

# Master Plan

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## Columbia Township Grand Junction, Michigan

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## **SECTION 1 - INTRODUCTION**

### **THE PLANNING PROCESS**

The purpose of a community's master plan is to provide guidance to public and private decision makers with regard to future changes in land use and the allocation of resources. The master plan contains information about physical and social features, community facilities, existing land use and economic trends.

The master plan also identifies key land use issues and then establishes goals and actions to address the issues. A plan for future land use plan also becomes part of the recommendations section and guides local officials when making future zoning and land development decisions.

### **ABOUT THE COLUMBIA TOWNSHIP MASTER PLAN**

This Master Plan was originally prepared in 2001 with the assistance of many individuals and groups throughout the Township. The Columbia Township Planning Commission, Township Board members and Township Staff worked with Gove Associates, Inc. in defining the scope and developing the final document. It is not a zoning ordinance, mandating specific land use codes and other enforcement measures; instead, it is a guide to share existing planning desires, pursue community-supported new land use practices and implement changes to future zoning regulations.

An essential responsibility of Columbia Township is not only utilizing the Master Plan, but updating its goals and recommendations for future development and redevelopment. State law requires that a Master Plan be reviewed every five years to determine if an update is needed. In 2008, the Planning Commission determined that, in order to take advantage of new information developed for the Black River Watershed Plan by the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission that the Master Plan should be amended. It was also decided to ask property owners within the Township if they would be interested in having eligibility for the Van Buren County Farmland Preservation Program. To those ends, Michigan Township Services, Inc. was asked to provide assistance in updating the Master Plan. After further review in 2013, the Planning Commission again determined that an update was necessary.

While using the Columbia Township Master Plan, the following points should be kept in mind;

- The Master Plan is not permanent. It should be reviewed for update every 5 years to ensure that its goals and objectives are being met and are still consistent with the overall desired vision of the community.

- The Master Plan is not inflexible. It can be amended if such an action is deemed necessary.
- The Master Plan is not a law. It documents the physical, social and land use-related features, as well as the overall community vision and land use goals and objectives of Columbia Township much like a snapshot photo done at a point in time.
- The Master Plan's maps are not zoning maps. Instead, the maps within the Plan are a community guide for future zoning decisions (such as requests for re-zoning by property owners).
- The Master Plan is not a basis for property tax assessment. All assessed property in Michigan is based upon existing land uses.

## **THE COLUMBIA TOWNSHIP PLANNING COMMISSION**

The Columbia Township Planning Commission is the body responsible for developing and adopting the Columbia Township Master Plan. Amendments to the adopted master plan are also the responsibility of the Columbia Township Planning Commission unless the Township Board exercises its option under the Michigan Planning Enabling Act, to retain final approval. Township Board approval is required before a draft master plan or revision is distributed for general review.

## **HOW TO USE THE COLUMBIA TOWNSHIP MASTER PLAN**

The Columbia Township Master Plan is broken into eight sections, which are influenced by two key themes: existing land use and future land use. While both existing and future land use issues are noted though out the Master Plan, a description of Columbia Township's Existing Land Use is prominently covered in Section 4. Columbia Township's Future Land Use vision is covered in Section 7.

This Master Plan is to be used as a guide for community land use decisions by the Planning Commission, Township Board, Township Staff, business people, residents, nonprofit organizations and developers. Columbia Township has developed a Vision for the Township's future, as well as specific Goals and Objectives to better define and reach the Vision (see Section 6). An Implementation outline is provided in Section 8 to further guide the Township's Vision to Reality. It is up to each Columbia Township resident and any participant in Columbia Township's land use development, redevelopment and preservation, to constructively utilize this Master Plan and communicate its overriding intent of serving Columbia Township in maintaining and further advancing its quality, rural way of life.

## **SECTION 2 - COMMUNITY DESCRIPTION**

### **COLUMBIA TOWNSHIP**

Columbia Township is a rural community in the north-central portion of Van Buren County, occupying approximately 36 square miles or about 21,827 acres. Primary land cover is agriculture, lakes and woodlands. The Village of Breedsville is located in the southwestern quadrant of Columbia Township, and the unincorporated Village of Grand Junction is located at the intersection of CR 215 and Phoenix Road/CR 388.

### **GENERAL FEATURES**

There are features in any community that any resident would readily recognize as important to the character of the area and to their personal quality of life. These features are often the ones that residents will use to identify or connect themselves with a community. Some of these features may be cultural, such as a rural village business district, centennial farms, or similar man-made features. Other features used to connect a community to its residents will be natural; lakes, woods, wildlife, views, and other similar features. How these elements are included in the fabric of Columbia Township have a profound influence on the community's value.

### **Vegetation/Woodlands**

In Columbia Township, various species of hardwoods exist, including Ash, Beech, Oak, Elm, Hickory, Maple, Walnut and Pine. These hardwoods are mainly second growth, and found on poorly drained mineral soils.

### **Native Vegetation**

Native vegetation refers to the plant life that exists as a natural part of the landscape. It is increasingly recommended that native plants (vegetation that grows naturally in climate zone II and more specifically within 40 miles of Lake Michigan) be used because of their performance, site enhancement, and life cycle cost-benefits. Native plants typically cost more initially (depending on local availability); however, they are most cost-effective in the long run because they require less water and fertilizer, and are more resistant to local pests diseases. Native plants provide habitat for birds, butterflies and other wildlife, help to buffer noise, filter air pollution and provide us with beautiful scenery.

## **Open Space**

Some areas, which are naturally occurring or which have been set aside on purpose, add to the rural character of the Township because they maintain natural resources, recreational areas or undeveloped farmland. These include the wooded areas of the Township, parts of agricultural fields, parks and recreation properties and designated natural preservation areas.

## **Topography/Physiography**

Van Buren County's topography was molded by glacial activity which resulted in moraines, till plains, outwash plains, lake plains/drainage ways and areas where muck and silt deposition collected from melted glacial water activity. Columbia Township's topography ranges from a high of 753 feet above sea level to a low of 620 feet above sea level.

## **Soils**

The soil base in Columbia Township, as identified by the Soil Survey Conservation Service in the Soil Survey of Van Buren County, Michigan, has 22 soil types, each with its own unique characteristics and limitations for agriculture, residential and recreation development.

## **Wildlife**

A rich variety of wildlife is present in Columbia Township, providing a truly valuable living classroom of diversity regarding Amphibian, Bird, Mammal, Reptile and Aquatic Species. Typical of wildlife found in most lower Michigan, the diversity of species include frogs, toads, rabbits, white-tailed deer, squirrels, fox, bats, turtles, snakes, ducks, pheasants, turkey and a variety of waterfowl species.

The presence of an array of wildlife means that protection of their habitat is necessary to ensure their survival. Michigan's wildlife is one of the most precious resources. Surveys consistently show that residents value wildlife as part of their quality of life. In addition, wildlife is valued throughout Michigan for the contribution it makes to tourism, recreation, hunting, and fishing. As a result, there is an increasing appreciation of the role that wildlife contributes to the economy and quality of life of Michigan residents.

As with other natural features, it is important to remember that wildlife does not respect jurisdictional boundaries. As a result, it is important to coordinate activities with other local governments on the basis of biological or ecological boundaries rather than on purely political ones. In rural areas, there are significant opportunities for wildlife management, simply because of already existing, abundant wildlife habitat. This makes planning for wildlife habitat

protection possible, by identifying areas of high wildlife value and encouraging development elsewhere. Even with the development of scattered rural areas, large open spaces still may be found throughout the Township. This means that there is ample opportunity for movement of wildlife among habitat locations. It will require strong coordination of local governments and private landowners to ensure that wildlife considerations are included in the review of development plans.

## **POPULATION CENTERS**

### **Grand Junction**

Grand Junction, which at the beginning focused on the timber and fruit industries, developed at the junction of the Pere Marquette and Michigan Central railroads. At one time it hosted a hotel and a high school. Although railroad activity no longer exists, it continues to support business and residential properties. Still unincorporated, Grand Junction's status as a commercial center resulted in the establishment of the Grand Junction Commercial Overlay zoning district to encourage further business development in 2010.

Current businesses include a convenience store, a restaurant, an auto repair shop, a bait store, a liquor store, a septic tank maintenance contractor and an agricultural equipment repair facility. Grand Junction also hosts a church and a branch Post Office.

### **Breedsville**

Founded in 1835 and incorporated as a village in 1883, Breedsville elects its own officers. Its future is not described in this master plan. Local businesses include a convenience store and an auto repair shop. Also in Breedsville are a church and post office. Data listed in the Van Buren County master plan shows the population of Breedsville declined by approximately 15% between 2000 and 2010.

## **WATER RESOURCES**

Water is an important resource in Columbia Township. Water resources are abundant, with numerous lakes and streams within Columbia Township providing recreational and irrigation opportunities for the area. There are over 1,000 acres of lakes and over 20 miles of rivers and streams within the Township.

### **Lakes**

The lakes in Columbia Township are what draw many people. Lakes are valuable for the array of recreational, agricultural and economic opportunities that they offer. Lakes provide a community with extensive opportunities for recreation in

every season. People visit lakes for numerous reasons but one reason that will keep them coming back is a clean, healthy lake. Columbia Township has over 1,000 acres of lakes that contribute to the unique quality of life in the Township. This abundance of fresh water is valued highly for its contribution to the unique ecological, recreational and agricultural value that these lakes present. Lakes in Columbia Township include:

<u>Lake Names</u>	<u>Acres</u>
Mud Lake	23.4
Coffee Lake	40.4
Little Bear Lake	46.1
Silver Lake	50.1
North Lake	60.6
Saddle Lake	283.0
Munson Lake	38.5
Great Bear Lake	166.0
Stillwell Lake	18.3
Upper/ Lower Jephtha Lakes	114.2
Lake Moriah	17.0
Deer Lake	30.4
Lake Eleven	53.9
Lake Fourteen	69.5
<b>TOTAL ACRES</b>	<b>1,011.4</b>

**Black River Watershed**

Rivers in Columbia Township include the southern branch of the Black River, Melvin Creek and the Great Bear Lake Creek/Drain

The Black River watershed encompasses approximately 183,490 acres in Allegan and Van Buren counties; through its rivers, lakes, streams and wetlands. Of the total watershed, 56.2% lies in Van Buren County and Columbia Township has over 1,000 acres of lakes and streams connected to the Black River Watershed. The abundance of water resources within the Township provides residents and visitors alike a vast array of water related activities that they can enjoy throughout the seasons. The importance of this resource to the community means that careful attention must be paid to its protection and conservation.

The Black River Watershed Plan was completed by the Van Buren Conservation District. That plan focused specifically on nonpoint source pollution can be delivered by indirect means such as runoff from farms and residential lawns, paved roads and parking lots, and redevelopment or new construction areas. This type of pollution poses serious threats to water quality and the function of the Black River Watershed.

## **Floodplains**

In September 2008, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) published preliminary Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRMs) for Van Buren County. For the first time these maps delineated flood plains in Columbia Township.

Those floodplains were mainly located along the Black River, however, several inland lakes were also included. Maps which show these areas can be viewed on the FEMA Flood Map Service Center website. <<https://msc.fema.gov>>

A floodplain is defined as a land area that has a 1% chance of flooding each year. Conditions this severe, the "100 year flood", as discussed in the VBCO Hazard Mitigation Plan, would affect wide areas and have a 26% chance of occurring once during the course of a 30 year mortgage. By comparison, lower lying properties which are closer to watersheds and which are subject to the more frequent 10 year flood, have a 96% chance of being affected during the same 30 year period. These conditions can result in loss to businesses and residential properties and damage to roads, culverts and bridges.

## **Wetlands**

Wetland areas, as defined by the National Wetlands Inventory, are defined as "land characterized by the presence of water at a frequency and duration sufficient to support, and that under normal circumstances does support, wetland vegetation or aquatic life and is commonly referred to as a bog, swamp, or marsh". Wetlands, which are mainly found around the Township lakes and areas adjacent to Township rivers and creeks, are described on the VBCO interactive maps. <<http://www.vbco.org/vanburenmaps.asp>>

## **Drains**

In addition to the Black River, a system of drains has been developed to keep properties in low lying areas dry. These are maintained by Van Buren County using funds budgeted by the Township. Drains are listed on the VBCO interactive maps. <<http://www.vbco.org/vanburenmaps.asp>>

## **LAND RESOURCES**

### **Agricultural Land**

Agriculturally zoned lands make up approximately 84% of the land within Columbia Township. These areas include properties that have ongoing agricultural uses as well as unused properties that have been or are intended for agricultural purposes. Agriculture continues as a significant land use in the Township.

