

# DEERFIELD TOWNSHIP

## MASTER PLAN



**Adopted  
January, 2007**

**Deerfield Township  
Isabella County, Michigan**

# Chapter One

## Introduction

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Located in Central Michigan, West of Mount Pleasant, Deerfield Township is a rural, agricultural community with an abundant supply of open space parkland, forests, and a variety of land uses, dominated by agriculture and residential. The township's location, close to the cultural activities of Central Michigan University, coupled with large farms and the Chippewa River help define the local character.



Deerfield Township has experienced a rapid increase in residential growth over the past decade. In fact, between 1990 – 2000 Deerfield Township lead all municipalities in Isabella County in terms of the percentage of new housing starts and was second only to Union Township in terms of the number of new residents gained between 1990-2000. Some of this growth has created conflicts between traditional agricultural activities and new residents' desires for a suburban lifestyle.

To maintain the quality of life and the rural agricultural influence character of the township, a plan of action is necessary to determine how growth decisions will be made that reflect residents' desires regarding the use of land. The Master Plan serves as the land development policy guide reflecting community goals and philosophies in relation to the use of land.

The Deerfield Township Master Plan looks forward twenty-year time horizons from 2007 to 2027. Accordingly, the elements of the Master Plan are not meant to be accomplished in the short term, but rather to provide direction for the development decisions that will confront the Township.

## Plan Rational and Process

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The basic rationale of the Master Plan is outlined in the Michigan Zoning Enabling Act of 2006, Knowing the purpose of the Master Plan is important for a number of reasons:

- Provision of the Plan must be based upon the Michigan Zoning Enabling Act in order to pass careful scrutiny by a court of law;
- The purpose of the Act outlined in the basic intent of the Master Plan, including the subjects of planning efforts, and
- When formulating the Plan, it is important that the community understand the direction in which the Plan is heading, since the purposes can provide the basis for future goals and objectives.

The Planning Act specifically identifies the purpose of the Master Plan “to promote public health, safety and general welfare, to encourage the use of resources in accordance with their character and adaptability... and consider the character of each township and its suitability for particular uses judged in terms of such factors as the trend in land and population development.” These guidelines serve as the foundation for the intent and use of this plan.

## **Zoning and the Master Plan**

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There are important distinctions between the Master Plan and Zoning Ordinances. While the Master Plan is a guide for land use for the future/ the Zoning Ordinance regulates the use of land in the present. The Master Plan is not a binding, legal document; the Zoning Ordinances are laws that must be followed by the Township and its property owners.

Implementation of the Master Plan is realized through the Zoning Ordinance. Local control of land uses (with some exceptions such as certain state and federal land uses) is an accepted legal principle. Land use regulation is controlled through the separation of land into various use areas, called Zoning districts. The rules governing these districts are contained in the Zoning Ordinances.

As a guide, the Plan is not meant to be rigidly administered; changing conditions may affect the assumptions used when the Plan was originally conceived. But changing conditions do not necessarily mean that the Plan must change. Rather, the Township must examine those changes and decide if the conditions on which the Plan was based are still valid. If so, the Plan should be followed. However, as a general rule, the Master Plan should be reviewed by the community annually, and updated at least every five years to reflect current land use trends and residents’ desires. Renewal and update on the current Master Plan was started in October 2005 and finalized by the township board in December 2006.

# Chapter Two

## Community Profile

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The character of Deerfield Township is defined in part by the social, economic, and physical fabric of the community. These elements combined, provide a “picture of the community” that helped identify the necessary land use planning issues to be addressed. The following narrative highlights information and uses identified as part of the planning process.

## Demographic Overview

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The following are excerpts from the Demographic Profile of Isabella County prepared as part of the Deerfield Township Master Plan Update. The full County Demographic Profile is listed in the Appendix section of this document. Key highlights relevant to Deerfield Township are noted below.

- Between 1990–2000 Deerfield Township was one of the fastest growing communities in the County. The population of the Township has grown by approximately 11% with an estimated 2005 population of 3408.
- Deerfield Township has experienced tremendous housing growth in terms of housing units built in the township between 2000- 2005, which is up 18%.
- Deerfield Township has the highest median housing value in the County. (\$161,250.00). Residents in Deerfield Township also enjoy the highest per capita income in the County (\$29,908.00)



## Existing Land Use/Land Cover

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The Deerfield Township (existing) Land Use Map highlights the major land use classifications within the Township. The map represents land, as it exists today (as opposed to the Future Land Use Map, which represents the future direction for land use).



