

**DRAFT FOR REVIEW**



# Whitewater Township Master Plan

Planning Commission Updated Draft 5-22-2024

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**This Master Plan, a collaborative effort, is a forward-looking document that describes the desired direction for community development in Whitewater Township. It considers local history, current conditions, and trends and then looks forward, establishing a long-range vision for growth, redevelopment, and preservation. This vision is not just inspired by, but is the product of substantial community engagement and public input, with each resident and stakeholder a valued contributor.**

**With the long-range vision for community development, specific implementation steps are carefully developed. These steps include development policies, action initiatives, and zoning recommendations. When implemented, these steps will guide construction, redevelopment, and preservation efforts toward desired community goals.**

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# 1

## Introduction

The places where we live do not stay the same. Fundamentally, this is because the numbers and characteristics of residents generally change over time. Populations grow or shrink as people are born, die, and move in and out of communities. At the same time, residents transition through different stages of life, from dependent children to middle age, to older adults. These changes drive demand for numbers and types of housing units in an area, commercial needs, employment opportunities, and public services. With these demographic changes, the physical environment also changes. Buildings are built or repurposed, transportation systems develop or improve, and more complete public facilities are provided in response to evolving needs.

Sometimes physical change is nearly imperceptible, and sometimes it is dramatic and hard to miss, especially over a long time. The following chapter provides a brief historical overview of Whitewater Township. The community just a few generations ago is so much different than the community we live in today. Change is fueled by advancements in transportation, technology, socioeconomic trends, and even larger regional forces, as communities are almost always part of larger regions with important characteristics and dynamics.

Community master plans are fundamentally about understanding this change and charting a desired course forward. Creating this understanding generally begins with an educational and discovery element. This is provided in the first four chapters. Most importantly, however, the emphasis should be on articulating a long-term

and comprehensive perspective of what people want the future to look like. This Master Plan provides a vision for the future grounded in public engagement. It aims to speak authoritatively about what Whitewater Township residents want and hope for in the future regarding community development.

It is essential also to recognize that while completing a Master Plan is an important goal, it represents more of a milestone in the ongoing story of community development and redevelopment. This is not the first Master Plan update for Whitewater Township and is unlikely to be the last. Community planning is a forward-looking process that revisits established planning issues and helps identify new ones with fresh community engagement and participation. It also affords consideration of old and new issues with updated information about current conditions and trends.

Whitewater Township (and the larger region) is much different today than in 2015. Notably, the COVID pandemic began in 2020 and has helped fuel new community development trends. These include the growth in remote work options allowing people to live where they wish, as they are less tied to an office or other physical place than before. These and other considerations (to be discussed later) will likely have a lasting impact on Whitewater Township.

### Legal Context

Apart from helping to satisfy the basic desire to plan for the future and provide a direction for community change, there is an important legal dimension

to Master Plans. More than a dozen states require a local Master Plan (also called a comprehensive plan), and others encourage it in various ways. Michigan's controlling statute is the Michigan Planning Enabling Act (MPEA) of 2008. This act consolidated older, related planning statutes and defined basic requirements and procedures for developing a Master Plan in Michigan communities. One significant legal aspect of the MPEA is the connection between the Master Plan and zoning. The MPEA requires steps to reconcile proposed land use categories in the master plan with existing zoning districts in the zoning ordinance. Additionally, the Michigan Zoning Enabling Act of 2006 (Section 125.3203) similarly connects to the Master Plan by explicitly stating that a zoning ordinance shall be based on a plan designed to promote public health, safety, and general welfare.

### MPEA

While MPEA is generally silent regarding the process and steps by which a community gathers information and pursues citizen engagement as it develops a Master Plan, it does describe several elements to be included. While not an all-inclusive list, some major content-related issues include the following (Sections 125.3831 and 125.3833):

- Making careful and comprehensive surveys and studies of present conditions and future growth within the planning jurisdiction with due regard to its relation to neighboring jurisdictions.
- Consulting with representatives of adjacent local government units to avoid conflicts in Master Plans and zoning.

**One significant legal aspect of the MPEA relates to the connection between the master plan and zoning. The MPEA requires steps to reconcile proposed land use categories in the master plan with existing zoning districts found in the zoning ordinance.**

- Cooperation with state and federal governments, public transportation agencies, and other public agencies concerned with economic, social, and physical development.
- Addressing land use and infrastructure issues, projecting 20 years or more into the future.
- Developing maps, plats, charts, and descriptive, explanatory, and other related matters showing recommendations for physical development.
- A land use plan that classifies and allocates land for various purposes.
- All components of a transportation system and their interconnectivity (considering all legal users of the public right-of-way).
- Recommendations as to the general character, extent, and layout of redevelopment or rehabilitation of blighted areas; and the removal, relocation, widening, narrowing, vacating, abandonment, change of use, or extension of streets, grounds, open spaces, buildings, utilities, or other facilities.
- A zoning plan for various zoning districts that control the height, area, bulk, location, and use of buildings and premises. The zoning plan explains how the land use categories on the future land use map relate to the districts on the zoning map.
- Recommendations for implementing Master Plan proposals.

