

Chapter One

OVERVIEW

Introduction

This Chapter provides an overview of Locke Township and the Master Plan's role, importance, preparation process, and principal policies. It presents the framework for what follows by defining what the Master Plan is and what it is intended to accomplish. Understanding the fundamentals of the Master Plan will enable Locke Township residents and officials to appreciate the role it plays in ensuring the future welfare of the Township, its residents and its resources. Embracing this Plan as a vital tool in preserving and enhancing the public health, safety, and welfare of the Township is essential if this Plan is to be effective.

What is the Master Plan?

Purpose

Just as individuals and families plan for their future well being, so must municipalities. Just as individuals may open savings accounts to save for an addition to their house for a growing family, municipalities must look to the future and take specific actions to address current and future needs. Such actions may involve improvements to the roadway network, improvements to the level of emergency services, and the pursuit of an orderly development and preservation program.

This Master Plan is a policy document that identifies how growth and associated land development should be guided to enhance the future welfare of Locke Township. The following key words and phrases can generally describe the Master Plan:

FUTURE ORIENTED: The plan concerns itself with long-range planning to guide and manage future growth, development, and preservation. The plan is a picture of Locke Township today and a guide to how the community should evolve over the next ten to twenty years in response to growth and community aspirations.

GENERAL: The plan establishes broad principles and policies to address future land use and public services.

COMPREHENSIVE: The Plan is comprehensive in that it addresses all principal types of land use and the practical geographic boundaries of each.

A PLAN: The Plan is a specific tangible document which consists of both text and maps, a key portion of which presents and illustrates the Township's policies regarding its planned future land use pattern and associated public services.

DYNAMIC: The Plan is intended to be continually evolving in light of the aspirations of local residents, changing conditions in the Township, and new strategies to manage growth.

The Locke Township Planning Commission, under the authority of the Michigan Township Planning Act, P.A. 168 of 1959 (as amended), prepared this Master Plan. The Act provides for the development of plans by a Planning Commission for the purposes of, in part:

"...to promote public health, safety, and general welfare; to encourage the use of resources in accordance with their character and adaptability; to avoid the overcrowding of land by buildings or people; to lessen congestion on public roads and streets...and to consider the character of each Township and its suitability for particular uses judged in terms of such factors as the trend in land and population development."

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This Master Plan is not a law or regulatory document, but a "policy plan" to be implemented through, in part, zoning and other regulatory tools. For example, though the Master Plan is not a zoning ordinance, the Master Plan's recommendations and policies serve as a basis for updating the current Locke Township Zoning Ordinance. In fact, the Township Zoning Act, which provides Michigan townships with the statutory authority to adopt zoning regulations, stipulates that a municipality's land development regulations "...shall be based upon a plan..." This Master Plan addresses this statutory requirement and ensures a strong legal foundation for the Township's zoning regulations.

Elements of the Master Plan

This Master Plan consists of the following key components:

- 1) Chapter One – Overview presents an overview of the purpose and role of the Plan, the process followed in its preparation, key planning policies, and a summary of Township conditions.
- 2) Chapter Two – Planning Issues, Goals and Objectives presents a discussion of important planning issues facing the Township today, and associated goals and objectives that address these issues.
- 3) Chapter Three – Future Land Use Strategy presents the planned future land use pattern for the Township.
- 4) Chapter Four – Public Services Strategy presents policies regarding future public services.
- 5) Chapter Five – Implementation Strategies presents implementation measures to effectuate the policies of the Plan.
- 6) The Appendices present background studies that provide a review of existing conditions and trends including matters pertaining to demographics, land use, and public services.

Importance and Application of the Master Plan

The importance and application of the Locke Township Master Plan are demonstrated in: 1) the long-term interests of the Township; and 2) the day-to-day administration of the Township's planning and zoning program.

Long Term Interests

There are a number of interests shared by residents and officials of Locke Township today that can be expected to continue for years to come and be similarly shared by future residents and officials. Some of these important interests include:

- Protecting the Township's small-town and rural character.
- Minimizing increased tax burdens.
- Ensuring appropriate land use and adequate services to protect the public health, safety, and welfare of residents and visitors.
- Managing growth and development.
- Preserving important natural resources including woodlands, wetlands, stream corridors, and farmland.