Overall the map highlights the vast amount of land still in Cropland production. In particular, most of the area north of M-20 is in agricultural production and large portions of Sections 21, 30, 31, and 36 situated south of M-20. Since Residential development has been occurring along most County Roads, there are relatively few residential subdivisions or developments within the Township. Commercial uses are confined to three (3) small areas along M-20 (Littlefield/M-20, Winn/M-20, and Meridian/M-20).

Other land use classifications include Gravel Pits, (the largest is located in Section 19 and 20 adjacent to the Chippewa River), Public Lands (land owned by the Township or County such as the Township Hall, cemeteries, Deerfield Park, and Majeski Landing), and Quasi–Public uses (land owned by a private organization but serving a recreational

purpose such as Deerfield Woods Hunt Club, Audubon Woods, Isabella County Sportsman's Club, and the Boy Scout Camp.

## Natural Features

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Vast contiguous areas of upland forest are present in the southwest portion of the Township in close proximity to the Chippewa River. In addition, approximately 80% of the Township is classified as containing land with severe limitations for septic field absorption. Since the Township is served only by private individual septic systems and private wells, this poses added risk for potential groundwater contamination.

Ironically, some of the areas with the highest yield production capacity are also being threatened by housing construction. If productive farmland is converted to other uses, it is lost to agriculture permanently. Unless current trends change, the continued conversion of farmland to other uses will diminish the importance of agriculture and its benefits to the local economy.

## Chapter Three

### Planning Issues

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*Agricultural Preservation* – agricultural preservation is important, but we want to leave the door open to the farmers to sell land if necessary. For example, large parcels should be preserved but the opportunity should be there for the farmer to sell road frontage for development. Overall, the agricultural character should be preserved for the area north of M-20. Additional points include:



- Keep land in agricultural production and keep residential uses out of these areas (buildable vs. tillable)
- Farmers should still be able to sell smaller portions of their land if needed (e.g. selling a 2 acre corner from a 40 acre parcel)
- One, 2 acre split for each 40 acre parcel would be acceptable. However, it would have to be on the road, and not deep into tillable lands.
- Residences should be protected against Intensive Livestock Operations; however, existing operations should be permitted to continue.
- Do not restrict people from making farming profitable. Do not zone farmers out of business. Agricultural land pays more taxes for the services it receives from the land.



*Housing Development* – The consensus of the focus group was that there is more residential growth pressure in Deerfield Township than in surrounding townships. Overall, large-scale residential development should be restricted to areas south of M-20. Most focus group members felt 1 or 2 acre lots should be the smallest allowed in residential areas. However, some felt that if the soil type, over a large area, could support smaller lots that would be acceptable as well. Additional comments were as follows:

- No residential growth on the good agricultural land. (See future land use map)
- Require larger lots in areas where soil has poor septic tank suitability, particularly since the Health Department only looks at the single site under application, not the entire area.
- Different lot sizes and densities should be based on soil types (i.e. allow higher density on areas that cannot be easily farmed).
- Transportation routes should be considered when establishing districts and higher density areas.
- Keep open space for public use like hiking, and especially hunting.
- Development along the Chippewa River will cause more problems if nothing is done to limit it.

- Private roads are a concern; some have not been improved or maintained. The Township has funded improvements to some private roads to bring them up to public road standards.
- Public sewer is not necessary if new home lots are spread out enough (2 acre parcel recommended). It costs too much to put in public sewer lines.
- We want to guide growth, it's coming our way, we need to continue to evaluate our Master Plan every 5 years.

## Natural Features and Community Services

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*Chippewa River corridor* – This resource was viewed as the single most important natural feature within the Township. Several concerns were raised in relation to this resource:

- Homes being build within the Flood Plain; this should not be encouraged
- There is a need to preserve the aesthetic value of this water resource and the natural view from the river.
- Water quality should be preserved particularly for swimming and boating opportunities.
- There is concern about septic tank run-off from residential properties and chemical fertilizer run-off from farms.

*Park land and natural areas* – Several natural areas were identified that should be preserved and enhanced:



- Deerfield County Park was viewed as an important natural and recreational resource.
- Emphasis should be placed on improving this resource by gaining river access.

## Commercial Development

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- Limit future development to the three existing commercial areas. Some expansion may be warranted for these areas, but keep future growth within these existing clusters.
  - Littlefield Road and M-20
  - Winn and M-20
  - Meridian and M-20
- Concerns over the proliferation of home based businesses that create nuisance such as visible signs, parking, traffic, and outdoor storage.
- Allow the continuation of home based businesses, but put in place restrictions to address the outside appearance and require them to be set back away from the road so that they are not visible.