Farming creates jobs, provides a product for sale, and provides vast areas of open space and scenic corridors. Farmland also provides substantial environmental benefits, including floodplain protection, groundwater recharge, and wildlife habitat. In addition, the tradition of family owned farms has been passed down from generation to generation; supporting a strong social structure focused on community and family.

Based upon agricultural statistics for Van Buren County, agriculture will continue to be a prominent economic force. However, since at least 1992 there has been a loss of farmland county-wide, as well as fluctuations in the number of active farms in the value of agricultural products and the growth of the blueberry industry.

### **Land Preservation Areas**

Five land preserves are within the Township; two are conservation easements managed by the Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy, two conservation areas are run by the Michigan Nature Association and one is under the direct supervision of Columbia Township.

### **Woodlands**

Including areas on private property, woodlands act as a type of buffer and moderator of flooding, erosion, and noise and air pollution. Woodlands are important to the township's quality of life. Much of the woodlands within Columbia Township are either in small parcels, usually left from agricultural clearing, or large areas where farms have not been established and where intensive development has not yet occurred. Various species of hardwoods exist, including Ash, Beech, Oak, Hickory, Maple, and Walnut. These hardwoods are mainly second growth, and found poorly drained mineral soils that were not suited for agricultural needs. Roadside rows of Sugar Maple are often found near old farmsteads. These "sugar-bushes" are an important feature left over from the settlement period of Columbia Township. There are also stands of pine, on sandy soils and Cedar or Tamarack in wetlands. These may be second growth but the evergreens may be isolated reminders from virgin pre-settlement forests.

Aesthetically pleasing roadways with natural vegetation tend to be more popular than roads with little vegetation or highway clutter. Trees within the public domain should be managed for their aesthetics and for the critical role that they play in air quality mitigation through the filtering of air and noise pollution. Mature roadside trees are sometimes considered hazardous, but they are always seen as attractive and valuable and should be managed and maintained as part of the community identity. To the extent possible, roadside improvements should respect and maintain these important landmarks.

## **PUBLIC AREAS**

### **Cemeteries**

Two cemeteries open to all residents are maintained by the Township. These include the Township Cemetery south of the Township Hall and Thompson Cemetery west of 46th Street. The Township budget includes funds for maintenance and personnel.

Six additional cemeteries are listed on County maps, including one in Breedsville and the St. Francis Cemetery located south of Grand Junction on CR215.

### **Parks and Recreation**

Currently, Columbia Township maintains one park, immediately south of the Township Hall. It is an open, manicured field, which can be used for baseball/softball games. Nearby, the cities of Bangor, South Haven and Gobles have additional parks, as does the village of Bloomingdale.

There are 17 local lakes and ponds within Township borders. Public boat access to many of these bodies of water is available.

The Kal-Haven State Park railway crosses the Township from the northeast quadrant of Section 13 to the southwest quadrant of Section 6. This former railroad right of way crosses the northern end of the township from east to west. At the west side of the Township, at Grand Junction, there is a parking area with a well and pit toilet. The Trail provides year round recreation for walkers, runners, bikers and skiers. The Trail, which terminates at Kalamazoo in the east and South Haven in the west, brings people from across the State through the Township.

## **TRANSPORTATION**

Columbia Township is served by two-lane roads of the Van Buren County road system, as well as a variety of private service roads leading to Township lakes. The major east/west roadway is CR 388, which goes through Grand Junction and the upper half of Columbia Township. The major north/south roadway is CR 215, which connects northern Columbia Township and Grand Junction with Breedsville and M-43 to the south. These roads are maintained by the Van Buren County Road Commission with Township budgeting.

No Michigan or Federal highways cross the Township. State Road M-43 is located approximately *two* miles south of Columbia Township, connecting the City of Kalamazoo to the east and to South Haven to the west. Ten miles to the east, CR 388 provides a connection with north-south State Road M-40 at Gobles. Ten miles in the opposite direction, CR 388 connects with Federal I-196 at South

Haven for connections with Holland and Grand Rapids to the north and St Joseph to the south.

The Township is crossed from north and south by an active CSX Transportation rail route. Although there were stations at Grand Junction and Breedsville in the past, there is currently no scheduled passenger or freight from any Township location. The closest rail passenger stop is several miles in Bangor.

There is a regional airport in South Haven, with corporate and general aviation. The closest scheduled airline passenger service is in Grand Rapids and Kalamazoo.

Local bus service is available to Township residents on an On-Demand basis through Van Buren Transit. Transportation is available anywhere within the county and may be available across county lines for specific medical purposes.

**CLIMATE**

Columbia Township, like all of Michigan, experiences seasonal changes. This means that the area can support a variety of activities from swimming in the summer to snow skiing in the winter. Precipitation averages over three inches during 7 months of the year, with the wettest months being August and September. Table 2-2 identifies climate information for the Columbia Township area, as reported from the National Weather Service station in South Haven, Michigan.

**Table 2-2 – Temperature And Precipitation Data For Columbia Township**

<b>Month</b>	<b>Avg Max Daily Temp. (F)</b>	<b>Average Min Daily Temp. (F)</b>	<b>Average Precipitation (In)</b>	<b>Average Daily Snow Cover Depth (In)</b>
January	24.8	18.1	2.05	18.5
February	26.8	19.6	1.37	12.5
March	36.2	28.1	2.39	6.2
April	46.5	37.4	3.28	2.0
May	56.5	46.8	3.02	0.0
June	65.9	56.3	3.38	0.0
July	70.5	61.8	3.54	0.0
August	69.5	60.7	3.62	0.0
September	63.4	54.0	4.20	0.0
October	53.2	44.3	2.85	0.4
November	42.0	34.9	3.24	4.3
December	30.0	23.7	2.86	18.2
Annual	48.8	40.5	35.8	5.2

SOURCE: Midwest Regional Climate Center

Generally speaking, January is the coldest and July is the warmest month for the area. Precipitation averages over three inches during 7 months of the year, with the wettest months being August and September.

**HISTORICAL SITES**

According to the Michigan State Historical Preservation Office, the Gordon Hitt Farmstead is a known state historical site within Columbia Township.

**POPULATION**

**Population Growth**

Table 2-3 shows the historical population of the Township and County between 1960 and 2010. According to Table 2-3, Columbia Township's population almost doubled between 1960 and 2000 and then dropped slightly by 2010. During the same period, Van Buren County grew 57.6 percent, from a population of 48,395 to 76,258.

**Table 2-3 - Historic Population Trends 1960 - 2010**

	<b>1960</b>	<b>1970</b>	<b>1980</b>	<b>1990</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>% change 1960- 2010</b>
Columbia Twp.	1,374	1,657	2,248	2,552	2,714	2,588	88%
Van Buren Co.	48,395	56,173	66,814	70,060	76,263	76,258	58%

SOURCE: U.S. Census

**Projected Population**

Table 2-4 provides population projection trends to Year 2020. It is estimated that Columbia Township will grow by 12.6 percent between 2000 and 2020, while Van Buren County will grow by 16.2 percent and the State of Michigan will grow by 6.8 percent over the same period.

**Table 2-4 - Population Projection Trends To Year 2020**

	<b>1980</b>	<b>1990</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>Est 2020</b>
Columbia Township	2,248	2,552	2,714	2,585	3,056
Van Buren County	66,814	70,060	76,263	76,288	88,617
State of Michigan	9,262,044	9,295,297	9,938,444	9,883,640	10,614,258

SOURCE: U.S. Census

**Population Density**

Compared to the other eighteen Van Buren County townships, Columbia Township ranks thirteenth in population density based on the number residents per square mile. Non-residents own about 40% of all Township properties and the concentration of people around the larger Township lakes, where the lots tend to be smaller, is high in the summer. Based on 2010 census data, approximately 25% of the Township's 1511 housing units are designated for seasonal, recreational or occasional use.

**Age Distribution**

Age distribution of a community influences the types of facilities and programs needed. Table 2-5 shows Columbia Township's median age (37.6) is basically the same as Van Buren County's medium age (40.1). Approximately 28 percent of Columbia Township's population is 19 years old or younger, with an additional 57.5 percent being between the ages of 20 and 64.

**Table 2-5 - Age Distribution 2010**

	<b>&lt; 5</b>	<b>5-19</b>	<b>20-24</b>	<b>25-44</b>	<b>45-54</b>	<b>55-64</b>	<b>65+</b>	<b>Median Age</b>
Columbia Twp.	154	569	138	602	418	329	378	37.6
Van Buren Co.	4872	16530	3933	18084	12077	10239	10523	40.1
Michigan (%)	6.0	20.6	6.9	25.7	15.1	12.7	13.8	38.8

SOURCE: U.S. Census

**Male and Female Distribution**

Many communities have a higher proportion of females since women generally have a longer life expectancy. Throughout Michigan, females account for

approximately 51 percent of the state's total population in 2010. By comparison, Table 2-6 shows that Columbia Township has proportionally slightly more males (51.9%) than Van Buren County and the State of Michigan.

**Table 2-6 - Gender Distribution 2010**

	Male Population		Female Population	
Columbia Twp.	1342	51.9	1246	48.1
Van Buren Co.	37,803	-	38,455	-
Michigan	4,855,361	-	5,041,903	-

SOURCE: U.S. Census

**Racial Distribution**

According to Table 2-7 Columbia Township and Van Buren County have a higher proportion of white residents than Michigan as a whole and fewer residents in all other U.S. Census categories.

**Table 2-7 - Racial Distribution 2010**

	White	Black	Native	Asian	Other	Total
Columbia Twp.	2215	68	32	4	269	2588
Van Buren Co.	66916	3235	637	613	-	76,258
Michigan	7,852,317	1,391,269	55,723	248,265	-	9,883,640

SOURCE: U.S. Census

**Household Distribution**

Household distribution can influence a community's commercial, social, and recreation needs since the distribution often identifies unique community traits. According to Table 2-8, the Township and Van Buren County have higher proportions of family and married couple households than the State of Michigan as a whole. Nonfamily household totals are, therefore, lower within the Township and Van Buren County than statewide. Persons per household and average family size all are relatively close in size for the Township, County and State of Michigan.

**Table 2-8 - Household Distribution 2010**

	Total house holds	Family Households				Nonfamily Households			Per house hold	Avg family size
		Total	Married couple	Married w/ child <18	Female w/ no spouse	Total	Living Alone	Living Alone 65+		
Col. Twp.	964	693	532	201	100	271	210	74	2.66	3.08
VB Co.	28,928	20,434	15,342	6382	3500	8494	6955		2.61	3.07
Mich %	100.0	70.6	41.3	20.1	NA	29.4	24.1	9.4	2.61	3.09

SOURCE: U.S. Census

**TAX BASE**

Based on data compiled by the Michigan Department of Treasury in 2012, Columbia Township ranks 8th out of 18 townships in Van Buren County in terms of the assessed value of residential property, 9th in terms of industrial property, 12th in terms of agricultural property and last in terms of commercial property. The Township ranks 14th in terms of assessed value of personal property.

**EMPLOYMENT**

**Unemployment Trends**

Table 2-10 identifies employment trends in Columbia Township, Van Buren County and Michigan for comparison years 1997 through May, 2001.

**Table 2-10 - Labor Force Employment/Unemployment**

		2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Col Twp	% Unemployed	14.1	12.9	11.1	10.2	9.1	6.4
VB Cty	% Unemployed	14.0	12.3	9.9	8.7	8.3	5.9
Mich	% Unemployed	9.9	9.3	8.5	7.9	6.7	5.6

SOURCE: : US Bureau Labor Statistics

## **Employment Type**

**Table 2-11 - Employment Distribution 2013**

	Columbia Township	
	#	%
Employed civilians over 16	1088	100
Construction and installation	165	15.1
Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries	215	19.7
Management , Business and Financial	77	7.1
Computer, engineering and science	26	2.4
Production	77	7.1
Community, protective and social services	29	2.7
Law enforcement and legal	2	0.2
Fire protection	7	0.6
Transportation and material moving	63	5.8
Education, training and library	38	3.5
Food preparation and serving	14	1.3
Building maintenance	16	1.5
Health care and support	76	7.0
Personal care and service	15	1.4
Sales and office	268	24.6

SOURCE: American Community Survey

## **Employment Transportation**

Based on the Census Bureau's American Community Survey sample for 2009-2013, 97% of the estimated 1078 Columbia Township workers traveled to work by truck, car or van. 68% traveled alone with 34% of the total working outside the county. Average travel time was approximately 29 minutes.

## SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS

**Table 2-12 - Socio-Economic Characteristics For 2013**

	Median Household Income (\$1000)	Per Capita Income (\$1000)	Percentage of Population Below Poverty Level
Columbia Township	42.8	17.0	23.3
Van Buren County	45.1	21.8	19.4
State of Michigan	47.6	25.6	16.8

SOURCE: American Community Survey

## **SECTION 3 - COMMUNITY FACILITIES**

### **INTRODUCTION**

To properly address the needs and desires of Columbia Township's land use needs, as well as administer specific implementation actions identified in this Plan, a clear administrative structure and related funding is needed. The following section will identify the Township's organizational structure, services, budget and other related information.

### **ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE**

The residents of Columbia Township elect a five member Township Board. The elected officials serve on behalf of the interests of fellow Township residents, and oversee the budget and administration of Township business.

**Columbia Township  
Residents**

**Township Board**

**Fire Department**

**Township Staff**

**Contracted Services**

**Planning Commission,  
ZBA and Board of Review**

**Volunteers**

### **TOWNSHIP MAINTENANCE STAFF**

Maintenance of Township-owned facilities, including park land and the Township Hall, is done by one full-time maintenance worker and a part-time maintenance worker.

### **STANDARD OPERATION PROCEDURES/STAFF DESCRIPTION**

Columbia Township Hall is open between 9 a.m. and Noon Tuesday through Saturday. The Township Supervisor manages the over-all administration of Columbia Township's budget and on-going projects/activities. The Clerk manages Township voting, meeting and related records, as well as facilitates additional duties as designated by the Supervisor. The Treasurer manages the

Township budget, billing and taxpayer records, as well as facilitates additional duties as designated by the Supervisor. One part-time secretary aids secretarial duties at the Township Hall.

## **FIRE AND POLICE PROTECTION**

Columbia Township currently has a fourteen member volunteer Fire Department. The Fire Department is serviced by one pumper/tanker, one tanker, one engine, one medical rig and two grass rigs. The Department maintains a station on Phoenix Road in Grand Junction and a station at the intersection of CR384 and 52nd Street.

Police protection is provided by the Van Buren County Sheriff's Office.

## **TOWNSHIP FINANCIAL SUMMARY**

Columbia Township operates on a fiscal year, which runs April 1<sup>st</sup> to March 31<sup>st</sup>. The funding of Township operations is mainly provided through the collection of property taxes and state shared revenue. Additional revenue from state grants and charges for services, including cemetery lot sales, occur during the typical Township fiscal year.

The Table below shows actual income (Rev) and expenditures (Exp) for the Township generally and for the major operating funds.

<b>Township Financial Statements</b>						
		<b>2010</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2113</b>	<b>2014</b>
General fund (\$)	Rev	303,263	299,459	323,048	309,933	319,531
	Exp	294,881	271,838	269,323	551,282	274,377
Road fund(\$)	Rev	246,985	247,379	239,109	247,432	4,539
	Exp	289,144	232,454	135,047	198,568	146,356
Fire fund(\$)	Rev	228,005	192,859	170,123	168,335	168,550
	Exp	131,255	201,433	432,469	212,190	104,522
Police fund(\$)	Rev	102,317	105,866	102,435	107,482	107,739
	Exp	76,020	85,294	94,603	87,783	80,776
Overall total(\$)	Rev	965,127	936,512	913,915	924,659	769,075
	Exp	749,726	751,884	690,943	1,042,836	804,681

SOURCE: Township Financial Statements

## **RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHER AGENCIES**

The Township utilizes the services of Van Buren County for road maintenance needs within the community. Columbia Township has an ongoing relationship with local service clubs concerning local volunteer and community action activities. Furthermore, Columbia Township works on a limited basis with Van Buren Senior Services and Van Buren Transit to provide services to local residents.

## **SCHOOLS**

Educational needs for Columbia Township are served by two school districts: Bloomingdale and Bangor Community Schools. The two school districts are shown on Map 3-1. In 2014, total enrollment was 1272 in Bangor and 1219 in Bloomingdale. The estimated Pupil-to-Teacher ratio for the two school districts was 20:1 and 17:1 respectively.

## **PARKS AND RECREATION**

Currently, Columbia Township maintains one park, immediately south of the Township Hall. It is an open, manicured field, which can be used for baseball/softball games. Four land preserves are within the Township; two are conservation easements managed by the Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy, one is a conservation area run by the Michigan Nature Association and one is under the direct supervision of Columbia Township.

There are 17 local lakes and ponds within its borders. Public boat access to many of these bodies of water is available. The Kal-Haven State Park trailway crosses the Township from the northeast quadrant of Section 13 to the southwest quadrant of Section 6. The cities of Bangor, South Haven and Gobles have additional parks, as does the village of Bloomingdale. The Van Buren State Park is approximately 20 miles from Columbia Township, providing beachfront access to Lake Michigan and 434 campsites, picnic facilities, and trails.

## **LIBRARIES**

Columbia Township currently has access to four Van Buren County libraries within 10 miles of Grand Junction. These include libraries in Bloomingdale, Bangor, Gobles and South Haven. Each library provides a wide range of reading and visual aid materials for Township residents.

## **MEDICAL SERVICES**

Medical services for Columbia Township are available in South Haven Health System on South Bailey Avenue in South Haven, Allegan General Hospital on Linn Street in Allegan, and Lakeview Community Hospital on Hazen Street in Paw Paw. Pride Ambulance Service provides ambulance service under contract for the entire Township. The emergency services barn at the intersection of CR384 and 52<sup>nd</sup> Street, provides a centralized location for ambulance service response within Columbia Township.

## **UTILITIES**

Consumers Energy services Columbia Township with electricity. Private propane and fuel oil providers located throughout the area provide gas service to individual businesses and residences. Currently, there is no public sanitary sewer service or public water service available within the Township.

## **SECTION 4 - EXISTING LAND USE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Before pursuing specific future land use objectives, an inventory of existing land use in Columbia Township is necessary. The inventory depicts the existing distribution and location of land uses within the Township. Understanding existing land use patterns empower the community to make an assessment of both good and bad land use practices currently found within Columbia Township. The goal is to better clarify the reasoning concerning the designation and justification of proposed future land use classifications within the Township.

### **Land Use Categories**

The best perspective of existing land uses within Columbia Township is gained by categorizing land uses by specific classifications. The following table shows land use category by parcel and is based on Township tax information:

TABLE 4-1 - EXISTING (2015) LAND USE IN COLUMBIA TOWNSHIP

<b>Land Use Category</b>	<b>Parcels</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Residential	<b>1543</b>	<b>49</b>
Residential - Vacant	<b>1131</b>	<b>36</b>
Agricultural Use	<b>157</b>	<b>5</b>
Commercial	<b>83</b>	<b>3</b>
Public/ Exempt	<b>130</b>	<b>4</b>
Other	<b>143</b>	<b>4</b>
Total	<b>3187</b>	

Columbia Township covers an area of approximately 21,827 acres. The Township is primarily agricultural lands, open space and single-family residential with a large number of small undeveloped lots. Water bodies are also a prominent component of the total area of Columbia Township, thereby magnifying the importance of proper land use management to preserve and protect the rural and natural beauty, and water resources of the Township.

## **AGRICULTURAL ZONING DISTRICT**

The Agricultural district, with its farms and low-density residential areas, comprises the largest part of the Township's with more than 85% of the surface area. Farming continues to be a major contributor to the local economy. Its low-density residential areas and open spaces provide a natural setting for the lakes and village population centers; the Township has more than 300 properties that are 20 acres or larger with many of the largest located in the western half of the Agricultural district.

### **Farmland**

This category includes areas used for the production of crops, orchards, or the raising of livestock which have historically formed the basis for community life and which now contribute to the rural environment. This open space and forest areas, as well as wetlands and lakes, are also part of Columbia Township's rich natural land inventory

An on-going concern within Columbia Township is the promotion of sustainable local agriculture. Farmland is a private investment by individuals or corporate agricultural concerns. Farmland, often the key retirement investment of the farm owner, can be more valuable in subdivided parcels of residential land contingent upon its location and proximity to roads, lakes, streams and other factors.

Therefore, recognizing the community-wide need to support sustainable agricultural and land use/water preservation practices:

- Soil Protection
- Crop Diversity
- Organic Farming
- Animal Waste Management
- Reduction of Groundwater Contamination
- Wetland/Water Protection Programs

Tax records list 142 agriculturally zoned properties classed as having actual agricultural use. These parcels total 5000 acres - nearly 25% of the total Township surface area.

Columbia Township will continue to prosper as a rural, natural community as long as citizens recognize the importance of working farms in slowing the rate of development in the Township, and farmers recognize the importance of safe and effective land use methods.

## **Agricultural District Residential Properties**

The A - Agricultural classification indicates an area in which dwellings with their accessory buildings occupy the major portion of the land and can include:

- Single-Family Dwelling Units
- Multiple-Family Dwelling Units containing two dwelling units
- Manufactured Homes which include mobile homes and modular housing unit designs. These residential units are assembled primarily off-site and anchored upon paved slabs or sub-foundations.

Tax records list approximately 1139 agriculturally zoned properties that are classed as residential. As shown below, slightly more than half of these properties are owned by non-residents who are not eligible for Michigan's Homeowners Principal Residence property tax exemption.

In addition, the Agricultural district surrounds several areas separately zoned for residential use. These include two areas zoned R1 - Residential at Berlamont and at the intersection of CR380 and 52nd Street east of Breedsville. Two more areas on 2nd Avenue and 5th Avenue are zoned R0 - Residential Old Plats and R2 - Resort Residential. These areas, which total less than 1% of Township area, contain about 230 properties of which more than 80% are owned by local residents.

Although these properties are numerous, they are spread over the 18,000 plus acres of the Agricultural district. They represent a low population density which also contributes to the impact of the rural environment.

## **BUSINESS, COMMERCIAL/RETAIL AND SERVICE**

### **Grand Junction Commercial Overlay District**

Although zoned Residential, Grand Junction's status as a commercial center resulted in the establishment of the Grand Junction Commercial Overlay zoning district in 2010 to encourage further business development. Tax records list twelve properties including a convenience store, a restaurant, an auto repair shop, a bait store, a liquor store, a septic tank maintenance contractor and an agricultural equipment repair facility. This area creates a mixed use environment where residences along CR388 and CR215 co-exist with commercial activity.

In 2015, to encourage further commercial activity, the Township took steps to rezone to C - Commercial those areas at the east and west end of Grand Junction where commercial activity dominates. These properties continue to be included within the Grand Junction Commercial Overlay district.

## **Commercial Zones**

This category includes areas, with or without structures, where goods are distributed or services are provided. The category includes areas in which retail and wholesale goods are sold, personal or business services are provided, or in which professional offices are located. Structures, adjacent land and parking areas dedicated for the use of employees and customers are included in the category.

Other than Grand Junction, six Township parcels are zoned C - Commercial including the blueberry processing facility south of Grand Junction, the campground at the west end of Saddle Lake, the former restaurant property on North Lake, the propane facility on CR384, the golf course around Upper Jephtha Lake and a property on the west side of 48th Street near the Kal-Haven Trail crossing. In addition, the portion of the Kal-Haven Trail within the Township is zoned Commercial.

Not including Breedsville and Grand Junction, tax records list more than two dozen other properties that are classed for tax purposes as having commercial activity. Half of these are located in an area which extends west of Grand Junction along CR388 and south along CR215 to Breedsville or along CR384 to the south of North and Saddle Lakes. Others are located near Berlamont at the east end of the Township and near Upper Jephtha Lake in general proximity to existing areas now zoned Commercial.

## **Industrial/Manufacturing**

The Industrial - I classification includes areas where raw or unfinished materials or commodities are used to produce a product or service. Manufacturing processes often produce noise, odors, vibrations, light or other emissions that may be detrimental to surrounding land uses.

The Township zoning map shows one area located at the west end of North Lake zoned Industrial that has been on the zoning map since 2006. In addition, tax records list other properties that have been classed as having industrial use. Except for properties on 57th Street and those south of Saddle Lake on 52nd Street, these are located at the blueberry processing facilities near Grand Junction.

## **LAKE AREAS**

Located primarily near the center of the Township, fourteen lakes provide residential living space, recreational opportunities and tax income for the Township. A significant percentage of lake property owners are non-residents who do not qualify for the Homeowners Principal Residence property tax exemption.

