

Chapter 7

FUTURE LAND USE

The Future Land Use Plan will serve as a guide for the community's vision. It is based on an analysis of land use issues facing Heath Township, existing land use and conditions, demographic and housing statistics, environmental and physical limitations and resources, regional transportation influences and public input session, and the goals and objectives set forth established as part of the process.

PLANNING PRINCIPLES

There are three basic land use planning principles that were used as guides in establishing the Future land Use plan for Township. They are general principles and were applied to all land use categories:

Foster a Sense of Community.

Promote development which builds upon existing community center of Hamilton. Where allowed, rural residential clusters of homes should use natural and man-made boundaries and landmarks to create defined neighborhoods as well as sufficient buffers to and for nearby agricultural operations.

Utilization and Preservation of Agricultural and Protection of Natural Systems

Land fragmentation and the proliferation of non-farm residences within the rural areas can disrupt the efficiency of farm operations and create irreconcilable land use conflicts. New development should be directed and encouraged to locate where soils, topography and existing land use patterns are naturally conducive to modern agricultural enterprises.

In addition to farmland, natural areas and open space define the areas rural character, provide recharge for groundwater and drinking water and provide numerous recreation opportunities. Special consideration should be given to protect environmentally sensitive areas, particularly along streams of Township. Watershed focused land use planning tools should be used to protect riparian wetlands, and floodplains. The preservation of key natural, undeveloped areas is vital to aquatic habits and wildlife populations.

Smart Growth-Efficiency and Compactness

Major development activity, whether as singular project or as a series of smaller proposals with a collectively large impact, should be directed to locations where the use of the existing and already programmed or planned public investment in capital improvements can be maximized. Significant Development should only be allowed to occur when the infrastructure, (roads and utilities) are capable of supporting and sustaining it.

FUTURE LAND USE CLASSIFICATIONS AND ZONING PLAN

The following descriptions of the future land use classifications explain the type, intensity and location of the proposed uses. The Future Land Use Map included at the end of this chapter illustrates the geographic relationships of each.

Agricultural and Rural Preservation Classification/AG (Corresponds with AG Agricultural Zoning District)

This planning category is established to accomplish the following:

- To promote farming activities as the primary land use in the privately held areas of the Township that are best suited for farming and to conserve as long as practical, the Township's most productive agricultural land.
- To preserve woodlands and wetlands often associated with farm size parcels. These features are useful as water retention, surface water purification and ground water recharge, and as habitat for plant and animal life. They have significant aesthetic and scenic value and characterize the desired qualities of the rural environment.
- To discourage the conversion of agricultural and other rural land to scattered non-farm development which, when unchecked, not only hinders farm operations, but results in divestments in farming, and higher costs and inefficiencies in the provision of public services and infrastructure.
- To encourage long-term investment in the improvements needed to maintain and expand agricultural production by creating a stable environment for farming and farm related businesses.

SGA State Game Area and Environs Classification/SGA (Corresponds with the SGA State Game Area Zoning District).

The description and purpose of the State Game Area and Environs (SGA) planning category is as follows:

- To recognize and maintain a protective environment for the special and important natural features and resources contained within the Allegan State Game Area and other public and private property closely associated with it.
- The majority of lands within this classification are public holdings comprising the Allegan State Game Area and much of the land within this classification is characterized by extensive wetland and woodland environments. These resources are critical in providing for wildlife habitat, water and air purification, flood control and recreation opportunities. The rural character of the Township is in large part defined by the existence of the State Game Area and its continuation as a well managed wildlife and recreational resource area is critical to the region and state.
- As a local land use planning classification the SGA boundary is predominately but not exclusively publicly held land. It is also recognized that there is some potential for State divestiture of game area lands or its conversion to other public use. Within this classification, the introduction of alternative public or private conservation and resource based recreational land uses will be facilitated but significant rural residential development or intensive infrastructure and capital development which would undermine the integrity Allegan State Game Area as a wildlife and forest management unit will be discouraged.

