

Chapter 6

GOALS AND POLICIES

Planning goals are strategic statements that express and define the community's future. They provide long-range direction for virtually all planning activities. For that reason there needs to be a good understanding of the community's planning goals both in terms of the physical direction they provide and in terms of the social, economic and regulatory implications that they have. Equally important, there needs to be a consensus among the elected officials and the Planning Commission that the goals stated in the Master Plan are relevant, realistic and reflective of the overall needs and desires of residents and land owners. For these reasons, it is important that the Planning Commission, elected officials and residents periodically review and revalidate the Master Plan's goals and the tools that are used to achieve its goals.

A community's goals and its development policies are related and co-dependent. The policies are in essence "what to do" action statements that if completed or implemented will enable the community to reach its goals. The policies along with certain other recommended implementation measures also need to be periodically updated and validated.

The following Goals and Policies build upon the goals and objectives included in the previous Master Plan. They were refined subsequent to a process of identification and discussion of a number of current and emerging development issues. The process included analysis of demographic and development trends and discussions with Township officials about local development issues, concerns and priorities.

The statements below are listed by topic areas. Following each goal are policy statements that describe the means used to achieve the desired goal.

General Growth Management

Goal: Maintain the predominately rural character of the Community while guiding development in a manner, which is orderly, consistent with the efficient provision and/or expansion of public facilities. Foster the wise use of natural resources and the protection of environmentally sensitive areas and strive to preserve scenic beauty.

Policies and Objectives

1. Adhere to the following ten "Tenants of Smart Growth".

1. Create a range of housing opportunities and choices.
 2. Create walkable neighborhoods.
 3. Encourage community and stakeholder collaboration.
 4. Foster distinctive, attractive communities with a strong sense of place.
 5. Make development decisions predictable, fair and cost-effective.
 6. Mix land uses.
 7. Preserve open space, farmland, natural beauty and critical environmental areas.
 8. Provide a variety of transportation choices.
 9. Strengthen and direct development towards existing communities.
 10. Take advantage of compact development design.
2. Consider the proximity to transportation and the potential for future utilities as major factors when planning for future medium and high residential densities and economic development in the northwest part of Township. Residential subdivisions, multiple family development and commercial and industrial development should be directed toward vacant land that is within the vicinity of presently developing areas.
 3. Encourage mixed-use development to allow siting of residential, retail, office, recreational, and educational facilities within close proximity to each other thus encouraging walking and bicycling as routine parts of everyday life.
 4. Maximize the proportion of residences within one quarter to one half mile of parks, schools, grocers, retailers, service providers, employment, public transportation and other desirable community features.

Residential Development

Goal: Within the overarching goal of maintaining the Township's rural character, encourage a variety of affordable residential dwelling types and housing densities in the geographic areas best suited for each. The mix of housing will be consistent with the needs of a changing economy and population and will be reliant on quality and innovative site design to ensure compatibility with the character of existing residences in the vicinity.

Policies and Objectives

1. Medium and moderately high density residential areas (the "R-2" Single Family Residential and "R-3" Multiple Family Residential zoning districts) should be located primarily upon lands within Hamilton and in its immediate vicinity. The highest densities of development will be concentrated in Hamilton and radiate concentrically outward. Development controls should enable existing single-family homes, higher

density attached and multi-family dwelling units and “neo-traditional neighborhoods having a street pattern and density that creates a “sense of community” and a compactness that will enable the efficient provision of a full range of services when needed.

2. Maintain the predominance of low density rural residential development (R-1a and R-1 Rural Estate District) as transitions between active farming areas and the Allegan State Game Area and the more concentrated areas of development emerging from Hamilton. With the exception of intensive livestock practices, traditional farming activities are viewed as being compatible with the pattern and density of residential development facilitated in those areas. Rural residential areas should otherwise be protected from incompatible non-residential influences.
3. Even though small pockets of higher density will be created, promote clustering as an optional but favored form of development to achieve desired “gross densities” in the R1a, R-1 and Ag zoning districts.
4. Expansion of existing mobile home parks or construction of new mobile home parks adjacent to existing mobile home parks will be encouraged over the creation of new mobile home parks elsewhere in the Township.
5. To preserve the stability of existing neighborhoods only quiet, low traffic, low intensity home occupations and family businesses will be facilitated in residential areas.
6. In accordance with the ability of residents to help finance such improvements, provide streetlights and sidewalks in residential areas where there is a demonstrated need.

Agriculture

Goal: Preserve the agricultural economic base of the Township and protect the township’s productive farmland from residential or other encroachment.