*For a full description of required content see: The Michigan Planning Enabling Act, Act 33 of 2008*

### Related Local Planning

This Master Plan updates and replaces the 2015 Whitewater Township Master Plan. It provides a substantial amount of new information, along with updated goals, vision, and implementation steps.

Like many Michigan communities, Whitewater Township has a Recreation Plan. It was adopted on December 14, 2021. It is a 5-year plan (2021-2025) with content

## Master Plan

that reflects requirements set forth by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources to secure and maintain grant eligibility. It describes Whitewater Township and provides a recreational inventory, action plan, and capital improvements schedule related to park improvements. This Master Plan is therefore largely silent on Park and Recreation issues.

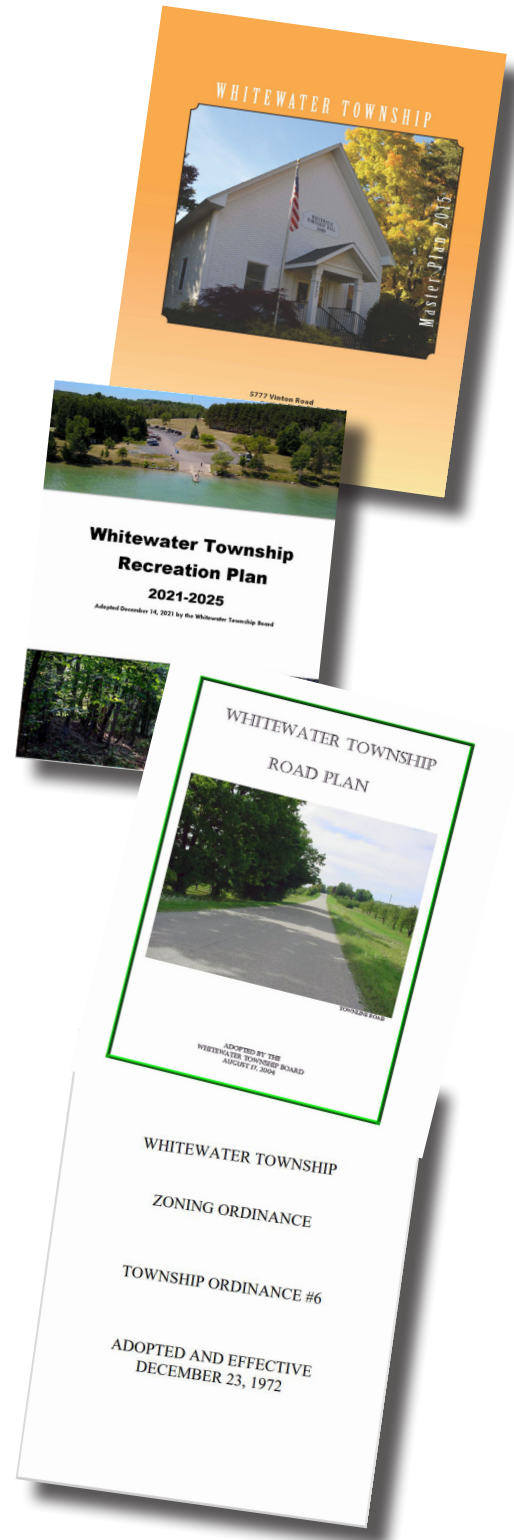
Finally, Whitewater Township has a Road Plan adopted in 2004. This document is discussed in Chapters 3 and 8.

### Relationship Between a Master Plan and The Zoning Ordinance

Sometimes there can be confusion between a community's Master Plan and its Zoning Ordinance. It should be clear that a Master Plan does not directly set forth legal requirements for public or private development. Rather, it provides the rationale and reasoning behind existing zoning and related land use controls. It also frequently recommends updating a zoning ordinance to respond to evolving land use needs and community desires. For example, a Master Plan may identify the need to provide a greater mix of housing types based on community input and related data. The Master Plan might also identify regulatory barriers to achieving a desired housing mix and may identify the need for zoning amendments to accomplish desired goals. Steps to amend the zoning ordinance would follow adopting a new Master Plan as an implementation step. The zoning language developed afterward would contain all required details, such as dimensional standards, use regulations, and development review procedures. The planning process associated with a Master Plan could also identify local environmental issues related to land development and recommend regulatory measures to prevent further problems. The recommended actions in the Master Plan are typically general but are followed by developing and adopting specific regulations.

### Planning Process

The planning process to develop this Master Plan update followed a logical pattern of discovery about Whitewater Township's past and present. Much of this discovery process occurred in the winter and spring of 2023. While this discovery work was taking place, the Planning Commission formed the Resident Outreach Subcommittee (ROS) to explore options for community engagement.