Single Family Residential Classification

The bulwark of the Township's single family residential zoning strategy incorporates three single-family zoning districts: “R-1 Rural Estate and Agriculture”, “R-1a Rural Estate District” and R-2 Single Family Residential District. R-2 is the densest of the three districts. The minimum lot size in the R-1 District is 2 acres. In the R-1a, the minimum lot size is approximately 1 acre and in the R-2, twelve thousand square foot lots (approximately 3 dwelling units per developed acre) are permitted. While all three zoning districts are now characterized by single-family homes situated in lineal fashion along the major streets with

ample deep lots, newer cluster subdivisions that include “set aside” open spaces and a variety of lots sizes are also encouraged.

Rural Estate and Agriculture Classification/R-1 (Corresponds to the R-1 Rural Estate and Agriculture Zoning District).

The intent of this planning classification is to establish areas where the overall long term character remains predominantly rural, regardless of future activity. Farming operations are expected to continue and development will occur in the form of individual lot splits as well multi-lot subdivision developments. An area-wide gross density of approximately one unit per 2 or more acres is intended. Agricultural operations and activities are also envisioned to continue but are not necessarily viewed as the long term or permanent land use. In many cases this classification serves as a transitional buffer between the AG and SGA Planning classifications and more densely developed areas nears.

The R-1 classification recognizes that there is a category of residents and homebuyers that desire a rural environment in relatively close proximity to urban amenities. The relatively low density of development that is permitted in this classification also facilitates the preservation of wetlands, woodlands and other open spaces, which are useful as water retention and ground water recharge, and habitat for wildlife.

Within the R-1 areas, agriculture is also a significant physical and cultural trait. This is an important planning consideration since farming may continue as a principle permitted land use activity. Also anticipated to occur in the R-1 areas are a variety of other specialized land uses that rely on relatively large acreages. These include recreational uses such as golf courses and mineral extraction.

When compared to smaller lots, the 2 acre parcel size allowed in this classification will provide ample reserve area for septic system placement and will lead to fewer non-farm activities and conflict points next to active farms and to the State Game Area. Zoning provisions that offer open space clustering as an optional development technique are also available in this classification. Open Space development projects encourage the clustering of smaller home sites in exchange for the preservation of larger “open space tracts”. This alternative to “large lot” zoning can often be more beneficial to the environment, more

useful in preserving the integrity of neighboring farm operations and help to better preserve the rural character overall.

Rural Residential Planning Classification /R-1a (Corresponds to the R-1a Rural Estate and Agriculture Zoning District).

The intent of the R-1a planning designation is to provide a somewhat higher density transition zone between the agricultural uses on the east side of the Township and the more intensive uses in the Village of Hamilton than is provided by the R-1 designation. Equally important, it is intended to facilitate a more exclusive, limited range of single family residentially related uses and to restrict multiple family, office, commercial, industrial and other uses that would interfere with the value of single family residential properties in the area. This designation is therefore also used in Section 35 at the extreme southern extent of the Township adjacent to areas in nearby Valley Township where high value residential development has occurred.

It is intended that development within this classification will be designed to preserve significant natural areas and to preserve farmland wherever possible. Preservation of open space, protection of flood prone areas, protection of wetlands and woodlots, and preservation of other natural features is important. To that end, the use of the open space provision of this Ordinance is recommended and encouraged.

It is not envisioned that public water and sewer facilities will be used to server these areas.

Single Family Residential Classification/R-2 (Corresponds to the R-2 Single Family Residential Zoning District).

The R-2 classification is located primarily in the Hamilton core are area of the township and encompasses the majority of the Townships older housing stock and highest single family housing density.

Multiple Family Residential Classification/R-3 (Corresponds to the R-3 Multiple-Family Residential District).

Multiple-Family Residential development will consist primarily of apartment homes, senior living facilities, and attached condominiums. The maximum permitted density for a single-

family and two-family dwelling is the same as the R-2 classification. Because public sewer and water are not available in the Township the maximum permitted density for multiple family dwellings is approximately 4 dwelling units per acre.

Multiple-Family Residential uses are intended to provide affordable and high quality housing for young families, the elderly and young professionals, and to act as a transition from lower density residential uses to more intense uses. Such uses will be in close proximity to, and will provide pedestrian connections to, commercial services.