Three zoning classifications apply in the areas bordering the lakes. This includes agriculturally zoned properties, with both single family residences and farms. However, the greatest parts of Saddle, Munson, North, Silver, Great Bear, Scott and Upper Jephtha Lakes are bordered by the R2 and R0 residential districts.

Tax records include over 330 properties zoned R2 - Resort Residential which allow single and two family dwellings of which two-thirds are local taxpayers.

In 2010, areas on Saddle Lake, Upper Jephtha Lake, Lake Eleven, Munson Lake and Silver Lake were rezoned from R2 to R0 - Residential Old Plat. An additional area on the north shore of Scott Lake was included in this change. This zoning category includes single family permanent and seasonal residences with typically small lots in subdivisions platted prior to 1967. Tax records include almost 800 properties with this zoning category. 80% of these are also local residents.

Regardless of their zoning designations, the locations and sizes of these residential zones have remained the same since the 1994 zoning map changes were issued. They include more than 1100 residential properties which occupy less than 10% of the total area of the Township.

## **TOWNS AND VILLAGES**

### **Grand Junction**

Grand Junction is a population center which lies in the middle of an expected commercial development corridor which extends west along CR388 and south along CR215. The Commercial Overlay designation reflects the fact that the village itself is zoned R1 - Residential. Tax records reflect 67 single family dwellings of conventional or manufactured construction. Two-thirds are owned by local residents.

Local records show that as recently as thirty or forty years ago, Grand Junction was a thriving community which served as a focus for area residents. Where current businesses now include a convenience store, a restaurant, an auto repair shop and a liquor store, there were also butcher shops, hardware stores, hotels and schools. Over time, these have closed due to the loss of railroad activity and the proximity of "big box" shopping elsewhere in the area. In their places, visitors now find a vacant school and more than a half-dozen empty lots or abandoned buildings.

### **Breedsville**

Founded in 1835 and incorporated as a village in 1883, Breedsville elects its own officers. Although not a part of the Columbia Township structure, and its

future is not addressed in this plan, it is important as a population center with than 150 residential properties and several businesses.

## **RURAL LIVING AND OPEN SPACE**

Open space is an important element which contributes to the rural aspects of the Township because it is characterized by wooded areas, farm fields and areas of generally low population density. This surrounds and is in contrast with the Township's villages and lake areas.

Natural features such as native vegetation, woodlands, wildlife habitat and wildlife corridors add to the natural features that lure people to Columbia Township. Removing these natural features will not only alter the landscape of the community but it can also lead to water quality issues such as increased runoff, erosion and flooding.

The following land use types contribute to this important sense of rural openness - development in these areas should be discouraged:

### **Farmland**

Farmland, in addition to it's economic importance, contributes to the openness that residents appreciate because of the wide spaces used for crops and livestock or the open areas not currently in agriculture.

### **Rural residential properties**

These 1139 properties are spread out over more than 18,000 acres (84% of the Township) in the Agricultural district - a low population density. Many of these properties contain wooded areas and wetlands.

### **Conservation/Preserve Areas**

These areas are used for the conservation and preservation of animals, waterways, wetland, trees and plant life and/or land occupying a specific parcel or parcels. This includes properties owned by Michigan DNR and by conservation preserves and land banks.

### **Recreation Areas**

A facility or area used for recreational activities, including public lake accesses, and golf courses. This category includes all structures, adjacent land and parking areas dedicated for use by employees and customers of such recreational areas or facilities. There are 17 local lakes and ponds within its borders. Public boat access to many of these bodies of water is available.

Currently, Columbia Township maintains one park, immediately south of the Township Hall. It is an open, manicured field, which can be used for baseball/softball games. Four land preserves are within the Township; two are conservation easements managed by the Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy, one is a conservation area run by the Michigan Nature Association and one is under the direct supervision of Columbia Township.

The Kal-Haven Trail, a former railroad right of way, crosses the northern end of the township from east to west. At the west side of the Township, at Grand Junction, there is a parking area with a well and pit toilet. The Trail provides year round recreation for walkers, runners, bikers and skiers. Tax records show properties identified specifically for the Kal-Haven Trail are owned by the State of Michigan.

### **Natural Areas**

Category also includes open space and forest land, as well as abandoned agricultural fields and flood plains. Lands in this category consist of both suitable and unsuitable areas for development. Clearly there are some resources which, if lost, would significantly detract from the environment and the community as a whole.

Natural features such as native vegetation, woodlands, wildlife habitat and wildlife corridors add to the natural features that lure people to Columbia Township. Removing these natural features will not only alter the landscape of the community but it can also lead to water quality issues such as increased runoff, erosion and flooding. Development in these areas should be discouraged.

### **PROPERTY OWNERSHIP**

Due to the lakes and the proximity to large population centers, the Township has numerous properties owned by non-residents. These owners are not eligible for the Michigan Homeowners Principal Residence property tax exemption which allows them to forego paying a portion of their school taxes - a significant portion of the property tax bill. The following table shows the breakdown by owner parcel type in their respective zoning areas:

	Homestead	Non-Homestead	Total
Agricultural/ Agricultural Use	3	139	142
Agricultural/ Residential Use	551	588	1139
Agricultural (R0, R1, R2)	201	34	235
Residential R0 (lake areas)	660	121	781
Residential R1 (lake areas)	9	6	15
Residential R2 (lake areas)	213	118	331
Grand Junction/Residential	46	21	67
Breedsville/ Residential	66	87	153
Total	1749	1114	2863

Source: Township Tax Lists

## **SECTION 5 - COMMUNITY INPUT**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The Columbia Township Comprehensive Land Use Plan can only be comprehensive when it provides inclusive community input. The overall vision, goals and objectives of the plan must be based upon a foundation of statistical data, topological mapping, geological data, urban land use theory and public insight.

Regarding the Columbia Township Comprehensive Land Use Plan, community input was provided by the following:

- Distributing a community-wide questionnaire
- Holding a public visioning session on June 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2001 at the Columbia Township Hall.
- During the process of developing the Black River Watershed Plan in 2004-2005, the Van Buren County Conservation District planners held a series of visionary sessions to gather the input of local stakeholders.
- During the 2008/2009 *master* plan amendment process, 240 Farmland Preservation Interest survey cards were mailed to property owners who owned more than 20 acres of land in the Township. Forty-one (17%) of the postcards were returned with the majority expressing interest in the County's farmland preservation program.
- On March 16, 2009 an informational meeting was held to which the respondents to the farmland preservation questionnaire were invited to participate.
- August 2013 Planning Commission review of 2009 Master Plan objectives
- December 2013 Planning Commission resident survey
- March 2014 Planning Commission review of 2009 Master Plan projections
- December 2014 Planning commission resident survey

- May 2015 zoning ordinance referendum
- July 2015 Grand Junction rezoning hearing
- August 2015 Planning Commission resident survey

The following provides a summary of the results of each of those activities:

## **2001 COMMUNITY SURVEY**

Columbia Township Questionnaire Results - Between November 2000 and March 2001 a planning survey questionnaire was developed, distributed, collected, tabulated and analyzed by Gove Associates. The questionnaire was mailed using the Columbia Township Property Appraiser's property tax list of homeowners. Approximately 1,600 surveys were mailed, and 300 were returned as of April 2, 2001 - a good return rate of 19%.

Based on the results of the survey, the following represent major resident concerns:

- 17% of responses indicated a need for stronger zoning code and blight enforcement. 86% agreed with strict sign regulations.
- 80% of responders supported farmland preservation and 28% indicated that action should be taken
- Responders selected preservation of natural areas (44%), loss of open space (17%) and loss of wetlands (14%) as issues to be dealt with by the Township
- 36% of responses agreed road maintenance needed more attention. Traffic congestion and speeding were not considered major concerns and limited support for improved traffic controls in specific areas.
- 56% of responses were in favor of new retail and service businesses but not the use of public funds to attract them. 53% supported home business activities.
- Responses supported increased public services including police (51%), fire (48%), ambulance (51%) and recycling (54%) but not public water supply. There was lesser interest in cable/internet (10%) services.
- 12% of responders supported action on park and recreation facilities

- 35% of responders indicated the use of pesticides was a problem. 15% indicated drinking water quality was an important issue. Soil erosion was indicated as a potential problem.
- 48% of responses supported more single-family housing and 44% supported new senior housing. 43% agreed to the need for designated mobile and manufactured home areas. 46% did not agree with encouraging apartment buildings. 57% supported limits on domestic animals on non-farm properties.

## **2001 COMMUNITY VISIONING SESSION**

On June 2, 2001 a public visioning concerning public input on future land use in Columbia Township was held at the Township Hall. A presentation on Columbia Township's past and future population, housing and overall land use by the consultant was followed by dividing attendees into three specific work groups. Each work group was provided with Township maps, land use issue notepads and markers to both write and illustrate Residential, Commercial, Industrial, Public Land, Open Space, Agricultural and any other land use issue within Columbia Township.

The survey identified a number of resident issues including the following concerns:

- All three working groups emphasized the need for strict zoning code enforcement and blight control with specific mention made of the protection of property values. Control of mobile home park locations was important and identified by all groups.
- Two of the three work groups discussed methods to preserve farmland. These included parcel size rules for land splits and subdivisions along with tax incentives and minimum road frontages.
- Work groups supported commercial and industrial activity in zoned areas and along major roads. One group saw no need for an industrial zoned area.
- Two of three work groups identified specific street light, traffic sign and road maintenance issues including use of sprays for roadside weed control.
- All three working groups identified environmental and wildlife preservation concerns including the need for conservation areas. Other major concerns included mining, aerial spraying and controls over hazardous waste and garbage.

- Groups all identified water quality concerns including pesticide spraying and public access to lakes.
- Groups identified ideas for improved recreational facilities but were not generally in favor of new public lands. One group suggested the establishment of a web page for non-resident property owners.

## **BLACK RIVER WATERSHED STAKEHOLDER MEETINGS**

The watershed-wide stakeholder and public participation meetings held in 2004-2005 identified desired uses for the Black River Watershed. The following lists stakeholder concerns identified through a series of watershed-wide public meetings, interviews and other forms of public participation. It must be kept in mind that these sessions involved public participation from all fourteen townships, cities and villages within the three branches of the Black River.

- Maintain the water supply for industrial and agricultural uses - Participant concerns included loss of wetlands due to weak zoning practices and the potential effects of agricultural pumping on aquifers.
- Improve and maintain warm and cold water fishery and habitat for other indigenous animals and aquatic life - Participants noted the results of run-off from farms and road maintenance, industrial pollution and substandard septic systems on algae and weed growth; also noted were the effects of Canada Geese and invasive species on water quality and wildlife diversity.
- Improve and maintain recreational infrastructure and water quality standards to facilitate water skiing, canoeing, wading and swimming - Concerns included the impact of agricultural pumping on lake levels as well as the effects of litter and pollution from careless users. Participants described the need for improved recreational infrastructure along the Black River including a trail or boardwalk
- Increase public involvement, awareness and stewardship in the watershed - Participants identified the need for strong zoning controls to maintain wetlands, fisheries and wildlife habitats from commercial or residential development and weak wildlife management practices as well as good Coordination between government bodies and builders/ developers

## **2009 FARMLAND PRESERVATION INFORMATION SESSION**

In December 2008, the Township mailed about 240 postcard surveys to all property owners with more than 20 acres of land in the Township. The postcard asked if the property owner would be interested in farmland preservation. There were 51 cards returned in response (21%). Of those, the majority expressed an interest in farmland preservation.

The Township Planning Commission invited all respondents to a public meeting on March 16, 2009, to determine the amount and degree of interest in the county's farmland preservation program. About 12 persons attended and took an active part in the discussion. All but one of the participants expressed interest in the county program but no one was ready to apply at this point in time. The consensus was that the opportunity should be made available for anyone who might want to apply in the future.

### **2009 GRAND JUNCTION AREA COMMERCIAL RE-ZONING HEARING**

Residential property owners within the existing Grand Junction residential zones acknowledged that there is a need for rezoning to commercial but objected to blanket rezoning. The primary issue centered around problems experienced with the sale of residential use property that has been zoned commercial. Even though the non-conforming use sections of the zoning text are very liberal as to the reconstruction of non-conforming use structures lending institutions have become very reluctant to grant loans in such situations. The result is a lowering of property values due to a perception of uncertainty and/or increased regulation. This concern was addressed when the Grand Junction Commercial overlay District was established in 2010.

