noise walls or other noise mitigation assistance from MDOT, should highway noise become a problem. This is because both federal and state policies do not cover highway noise mitigation in the situation where a noise sensitive land use (like a residential subdivision) moves in close to the highway noise source—after the highway was constructed. The cost for any future noise

mitigation measures would have to be borne by the landowners in the subdivision.

Of course such a situation is highly preventable by only allowing noise compatible land uses next to high volume highways. These include land uses like farms, forestry, and open space uses (among others). If noise sensitive land uses like homes, churches and schools are proposed next to the highway, they should be required to be sound proofed and designed to minimize highway noise impacts. MDOT is working on sample zoning regulations and design guidelines to assist local governments with this task. The County Planning Commission should be alert to future opportunities to reduce the negative impacts of highway noise through various noise compatible land use planning and regulatory techniques and share these with local governments so they can be incorporated into local zoning ordinances.

Airports

Airports are important for attracting some types of economic development. As a result, airports are an important local asset that should be carefully managed and maintained to meet the demand for future air travel and air freight shipment. The Greenville Municipal Airport and the Lakeview Airport are low volume local airports (about 39 aircraft operations/day). Mayes Airport in Carson City has about 48 operations a month. These facilities provide an important opportunity for specialized aircraft and single engine airplanes that is convenient and relatively cheap for the users. These attractive features should be nurtured and used to attract additional users with air service related economic needs. Local zoning ordinances should include airport overlay zones to ensure the height of future structures in the area of the airport (up to ten miles away) do not exceed allowable maximum heights as established by the FAA.

Public Transit

Presently Greenville has a limited “dial-a-ride” service that provides public transportation to a small clientele in the southwest part of the county; basically only the City of Greenville and Eureka Township.. While few people are served, for many of those served, the bus is an important lifeline to work, medical care, shopping and education. As the existing population ages, and as new jobs develop in the county, the demand for fixed route, short headway, public transit service between the small cities in the county will grow. It is important for the county to stay on top of this rising demand and to take the necessary steps, in cooperation with other benefited parties and jurisdictions, to provide public transit at a level of service necessary to meet the needs of an expanding ridership.

Non-Motorized Transportation

A well coordinated and integrated system of pedestrian sidewalks, bicycle trails and pathways that link common destinations is critical to a high quality of life and to active healthy living. The most important livability improvement a city or village can usually make is to add an integrated sidewalk system if it does not already have one. Similar livability benefits can occur in townships—even very rural ones—if the pathways are connected and lead to common destinations like schools, recreation facilities and retail areas. Key parts of such a system are already in place in some parts of the county, with the Fred Meijer Heartland Trail, the Fred Meijer Flat River Trail and the White Pine Trail State Park being the skeleton for a much larger system. But expansion is necessary in order to reach critical mass where use levels are high. In rural areas, trails should be designed for bicycle and pedestrian use in the summer and snowshoeing, cross country skiing and snowmobile use in the winter. This is the kind of quality of life improvement

that can help attract new jobs and residents to a community.

PUBLIC SEWER AND WATER

For most new commercial, office or industrial development in Michigan, and for all higher density residential development, the presence of both public sewer and water is an essential element for economic viability. In most rural communities, these public services are either in limited supply, or are not associated with a quality road system that has unutilized capacity. Yet in Greenville, Stanton, Lakeview, Carson City, Edmore, Sheridan, and Howard City, these elements are all in place. Pierson and Crystal Township have public sewer systems but no public water systems and the serviced area is not on a state highway. Rather than spending significant public and private resources to build new sewer and water infrastructure elsewhere in the county, it is most cost-effective to wisely use the infrastructure that is already in place. The vision, goals and strategies in Chapter 3 and the future land use pattern presented in Chapter 5 proposes new high density residential and economic development largely in those seven communities in the county that already have existing public sewer and water systems.