R-4 Manufactured Home Park Classification /R-4 (Corresponds to R-4 Manufactured Home Park Zoning District).

The Manufactured Home Park classification is intended to provide for the location and regulation of Manufactured Housing Communities (a.k.a. mobile home parks). R-4 classifications should serve as a transition between developed residential areas and non-residential classifications and where the potential impacts of the proposed development on traffic and the character of surrounding community can be minimized by on-site mitigation measures or the nature of the surrounding environment. Manufactured home parks should not be located where they would materially interrupt the continuity and pattern of local streets and conventional residential neighborhoods.

If possible sanitary sewer and water supply with sufficient capacity to serve the residents and to provide fire protection should be provided. In the alternative adequate private community water and/or wastewater facilities should be sited and developed in accordance with state regulations and township policies.

Commercial Classification C (Corresponds with the C-1 General Business Zoning District)

The third commercial area begins further to the south approximately ¼ mile north of 134th Ave and extends to approximately ¼ mile south of 134th. It contains much of the Township newest “highway oriented” commercial development as well as other general service type land uses. The Commercial land use category is intended to provide areas for a wider variety of business uses, including office uses, those uses which generate high volumes of traffic and uses that may include outdoor sales and/or storage of vehicles, equipment or materials. Such uses typically require fairly large amounts of land relative to building square footage. They can also generate undesirable visual impacts and should, therefore be regulated by site design standards.

Developments are not expected to be of a regional scale and should provide for efficient ingress and egress. Access points in the general commercial area will be coordinated with neighboring uses to minimize traffic conflicts and increase safety for motorists and driveways will be located as far from street intersections as possible. Landscaping and trees will be planted in the parking areas and around the perimeter of the site to help visually buffer the use from neighboring uses.

Industrial Classification/I (Corresponds with I Industrial Zoning District).

This designation is intended to accommodate compatible industrial uses, such as light manufacturing and processing, warehousing, automobile repair, storage, and similar establishments. Light industrial areas are positioned for easy access to M-40. It is anticipated that light industrial growth will occur in both individual sites and planned, multiple site developments. Building design and site improvement is to be analogous to high-quality office developments. Emissions into the environment should not be perceptible at any lot line.

Wherever possible, natural features in these areas are to be preserved, especially when preserved areas can be used to buffer industry from neighboring uses and mitigate industrial effects. Site design criteria should include signage, landscaping, lighting, access control, and building design. Where practical, pedestrian linkages to business and residential areas in Hamilton are desired to provide for alternative modes of transportation to and from work.

Loading areas should be located in the rear of buildings. Outdoor storage should be minimized and where permitted, buffering techniques should be implemented. Sides and front facades of the buildings should be designed with high quality building materials such as stone, brick, and other natural materials. Landscaping should be used to augment the natural impression found in Heath Township.

Natural River Overlay Classification/NR (Corresponds with the NR Overlay District).

The Natural River Overlay boundaries are intended to identify and protect critical watercourses in the Township, and are part of a regional effort to protect the river and surface water quality in general. These natural waterways are significant in many ways, including their vital role in carrying storm water runoff, as a recreational resource, and for their intrinsic natural ecological and biological value. The long-term goal of focusing land

use policies on the watershed is to improve surface water quality. Two of the objectives that must be met to achieve that goal include reducing non-point source pollution, and the preservation and enhancement of natural vegetation adjacent to watercourses.

The mapped overlay is meant to designate the land closest to the watercourses as the area that is best used as a buffer between disruptive development or harmful development practices and the watercourse. This simple approach can be highly effective in achieving the stated water quality objectives. Within the buffer, extensive removal of natural ground cover and trees adjacent to watercourses is discouraged. Structures and development and intensive agricultural activities such as animal grazing and cultivation, will be encouraged to be setback a minimum of fifty feet from any waterway. Implementation measures may range from educational efforts that encourage farmers to employ best management practices near the watercourses to zoning regulations that establish minimum building setbacks and other "no disturb" controls on land developers.