This included a review of a prior community survey (conducted in 2009), steps to prepare a new survey to learn of updated community perspectives, and steps to plan for and organize public events to allow for an person open house and planning workshop. The list below provides a general description of steps taken to develop this Master Plan:

<b>Date(s)</b>	<b>Activity</b>
12/7/2022	Presentation to the Planning Commission Introduction to Master Plan review process
12/22/2022	Notice of Intent to Update Master Plan sent to adjacent jurisdictions
1/4/2023 2/1/2023	Planning Commission discussion about citizen engagement and community outreach
3/10/2023 3/17/2023	Resident Outreach Subcommittee Meetings
4/5/2023	Planning Commission discussion about citizen engagement and resident survey
4/24/2023	Resident Outreach Subcommittee Meeting
5/3/2023	The Planning Commission discussed citizen engagement and the resident survey. Chapters 1-4 of the Master Plan were released in draft form for comment, and the draft was posted on the township website.
5/4/2023 5/11/2023	Resident Outreach Subcommittee Meetings focused on resident survey logistics and launch.
5/17/2023	Special Joint Township Board and Planning Commission Meeting
5/22/2023 5/31/2023	Resident Outreach Subcommittee Meetings focused on resident survey logistics and launch.
6/7/2023	Planning Commission discussion about resident survey and subsequent citizen engagement steps
6/14/2023	Due date for surveys to be returned
7/6/2023	Resident Outreach Subcommittee Meeting - Survey tabulation and RFP for workshop facilitation discussion
7/12/2023	Planning Commission Meeting - Survey tabulation and RFP for workshop facilitation discussion
8/2/2023	Planning Commission Meeting - Survey tabulation and RFP for workshop facilitation discussion

8/10/2023	Resident Outreach Subcommittee Meeting on Open House Planning
8/24/2023	Resident Outreach Subcommittee Meeting on Open House Planning
9/6/2023	Planning Commission Meeting - Approved survey results to be posted on the township website. Analysis of survey results. Planning for Open House on September 28.
9/15/2023	ROS Meeting - Workshop Planning
9/20/2023	Special Planning Commission & ROS Meeting - Open House preparation, planning for Workshop on November 7, 2023
9/28/2023	Master Plan Open House
10/4/2023	Planning Commission Meeting - Open House Debrief & Plans for Workshop on Nov. 7, 2023
11/1/2023	Planning Commission Meeting - Workshop Planning and Discussion
11/7/2023	Master Plan Workshop
12/6/2023	Planning Commission Meeting - Master Plan Open House & Workshop Results Discussion
12/13/2023	Joint Planning Commission Meeting and Township Board Meeting - Master Plan Update Discussion
1/3/2024	Draft of Chapter 5 (Community Engagement) provided to PC for comment.
3/19/2024	Complete Draft Master Plan released for Planning Commission Review
4/18/2024	Planning Commission holds a special meeting to discuss edits, clarifications and changes to 3/19/2024 draft with Resident Outreach Subcommittee.
6/5/2024	Updated draft produced on 5/22/24 and discussed on 6/5/2024 at Planning Commission meeting.

**TO BE EXPANDED AS PLANNING PROCESS CONTINUES**

# 2

## Historic Context

Before beginning to consider the current or future characteristics of Whitewater Township, it makes sense to review local history. Many previous generations have called Whitewater Township home, and their stories and past milestones give insight into why some of the features we see today are as they are. The 2015 Master Plan provided considerable historical information expanded upon below.

Historical information is provided for three reasons. First, some historical facts may surprise some who are less familiar with the area. In the past, Williamsburg was far more of a commercial hub than it is today. Secondly, looking back at history helps draw attention to how communities change over time. Buildings are built and torn down, roads move, technology advances, and social behavior changes. Thirdly, historical material provides context and understanding from which we can look at current and future conditions. Understanding what came before expands our understanding of the present character of Whitewater Township. It also suggests a sense of place that is uniquely Whitewater Township. Whitewater Township is unique partly because of its history.

**“When our grandparents came in the 1850’s, Whitewater Township was a wilderness covered with huge pine and hemlock. Many white pine were three and four feet through and some even five feet. These were also beech, maple, elm, oak and birch with a few basswood, also cedar and tamarack in the swamps.”**

*Rob’s Recollections, An Early History of Whitewater Township and Skegemog Point Grand Traverse County, Michigan By Robert Lucius Samels*

### Native American History

Archaeologists theorize that five or six different cultures of people have occupied the area of the Township around Skegemog Point beginning approximately 10,500 BC. Before the white settlers in the area, the Mascoutin (or “People of the Open Prairie”), a branch of the Algonquin Tribe, lived in the area until the 1630s, followed by the Chippewa and Ottawa Indian Tribes. The majority of Native Americans were moved north to a reservation after 1857.