As each new increment of development takes place, the sewer and water would be extended out from existing lines and linked to create loops with adjacent development. This would occur as the new streets in this area were constructed. It will be necessary to ensure that the site plan review standards in each local zoning ordinance adequately require use of public sewer and water by extending existing public sewer and water infrastructure as each new development occurs in order for this vision to become a reality. It is also important to ensure that new development does not underutilize property. Since property served by both sewer and water is a relatively scarce commodity, and several of the municipal systems are nearing capacity (notably Carson City and Lakeview with 20 and 30% remaining capacity respectively), it is important that as each new development occurs, it is dense and intensely uses these vital urban services so that there is little pressure to develop on rural land elsewhere in the county where there are limited public services. Another important policy is to not extend public sewer or water into any areas not shown as a community service area on Map 5-1.

Small settlements and lakefront owners interested in protecting lake water quality that lack sewer or water service and wish solve a contaminated groundwater problem with public sewer and/or water service may need financial assistance from the county in backing sewer or water bonds. These should all be independent facilities, rather than lengthy extensions of existing facilities. A recent example, is sewer around Nevins and Derby Lakes which ties into Montcalm Community College's expanded system.

COMMUNICATIONS

The lines between traditional communication competitors such as television, radio, internet and telephone, are rapidly being obscured. The lines will continue to blur for some time. The important concern for Montcalm County is to not get lost in the transformation. High speed communications are essential to contemporary business models and to a high quality of personal and family life. Any opportunities the county has to assist in upgrading communication options should be seized. A dozen urban communities in Michigan are in the process of offering high speed wireless service to all businesses and citizens. Oakland County is among them. While the resources available to Oakland County far outpace those available to Montcalm County, the benefits to future job and residential growth in the county cannot be overlooked. While no rural county in Michigan has yet gone down this path, some will. When the opportunity is ripe,

Montcalm County needs to be ready. The early adaptors will have a significant leg up on the last ones in, and when it comes to attracting new high tech economic development (every community's dream), high speed communications is essential. A local private company (CASAIR) has been awarded a USDA grant/loan which will allow for high speed internet to be available to all Montcalm County residents no matter where their residence or business is located.

NATURAL GAS & ELECTRIC

The presence of natural gas and 3-phase electric service is another critical component of new job producing development and higher density residential development. Again, these services are already available in the cities and villages of the county, but not in many of the rural parts of the county. Public resources should not be spent to promote improvements to natural gas or electricity service outside existing cities and villages unless there are extenuating benefits (such as an agricultural processing facility needed them and could not locate elsewhere, and the business would generate many jobs for a long time).

SCHOOLS

High quality K-12 educational facilities have long been a factor in attracting new businesses to a community, because it is easier to attract employees to an area with a reputation for quality schools. This reason alone (and there are many more) justifies a huge public effort to build and maintain quality schools. It is at least as important to ensure that the Montcalm Community College remain a viable institution which produces graduates with skills that employers need. New businesses are attracted to areas that have a well-trained workforce, and the necessary vehicles (like a community college) to quickly train many more workers. This need is currently being responded to by the significant expansion of Montcalm Community College's facilities at its campus in Greenville. Continuing education opportunities are also of growing interest to retired persons and few sources of local circulating income are more stable than the pensions of retired persons. In short, there is never too much importance placed on building and maintaining a quality educational system in a community. While the county has little ability to influence decisions related to improvements to public schools, it should always help facilitate decisions that improve the economic competitiveness of the county and that help to better meet the educational needs of its citizens. When it comes to siting new school facilities, the county should be an active player and attempt to strongly influence siting decisions so that new school facilities are located in already developed or developing areas and strongly discourage, the location of new schools in rural locations without adequate public roads, sewer and water facilities.