- Some indicate that home businesses should be confined to a single family residence while others felt it was appropriate to allow an accessory building.

# Chapter Four

## Goals and Policies

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A fundamental component of the Master Plan is to establish goals and policies concerning the future direction of land use. Deerfield Township has experienced growth over the past several years which has heightened the need to plan for future development. There is an opportunity now to identify the important assets that define the character of the township, and establish policies to protect and enhance them.

The first step in creating goals and policies that represent Deerfield Township's future is the identification of community needs and concerns. These have been identified in the previous chapter on Planning Issues. Finally, the goals and policies identified in this Chapter provide the guidelines for achieving the desired direction. These statements reflect the philosophy of the community for future development. The remainder of the Plan is based on the desire to implement these philosophies.

## Land Use and Township Character

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*Goal:* The character of Deerfield Township will be primarily agricultural, with residential homes in rural setting.

*Rational:* Residents strongly desire to keep the Township as a rural, agricultural community, with limited commercial development. The preservation of agricultural lands and homes in a rural setting define the character of the Township and quality of life for most residents. Thus the Planning Commission has adopted a Tillable vs. Buildable land management mindset in its zoning standards.



*Policies:*

- The Township has adopted policies that reflect agricultural preservation techniques that maintain the most productive farmland in agricultural use, primarily north of M-20.
- The township has adopted Ordinance provisions that minimize conflict between agricultural and residential uses, such as buffer zones, clustering, open space subdivision and other techniques that help achieve this objective.
- Residential lots should be clustered so that large areas of land remain open and available for agriculture production or the protection of natural features.
- Higher density residential uses will generally be encouraged south of M-20 to minimize conflicts with large scale farming operations. (Example: Mineral Springs, Irish Hills, Meridian Estates, etc.)

- Soil conditions shall be a consideration in housing density and location, along with other site constraints that could affect the physical development of the property.
- Non-agricultural based commercial development will generally be limited to the three existing commercial areas along M-20.
- Home-based businesses will be required to minimize their impact on adjacent residential areas by adequately addressing such issues as traffic, parking, outdoor storage, and visual appearance.



## **Public Services and Facilities**

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*Goals:* The Township will provide public services and facilities that are appropriate for an agricultural, low-density community.

*Rational:* The larger lots and fields within Deerfield Township make it difficult to provide extensive public services in a cost effective manner. Moreover, it is unlikely that wide spread public water or sanitary sewer will be available except in limited areas such as those bordering Union Township (along Meridian Road).

*Policies:*

- Current Ordinances require Health Department approval prior to receiving any township approval.
- New residential development will generally not exceed an overall density of 1 unit per acre to minimize the need for public water and sewer facilities.
- Before approval, a site plan review is required for land development projects to ensure that adequate utilities, roads, fire, police and safety services are adequate to serve the proposed uses.

## **Protecting the Environment**

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*Goal:* Land development in Deerfield Township will be planned and designed to protect important natural features and sensitive environmental areas.

*Rationale:* The high quality of soils for agriculture production, vast woodlots, Chippewa River, and wetland areas are important elements of the rural character of Deerfield Township. In addition, soil conditions make certain areas of the Township susceptible to ground water contamination. It is a desire of the Township to preserve and enhance important natural features, which help define the rural character, and protect water resources and natural habitat.

*Policies:*

- Identification and protection of groundwater resources, surface waters, important woodlots, natural resources, and other environment features will be a primary consideration of the Township when reviewing development proposals.
- Guidelines have been implemented for the protection of the Chippewa River in terms of water quality, recreational opportunities and aesthetic value (Water Overlay Ordinance Section 12).
- Follow the 100 year Flood Plain map to protect the flood plan area from inappropriate development.
- Site plan development procedures and special land use process have been development for the Quasi – Public land use of natural areas such as the Boy Scout Camp and the Nature Preserve (Quasi-Public District Section 10).

## **Transportation**

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*Goal:* The township will pursue land development polices that foster a safe and efficient transportation network appropriate for an agricultural/rural residential community.

*Rational:* Over time new residential development will likely affect resident’s perception of traffic as they begin to notice more cars and other vehicles along the major roadways. In addition, newer residents may ask that gravel roads be paved. The Township will have to balance the desires of residents for rural character (unpaved and private drives) with the need to provide a safe, efficient, high quality roadway system.