### Early European Settlers

Following Father Baraga’s mapping of the area between 1830-1840, the Government Survey of 1850 was completed and the



*This monument is found at Hi-Pray Park honoring the early pioneers of Whitewater Township of 1856 (Langworthy, Cox, Gay, Scofield).*

area received its first permanent white settlers. Amon Langworthy, George Brown, and William H. Fife (who later became the Township's first supervisor) came in 1854, Joseph Sours in 1855, H. S. Beach in 1856, and J. M. Merrill in 1858. At "Hi" Pray Park, a stone memorializes the Williamsburg pioneers of 1856.

Before construction of roads and railroads in the area, supplies came by boat from Elk Rapids on Elk and Round (today known as Skegemog Lake) Lakes and were transported cross-country to the Williamsburg area.

Some General Historic Milestones

*Michigan Territory was created in 1805*

*Father Baraga mapped the area between 1830-1840*

*The majority of Native Americans were moved north to a reservation after 1857.*

*The current Township Hall was built in 1889*

*The State of Michigan relocated M-72 in the 1960's*

**1800**

**1850**

**1900**

**1950**

*1776 Continental Congress ratifies the Declaration of Independence*

*Early white visitors to the area came to trap and trade with the Indians, perhaps as early as 1810-1820.*

*Construction of the Grand Rapids and Indiana Railroad began in the area in 1867.*

*In 1903, the population of Williamsburg was about 150*

*In 1960, the population of Whitewater Township was 630 (US. Census)*

*The Government Survey of 1850 was completed and the area received its first permanent white settlers.*

VINDSBYE OF WILLIAMSBURG, MICH.



## Master Plan

The area of Williamsburg was originally part of a large county called Michilimackinac and was the largest settlement in the area. In 1859, Whitewater Township became the third township in the county, after Peninsula and Traverse. It covered the area from Elk Lake to Grand Traverse Bay.

Williamsburg was the fourth name assigned to the emerging town. Three former names proposed included Cedar Rapids, the Mill or Scofield's Mill, and Dunbar. Finally, Williamsburg was proposed and approved by the Postal Service beginning in 1856.

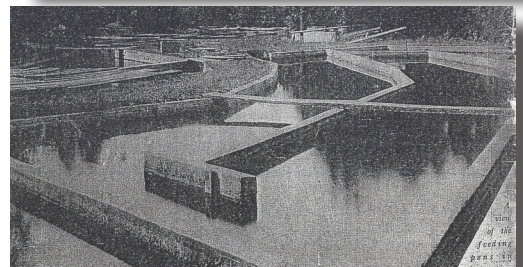
The current Township Hall was built in 1889 on land donated by David Vinton, Jr. and is still in use today. Before the ceiling was lowered, plays were also performed in this building, as well as basketball games.



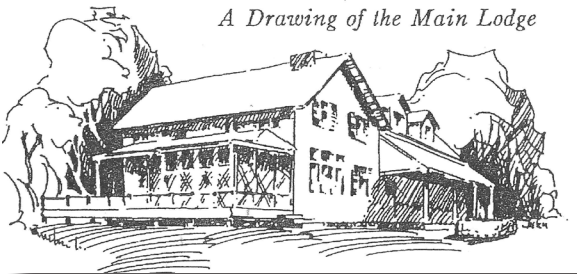
In 1903, the population of Williamsburg was about 150. With agriculture on the rise, the town contained a store, hotel, blacksmith shop, sawmills, gristmill, grange hall, Township Hall, a Methodist-Episcopal Church, and was home to seven schools. By the 1930's the population was 460.

The Grist Mill was an important feature in the area before it was torn down in about 1915. It was built at the end of the civil war. John H. Bissell, a Detroit area attorney, owned the pond.

Another prominent feature in Williamsburg between 1890 and 1940 was a large fish hatchery and fishing lodge. The Charles M. Greenway's estate called "Weesh-Ko-Wong," meaning "clear cold water," was a large and notable fish hatchery. Numerous springs fed the pond (also known as Bissell's Pond). Famous for his brook and rainbow trout fingerlings, he also tried repopulating the grayling, a native fish decimated by logging and non-native trout species in Michigan. During one year, the hatchery sold 65,000 brook trout, and the egg capacity was