MEDICAL FACILITIES

Rural communities are often at a significant disadvantage when it comes to attracting new jobs because they have limited medical facilities. However, Montcalm County has a much broader range of medical facilities (and even four hospitals—in Greenville, Lakeview, Carson City and Sheridan) within the county than is typical. Again this is an economic development and quality of life asset that should not be overlooked. As with schools, the county has little direct ability to influence the scope and quality of available medical facilities, but it should always try to facilitate improvements that enhance the ability to attract new jobs and better meet the medical needs of its residents.

POLICE AND FIRE FACILITIES

Presently the police, firefighting and EMS services within Montcalm County are being

adequately met through a series of inter-jurisdictional cooperative agreements. This is a great way to cost-effectively provide the needed services. However, future physical facilities like fire halls and police stations should be located within established developed areas so that these new public facilities do not contribute to sprawl. Continued cooperation in the provision of these services is key to keeping them fiscally viable.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT FACILITIES

The same can be said about city, village, township and county general government buildings. They should be located within established cities, villages or well developed suburban areas—not in the "middle of nowhere." Where and how the public spends infrastructure dollars greatly influences private sector spending on new development. The public sector should lead by engaging in new facility siting practices that result in locations that are consistent with the policies of this Plan. Similarly, the public should always build buildings using quality materials that last, and use well designed exteriors so as to set the bar on quality design for the private sector to emulate.

PARKS & RECREATION FACILITIES

Last but not least, the number, size, location and characteristics of public parks and recreation facilities in the county has a lot to do with citizen contentment over quality of life. The five state game areas and Huron-Manistee National Forest land in Montcalm County are very important resources in this regard, but alone they cannot meet the daily recreation needs of local citizens. Active living leads to healthy people and high satisfaction over living choices. It also leads to fewer and often less serious medical needs. Thus, it is important that local parks and recreation facilities be constructed and maintained in locations that best meet the needs of the people who will use them. The county has a County Park and Recreation Plan that contains an inventory of existing county park and recreation facilities, needs and a strategy for future improvements. The county owns six recreation areas totaling almost 200 acres, but they are primarily concentrated in the northwest part of the county and not all areas of the county are adequately served with park and recreation facilities. The County Park and Recreation Plan is a prerequisite to eligibility for state and federal funds targeted at park and recreation facilities. It is very important for the county to continue to prepare and update the County Park and Recreation Plan at least every five years, and then to pursue state and federal funds to help pay for future parkland acquisition and improvement. Of course some county and local funds will be necessary to meet match requirements on grants, but parks are basic elements of local quality of life which are essential to citizen happiness. This is true, whether you are a local resident, a visitor or a potential new employer eyeing the area for quality of life indicators. Besides, paying for a fraction of a park or recreation facility while another governmental level pays for the rest, is only fiscally sound common sense if the facility is properly designed and located for cost-effective future use.

Chapter 7

INTERJURISDICTIONAL COORDINATION & PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

INTRODUCTION

As important a benchmark as this General Plan represents, the initiatives proposed in this Plan will not implement themselves. It will take the concerted efforts of citizens, elected officials and local and county administrative officials to bring this Plan from concept into reality. It will take continued support and commitment for many years. However, the goals of this Plan and the strategies proposed to implement it offer the promise of a much better future than that likely to occur if recent trends continue unchanged.

Benefits to all groups will be numerous and most visible in terms of an increased quality of life that can attract new businesses and jobs, and greater satisfaction of residents. An increased quality of life comes from new jobs, an enhanced agricultural sector, creation of more distinctive residential neighborhoods and commercial areas and retention of the rural scenic character of the landscape. Many indirect benefits will also occur. These include improved access to information needed for decision-making and better cooperation among units of government.