The Master Plan supports these long-term interests by providing a future-oriented strategy that aggressively seeks to further these and other long-term interests. Chapter Three presents important policies in this regard.

Day-To-Day Administration

In addition to furthering the long-term interests of the Township, the Master Plan also plays an important role in the day-to-day planning and zoning efforts of the Township:

- Advisory Policies: The Plan is an official advisory policy statement that should be readily shared with existing and prospective landowners and developers. The Plan informs them of the long term intentions of the Township regarding land use and encourages development proposals more closely integrated with the policies of the Plan.
- Regulatory Programs: The Plan establishes a practical basis for the Township to revise, update, or otherwise prepare regulatory programs, including zoning and land division regulations, intended to ensure that the policies of the Plan are implemented.
- Review of Land Development Proposals: Chapter Two includes a list of Township goals and objectives which should be reviewed when consideration is given to future proposed rezoning requests, site plans, and related land use proposals, to further establish a record upon which the proposal can be evaluated. Equally important, Chapter Three provides policies regarding the planned future land use pattern in the Township. This Chapter also provides valuable reference points upon which land use proposals should be evaluated.
- Public Services Improvements: The cost-effective use of the Township's tax dollars requires the identification of a planned future land use pattern. Residential, commercial, and industrial land uses have varying public services needs. The identification of a planned future land use pattern enables the Township to pinpoint areas that may be in need of current public services improvements. The identification also enables the Township to better determine areas of future need, rather than playing "catch-up" while the Township's health, safety, and welfare may be at risk. Again, Chapters Three and Four provide important guidance in this area.

- Intergovernmental Coordination: This Plan provides the basis for Township officials to communicate effectively with nearby communities regarding both the impact of their planning and zoning actions and opportunities for mutual gain through coordinated efforts in the areas of land use and public services.
- Factual Reference: The Plan includes a factual overview of relevant trends and conditions in the Township. This factual profile can educate local officials and residents and aid in the review of development proposals, encourage constructive discussion of planning issues and policies, and serve as a base line for future studies.

How This Plan Was Prepared

During the early 1990s, Locke Township officials grew increasingly concerned about the proper management of future growth and development, and the ability of its zoning regulations to ensure the type of future Township character that its residents support. To focus greater efforts in the area of long term community planning, the Township initiated the development of a new Master Plan. Soliciting public input during the process, a master plan was adopted in 1995.

Approximately five years after the adoption of the 1998 Master Plan, specific issues surfaced in the community that raised questions about the appropriateness of certain aspects of the 1995 Plan. These included important elements that were lacking or otherwise unclear. Some of the concerns surfaced as officials began to consider updating the Township's zoning regulations. To address the concerns in a comprehensive and orderly manner, Township officials decided to develop a wholly new Plan. The goal was to prepare a new Plan that was generally based on the 1995 Plan but with the necessary revisions to address the 1995 Plan's deficiencies. The Township sought the expertise of a professional planner to assist with the preparation of the document. The Planning Commission assembled a complete draft of the new Plan suitable for presentation to the residents of the community. The Planning Commission held a public hearing on the draft Plan on October 20, 2004 and the Plan was finalized and adopted by the Planning Commission on November 17, 2004.

Overview of Planning Policies

This Plan presents a coordinated strategy that addresses growth, development and preservation. The Plan supports the continuation of Locke Township as a predominantly agricultural and rural residential community, with reasonable opportunities for higher density residential development and commercial and industrial development. The Plan recommends that the majority of the Township be reserved for farming activities and rural residential development, and that suburban development patterns be limited to the southeast and southwest corners of the Township. Commercial development is guided to specific segments of M-52, in addition to opportunities for commercial and industrial uses in association with residences where such home occupations will not undermine the welfare of surrounding residential areas.

Locke Township Overview

The following is a brief overview of Locke Township today. A more detailed review of Locke Township trends and conditions can be found in Appendix A, B, C, and D.