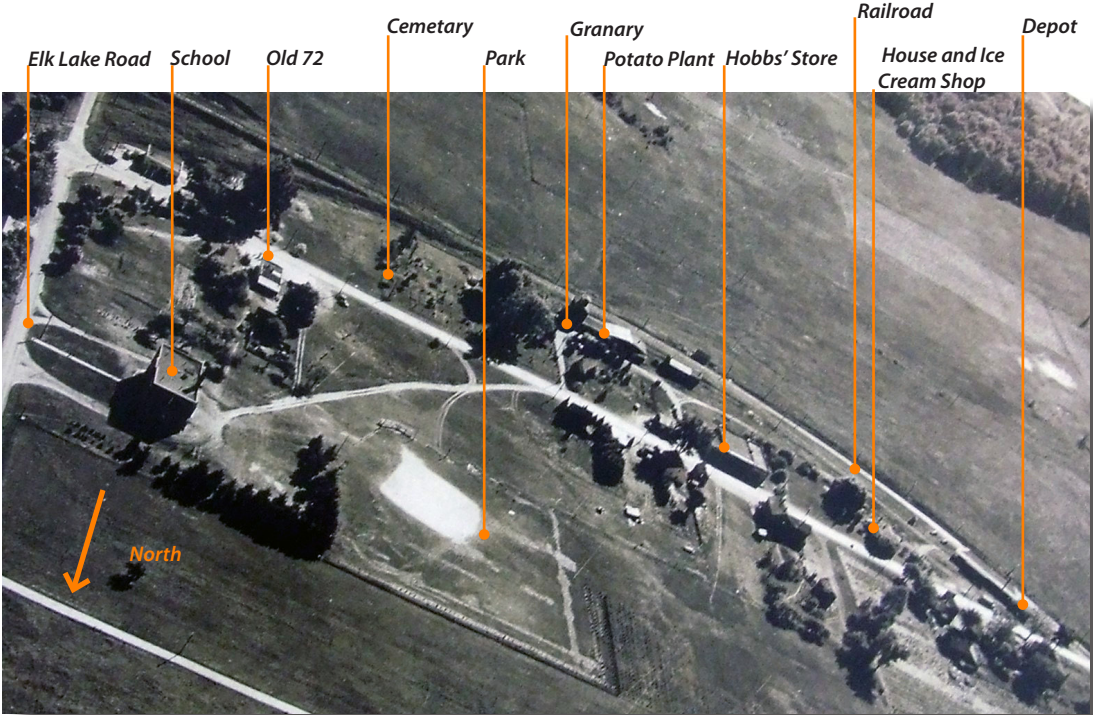


one million eggs per season. The fishing lodge had accommodations for about eleven people, including bathrooms, a kitchen, a living room, laundry, and a dining room.

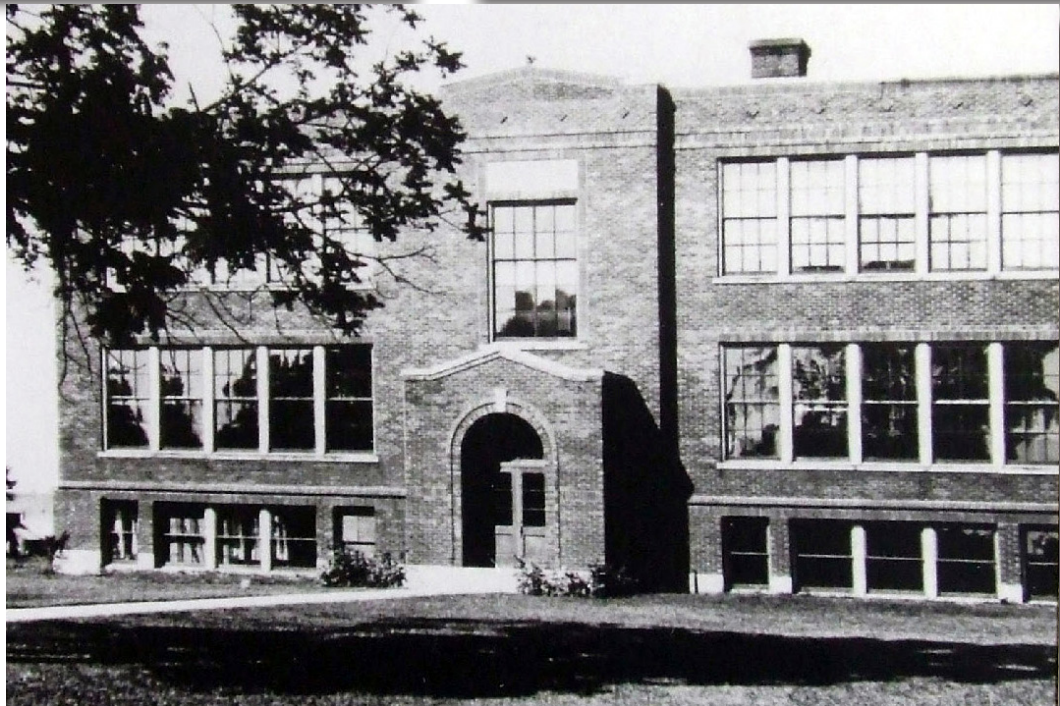
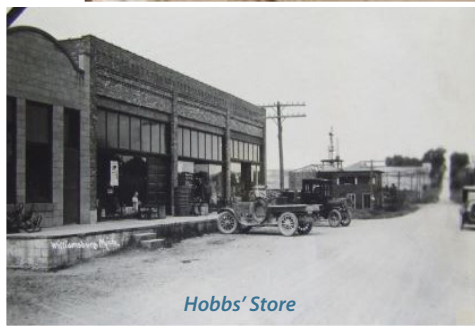
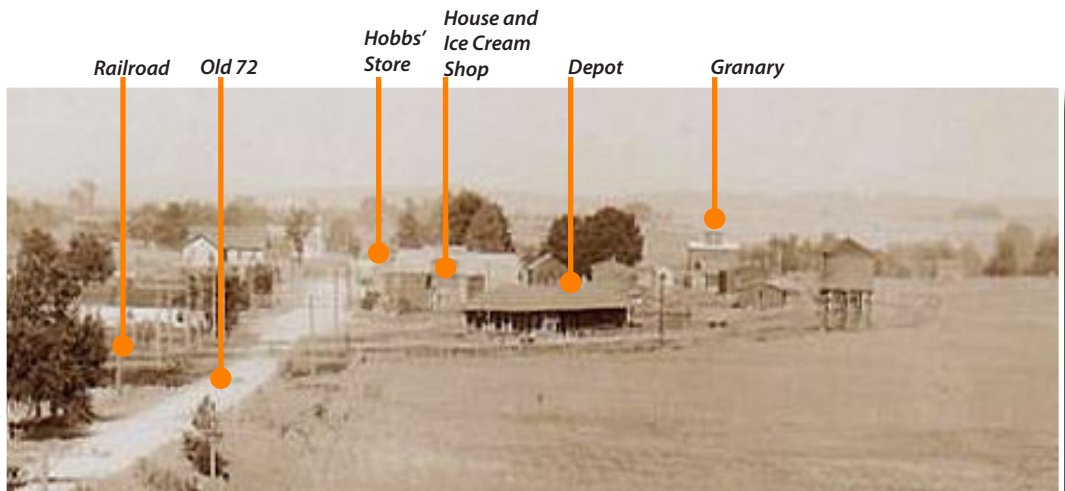