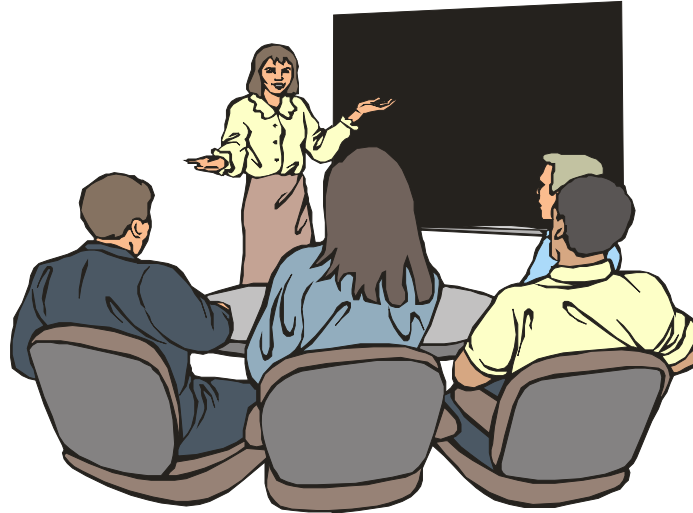
The central ingredients to successful Plan implementation will be:

- Commitment by the County Planning Commission, the County Board of Commissioners, citizens and support from local units of government. Implementation of the General Plan will require the county and local governments, businesses and citizens to drop some old habits and adopt some new approaches. This is not always easy to do. However, the desired vision will not be reached without commitment by all involved.
- A better educated citizenry and local officials. While many citizens and officials want trends to change, they lack the knowledge to make them change or do not understand the cause and effect link of actions they take on an ongoing basis. Information about more appropriate residential development patterns, the fiscal and land use constraints of extending urban services, modern farming and forestry methods, scenery and open space preservation, natural resource protection and other tools to sustain the quality of life in Montcalm County need to reach citizens and officials or they will not understand why and how local decision-making must change. The Montcalm County Fact Book, the internet based Community Information System and this Plan are important first steps in helping to improve future land use decision making. See Figure 7-1.

FOCUSING ON PRIORITIES

It is easy for a Planning Commission at either the county or local level to become distracted with ongoing tasks or ad hoc, controversial issues. Still, the Commission needs to prioritize its tasks. Time needs to be set aside for high priority items. These include the preparation of an annual report and work program for the next year, and when appropriate, the five-year Plan update. These are discussed below.

Figure 7-1
Education is the Top Implementation Priority of the
Montcalm County General Plan



Annual Tasks

An annual report on all activities undertaken by the County Planning Commission with a special focus on actions taken to implement the Plan should be made to the County Board of Commissioners. A proposed work program that identifies priorities and projected expenses for the next year should also be prepared and submitted in time to be included in the annual budget process. The Planning Commission should begin reviewing all proposed new public facilities in the county for consistency with the Plan. Periodically, and at least once each five years, the General Plan should be thoroughly reviewed and updated by the County Planning Commission.

Top Priorities

The Planning Commission can not be expected to accomplish all of the strategies listed in the goals, objectives and strategies. Many of these can only be accomplished by other agencies or groups. It is important that discussions begin with those groups so that they understand the goals, find agreeable common ground where there are differences and obtain a commitment to the action.

One approach to establishing priorities is to use the following standards:

- Make a high priority of those actions that are the precursor to other steps. One example is the recommendation in Chapter 4 to develop a 5-year countywide strategic economic and community development plan.
- Those actions that are assigned to a particular group are a high priority.
- A lower priority may be those actions that are not assigned to a group or that broadly identify the "county," as the responsible party.
- If an action does not list a responsible party, it remains a lower priority until a group or agency steps forward to take ownership of it.

The following activities should be the key priorities of the Planning Commission for the next five years:

- Continue to educate all local units of government in the county about the vision, goals, objectives and strategies of the County General Plan and provide technical assistance in the integration of these elements into local plans and zoning decisions.
- Educate all citizens about the vision, goals, objectives and strategies of the updated County General Plan and provide technical assistance in the integration of these elements into property owner development and redevelopment efforts.
- Directly use this Plan in the analysis and review of proposed rezonings, zoning text amendments, and new or amended master plans submitted to the County Planning Commission for statutory review and approval. This means recommending approval for actions consistent with the Plan and denial or modification for actions inconsistent with this Plan.
- Exercise review authority in ways to improve local decisions by guiding decisions toward integrated and coordinated solutions based on the core objectives and strategies in this Plan.
- Provide training and technical assistance to local governments on general planning, zoning and capital improvement programming. Many County Planning Commissions in Michigan host an annual one day conference for local governments in the County, others offer periodic workshops on key topics. Both are great ways to meet the local planning commission education needs in the land use arena.
- Monitor local and county agency decisions and periodically inform local governments and the County Board of Commissioners on the status of efforts to improve land use decision making in Montcalm County.
- Strongly advocate that the county budget and provide for digital oblique air photos of all the land in the county. These photos should be taken during upcoming flights in cooperation with surrounding counties and with the support of local units of government.
- Strongly advocate that FEMA complete mapping of floodplains throughout the county.
- Join efforts with others outside the county to modernize planning and zoning enabling legislation and to authorize new tools to better manage growth and preserve open space.
- Update the Montcalm County Data Book online on at least on bi-annual basis and major updates to hard copy consistent with the next update to the Plan in late 2013 utilizing the new 2010 Census data.

The County Planning Commission should also be involved with others and champion the preparation of the following additional plans in the county:

- A county transportation plan
- A county strategic economic and community development plan
- Access management plans for M-57, M-66, M-46 and M-91.
- An agricultural protection plan in conjunction with townships with zoning, so that farmers in the county are eligible to participate in the state PDR program.
- Watershed management plans of each river watershed and major lake watersheds.
- A greenspace plan for a linked system of greenspaces throughout the county.
- Periodic updates to the Montcalm County Recreational Plan. The number of county parks should be expanded per the Montcalm County Recreational Plan, but special attention should be given to establishment of new county parks in the parts of the county without any.

ADDRESSING ISSUES OF GREATER THAN LOCAL CONCERN

Local jurisdictions frequently face issues that have implications beyond the jurisdiction (both intra-county and inter-county). Public interests that are broader than simply local interests include (but are not limited to) those in Table 7-1. Examples of common issues of greater than local concern are illustrated in Figure 7-2.