Locke Township is located in the northeast corner of Ingham County in the south-central region of Michigan's Lower Peninsula. Principal surrounding townships are Perry to the north, Conway to the east, Leroy to the south, and Williamstown to the west. The nearest urban center to the Township is the City of Williamston, a community of approximately 3,500 persons that abuts the southwest corner of the Township. The outer fringes of the larger urban centers of Lansing, East Lansing, and Meridian Township, with a total population of approximately 205,000, are located 10 – 15 miles to the west.

The Township's topography can be generally described as nearly level to gently rolling. Drainage is facilitated through a network of watercourses. The most dominant is the Red Cedar River. The Red Cedar River travels west along portions of the Township's southern periphery. The Red Cedar River is fed by two principal drains that extend northward through the Township – Wolf Creek and Squaw Creek. The Red Cedar subsequently flows into the Grand River in Lansing. There are no natural lakes or ponds in excess of ten acres in the Township.

Vegetative cover in Locke Township consists largely of cropland, accounting for approximately 70% of the Township area. The principal exceptions are those areas characterized by wetlands, woodlands, or residential development and its associated lawn areas. There are approximately 2,600 acres of wetlands in the Township, comprising 12% of its landscape. The wetlands are dispersed throughout the Township but are most prominent

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along or near to watercourses including the Red Cedar River and the Wolf and Squaw Creeks. Nearly all of the Township's wetlands are comprised of lowland hardwoods such as ash, elm, soft maples, and cottonwoods. The balance is comprised of shrub and emergent wetlands. The Township is nearly void of upland hardwood stands.

Regional access to Locke Township is afforded by I-96, I-69, and M-52. Interstate 96 (I-96) approaches within two miles of the Township's southern border and I-69 travels within four miles of its northern border. M-52 travels north-south through the central region of the Township, with both an I-96 and I-69 interchange. Lansing's Capital City Airport is located approximately 25 miles west of the Township. Locke Township's local roadway network generally exhibits a grid-like pattern, characteristic of the majority of townships in Lower Michigan.

Most of the Locke Township landscape is dominated by farming operations, woodlands, wetlands and other open spaces, and scattered residences. Farming operations occupy approximately 70% of the Township acreage and are present in nearly all areas of the community. Crop farming is predominant although there are a number of livestock operations scattered throughout the Township including dairy, sheep and horse farming.

Residential development comprises approximately 5% (1,200 acres) of the acreage in Locke Township. The 2000 Census recorded 586 dwelling units, 578 of which were single family dwellings and the balance were part of two-family dwelling structures. Except for two platted subdivisions, nearly all of the residential development in the Township has occurred in a strip pattern along the Township's section-line roads on parcels of 5 – 20 acres. The original residential settlement pattern – dwellings on farm parcels approaching 40 acres or more in size – is still very evident but accounts for a small portion of the total households.

The most visible signs of commercial development in Locke Township are along M-52 between Haslett and Bell Oak Roads. The northwest corner of the M-52/Haslett Road intersection includes a small convenience store. The northeast corner of the M-52/Bell Oak Road intersection includes a vehicle repair and truck rental service. The balance of the Township's commercial uses, excluding its farm operations, consist of business operations in conjunction with a residence, and include such uses as vehicle repair shops and a decorating service. Industrial uses in the Township are also limited to businesses operated in conjunction with residences.

A five member Township Board governs Locke Township. The Township Hall on the north side of Bell Oak Road, a short distance east of M-52. The primary offices for local officials are in their homes.

Public services in the Township are comparatively limited. There is no public sewer or water and the Township relies on the State Police and County Sheriffs Department for police protection. Locke Township receives fire protection and ambulance service from the Northeast Ingham Emergency Service Authority (NIESA). NIESA provides service to a four township area including the Village of Webberville and the City of Williamston. Fire stations are located in Williamston and Webberville. NIESA contracts with the Village of Perry Fire Department to provide fire protection to the northern portion of Locke Township. Locke Township operates and maintains three cemeteries. Though the Township does not operate any parks or other recreation facilities, area residents do have access to the various recreation facilities in the surrounding communities and greater regional area. The Township is served by five public school districts.

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