Williamsburg expanded in the early 1900s with new construction that followed the railroad construction in the 1890s. To the north, along Old 72, businesses included a granary, ice cream shop, mercantile & farm implement store (Hobbs Store), and other establishments. Development activity also included a school and park (Hi-Pray Park today), as shown below.

**Buildings Along Old M-72**



# Master Plan



South of Old 72, other commercial activity existed. Specifically, the Charles Will Hardware Store was located on Vinton Street (nearly across from the Township Hall). Unfortunately, this establishment (along with others) burned down. The house that can be seen north of the hardware store was owned by Charles Will and still stands today.



Just south of the Charles Will Hardware Store was an area called "The Corners." This area was located at the corner of Church Street and Vinton Road. An ice cream shop existed here, along with a grocery store and dry goods store.

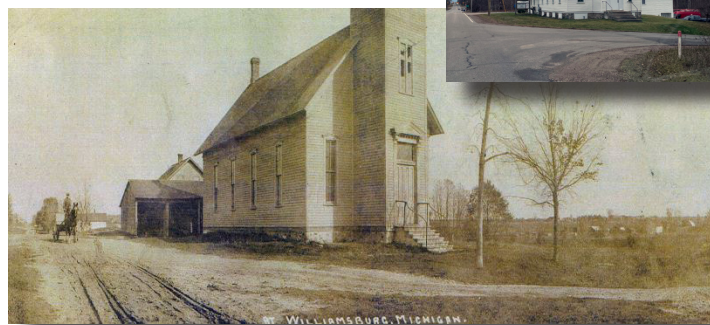


*Church Street - Looking East Toward Vinton St.*

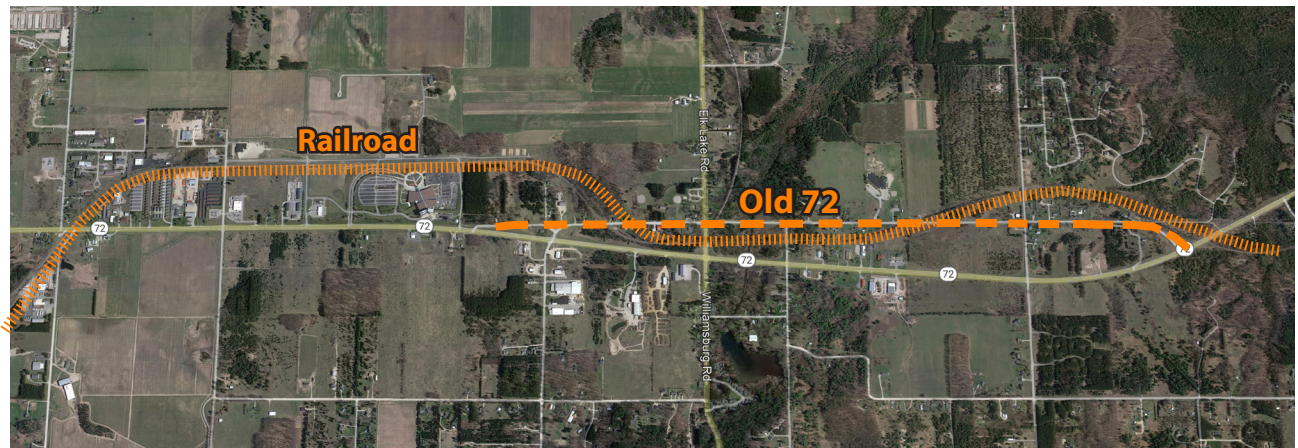


*Intersection of Church Street and Vinton St.*

Perhaps the most prominent building south of Old 72 was the Church built at the intersection of Williamsburg Road and Church Street. This Church is among the oldest standing buildings in Williamsburg. The sign at the north entrance indicates that it was established in 1881. It has been added on to and altered but still stands intact today.