Figure 7-2
Examples of Issues of Greater than Local Concern

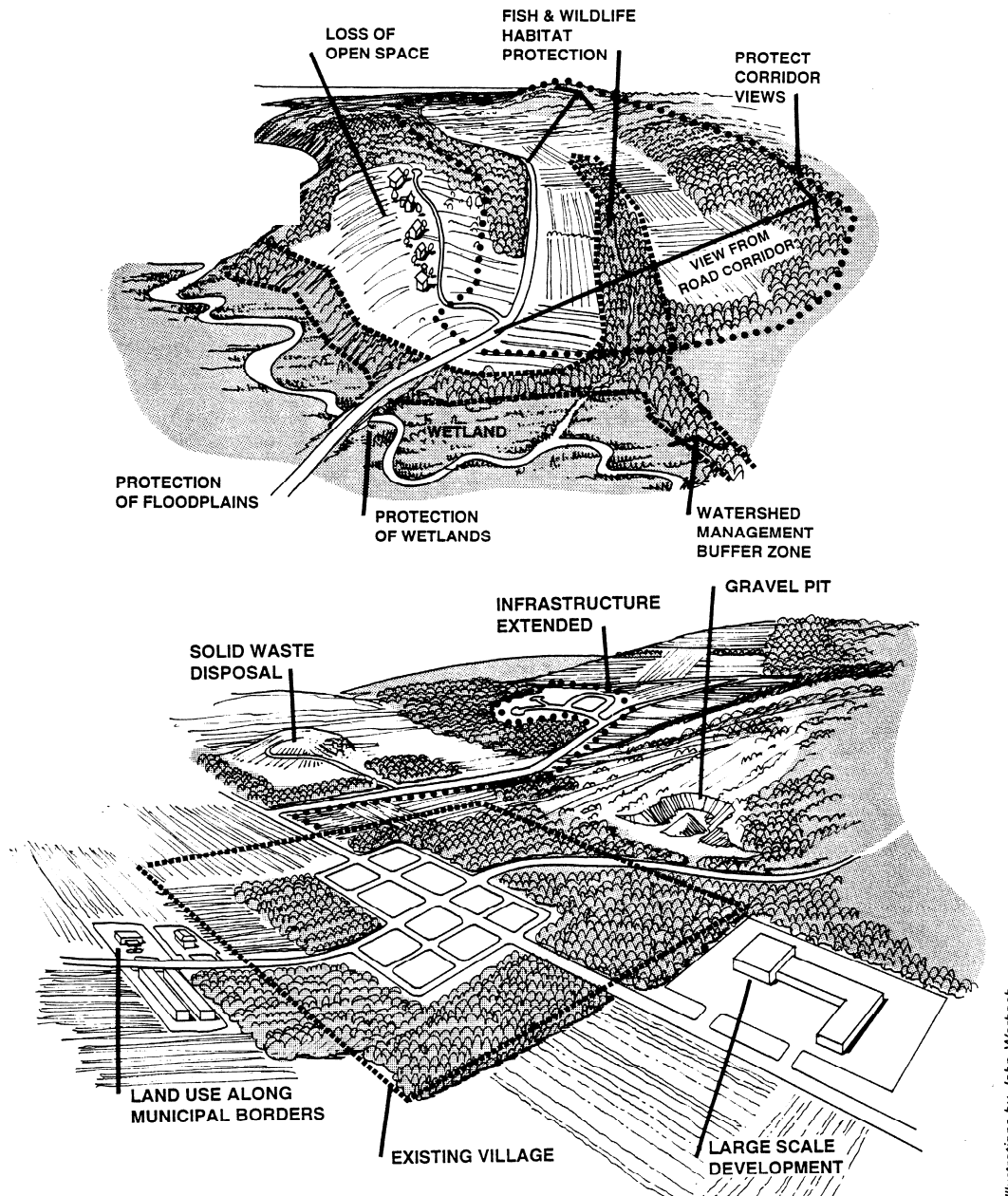


Table 7-1 Issues of Greater than Local Concern

Protecting the Environment and Natural Resources

- Watersheds and water quality
- Wetlands protection
- Floodplain protection
- Land pollution (contaminated sites)
- Soil conservation and stormwater pollution
- Air pollution
- Groundwater pollution
- Oil and gas pollution
- Noise pollution
- Water pollution of inland lakes, rivers and streams
- Protection of areas with steep slopes
- Wildlife corridors and fish and wildlife habitat protection
- Protection of unique and endangered species
- Protection of agricultural land
- Sustainability of privately owned forest land
- Water surfaces that are under control of multiple local jurisdictions, especially as relates to keyhole development
- Use of public access sites
- Maintaining a “sense of place” where that sense is the major attraction for tourists and the service sector economy.

Siting Public Facilities or Providing New Public Services

- Solid waste and recycling
- Emergency services (fire, ambulance, police) – to achieve greater efficiency
- Transportation/roads
- Public transportation
- Trails (siting of) – federal, state, local, and property owners
- "Regional" park facilities
- District library and district boundaries for libraries
- Mental and other health facilities
- Provision of senior services – location of facilities, including handicapped services
- Extension of sewer and water utilities
- Schools (especially if a new school, or consolidation of schools is considered)

Maintaining a Sustainable Economy and Promoting Economic Development

- Real (livable) wages, job opportunities for young adults and families with children
- Adequate lifelong educational opportunities for all citizens: health of the Montcalm Community College
- Adequate affordable housing for middle and low income persons.