Policies and Objectives

1. Support the Farmland and Open Space Preservation Act, (P.A. 116 of 1974) by encouraging the use of preservation agreements by area farmers and approving the agreements that are consistent with the Master Plan.
2. Maintain the current two tiered agricultural and rural residential preservation system created by the AG District and R-1 Districts. Through these zoning districts, limit

extensive non-farm development and minimize additional land fragmentation from occurring in areas containing quality farmland and which otherwise remain relatively unfragmented and actively farmed.

3. Encourage specialty farms and related activities in order to enhance agri-tourism business opportunities such as “you-pick”, farmers markets, farm tours, corn mazes, etc.
4. Periodically re-evaluate the Agricultural Zoning (AG) District boundaries and ensure adequate transitions (rural buffers) between other districts and land uses.
5. Facilitate and encourage local farmers to participate in the Allegan County Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) program by supporting PDR applications that are consistent with the Township’s Future Land Use Plan, zoning and infrastructure improvements.
6. As an alternative to the creation of large lot subdivisions and large lot land split developments with multiple lots, encourage the utilization of cluster zoning options in a manner that enables the same or slightly higher gross density of residential lots on a smaller development area. This will allow the creation of buffers, the preservation of consolidated open space and better compatibility with ongoing agricultural activities.
7. Through both conventional lot size requirements and the use of optional cluster zoning techniques, maintain an average gross density of no greater than one dwelling unit per five acres in the rural and agricultural areas of the Township.

Commercial Development

Goal: Provide for the basic service and shopping needs of residents by directing commercial development to take place in suitable areas but in a manner which limits commercial strip development, minimizes conflicts with surrounding land uses and prevents unnecessary conflicts with the movement of traffic along major highways.

Policies and Objectives

1. Continue to recognize Hamilton as a community service center, servicing the northwesterly part of Allegan County. The various existing commercial areas in the unincorporated Village of Hamilton will be maintained and a centralized mixed-use commercial area will be encouraged to expand.
2. With the exception of an area not exceeding approximately one mile southeast of Hamilton, new commercial development along M-40 will be limited. This will be

manifested as "nodal development" at key planned locations instead of commercial strip development.

3. Institute concurrency policies that tie zoning decisions to infrastructure. This means avoiding the premature conversion of existing residential areas to commercial use by tying the conversion to a demonstrated market need and to street and utility improvements that can accommodate the change. It also means avoiding high intensities of commercial development in existing areas zoned for commercial use that will lead to the need for street improvements that cannot be economically and efficiently provided in the foreseeable future.
4. Require large lot frontage and service roads for commercial uses along M-40 to prevent traffic hazards. Limit the number and spacing of driveways and wherever feasible encourage the shared use of commercial driveways and
5. Promote high quality commercial development through the continued use of local site plan review and site design standards. Discourage unsafe and unsightly strip commercial development along M-40 through site design and landscaping requirements such as berms, tree planting and shared parking.
6. Within the site plan review process, implement low impact and green building and site design standards.
7. Encourage new commercial development to locate adjacent to existing commercial areas.
8. Facilitate the adaptive reuse of existing structures and encourage the design and location of neighborhood commercial centers in a manner which complements and does not conflict with adjoining residential areas.
9. Encourage a compatible and desirable mix of commercial uses.
10. Discourage lot-by-lot conversion of existing buildings and lots into a commercial strip unless a unified plan is developed that will result in shared and secondary access.

Industrial Development

Goal: Encourage the location of non-polluting light industry in the area without damaging the environment, spoiling the scenic beauty of the area or overburdening local roads, utilities, or other public services.

Policies and Objectives:

1. Industrial sites should offer significant benefits to the local community and be in close proximity to M-40.
2. Encourage new industries to locate contiguously to existing industrial areas and in locations having adequate electric and gas and solid waste disposal services to minimize service costs and negative impacts on other land uses.
3. Utilize site plan requirements for light industries and require generous amounts of open space, attractive landscaping and buffering for sensitive non-industrial uses that are adjacent

Environment and Open Space

Goal: The environment and natural beauty of the rivers and streams must be protected and the Township's natural resources conserved. New development must take place in an environmentally consistent and sound manner and the potential for flood hazard, soil erosion, disturbances to the natural drainage network and surface and groundwater contamination must be minimized.