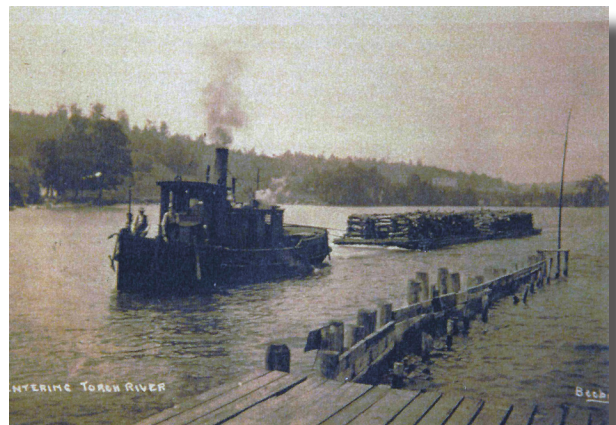


Like everywhere in America, the 1960s changed Williamsburg and its 630 residents. The State of Michigan relocated M-72, bisecting the town, and the last railroad steam engine traveled the tracks. The Williamsburg Consolidated School became a part of the Elk Rapids School District in the 1950's. The gymnasium remained, hosting community events and well-known dances attended by people from miles around well into the decade.



### Transportation History

Along with the relocation of M-72, transportation has been an important factor for many years. Before the invention of the automobile in the late 1800s and its growing popularity in the early 1900s, people traveled by boat, horse, and railroads. In the late 1870s through the early 1900s, boats moved passengers and goods across the Great Lakes and within the interconnected system of rivers and lakes known as the Chain of Lakes. The Chain of Lakes is a 75-mile-long waterway with 14 lakes and rivers connecting Elk Lake and East Grand Traverse Bay with communities northeast of Whitewater Township, such as Bellaire, Central Lake, and Elsworth. Historically, this waterway was used to transport logs to sawmills. Today, boat traffic is oriented mainly toward recreational purposes, and the Chain of Lakes is a popular tourist destination with seasonal and year-round homes along the shorelines. It is even officially defined as a water trail for kayaking, paddle boarding, and canoeing (see [www.michiganwatertrails.org](http://www.michiganwatertrails.org)).



In the 1890s, railroads began serving the area, moving passengers, logs, agricultural products, and other goods. A train station was built in Williamsburg, along with a water tower to support the needs of the steam engines. As reliance on private motor vehicle transportation grew in the early parts of the 1900s, demand for rail service declined. Today, the rails and rail beds are still visible in Williamsburg (just a few hundred feet west of the Williamsburg Post office on Old M 72). This same rail bed extends westward behind the Turtle Creek Casino toward Acme and crosses M 72 at Bates Road. South of Bates Road, the railroad right-of-way includes a paved recreational trail that is part of the regional TART Trail system.

With growing numbers of auto and truck traffic in the last 100 years or so, the road network of Whitewater Township evolved from trails to paved roadways. In the early years, instead of paying taxes for road maintenance, people would work a certain number of days on the road, according to the amount of land they owned. A highway commissioner was elected and called the Pathmaster. The Pathmaster would make sure each settler did their allotted time on the roads.

M 72 is the busiest road in Whitewater Township today. It is a state trunkline highway that was first designed as a state highway in 1919. It has evolved over the years to be one of three state highways that crosses the Lower Peninsula from Lake Michigan to Lake Huron. The development of M 72 as an important state route has included bypasses and routing to avoid denser and more populated areas, allowing for higher traffic speeds and heavier traffic volumes.

### Major Underground Gas Leak

For older residents, the memory of the major gas leak is a significant reminder that parts of Whitewater Township were almost lost to an explosion. About 50 years ago (April 1973), Whitewater Township was the site of a near disaster due to a natural gas blowout. According to MLive (April 21, 2016), hundreds of craters and geysers appeared with gas seeping from underground, and hundreds of local people were evacuated and displaced (some over a long period of time). Some holes were 15-20 feet across. The Township Hall and M-72 were threatened, and there was fear that a spark could create an explosion. After this incident, lawsuits were filed, and new regulations and orders were promulgated. There are thousands of oil and gas wells in Northwestern Michigan.