### **2013 PLANNING COMMISSION REVIEW OF PREVIOUS MASTER PLAN OBJECTIVES**

As part of the decision-making process for the five year Master Plan review, Planning Commission members looked at the status of the goals and objectives issued with the existing master plan:

- Efforts to focus and improve commercial activity in the Grand Junction area had been implemented by the creation of the Grand Junction Commercial Overlay zoning district in 2010.
- Objectives designed to help preserve farmland, open space and natural areas did not include specific actions, assignments or due dates and had not been completed.
- Many objectives were designed as policy statements, including action words for Township personnel such as "work with" and "encourage". However, these were not located for reference.

### **2013 PLANNING COMMISSION SURVEY**

Included with 2013 winter tax bills, taxpayers received a Planning Commission survey designed to obtain their thoughts about typical land use and zoning

issues. More than 450 responses were returned. The following results were considered significant:

- 53% of the responders indicated they were not actual Township residents. About 60% stated they were in favor of an increased Township population growth.
- 73% of responders stated that rural living was their reason for living in the Township
- Almost 90% of the responses indicating support for farmland preservation.
- 90% were also in favor of preservation of natural areas.
- One-third of the responders indicated they were the owners of waterfront property. 82% of all responders were concerned about the quality of water in lakes and streams.
- By a two-to-one margin (70%), responses were in favor of improved Township roads. Responses also supported increased public services such as police (38%), fire (34%) and ambulance (40%).
- More than 85% of the responses thought more retail or service businesses should be encouraged. 70% thought more industry should be encouraged. 78% were in favor of home based businesses.
- Responders could also add written comments of their own and one-third (about 150) of the responders did that. The highest number of comments (20% each) were received in favor of better roads and lower taxes. Blight, in several forms, also received a large number of comments (more than 15%). Significant numbers of comments, almost 10%, were also received concerning water or air quality, communications with taxpayers and about Township regulations (evenly split between too many rules and not enough enforcement).

## **2014 MASTER PLAN 2009 PROJECTIONS REVIEW**

As part of the Master Plan update, Planning Commission members reviewed the status of land use projections from the previous Master Plan version in 2009. The following results were reported:

- Expected population rise had not occurred reducing the expected impact on police and fire services and the amount of new housing around population centers

- There was a large number (20+) of abandoned homes and farms. This was being balanced in part by new blueberry agriculture
- Concerns about quality of water in lakes and streams were on the rise due to agriculture inside the Township and external sources such as Bloomingdale water treatment.

## **2014 PLANNING COMMISSION RESIDENT SURVEY**

Because of the large number of waterfront property owners who responded to the 2013 survey, the winter 2014 tax billings included a second Planning Commission survey primarily for those taxpayers. Nearly 250 responses were received.

Although the survey was aimed primarily at waterfront property owners, two survey questions were addressed to all residents. The first listed a number of potential land uses for which Michigan statutes restrict the amount local control over site selection and approval. Residents were asked which ones they were most concerned about.

- More than 90% indicated they had concerns about hazardous material storage.
- Underground storage tank concerns were identified by 45%
- 40% of concerns about landfills and oil or gas mining.
- Other potential problem areas such as high volume water wells, medical marijuana, adult entertainment and mobile home parks were mentioned by about one-third of the responses.

Responders were asked if they were satisfied with the range of local restaurants, services and retail outlets to which 55% said they were not. In the place provided for suggestions, nearly 50 responders supported the need for both restaurants and retail with a third of those specifically mentioning the villages or the lakes.

Questions directed at waterfront owners found boating, fishing and the general outdoor experience receiving the most votes as favorite activities. With respect to future threats, 40% of waterfront property owners listed water quality problems as significant. Law enforcement related issues such as crime and problem neighbors received about 40% of responses. Blight, public access problems and overcrowding were individually selected by 25%.

In the spaces provided for additional written comments, nearly 25% of the 162 responses specifically mentioned concerns about water quality including the lowering of lake levels due to water being pumped out for agricultural purposes.

14% of responses indicated taxes were too high. 10% of the hand-written comments from responders dealt with protection and preservation of wildlife habitat and natural areas. Noise, control of watercraft and blight were concerns of about 8% each with fewer comments (6%) about the need for improvements to lake facilities and control of threat to natural features.

Finally, lake owners were asked to identify which of a number of lake improvement activities would be considered useful. Control of invasive species, maintenance of natural shorelines and minimum septic tank setbacks from the lakeshore all received more than 90% positive responses. Development of a noise ordinance and limits on boat motor sizes also received more than 70% support.

### **2015 ZONING ORDINANCE REFERENDUM**

A zoning ordinance change to allow expanded home business activity in the Agricultural district was opposed as a negative impact because of the potential for businesses such as auto repair. As a result of the referendum held, 60% of residents voted against, and repealed, this zoning change.

### **2015 GRAND JUNCTION REZONING HEARING**

In 2015, to encourage further commercial activity, the Township took steps to rezone to Commercial areas at the east and west end of Grand Junction where commercial activity dominated. These areas continue to be included within the Grand Junction Commercial Overlay district. Public comments supported rezoning.

### **2015 TOWNSHIP RESIDENT SURVEY**

Based on responses to previous surveys, the Planning Commission issued an additional survey in the Summer 2015 tax billing to obtain more specific information about three frequent areas of concern. Over 130 responses were received:

#### **Blight**

Responding to questions about the definition of blight, residents selected abandoned homes (38%), poorly maintained homes (36%), road maintenance (36%), accumulated trash (30%) and roadside trash and weeds (31%). Fewer responses were received for abandoned vehicles (25%) and poorly maintained commercial buildings (14%)

## **Noise**

Responders considered fireworks the most significant cause of "noise pollution" (22%) followed by loud music (19%). Road traffic and loud animals were noted by 13%. Parties, railroads and bars/ restaurants were each less than 9%.

## **Watercraft Use**

Survey responses indicated reckless operation (23%), operation too close to swimming areas/ docks (20%) and excessive speed (18%) were the most frequently encountered problems. Buzzing, operation by minors, alcohol use and operating late at night or early in the morning were each selected by 13% or less.

## **SECTION 6 - GOALS AND OBJECTIVES**

### **VISION STATEMENT**

Columbia Township values its rural, agricultural environment and recognizes that its many lakes represent not only homes but a tourist destination and a watershed resource. Therefore, it is the intent of this Master Plan to encourage preservation of both Columbia Township's natural features and agricultural activities.

The preservation of farmland, lakes, natural areas, wetlands and open space will be the underlying community issues upon which future balanced development and community planning decisions should be based. This will ensure a continued rural quality of life for Columbia Township property owners into the future.

Furthermore, the Township should strive to provide a quality living environment for all of its residents, supporting fair and equitable regulations, while not impeding upon the rights of its current and future property owners. Underlying all land use planning actions, Columbia Township commits itself to promote community pride and upholding property values of its Township landowners.

### **GOAL 1 - RURAL CHARACTER**

Columbia Township will work to preserve its rural character and open space.

#### **Strategy**

Increased blueberry agriculture and commercial land uses over which the community has limited control could impact rural character and open space. The Township should anticipate these changes and develop methods to protect residential property values and rural living space.

#### **Actions**

Review Township tax-reverted properties and determine if they have features important to rural character, wildlife habitat, farmland preservation or recreation. Determine the best approach for their use or sale.

1. Develop a plan for responding to proposed land uses for which State statutes restrict local control. These include hazardous material storage, underground storage tanks, landfills and oil or gas mining as identified through the 2013 Planning Commission survey.

2. Update zoning requirements so that developers pay their share of costs of required improvements to roads, bridges and other infrastructure or services.
3. Update zoning requirements to include methods, such as protection for trees and skylines, vegetation buffers, increased lot sizes or setbacks and use of existing farm lanes, which promote open space, preservation of natural assets and which emphasize rural living.

## **GOAL 2 - FARMLAND PRESERVATION**

Columbia Township will work to preserve the area's valued farmland.

### **Strategy**

Population growth and the need for desirable rural living space could compete with the use of rural property for farming. Township land use planning should consider farmland preservation a priority because it adds to the rural environment and because agriculture is important to the local economy.

### **Actions**

1. Update zoning requirements to include methods for preservation of larger lot sizes in agricultural areas.
2. Consider participation in the Van Buren County Farmland Preservation Program. Complete all requirements and submit the required resolution.

## **GOAL 3 - NATURAL AREA PRESERVATION**

Columbia Township will emphasize, in its planning efforts, the special, valued aspects of the Township's natural areas including its wetlands, woodlots and wildlife habitat throughout the Township.

### **Strategy**

Population growth and blueberry agriculture will continue to compete for land that includes forested areas, wetlands and wildlife habitat. To protect these areas, Township land use decision-making should seek a balance between farmland, residential properties, woodlands and natural areas.

## **Actions**

1. Review Township tax-reverted properties and determine if they have features important to rural character, wildlife habitat, farmland preservation or recreation. Determine the best approach for their use or sale.
2. Provide information on the Township website about creation of conservation easements and other owner voluntary methods for preservation of farmland, open space and natural areas.
3. Inventory existing conservation and natural areas and identify them on the Township zoning map.

## **GOAL 4 - TOWNSHIP ROADS**

Columbia Township will promote, develop and maintain a safe and efficient roadway network.

### **Strategy**

The Township has limited control of road maintenance resources but retains responsibility for some of the costs related to bridge failures and other large expenses. It should continue to be proactive in identifying likely problem areas and in doing contingency financial planning.

### **Actions**

1. Identify poorly marked intersections and similar road safety issues and set priorities with the Van Buren County Road Commission to correct them with lights, signs or other methods.
2. Identify locations where infrastructure failures could severely impact Township road use and incur high cost. Make sure the public is aware of these.
3. For locations where failure is likely, establish a Township fund or other financial backing to cover Township costs of potential failures.
4. Set a priority with the Van Buren County Road Commission to resurface or pave major roads in and out of Grand Junction.

5. Set a priority with the Van Buren County Road Commission to level roads at CSX grade crossings.

## **GOAL 5 - ZONING AND CODE ENFORCEMENT**

Columbia Township will continue to seek out effective and cost-efficient means to enforce community zoning and land use ordinances.

### **Strategy**

Concerns involving zoning noncompliances and blight will continue to be a source of citizen complaints. The Township should supplement zoning administration activity with efforts to develop an understanding of zoning requirements and community pride.

### **Actions**

1. Identify and post all Township ordinances and the Master Plan on the Township website
2. Schedule and publicize regular Township cleanup days
3. Establish a Township Historical Commission to build community pride by recognizing past community history and accomplishments
4. Update the Township blight ordinance as necessary to include concerns identified in the 2013 Planning Commission survey and to include current practices for reporting and control of zoning and blight issues.
5. Consider issue of a Township Cemetery ordinance

## **GOAL 6 - LOCAL BUSINESSES**

Columbia Township will encourage commercial and retail businesses.

### **Strategy**

Year-round and summer residents will continue to be in favor of additional retail businesses and restaurants. Township zoning should support new businesses which are appropriate for their zoning districts and neighborhoods and which produce local jobs and increase the tax base.

## **Actions**

1. Identify businesses that are compatible with the Township and develop a plan to attract them.
2. Review uses in township zoning requirements and revise them to include a wider range of allowed businesses appropriate for the various zoning districts.
3. Make sure the Township site plan review process meets current standards for completeness and transparency and that it addresses potential impacts on the environment and rural living space.
4. Consider elimination of the Industrial zoning category and industrial uses. Revise the Commercial zoning category if necessary to include any currently Industrial zoned businesses.

## **GOAL 7 - RECREATION**

Columbia Township will provide for maintenance and improvement of Township recreation facilities

### **Strategy**

The Township has limited resources to develop and maintain recreational properties. Recreation planning should reflect community needs and capabilities.

### **Actions**

1. Develop the Township-owned 20 acre property on the east side of 52 1/2 Street into a park or recreation area.
2. Develop and implement a plan to connect users of the Kal-Haven Trail with the community and its businesses.
3. Review Township tax-reverted properties and determine if they have features important to rural character, wildlife habitat, farmland preservation or recreation. Determine the best approach for their use or sale.
4. Develop and implement a Township grant writing capability

5. Develop a DNRE a 5-year recreation plan as the basis for grant applications

### **GOAL 8 - TOWNSHIP LAKES**

Columbia Township will support protection of community lakes and their environments to preserve them as residential areas, recreational destinations and sources for the Black River Watershed.

#### **Strategy**

Lake water quality will continue to be affected by agricultural products, storm water run-off and other pollutants. The Township should encourage the use of the best zoning and agricultural methods so that water resources are protected and preserved.