*Policies:*

- The township has a working relationship with the Isabella County Road Commission under the provision of state law, to maintain and to implement a priority review system for improving roads. Factors such as resident desires, traffic volumes, roadway function, land use, and other appropriate elements such as the Township Five Year Road plan are considered.
- The Township will encourage land development along major roadways that reduces the number of access points for individual uses.
- The Township will continue to work with the County Road Commission and MDOT to evaluate ways in which the rural character of the Township can be maintained primarily along major roadways such as M-20 and County Primary Roads.

# Chapter Five

## Future Land Use Classifications

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The Future Land Use classifications are intended to reflect the goals and values of Deerfield Township. The classifications focus on the goal, which states: *The character of Deerfield Township will be primarily agricultural with residential homes in rural settings.*

The Township acknowledges that new development will occur, but strongly desires this growth to:

- emphasize orderly development;
- protect the groundwater resources from which its residents obtain water; and
- recognize that the availability of public utilities will be limited throughout the planning period.

However, it is also recognized that existing concentrations of housing developments may require future public/community water or sewer systems to address environmental issues. However this plan does not call for a public water or sewer system within the planning period.

## Agricultural Preservation

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The preservation of agricultural lands is still a priority and is reflected in the goals and policies as adopted in 2001 Ordinances. Deerfield Township has large areas in agricultural production today with much of the northern half of the Township containing prime agricultural soils.

The Agricultural Preservation (AP) classification is intended to protect active farmland by limiting non-agricultural uses. Densities would generally not exceed 2 non-farm homes for each 40-acre parcel. Lot splits for houses would be allowed adjacent to county roads, with a minimum lot size of one (1) acre and a maximum of five(5) acres with a 330 foot maximum depth from the road centerline before being applied.

Some residential construction has taken place in areas that were once exclusively agriculture. Over time, non-agricultural development will create conflicts with the existing farming practices and diminish the importance of farmland. Guidelines are necessary to minimize these conflicts.

## Rural Residential

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Unlike the Agricultural Preservation classification, Rural Residential areas will allow non-farm housing development and other related uses (i.e. golf courses, riding stables, campgrounds, gun clubs, kennels, and schools), while remaining compatible with farming practices. This classification is intended to preserve the rural residential character of the Township, while recognizing that much of this land will be converted to residential use. Farms uses would continue to be allowed, but meets the township *buildable vs. tillable concept* and thus allows some flexibility in the development of land use.



It is recommended that new parcels within this classification achieve a maximum density of one residential unit per each 2 acres, depending on individual site conditions. Lot frontage and setback requirements have been established to maintain the rural character of the area. Such techniques as buffer zones, clustering, and open space subdivisions are also being utilized to achieve this objective.

In addition, most of the Township contains soil conditions that pose severe limitations for septic field absorption. These conditions warrant lots of sufficient size to minimize potential ground water pollution. Public utilities are not developable in many of these areas in the near future due to the low density population and distance to the nearest available systems. Without access to public utilities, protecting the source of well water is an important planning objective.

## Residential Services

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This classification is intended to include much of the higher density development, which has occurred in the Township as well as future concentrations of residential development that are contiguous to these existing areas. Farm uses would be limited to this classification. Residential Service areas will contain the most intensive development, including residential lots of less than one acre.

Other residential related development requiring a higher level of services (schools, churches, and golf courses) are also included in this classification. However, new development should be designed and constructed in a manner to minimize the need for the extension of public utilities. Furthermore, new residential development will be limited to a size and scale to ensure that Township services are adequate to serve the proposed development.

## Commercial

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There is a desire to limit future commercial development within Deerfield Township to the three (3) existing concentrations of the development along M-20. The low density/agricultural nature of the Township coupled with the lack of utilities, paved roads, and public services

limits the suitability for large, new areas to be developed with commercial uses. In addition, it is the desire of the Township to discourage commercial strip development along M-20. The low demand coupled with the Township’s close proximity to Mt. Pleasant serves as further justification for designating limited areas for future commercial development.

The Commercial classification would limit future development to the existing commercial areas located along M-20 (Littlefield Rd./M-20, Winn Rd./M-20, and Meridian Rd./M-20). To assist in preserving the rural character, total building square footage would not exceed 10,000 square feet and be located on lots of at least two (2) acres. Specific considerations will include compatibility with surrounding land uses (existing and planned), traffic safety, convenience, and other components such as intersection improvements, adequate turning lanes, signal improvements and sight line requirements.