Table 7-1 (Continued) Issues of Greater than Local Concern

Land Use

- LULU's (locally unwanted land uses that meet a regional need), such as gravel pits, junk yards, landfills, communication towers, electric generating windmills, etc.
- Large scale development (shopping center, airports, etc.)
- Zoned density in some rural areas while low, is too high to cost effectively service
- Compact settlement pattern vs. dispersed settlement pattern and the associated impacts on infrastructure extensions or establishment of infrastructure
- Siting affordable housing—especially mobile home parks
- Lack of similar regulations and uneven enforcement across jurisdiction boundaries
- Compatibility of land uses along jurisdiction boundaries regarding zoning and land use issues
- Loss of rural open space—especially along roads in the county
- Regional focus on open space preservation and farmland preservation
- Protecting important viewsheds and rural corridor views.

Other

- Interjurisdictional equity issues
- Intergenerational equity issues
- Sustainability.

In many instances, these issues of greater than local concern revolve around common environmental features (which do not respect municipal boundaries), or infrastructure, economic development and the needs of special populations.

It takes a basic change of attitude toward other jurisdictions to effectively deal with issues of greater than local concern. It takes recognition that all the citizens are in the same boat together. In the aggregate, they all face the same potential loss or gain. It takes acceptance that the other jurisdictions are not in competition or opposition, at least not on every aspect of the issue. It takes the ability to exercise mutual respect in areas of overlapping responsibilities and mutual support where responsibilities are separate, but compatible in pursuit of common goals and a common vision of the county. By jointly engaging the issues, common ground can usually be found. It is the common ground that is most often used as the basis for effective inter-jurisdictional cooperation.

ROLE OF KEY PLAYERS

It will take the efforts of many different groups to implement the Montcalm General Plan. Key among them are the local planning commissions and governing boards, the County Board of Commissioners and the County Planning Commission.

The framed text on Table 7-2 on the next three pages lists the responsibilities and roles of local planning commissions, local governing bodies, the County Board of Commissioners and the County Planning Commission as defined by the 2008 Planning Enabling Act.

Table 7-2
Planning Enabling Act Responsibilities of Local Government Decision-makers

County Board of Commissioners

The County Board of Commissioners must take the lead in order to support continued planning in Montcalm County. Its basic statutory and administrative responsibilities are as follows (not all of these are currently being performed):

- As the option to be the body to adopt the County Master Plan
- Periodically hold a joint meeting with the County Planning Commission to go over issues of common interest.
- Approve funding for the planning/zoning program each year including funds for training and continuing education of commissioners and staff, and for public and local official education on planning and zoning.
- Approve hiring of consultants as recommended by the County Planning Commission or delegate the authority to the County Planning Commission pursuant to an approved work program and budget.
- Hear the Planning Commission's annual report of activities and a proposed work program for the next year, in enough time to be considered in the budget process.
- Leave the duty of preparing a capital improvement plan with the Planning Commission or assign it to another entity in the county.
- Hear the Planning Commission's review of proposed capital improvements for consistency with the Plan prior to the County Board or other public agency action.
- Support efforts by the Planning Commission to educate citizens and local officials on a wide variety of land use and Smart Growth issues.

County Planning Commission

The County Planning Commission was created by the County Board of Commissioners on September 8, 2003 pursuant to the requirements of the County Planning Act, PA 282 of 1945. Currently, the County Planning Commission which is now governed by the Michigan Planning Enabling Act P.A. 33 of 2008 is responsible for:

- Preparing and maintaining a plan for the development and protection of the County. It will be the body to adopt the Master Plan, unless the County Board of Commissioner's asserts its right to be the entity which adopts the plan after recommendation from the County Planning Commission.
- Formal review of proposed municipal and adjacent county plans and/or township zoning amendments.
- Attempting to prevent incompatible planning and zoning along governmental boundaries through adherence to the county Master Plan.
- Reviewing and commenting on proposed new public lands, facilities or improvements for consistency with the Master Plan.
- Review and comment on proposed PA 116 Farmland and Open Space Enrollments.
- Periodically reviewing and/or preparing various state or federal grant applications.
- Receiving, storing and sharing data from the Michigan Resource Inventory Program and helping to keep the County Community Information System filled with valuable and contemporary information.
- Providing information and education services for the U.S. Bureau of the Census.
- Receiving citizen comments on local planning and zoning issues and acting upon or referring those comments as appropriate.
-