#### **Actions**

1. Verify that best practices are being employed for activities that have an indirect impact on lake and stream water quality. These include pesticide spraying, road maintenance, fertilizer use, dust control and irrigation wells.
2. Review and update zoning and site plan review requirements which promote the protection of lake and river water quality such as impervious surface limits, building location restrictions, setbacks for buildings, wells and septic systems and shoreline landscaping.
3. Incorporate SWMPC recommendations from 2008 related to protection of water resources and water quality into the Township zoning ordinance and other ordinances.

### **GOAL 9 - RESIDENTIAL HOUSING**

Columbia Township will support fair and equitable housing for all Township residents

#### **Strategy**

Census data shows that, although the Township has had an aging population and a slightly lower than State average income, this could change as the

population grows. Land use planning should provide for housing types appropriate in each zoning district

### **Actions**

1. Consider revising zoning requirements to allow additional flexibility in housing types appropriate for each zoning district. Specify lot sizes and other physical features appropriate for each type and location.
2. Consider revising zoning requirements to eliminate the residential mobile home district and revise the existing definition to include requirements that to restrict locations of mobile home parks to areas close to population centers and county roads.

## **SECTION 7 - FUTURE LAND USE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Upon designating an overall vision and specific community goals and objectives, a future land use plan and map can be developed to better implement and envision the before-mentioned Township vision, goals and objectives.

Land use practices within Columbia Township are reflective of land use practices found in rural communities throughout Michigan and the United States. For example, with 14 lakes within its borders, Columbia Township has an abundance of flag lots. Flag lots are interior lots with either a narrow easement lane road access or no road frontage but having a guaranteed access via a permanent right-of-way across an adjoining parcel. Flag lots often cause difficulty due to an abundance of curb cuts along rural roadways (with high speeds and blind-spots that are often associated with such roadways), property use disputes between adjacent property owners, access issues for emergency service vehicles and non-conforming setback issues related to a community's zoning code.

The placement of homes fronting rural Columbia Township roads is a typical rural land use practice. Locating homes on sub-parceled agricultural or open space land fronting rural roadways is an inefficient method of residential development. This method depletes usable agricultural property, increases driveway/roadway traffic, and builds residential "walls" around agricultural property, which impacts farm equipment ingress/egress. Furthermore, this form of residential development often leads to difficult residential vs. agricultural land use complaints, such as complaints concerning chemical use, organic smells, and noise of farm equipment.

With respect to the future, Columbia Township has several things in common with other rural communities in Van Buren County. What was once an agricultural community centered around local villages has evolved over time into a lightly-populated, mixed farming and residential area surrounding densely-populated lakes that now have a high percentage of non-resident property owners. The villages remain as population centers, but their importance for daily shopping has declined with the advent of the automobile, good roads and access to shopping in South Haven and Kalamazoo. In the rural areas of the Township, the combination of agricultural land and natural areas has created a desirable country living atmosphere and a continuing demand for single family homes. These trends are expected to continue as the population gradually increases over time.

## **FUTURE LAND USE OBJECTIVES**

It is the intent of this Master Plan to support the Township Vision Statement and its individual goals as they are described in Section 6. The actions which address each goal were designed to reflect community interests, to anticipate and account for future changes and to make sure that zoning and other land use tools protect important community attributes. These efforts focus on the following areas:

- Preservation of the rural, agricultural lifestyle in the outlying parts of the Township by maintaining a balance between residences, farms and natural areas
- Growth of commercial activity in Grand Junction and other areas of the Township by encouraging businesses that support local needs
- Maintenance of the waterfront living lifestyle around the Township's lakes by limiting the effects of human activity on the water and other environment resources in all areas of the community.

## **COLUMBIA TOWNSHIP'S FUTURE LAND USE PLAN**

The future land use plan for Columbia Township is tied to issues raised from community input as well as the vision statement and specific community goals and objectives as noted in Section 6. The underlying objective of the future land use plan will be to preserve the overall rural, agricultural and water resources of Columbia Township. The Future Land Use Map is shown in Appendix 3. It reflects demographic data and public input described in earlier sections of this Master Plan. It identifies areas where residential populations are likely to concentrate in the future, the areas where commercial activity is expected to expand and the areas designated for conservation efforts and farmland preservation.

It is essential to note that any area designated on the future land use map for a specific land use or otherwise discussed in this plan does NOT guarantee such land use will actually occur in the future. Instead, the designation is a proposed future use to further advance the land use planning vision, goals and objectives of Columbia Township. Any proposed future changes to zoning districts or allowed land uses within zoning districts involve formal zoning ordinance changes which require public input and public hearings before approval. Beyond applying specific public or nonprofit land use controls, or the outright purchase of land, Columbia Township is limited in influencing the future development of private property.

In some cases, the Future Land Use Plan identifies where changes are taking place that do not appear to reflect the Township's Vision and Goals and that are

enabled by current zoning. These are recognized because they point to the need for potential improvements to zoning requirements.

## **AGRICULTURAL LAND USE**

Agriculturally zoned lands make up approximately 84% of the land-within Columbia Township. These areas include properties that have ongoing agricultural uses as well as unused properties that have been or are intended for future agricultural purposes. This includes areas used for the production of crops, orchards, or the raising of livestock which have historically formed the basis for community life and which now contribute to the rural environment. Currently,. this approximately 5,000 acres or less than 25% of the total township land area of 21,800 acres.

In addition, the Agricultural zoning district includes a large number of personal residences and numerous lakes. Both farms and residential properties include forested areas and areas that provide wildlife habitat.

### **Farming's Contribution to Columbia Township**

Farming is important because of its contribution to the local economy. Farming creates jobs, provides a product for sale, and provides vast areas of open space and scenic corridors. Farmland also provides substantial environmental benefits, including floodplain protection, groundwater recharge, and wildlife habitat. In addition, the tradition of family owned farms has been passed down from generation to generation; supporting a strong social structure focused on community and family.

Based upon agricultural statistics for Van Buren County, agriculture will continue to be a prominent economic force and a significant land use in the Township. However, an on-going concern within Columbia Township is the promotion of sustainable local agriculture. Farmland is a private investment by individuals or corporate agricultural concerns. Farmland, often the key retirement investment of the farm owner, can be more valuable in subdivided parcels of residential land contingent upon its location and proximity to roads, lakes, streams and other factors.

### **Agricultural Land Use Changes**

Farming was once the primary economic activity in Columbia Township. However, due to demographic changes, farming now coexists with residential properties. Out of a current Township population of about 2800, tax rolls now classify more than 1100 Agricultural district parcels of land as having residential use. The low population density in the Agricultural district along with the combination of agricultural land with forested and natural areas has created a rural country living atmosphere that many Township residents consider desirable.

However, this ongoing change has not been without a penalty. Since at least 1992 there has been a loss of farmland county-wide as well as a reduction in the number of active farms. In Columbia Township, as in other parts of the County, the influx of those seeking rural living has reduced the amount of agricultural land and may eventually damage the rural living effect. . Because single family residences and farms are allowed uses in the Agricultural district, no zoning changes would be required to allow this transformation to continue to take place.

### **Public Opinion and Community Goals**

In 2001, a survey of taxpayers found that 80% of responders supported farmland preservation. A follow up workshop of Township residents later that year discussed various methods of achieving that end. Farmland preservation was established as a community goal in the 2001 version of the Township master plan. Neither the survey or the workshop identified any specific farmland preservation methods but they did establish that there was a high taxpayer interest in farmland preservation.

In 2008, the Township conducted a survey of property owners who owned more than 20 acres of land; approximately half of the responders expressed an interest in farmland preservation. As a result, the Township Planning Commission held a public hearing to determine the degree of interest in the Van Buren County farmland preservation program. However, this meeting was lightly attended and although there was interest in the program, no one was ready to apply. Farmland preservation was continued as a goal in the 2009 version of the master plan.

During the initial Planning Commission survey taken in preparation for this master plan revision, taxpayers clearly supported farmland preservation. Based on survey results, 90% of more than 450 responses indicated support for farmland preservation. 90% of responders were also in favor of preserving natural areas and 73% stated that rural living was their reason for living in the Township.

These results demonstrate that a rural, agricultural lifestyle and the preeminence of farmland continue to be important to Columbia Township. Farmland preservation continues as an significant goal in support of the Township's Vision Statement.

### **Zoning Methods for Farmland Preservation**

The preservation of large agricultural areas in Columbia Township is best accomplished by considering the application of specific zoning concepts when updating the Township's existing zoning ordinance to this Master Plan. Zoning concepts to consider include:

*Agricultural Buffer Zone:* A buffer, or transition, zone created between agricultural land and adjacent unrelated development (residential, commercial, and industrial). The buffer zone protects existing agricultural operations from problems and complaints generated by neighboring residential, commercial and/or industrial land uses.

*Point/Numerical Zoning:* Zoning which establishes objective standards in which a proposed lot must meet for development approval. The standards are defined by a point system, and the proposed lot must accumulate a minimum number of points for development to occur. Standards may include setback requirements, existing density of development considerations, availability of public utilities, police/fire protection, trip generation, etc.

*Exclusive Farmland Zoning:* Zoning in which on-farm residents are not allowed and properties may be split into larger parcels of at least 40 acres or more.

*Quarter-Quarter Zoning:* Allows for one non-farm residential dwelling for each 40 acres of land.

*Sliding Scale Zoning:* Better associates parcel size to development of residential units. The number of allowable non-farm residences increases as the size of the parent parcel increases. However, proportionally fewer dwellings are allowed the larger the parent parcel. For example, one dwelling may be allowed for the first 10 acres, another dwelling for the next 20 acres, a third dwelling for the next 30 acres.

*Large-Lot Zoning:* This is not a farmland preservation tool, but rather a rural character preservation technique. Minimum lot size can be 5 to 20 acres and requires a minimum of 330 feet of road frontage. It does not prevent the breakup of farms but does maintain a rural character by keeping development to a minimum.

*Plat/Condominium Subdivision Restrictions in Agricultural Districts:* Prohibits more subdivision lots than could be obtained as divisions exempt from the state Land Division Act. Does not prohibit plats or condominiums, but limits the total number of divisions no matter what method is used to divide land.

Often, communities apply a combination of these zoning concepts to address the preservation of agricultural land. Regardless of the type implemented, effective zoning codes and administration can be a valuable instrument in Columbia Township's goal of preserving agricultural land, open space and the community's rural character, while ensuring landowner rights concerning resale value and development.

## **State of Michigan Farmland Preservation Programs**

There are also non-zoning strategies available for farmland preservation. These include various Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development activities included in the Farmland and Open Space Preservation Program. These are voluntary programs for owners designed to preserve agricultural land which has market value that exceeds its value as agricultural land or open space. They involve agreements between landowners and the State to restrict future development or types of land use in exchange for tax benefits or exemptions. They may also involve outright owner donations or, as available, State funding in some form.

As noted above under the Section entitled Farming's Contribution to Columbia Township, farming and farmland play a significant role in the Township's economic and environmental diversity. Due in part to the current strength of the blueberry industry, this role is expected to continue.

However, as described in the Agricultural Land Use Changes section, the role of agriculture and the availability of farmland in the Township is challenged by increasing numbers of residents who move there because of the rural agricultural living experience rather than agriculture. The desirability of residential living in a country environment has served to reduce the amount of land used for farming. What was once a largely agricultural countryside is now shared with numerous single family residences. Currently, approximately 5000 acres, less than 25% of the total Township land area, is in agriculture.

## **Van Buren County Farmland Preservation Program**

This effect has been noted in other Van Buren County communities. As a result, in 2004, the County adopted its own Farmland and Open Space ordinance and with it established the Van Buren County Farmland and Open Space Preservation Program. The program, which is now based on the State's Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act and the zoning statute, provides landowner opportunities for preserving farmland and open space areas in locations where property market values exceed their agricultural values.

This is a voluntary program which allows property owners who meet certain criteria to sell future property development rights to Van Buren County via grants provided by the State of Michigan. Although the funding and operation of this program has been curtailed due to State budget priorities, if funded, it would represent a potential opportunity for farmers and others who have an interest in preserving agricultural land.

## **Farmland Preservation Target Areas**

The Future Land Use Map included as Appendix 3 shows the Township areas where properties exist that are likely to be candidates for farmland preservation. Properties in this area of the map are candidates for all zoning and non-zoning strategies described above.

