

Chapter One

Introduction

Located in central Isabella County, Deerfield Township is a rural, agricultural and residential community with an abundant supply of open space, parkland, forests, and a variety of land uses, dominated by agricultural and residential parcels. 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.

Although population growth has slowed somewhat, as reflected in the 2010 census which shows a .03% increase, care should be taken to prevent conflicts between traditional agriculture and new residents' desires for a suburban lifestyle.

To maintain the quality of life and the rural agricultural and residential character of the Township, a plan of action is necessary to determine how 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 years or more. 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 over time.

Plan Rationale

The basic rationale of the Master Plan is outlined in the current Township Planning Act and the related Michigan Zoning Enabling Act of 2006.

The Planning Act specifically states that the purpose of the Master Plan is “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

There are important distinctions between the Master Plan and The Zoning Ordinance. 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 Ordinance is a law 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 Ordinance.

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. 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 Planning Commission and updated at least every five years as necessary to reflect current land use trends and activities.

Chapter Two

Community Profile

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 helps 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

The following are excerpts from the Demographic Profile of Isabella County prepared as part of the Deerfield Township Master Plan Update. Key highlights relevant to Deerfield Township are noted below.

- The population of the Township grew by approximately 3.5% between 2000-2010 with a population of 3,188 in 2010
- The per capita income of Township residents in 2009 was \$30,633, the highest in the county
- The median housing value in the Township between 2006-2010 was \$176,700, the highest in the county

Further demographic information is available from the Isabella County Community Development Department .

Existing Land Use/Land Cover

The Deerfield Township Land Use Map highlights the major land use classifications within the Township. The map represents land as it exists today.

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

Other land use classifications include Industrial, (the largest is located in Sections 19, 20, and 29 adjacent to the Chippewa River), Public Lands (land owned by the Township or County such as the Township Hall, cemeteries, Deerfield Park, and Majeske Landing).

Natural Features

Vast contiguous areas of upland forest are present in the southwest portion of the Township close to the Chippewa River. In addition, approximately 80 per cent 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.

Some of the areas with the highest yielding agricultural production capacity are being threatened by housing construction. Once 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

Agricultural Preservation – Agricultural preservation is important, but land owners should be allowed to sell land if necessary. For example, large parcels should be preserved, but the opportunity should be there for the land owners to sell road frontage for development or housing. 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 (Tillable vs. Buildable)
- Allow land owners to sell smaller portions of their land if needed (e.g. selling an acre or two from a 40 acre parcel)

Housing Development - Overall, residential development is encouraged mainly in areas south of M-20. One acre lots are the minimum lot size in the residential areas. Maintaining a majority of viable agricultural land and natural outdoor recreation areas is a priority of the township, therefore zoning reflects limits on significant expansion of housing developments.

Natural Features and Community Services

Chippewa River corridor – This resource is considered the single most important natural feature within the Township. These goals were established in relation to this resource:

- preserve the aesthetic value of this water resource and the natural view from the river.
- preserve water quality particularly for swimming and boating opportunities.
- minimize septic tank run-off from residential properties and chemical fertilizer run-off from farms.
- improve Deerfield County Park as an important natural resource by gaining river access

Commercial Development

Goal for the Commercial District:

- limit future development to the three existing commercial areas
- keep future growth in the existing clusters

Littlefield Road and M-20
Winn Road and M-20
Meridian Road and M-20

Chapter Four

Goals and Policies

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 characteristics that define the nature 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 interest of the community for future development.

Land Use and Township Character

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

Rationale: 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 mind set in its zoning standards.

Policies:

- The Township has adopted policies that reflect agricultural preservation techniques that maintain the most productive farmland in agricultural use.
- The Township has adopted Ordinance provisions that minimize conflict between agricultural and residential uses, such as buffer zones, clustering, open space subdivision and other provisions 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.
- 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 existing commercial areas along M-20.
- Home-based businesses will be required to minimize impact on adjacent residential areas by adequately addressing such issues as traffic, parking, outdoor storage, and visual appearance.

Public Services and Facilities

Goals:

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

Rationale:

- The larger lots and fields in 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 sewers will be available except in limited areas such as those bordering Union Township.

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, site plan review is required for land development projects to ensure that utilities, roads, fire, police and safety services are adequate to serve the proposed uses.

Protecting the Environment

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, the 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 environmental 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.
- Follow the 100 year Flood Plain map to protect the flood plain area from inappropriate development.

Transportation

Goal:

- The Township will pursue land development policies that foster a safe and efficient transportation network appropriate for an agricultural/rural residential community.

Rationale:

- Over time new residential development will likely affect residents' 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 strive 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 provide a priority review system for improving roads, considering such factors as resident desires, traffic volumes, roadway function, land use, and other appropriate elements such as the Township Five Year Road plan.
- 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 along major roadways such as M-20 and the primary County roads.

Chapter Five

Future Land Use Classifications

The Future Land Use classifications are intended to reflect the goals and values of Deerfield Township. The classifications focus on the goals, 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 the 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,

although this plan does not call for a public water or sewer system within the planning period.

Agricultural Preservation

The preservation of agricultural lands is still a priority and is reflected in the goals and policies as adopted in the 2016 Ordinance. Deerfield Township has large areas of the Township in agricultural production, as much of the northern half of the Township contains 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 depth maximum from the road.

Rural Residential

Unlike the Agricultural Preservation classifications, 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. Farm uses would continue to be allowed, and thus provide flexibility in the development of land use.

It is recommended that new parcels within this classification achieve a maximum density of one unit per acre, 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 used 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 anticipated 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

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. Residential Service areas will contain the most intensive development, including residential lots of less than one acre.

Other residential related developments which require a higher level of services (schools, churches, and golf courses), are also included in this classification. New development should be designed and constructed in a manner to minimize the need for extension of public utilities.

Commercial

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 converted to 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 limits future development to the existing commercial area 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.

The above descriptions do 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.).

Home-based 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.

Industrial

Portions of Sections 19, 20 and 29 have been classified for industrial use at this time. 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;
- Sites shall be located on, and direct traffic to roads other than those strictly serving neighborhoods and residential development areas.

- Industrial site development shall provide adequate building and parking setbacks, buffering for adjacent residential uses, demonstrate sensitivity toward natural features, and have limited access points to the main roads.

FUTURE LAND USE CLASSIFICATION SUMMARY

| <u>Classification</u> | <u>Density/Lot Size</u> |
|------------------------------|---|
| Agriculture Preservation | Two Splits per 40 acre parcel; split lots 1-5 acres |
| Rural Residential | One unit per one acre |
| Residential Service | One unit per acre |
| Commercial | One acre min. lot size/ commercial not to exceed 10,000 sq. ft. |
| Industrial | Four acre min. lot size |

Public

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 County Park.

Natural Resource Protection Overlay

The Chippewa River and its tributaries are recognized as an important natural resource that enhances the quality of life within the Township. This resource provides recreational opportunities as well as important environmental benefits. The Master Plan serves to protect these important features.