This does not preclude certain agricultural and home-based businesses from locating within the Agricultural Preservation and Rural Residential Districts. Agricultural businesses would be restricted to those directly related to farming and cultivation of plants (greenhouses, roadside stands, farm markets, etc.). The relationship to adjoining properties would be carefully reviewed.

Home businesses would be allowed on properties that have residential use already established. However, there will be strict limitations on the extent of the business activity permitted.

No land has been classified for industrial use at this time due to the lack of infrastructure. Land may be appropriate for rezoning to industrial use in the future if certain conditions can be met including:

- Industrial sites will be located where residential development will not be impaired or negatively affected;
- Industrial development will generally provide employment principally for Deerfield Township area residents, rather than serving the regional market;
- Sites shall be located on and direct traffic to streets other than those strictly serving neighborhoods, and
- Industrial site development shall provide adequate building and parking setbacks, buffering for adjacent residential uses, demonstrate sensitivity toward natural features, have limited access points to the main roadways, and have access to public utilities and services.

***FUTURE LAND USE CLASSIFICATION SUMMARY***

<b><i>Classification</i></b>	<b><i>Density/Lot Size</i></b>
Agricultural Preservation	2 splits per 40 acres parcel; splits lost 1-5 acres.
Rural Residential	One unit per 2 acres
Residential Service	One unit per acre
Commercial	2 acre min. lot size/ commercial not to exceed 10,000 sq. ft.

## Public

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Several public uses exist within the Township and are anticipated to remain as such during the planning period. These include the Township hall complex, cemeteries and Deerfield Park.

## Quasi – Public

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This classification includes several areas that are used for private recreational purposes. These include the Boy Scout Camp, Hunting Club, Sportsman’s Club, and the Audubon Nature Preserve. It is the intent that these areas will remain in recreation use. Future opportunities for recreation land will be explored, especially lands with access to water and significant natural features.



## Natural Resource Protection Overlay

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The Chippewa River and its tributaries were recognized as important natural resource that enhances the quality of life within the Township. This resource provides recreational opportunities as well as important environmental benefits. With this in mind a zoning overlay district was implemented within the Deerfield Township Ordinance adopted in 2001.

An overlay-zoning district is a zone that imposes an additional set of requirements upon those of the underlying zone district. The Future Land Use Map illustrates an overlay zone 300 feet wide on each side of the river. In an area where an overlay zone is established, the land must be used under the conditions and requirements of both zones, the most restrictive requirements prevailing in case of conflict. There were several techniques used to protect these valuable resources, such as:

- additional building setback, lot width, and septic setbacks;
- natural vegetation strips close to the river banks; and
- limited non-residential activity.

Overall, these techniques serve to protect these important features without creating a more restrictive district for land located outside of the overlay area.

# Demographics

## Population

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The population of Isabella County has been steadily growing throughout most of the past 100 years. During the 1980's, the County's population grew by a few hundred people (1% growth). In the nineties, growth has seen a double-digit growth pattern.

Population continues to be distributed unevenly throughout the county with the majority of the concentration in the south-central section, around Mt. Pleasant the county seat. In addition, since Mt. Pleasant is the county's largest employment center, it is not surprising that the three most densely populated Townships in the county are Union, Chippewa, and Deerfield.

### Population Trend for Isabella County

<b>Community</b>	<b>1990</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>% Increase</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>% Increase</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>% Increase</b>
Broomfield	1202	1620	35%	2042	26%	2284	12%
Chippewa	4119	4617	12%	4732	2%	4925	4%
Coe	2960	2993	1%	3139	5%	3289	5%
Coldwater	683	737	8%	727	1%	745	2%
<b>Deerfield</b>	<b>2652</b>	<b>3081</b>	<b>16%</b>	<b>3249</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>3415</b>	<b>5%</b>
Denver	969	1147	18%	1161	1%	1201	3%
Fremont	1237	1358	10%	1436	6%	1509	5%
Gilmore	1135	1376	21%	1436	4%	1496	4%
Isabella	2039	2145	5%	2204	3%	2293	4%
Lincoln	1777	1936	9%	2139	10%	2281	7%
Mt. Pleasant	22,981	25,946	13%	28609	10%	30,644	7%
Nottawa	1940	2278	17%	2278	0%	2349	3%
Rolland	1097	1210	10%	1261	4%	1319	5%
Sherman	1791	2616	46%	3108	18%	3413	10%
Union	5484	7615	39%	8958	18%	9772	9%
Vernon	1268	1342	6%	1399	4%	1461	4%
Wise	1257	1301	4%	1312	1%	1357	3%
Isabella County	54,624	63,351	16%	69,217	9%	73,789	7%