As shown, the farmland preservation area is defined by the current Agricultural zoning district in the Township except those areas specifically zoned otherwise. This is because the Township, which was once almost exclusively agricultural, has been changed by the emergence of smaller residential properties throughout the community. There are now no areas which are exclusive to large acreage agriculture properties. This transformation demonstrates why farm properties may have future market values beyond their agricultural worth. It validates the need for sound zoning practice to maintain the balance between residential and agricultural land.

## **NATURAL AREAS AND CONSERVATION LAND USE**

The Township's Agricultural zoning district also includes woodlands and other natural areas. Typically, these are included as part of the larger existing residential and agricultural properties. This district also includes the conservation preserves described in Section 2. As noted above, these areas, along with the many agricultural properties, are part of the rural, agricultural effect that is considered important. Preservation of natural areas is strongly supported by residents.

The majority of woodlands and other natural areas are part of private farms and residences and are subject to sale or use at the discretion of the owners. The sale of timber or other resources or changes to the landscape on these properties has the potential to impact the appearance of the surrounding areas. In addition to these changes, property can be divided to allow additional homes. None of these changes, which continue to occur, require rezoning or zoning ordinance language changes.

While these changes can not be prohibited, they can be encouraged, by good land use practices and with strong community awareness, to take place in ways that help to preserve natural features and that reduce their effects on the surrounding community.

Section 2 describes several areas defined as conservation preserves that have been set aside by owners to protect them from future development and to ensure their natural features remain in the community. Over time, the number of conservation preserves could change if more property owners decide for themselves, based on economic considerations and other factors, to take this

course of action. Use of land as a conservation preserve is not currently listed as a principle or special use in any Township zoning district.

## **RESIDENTIAL LAND USE**

The development of residential land within Columbia Township will create many related issues in the future. For example, more residential property will require additional community services, such as fire and police. Also, additional residential property around lakes will further impact the introduction of chemicals, sewage and boater noise upon Township waterways. Most of all, additional residential development could further erode the areas overall rural environment, agricultural land and open space.

In Section 2, Table 2-4 presents population projections for Columbia Township based on U. S. Census data. Clearly, population projections are not always accurate. However, they do provide some guidance on the potential future needs of Columbia Township for which population is expected to increase gradually over time.

Earlier land use planning identified areas most likely for new residences along CR215 from the Village of Breedsville to Grand Junction and east on CR384 to Saddle Lake, as well as around Upper Jephtha Lake and western Great Bear Lake, as areas for residential development. This includes areas in Sections 4, 5 and 9 adjacent to Grand Junction and sections 20, 28, 29 and 33 adjacent to Breedsville which were located on the projected land use map at that time. As new residents arrive and the Township population increases, these predictions are likely to remain true because the existing the village areas and the proximity to County roads will serve to attract many of the new residents.

Based upon community input, public discussion and review of existing zoning and land use practices within Columbia Township, residential development priorities were identified as follows:

- The predominant residence in all areas will be single-family housing on individual lots.
- Mobile home parks should be located in designated development areas along main thoroughfares and be under strict site planning procedures.
- Formal large residential housing developments should have a minimal impact upon existing farmland, open space and natural areas.

## **Agricultural Zoning District**

In the future, the typical residence type in the Agricultural district will continue to be the single family home. With respect to other residence types, past resident surveys have noted resistance to large apartment buildings and mobile home parks which could detract visually and result in increased rural traffic. As a result, increased population in the agricultural areas will likely result in land owners dividing their properties to create locations for more single family homes. Single family homes and farms are both Agricultural zoning district principal uses. Future rezoning or changes to allowed uses will not be required for these changes to continue.

Because population trends appear to favor single family residences and public sewer and water are not available, large-scale housing developments are unlikely. In the event there is interest, to ensure compatibility with the current residential and farming environment, If plans are proposed, the Township has determined that consideration of more progressive, proactive residential land use development tools should be considered. Addressing the demand for future residential development requires;

- Identification of the number and size of parcels required to accommodate expected growth.
- Identification of appropriate parcel locations and general acreage to specifically accommodate expected growth.

The underlying principles when reviewing any future residential housing developments in Columbia Township should be based upon identified impact criteria, as defined within the Vision Statement, Goals and Objectives found in Section 6. Specifically, criteria should include:

- Sustainability of residential development over time.
- Develop residential housing adjacent to or in existing "built-up" areas and upon non-prime farmland areas, avoiding development upon larger farmland, wetlands and large open space areas.
- Impact of residential development upon Columbia Township's infrastructure, tax base, rural environment and Township services.
- Project affordability in relationship to the overall housing market for the area.
- Feasibility of residential development: the relationship of the parcel designated for development to adjacent parcels current and future land use classifications.

- Public input to the proposed residential development.
- Project access to, and impact upon, existing primary roads

Planned Unit Development or clustered housing development is a valuable residential planning tool, providing an attractive alternative to traditional, sprawling, linear and land-consuming "tract" residential development. This method development promotes the preservation of large areas of open space while still providing the landowner financially valuable developmental rights. Essentially, residential development is allowed within a smaller area of the larger undeveloped or agricultural parcel. It allows the same number of housing units as a traditional subdivision by allowing a decreased lot size; the remaining undeveloped area of the parcel creates a permanent natural/open/recreational/agricultural space, thereby preserving the overall rural character of the community. Although not specifically listed as a use in any district, Planned Unit Developments are described in zoning requirements and are permitted in all zoning districts.

### **Lakes**

For many years, single family homes for residences or vacation homes have been constructed around all the lakes in the Township. In addition, two family homes are allowed in the R-2 (Resort-Residential) district which borders parts of several of the larger lakes. Zoning requirements restrict the use of multiple family dwellings which are constructed for more than two families in all these areas.

In 2010, areas on Saddle Lake, Upper Jephtha Lake, Lake Eleven, Munson Lake and Silver Lake were rezoned separately to account for permanent and seasonal residences with typically small subdivision lots which had been platted there prior to 1967. The new zoning restricts these areas to single family residences.

Available lake lots have been largely built out resulting in a higher population density around the lakes than in other Township areas. Future new residences around the lakes will be limited to those that occur because existing owners are able to divide their properties. Based on past history, visual impact on existing neighborhoods and the limits of current zoning requirements, any new residences will continue to be single family residences.

In the future, lake property values and desirability could be negatively affected if water quality problems are not controlled. Some lakes have already been required to take action on invasive plant species. Concerns also exist about the impact of agricultural irrigation wells on lake water levels and the effects of fertilizers. Proper use of land use planning and decision-making will be a key element in protecting Township lakes, which are becoming a tourist destination in addition to their roles as a place for homes and a watershed source.

## **Grand Junction**

Past projections have indicated a general population increase will result in new Township population which would tend to concentrate in Grand Junction and in the agricultural areas near it on CR215 and CR388. Platted in the 1890's, Grand Junction is zoned for single family homes except within the Grand Junction Commercial Overlay district which allows a mix of commercial and residential uses.

Zoning requirements do not allow duplexes, row houses and other forms of multiple family housing. In addition, surveys have shown residents object to large apartment buildings which, by their nature, would likely be located in population centers such as Grand Junction.

Duplexes or row houses would provide higher density and potentially lower cost housing methods and changes to Grand Junction zoning requirements would be necessary for this to occur. Currently, the village area appears to have an excess of vacant platted lots on the north and south sides. Because the expected Township population growth is projected to be gradual, future interest in these changes is expected only if population increase is higher than expected.

## **Mobile home parks**

A Residential Mobile Home District is identified in the Township zoning ordinance which provides limited design standards for mobile home park development. Promoting higher density development is more cost-efficient for developers, landowners and taxpayers, and is more environmentally sensitive than rural large lot residential zoning or traditional subdivision development, both of which allocate the entire parcel to private development and easements for streets and related infrastructure.

No locations are provided on the current Township zoning map for a Residential Mobile Home District and mobile home parks are not listed as principal or special uses in any zoning district. Although earlier Master Plan versions suggested areas near Grand Junction and Breedsville, no locations were identified on the future land use map.

The zoning ordinance recognizes mobile home park potential for adverse impact on adjacent land areas and specifies a minimum 10 acre development size. Unless sited near existing population areas, the increased traffic and visual impact of the mobile home park development could detract from the community's rural appearance and lifestyle, particularly in the Agricultural zoning district.

Individual mobile homes, which are considered single family dwellings and which are principle uses in all zoning districts, are found on individual lots throughout the Township. As a result, the potential for large mobile home parks is limited.

## **COMMERCIAL/RETAIL LAND USE**

Previous Township land use planning has considered that new retail and commercial activity would be centered at the intersections of CR388/ CR215 in Grand Junction and at CR384/ CR215. This trend is expected to continue due to the concentration of existing businesses and the ready access to county roads. Community input continues to support increased commercial activity in the form of restaurants and retail shops.

### **Grand Junction**

In 2010, the zoning ordinance was revised to create the Grand Junction Commercial Overlay District to encourage increased business development along CR388 and CR215. This change provided for a mix of commercial and residential activity. These provisions are included to encourage 'walkable' communities and ease the costs of start-up small-scale commercial businesses. In order to avoid adverse effects upon existing residential owners rezoned to commercial, non-sequential rezoning, commonly termed "leap-frogging" will be permitted as a matter of policy within the Grand Junction 'Mixed Use' planning area.

In 2015, Grand Junction zoning was again revised to create Commercial zones at the east and west ends of the village in areas where there was no residential activity and where unused buildings existed. This change was intended to encourage businesses which could provide employment for local residents and which would be compatible with the daily needs of those living in the rural areas of the Township or those vacationing at the many Township lakes.

Commercial activity is also predicted to the west of Grand Junction along CR 388 out to its intersection with CR681. Because CR 388 serves as a connection with South Haven and US 196, this area is a gateway to Grand Junction and the Township lakes. New businesses in this vicinity are expected to be compatible with the "daily needs" aspect of those businesses already in Grand Junction.

### **CR 215/ CR 384 Intersection Area**

Commercial growth is predicted to continue in the locality around this intersection which is situated between Breedsville and Grand Junction. This area also serves as a lake gateway - from Bangor and South Haven to the west and from Kalamazoo via M 43 and CR 215. Businesses in this area serve both agriculture and the lakes area. They include, or have included, business activities such as produce packaging, restaurants, campgrounds, equipment repair facilities and farm markets.

## **Berlamont**

Future commercial growth is also indicated on the east side of the Township where CR388 and CR384 provide a connection with Bloomingdale and the expanding commercial activity on the west side of Bloomingdale Township. In this area, a feed store, a chainsaw repair, a sawmill and an Amish school are located on the Bloomingdale Township side of CR 388. Except for the sawmill, these would be permitted uses across the road in Columbia Township where one commercially zoned property already exists south of Berlamont.

## **Future Commercial Development**

Current zoning requirements limit the types of commercial activity in all these areas except Grand Junction. Permitted principal and special uses in all districts are strongly protective of the Township's important lake and rural environments. However, they fail to include other business types that would support those environments and, at the same time, contribute to the Township's tax base and provide local job opportunities.

## **Industrial land use**

As of August 2001, industrial land use in Columbia Township consisted of 36 acres representing one business activity. However, "industrial" zoning, as currently defined by the Township zoning ordinance, may now be incompatible with the community's vision and may no longer be appropriate. Potential threats from the activities listed as allowed uses include direct environmental impacts, heavy commercial road traffic, reductions in wooded areas and natural features and changes to the quality and the level of the water in lakes and streams.

In addition, recent changes to State statutes limit local zoning and control over certain industrial-type business activities which could negatively impact the country-living lifestyle of those in the rural parts of the Township and the waterfront life style of those who live and vacation at the Township's many lakes. A 2014 Planning Commission taxpayer survey, which listed many of these activities, found residents especially concerned about the impact of hazardous material storage, underground storage tanks, landfills and oil or gas mining. These are similar to several of the items listed as allowed uses under Industrial in the zoning ordinance.

## **SECTION 8 - IMPLEMENTATION PLAN**

### **IMPLEMENTATION**

The greatest challenge for Columbia Township will be the implementation of the Master Plan. Maps, tables and text regarding both existing and proposed future land use within Columbia Township have been presented, but such information is irrelevant without ACTION. Community cooperation and commitment to the Master Plan's Vision Statement, Goals and Actions are vital ingredients to truly creating a successful, vibrant and rewarding future within Columbia Township.

Section 6 of this Master Plan lists nine goals which support the Vision Statement and the actions designed to achieve those goals. Each goal is based on community input and a determination that it supported some aspect of the Vision Statement. The community input basis for each goal is identified in Appendix 1.