Table 7-2 (Continued)
Planning Enabling Act Responsibilities of Local Government Decision-makers

- Educating citizens and representatives of local units of government on various county planning and Smart Growth development issues.
- Learning about and staying up-to-date on the responsibilities of the Planning Commission and on various tools available to implement local plans.
- Coordinating planning and associated development regulations with other governmental units and public agencies.
- Initiates and coordinates activities with representatives of other units of government on various issues of greater than local concern.

Local Governing Bodies

Local city or village councils and township boards of trustees also have specific planning and zoning responsibilities. These include:

- Appointment of qualified persons to serve as members of the local Planning Commission and Zoning Board of Appeals.
- Adoption of ordinances recommended by the Planning Commission for implementation of their Master Plan (local future land use plan), including when supported by the governing body, a zoning ordinance and subdivision regulations.
- Providing an adequate budget for the Planning Commission to carry out its responsibilities including keeping the Plan and Zoning Ordinance current, and receiving proper training on their roles, responsibilities and new tools and techniques for improving the community.
- Providing adequate staff and financial resources (including setting fee levels) for proper enforcement of adopted regulations.
- Has the option of holding another public hearing prior to acting on zoning, subdivision or infrastructure development matters.

Local Planning Commissions

Planning commissions in cities and villages in the county were organized under the Municipal Planning Act, PA 285 of 1931. Township planning commissions were organized under PA 168 of 1959. These municipalities are currently governed by the Michigan Planning Enabling Act P.A. 33 of 2008. Some of their principal responsibilities include:

- Creating, adopting and maintaining a local master plan to guide future land use change and to serve as the legal basis for the local zoning ordinance and other issues.
- Administering responsibilities under the local zoning ordinance (for those municipalities with local zoning) pursuant to P.A. 33 of 2008.
- Holding public hearings prior to acting on zoning, subdivision or infrastructure development matters.
- Advising the local governing body on proposed zonings, amendments, plats, capital improvements and related planning and zoning decisions.
- Responding to the recommendations of the County Planning Commission on planning and zoning issues.

Table 7-2 (Continued)
Planning Enabling Act Responsibilities of Local Government Decision-makers

- Making recommendations on special projects or delegated responsibilities (e.g. zoning ordinance enforcement).
- Working with property owners in order to try and achieve good development (or redevelopment).
- Educating citizens on the values and benefits of planning.
- Receiving citizen comments on local planning and zoning issues and acting upon or referring those comments as appropriate.
- Learning about and staying up-to-date on the responsibilities of the Planning Commission and on various tools available to implement local plans.

CONCLUDING THOUGHT

This General Plan represents hundreds of hours of input by the County Planning Commission, citizens and local government officials in Montcalm County over the past years. The circumstances it is intended to address did not occur overnight and they will not be resolved overnight. However, this Plan sets forth another option to a future that will occur if existing trends and uncoordinated decisions continue. Existing trends are fueled to a very great extent by existing plans, regulations and institutional relationships. To create a future different from existing trends, then current plans, policies, regulations and institutional relationships must also be changed.

Perhaps the catalyst for that change is for the preferred vision of Montcalm County, and what it takes to get to that vision, to be part of the "story" of Montcalm County that every resident, of every age, knows by heart. So, for example, if all Montcalm County residents know by heart that clustering, conservation subdivisions, community service districts, and farmland preservation are necessary for Montcalm County to remain largely rural, prosperous and continue to have a high quality of life, there is a greater chance that Montcalm County will have these characteristics. It is up to the County Planning Commission with support of the County Board of Commissioners to achieve this level of citizen understanding of and support for this vision and this Plan.