Policies and Objectives:

1. Protect local rivers, streams and wetlands from the encroachment of new development through the enforcement of existing "Natural River's Overlay" zoning. Substantially limit development in flood prone areas.
2. Implement low impact design standards for commercial and industrial development and private streets.
3. Through zoning and site plan review, encourage approaches to land development that take natural features such soils, topography, steep slopes, hydrology, and natural vegetation into account in the process of site design.
4. Work with the State of Michigan to maintain the Allegan State Game area as one of the pre-eminent wildlife and multi-use open spaces areas of the state and support its long term viability through local land use policies that are consistent with its existence.
5. Protect wildlife corridors and areas of natural habitat through zoning, easement donation/purchase.
6. Institute wellhead protection measures in commercial and industrial areas to avoid contamination of ground water drinking supplies. Incorporating ground water protection

guidelines in site plan review standards of the zoning ordinance.

Intergovernmental Cooperation

Goal: Through inter-jurisdictional cooperation, regional land use issues will be coordinated and Heath Township will be serviced by high quality transportation, health and safety services.

Policies and Objectives:

1. Recognize and coordinate the Heath Township Master Plan and Zoning Ordinance with the plans and zoning ordinances of adjacent units of government and where possible eliminate land use conflicts.
2. Collaborate with neighboring communities to maintain and improve regional health facilities and fire and emergency response services.
3. Explore and undertake methods to improve communication among neighboring municipalities.
4. Identify potential and desirable joint-planning activities, such as transportation and utilities improvement, and identify legislative and political barriers to achieving partnership.

Streets and Transportation

Goal: Maximize the efficiency, safety and ease of maintenance of the road system. Make provisions for road improvements that will promote growth in a way that is consistent with adopted goals and policies relating to land use. In addition, provide safe and comfortable routes for walking, and bicycling, and when feasible, public transportation. This will enable convenient and active travel as part of everyone's daily activities, thereby improving health, reducing pollution and meeting the needs of all users of the streets, including children, families, older adults, and people with disabilities.

Policies and Objectives:

1. Limit the number of driveways along major highway arterials by encouraging the shared use of driveways by commercial establishments and other major uses through site plan review.
2. Encourage clustered development.
3. Maintain reasonable minimum standards for private streets while insuring that private

streets do not interfere with the logical extension of the public road system or conflict with farmland preservation goals.

4. Establish priorities for incremental road improvements based on the Master Plan and areas of highest need.
5. Improve concurrency policies relative to the adequacy of roads prior to rezoning and development.
6. Improve cooperation with the Allegan County Road Commission so that routes for future roads and non-motorized trails are planned and coordinated well in advance.

Public and Private Utilities

Goal: As private community sized water and/or wastewater systems are developed, each should be designed in a manner that will permit their common distribution and collection lines to be easily connected to public systems should a future public system become available.

Policies and Objectives:

1. The Township should make private utility plans subject to Township approval and consider the assuming ultimate responsibility for common wastewater or water systems.
2. Recognize that user associations must be responsible for daily operations, cost of service and normal maintenance but major long term capital replacement costs, may create the need for the Township to be the necessary assessment vehicle for financing required capital improvements.
3. Require deed restrictions on affected property notifying all owners that the common wastewater or water system may in the future be required to connect to, or otherwise made public.
4. Where feasible require private collection and distribution lines and appurtenances of a private common water and wastewater treatment system to be designed and built to municipal standards adopted by the Township.

Energy

Goal: Encourage energy conservation through good land use planning and wise public building management. Facilitate the development of alternative renewable energy

infrastructure such as wind and solar power and promote building and site design and that is energy efficient.

Policies and Objectives:

1. Enact and utilize reasonable regulations that allow the development of alternative renewable energy facilities within the township.
2. To limit the number and length of trips generated by new development, encourage higher density residential development near areas having shopping and services.

Public Safety and Emergency Services

Goal: Provide police, fire, and emergency services consistent with public needs and the ability to finance improvements in the most cost effective manner for the Township.

Policies and Objectives:

1. Maintain a close, cooperative relationship with the Allegan County Sheriff's Department to ensure adequate police protection.
2. Maintain the Township's voluntary fire department and mutual aid relationship with neighboring communities.
3. Periodically review enforcement and compliance with local zoning ordinances to ensure an appropriate degree of enforcement and compliance.
4. Supply adequate training and staffing for enforcement officials.
5. Maintain communication between the Planning Commission, Township Board and Building/Zoning Officials to ensure ordinance and policy implementation and the monitoring of development activities.

Recreation

Goal: Provide for diverse recreational opportunities for all resident population groups.

Policies.

1. Consider developing a recreation plan that identifies the recreational needs of the community and sets forth a strategy for the acquisition and development of recreational facilities.
2. Work closely with Allegan County, adjacent townships and the school districts in the provision of recreational facilities that can be used by area wide residents.