Actions designed to achieve each goal are listed in Appendix 2 along with plans for implementing them. Actions were selected because they anticipate changes likely to take place over time, because they reflect interests identified through community input or because they will improve zoning and land use . These actions reflect the Smart Growth principles described in the Van Buren County Master Plan.

### **IMPLEMENTATION SCHEDULE**

The implementation schedule shown on Appendix 2 ties ~~the objectives~~ of each of the Goals with the participants responsible for completing those actions . While the schedule is not comprehensive, it does highlight primary actions needed to accomplish the Plan's overall Goals. The schedule identifies each action with corresponding goal and action numbers from Section 6 of the Master Plan.

It is the responsibility of the Township to ensure Actions are completed and Goals are met. Appendix 2 identifies responsibility for completion of each action. Actions falling under the purview of elected township officials are assigned to the Township Board. Others, including those that involve potential changes to zoning requirements, will be completed by the Planning Commission. Several actions, which require significant input from the public, are intended to be completed by community volunteer committees under Township supervision.

As shown on the Appendix 2, actions are planned for completion over a three year period ending in 2019. During that time, the Township Planning Commission is tasked with annual progress reviews to verify that those actions are being completed as planned.

## **APPENDIX 1 - GOAL BASIS LIST**

### **GOAL 1 - RURAL CHARACTER**

#### **Basis**

- Responders selected preservation of natural areas (33%), loss of open space (17%) and loss of wetlands (14%) as issues to be dealt with by the Township [2001 survey]
- Two out of three working groups identified wildlife preservation concerns [2001 visioning]
- Participants identified the need for strong zoning controls to maintain wetlands, fisheries and wildlife habitats from commercial or residential development and weak wildlife management practices [2005 Black River stakeholders]
- 73% of responders stated rural living was their reason for living in the Township [2013 survey]
- Responders expressed the highest concerns about the following land uses for which statutes restrict local control - hazardous material storage (90%), underground storage tanks (45%), landfills and oil or gas mining (40% each) [2014 survey]
- A zoning ordinance change to allow expanded home business activity in the Agricultural district was opposed as a negative impact because of the potential for businesses such as auto repair. As a result of the referendum held, 60% of residents voted against, and repealed, this zoning change. [2015 referendum]

### **GOAL 2 - FARMLAND PRESERVATION**

#### **Basis**

- 80% of responders supported farmland preservation and indicated that action should be taken (28%) [2001 survey]
- Two of the three work groups discussed methods to keep farmland [2001 visioning]

- Surveys of 240 large property (>20 acres) found general interest (39%) in farmland preservation but little interest in County farmland preservation programs [2009 farmland preservation]
- 90% of responses indicated support for farmland preservation [2013 survey]
- Road survey found 20+ abandoned homes and farmsteads and newly-planted blueberry fields. Van Buren County Land Services indicated approximately 5000 acres in the Township were being used for agriculture [2013 projections review]

### **GOAL 3 - NATURAL AREA PRESERVATION**

#### **Basis**

- Responders supported preservation of natural areas (44%). Issues to be dealt with included loss of open space (17%) and loss of wetlands (14%) [2001 survey]
- Two out of three working groups identified wildlife preservation concerns [2001 visioning]
- Participants identified the need to maintain wetlands, fisheries and wildlife habitats from commercial or residential development and weak wildlife management practices [2005 Black River stakeholders]
- 90% of responders were in favor of preservation of natural areas [2013 survey]
- 10% of the hand-written comments from responders dealt with protection and preservation of wildlife habitat and natural areas [2014 survey]

### **GOAL 4 - TOWNSHIP ROADS**

#### **Basis**

- 36% of responses agreed road maintenance needed more attention. Traffic congestion and speeding were not considered major concerns and there was limited support for improved traffic controls in specific areas. [2001 survey]
- Two of three work groups identified specific traffic sign and road maintenance issues [2001 visioning]

- 70% of responders were in favor of improved roads. This was supported by 20% of the hand-written comments. [2013 survey]
- Responding to questions about the definition of blight, residents selected road maintenance concerns (36%) [2015 survey]

## **GOAL 5 - ZONING AND CODE ENFORCEMENT**

### **Basis**

- 17% of responses indicated the need for stronger zoning code and blight enforcement. 86% agreed with strict sign regulations. [2001 survey]
- All three working groups emphasized the need for better zoning code and blight enforcement. Specific mention was made to protection of property values [2001 visioning]
- Where responders could include written comments of their own, more than 15% mentioned blight and code enforcement [2013 survey]
- With respect to future threats, 25% of responding waterfront property owners selected blight [2014 survey]
- Responding to questions about the definition of blight, residents selected abandoned homes (38%), poorly maintained homes (36%), accumulated trash (30%) and roadside trash and weeds (31%) [2015 survey]

## **GOAL 6 - LOCAL BUSINESSES**

### **Basis**

- 56% of responses were in favor of new retail and service businesses but not the use of public funds to attract them. 53% supported home business activities. [2001 survey]
- Work groups supported industrial activity in zoned areas and along major roads. One group saw no need for an industrial zoned area.
- Grand Junction residents supported new commercial activity but not rezoning of residential areas. This concern was addressed when the Grand Junction Commercial overlay District was established in 2010. [2009 Grand Junction commercial rezoning]

- 85% of responses supported new retail and service businesses. 70% thought more industry should be encouraged. 78% were in favor of home based businesses. [2013 survey]
- 55% of responses indicated there could be more retail shops and restaurants. This included specific comments concerning villages and the lake area. [2014 survey]

## **GOAL 7 - RECREATION**

### **Basis**

- 12% of responders indicated park and recreation facilities were an important item [2001 survey]
- One work group identified suggestions for improving recreation facilities at the Kal-Haven Trail and the Township hall [2001 visioning]
- Participants described the need for improved recreational infrastructure along the Black River including a trail or boardwalk [2005 Black River stakeholders 2004]
- Survey responses included a number of hand-written comments suggesting the need for more recreation facilities. [2013 and 2014 surveys]

## **GOAL 8 - TOWNSHIP LAKES**

### **Basis**

- 35% of responders indicated the use of pesticides was a problem and 15% indicated drinking water quality was an important issue. [2001 survey]
- Two of the three work groups indicated aerial spraying was a problem. The third group had a problem with septic waste around lakes. One work group also raised concerns about excess boat traffic on lakes. [2001 visioning]
- Stakeholders recognized the importance of the Black River Watershed as an agricultural and commercial water source, as a wildlife habitat and as a recreational and tourism resource and the importance of good zoning standards for maintaining them. It was also recognized that coordination between all stakeholders - local governments, state agencies, builders and developers was the key to success. [Black River stakeholders]

- 85% of all responders were concerned about the quality of water in lakes and streams. In addition, 10% of responses included write-in comments about water quality concerns [2013 survey]
- Waterfront owners selected boating, fishing and the general outdoor experience as favorite activities. With respect to future threats, 40% of waterfront property owners listed water quality problems as significant. In the spaces provided for additional written comments, nearly 25% of the 162 hand-written comments specifically mentioned concerns about water quality including the lowering of lake levels due to water being pumped out for agricultural purposes. [2014 survey]

## **GOAL 9 - RESIDENTIAL HOUSING**

### **Basis**

- 48% of responses supported more single-family housing and 44% supported new senior housing. 43% agreed to the need for designated mobile and manufactured home areas. 46% did not agree with encouraging apartment buildings. 57% supported limits on domestic animals on non-farm properties. [2001 survey]
- Two of the three working groups identified concerns with the location of mobile homes and mobile home parks [2001 visioning]
- Grand Junction residents supported new commercial activity but not rezoning of residential areas [2009 Grand Junction commercial rezoning]
- 27% of the Township population was 55 or older (2010 census); 23% of the population was considered to living below the established poverty level (2013 American Community Survey)

## **APPENDIX 2 - IMPLEMENTATION SCHEDULE**

GOAL NUMBER	SUBJECT	RESPON-SIBILITY	TIME FRAME
1-3-7	Review Township tax-reverted properties and determine if they have features important to rural character, wildlife habitat, farmland preservation or recreation. Determine the best approach for their use or sale.	TwpBd	2017-2019
1	Develop response plans for potential businesses for which Michigan statutes restrict local control. These include hazardous material storage, underground storage tanks, landfills and oil or gas mining as identified through the 2013 Planning Commission survey.	TwpBd	2019
1	Update zoning requirements so that developers pay their share of costs of required improvements to roads, bridges and other infrastructure or services.	Plng Comm	2018
1	Update zoning requirements to include methods, such as protection for trees and skylines, vegetation buffers, increased lot sizes or setbacks and use of existing farm lanes, which promote open space, preservation of natural assets and which emphasize rural living.	Plng Comm	2018
2	Update zoning requirements to include methods for preservation of larger lot sizes in agricultural areas.	Plng Comm	2018
2	Consider participation in the Van Buren County Farmland Preservation Program. Complete all requirements and submit the required resolution.	TwpBd	2018

3	Provide information on the Township website about creation of conservation easements and other owner voluntary methods for preservation of farmland, open space and natural areas.	TwpBd	2018
3	Inventory existing conservation and natural areas and identify them on the Township zoning map.	Plng Comm	2017
4	Identify poorly marked intersections and similar road safety issues and set priorities with the Van Buren County Road Commission to correct them with lights, signs or other methods.	TwpBd	2017
4	Identify locations where infrastructure failures could severely impact Township road use and incur high cost.. Make sure the public is aware of these.	TwpBd	2017
4	For locations where future failure is likely, establish a Township fund or other financial backing to cover Township costs of potential repairs.	TwpBd	2019
4	Set a priority with the Van Buren County Road Commission to resurface or pave major roads in and out of Grand Junction.	TwpBd	2017
4	Set a priority with the Van Buren County Road Commission to level roads at CSX grade crossings.	TwpBd	2018
5	Identify and post all Township ordinances and the Master Plan on the Township website	TwpBd	2017
5	Schedule and publicize regular Township cleanup days	TwpBd	2017
5	Establish a Township Historical Commission to build community pride by recognizing past community history and accomplishments.	TwpBd/ Community Volunteers	2018

5	Update the Township blight ordinance as necessary to include concerns identified in the 2015 Planning Commission survey and to include current practices for reporting and control of zoning and blight issues.	Plng Comm	2017
5	Consider issue of a Township Cemetery ordinance.	TwpBd	2017
6	Identify businesses that are compatible with the Township and develop a plan to attract them.	TwpBd/ Community Volunteers	2018
6	Review uses in township zoning requirements and revise them to include a wider range of allowed businesses appropriate for the various zoning districts.	Plng Comm	2019
6	Make sure the Township site plan review process meets current standards for completeness and transparency and that it addresses potential impacts on the environment and rural living space.	Plng Comm	2019
6	Consider elimination of the Industrial zoning category and industrial uses. Revise the Commercial zoning category if necessary to include any currently Industrial zoned businesses.	Plng Comm	2019
7	Develop the Township-owned property on the east side of 52 1/2 Street into a park or recreation area	TwpBd	2018
7	Develop and implement a plan to connect users of the Kal-Haven Trail with the community and its businesses	TwpBd/Co mmunity Volunteers	2018
7	Develop and implement a Township grant writing capability	TwpBd	2017
7	Develop a DNRE a 5-year recreation plan as the basis for grant applications	Plng Comm	2017

8	Verify that best practices are being employed for activities that have an indirect impact on lake and stream water quality. These include pesticide spraying, road maintenance, fertilizer use and irrigation wells.	TwpBd/Community Volunteers	2018
8	Review and update zoning and site plan review requirements which promote the protection of lake and river water quality such as impervious surface limits, building location restrictions, setbacks for buildings, wells and septic systems and shoreline landscaping.	Plng Comm	2018
8	Incorporate SWMPC recommendations from 2008 related to protection of water resources and water quality into the Township zoning ordinance and other ordinances.	Plng Comm	2018
9	Consider revising zoning requirements to allow additional flexibility in housing types appropriate for each zoning district. Specify lot sizes and other physical features appropriate for each type and location.	Plng Comm	2019
9	Consider revising zoning requirements to eliminate the residential mobile home district and revise the existing definition to include requirements that restrict locations of mobile home parks to areas close to population centers and county roads.	Plng Comm	2019
NA	Conduct an annual progress review on Master Plan goals and actions. Provide a written report to the Township Board	Plng Comm	2017-2019

# APPENDIX 3 - FUTURE LAND USE MAP