Source: Acme Heritage Society, Record Eagle, MLive.

## Other Places and People

### Mabel

A little town known as Mabel existed east of Williamsburg. At one time, Mabel had a post office, store and sawmill. A sign drawing attention to Mabel is still visible along the North side of M 72.



### Samels Farm:

William and Mariam (Watson) Samels moved to the Williamsburg area from Bruce Mines, Canada, in 1855 to begin farming. Frank Samels was the third son and fifth child of William and Miriam. Frank purchased 64 acres at the end of Skegemog Point Road in 1889, built a farmstead and raised a family of four sons. Native American artifacts were found on the site, and archaeologists discovered the remains of an entire woodland village along the Skegemog shoreline. The Samels farm was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1972 (one of 13 sites in Grand Traverse County). The Samels Family Heritage Society was formed in 2003 to help preserve the site and educate visitors about local history. Events at the Samels Farm during 2022 included a blacksmith class, farm work bee, quilting workshop, photography workshop, dances and gatherings.



*Photos courtesy of Samels Family Heritage Society*

### Hi Pray

Hilan (Hi) Pray, was born in 1909, and spent his early life in the Williamsburg area. He attended school in Williamsburg and graduated from Traverse City Central High School. He was the captain of the baseball team at Western Michigan University and taught school for a number of years. He also coached baseball and basketball. He played semi-pro baseball as a pitcher in both the Frankfort and Traverse City areas for a number of years. He was employed by the United States Postal Department.



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# 3

## Present Conditions of Whitewater Township

The Michigan Planning Enabling Act requires Planning Commissions to conduct careful and comprehensive surveys and studies of present conditions and future growth within the planning jurisdiction, with due regard for relationships to neighboring jurisdictions. This Chapter breaks down various features and characteristics of Whitewater Township to help understand current and potential community development challenges.

### Regional Context

Whitewater Township is part of a larger region, and the characteristics of this larger region significantly influence community development. Regions can be defined in multiple ways, but the fact that Whitewater Township is located in Grand Traverse County, just east of Traverse City is important from many standpoints. Three important considerations in terms of regional context include 1) growth pressure, 2) the presence of tourism and numbers of seasonal residents, and 3) major nearby development in Acme Township to the west.

#### Important considerations in terms of regional context include:

- 1) Growth pressure
- 2) Tourism and seasonal residents
- 3) Nearby development

### Growth Pressures

First and foremost, there is the issue of growth pressure. More population information will be provided later, but it is important to recognize that, unlike many Michigan counties with a more or less stable population, Grand Traverse County has been growing. In the last decade (2010-2020), Grand Traverse County grew by about 10 percent, while the State of Michigan grew by less than 2 percent (between 2000 and 2010, Michigan was the only state to lose population).

### Tourism & Seasonal Residents

While the growth rate for permanent residents in the larger region is important, tourists and seasonal residents should also be considered in ways that are unique to this area and in terms of impact on community development. Networks Northwest found that the current permanent population of Grand Traverse County of about 95,000 swells to about 161,000 when summer tourists and seasonal residents (mostly June, July, and August) are accounted for (see Seasonal Population Study for Northwest Lower Michigan, published October 2022). This seasonal population is drawn to area attractions (outdoor activities, wineries, restaurants, etc.) and accommodated in short-term rentals, hotels, and motels.

Available evidence suggests that the trend toward more seasonal residents and tourists will continue. According to the Traverse City Ticker ([www.traverseticker.com](http://www.traverseticker.com) - November 19, 2022), eight new hotels are in the development pipeline in the

*The Traverse City region is an attractive destination in many respects. Manmade and natural features in the area draw both tourists and people who wish to become seasonal or full-time residents. Evidence of the attractiveness of the area is found in national and even international rankings. Some recent examples found on the Traverse City Tourism website include:*

- *The 23 Best Places to Go in the U.S. in 2023 (December 2022) - Condé Nast Traveler*
- *12 Best Places to Buy a Lake House in the U.S. (November 2022) - Travel & Leisure*
- *The Best Ski Resorts in the U.S./Crystal Mountain (October 2022) - U.S. News & World Report*
- *Premier Affordable Area to Retire in the US (August 2022) - Herald Review (Realtor.com)*
- *8 Most Charming Towns in the U.S. for a Fall Getaway (August 2022) - Best Life*
- *USA Today Best Winery Hotel-Readers' Choice 2022/Chateau Chantal (August 2022) - USA Today*
- *The Most Accessible National Parks in the U.S./Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore (July 2022) - Condé Nast Traveler*
- *Every State's Top Fourth of July Show (July 2022) - Travel Pulse*
- *7 of the Most Outdoorsy Cities in the U.S. (June 2022) - Trip Trivia*
- *7 Secret Beaches that are Worth the Trip to Get There (May 2022) - Morningstar*
- *The Most Beautiful Place in Each State (May 2022) - Travel & Leisure*
- *10 of the Best Scenic Drives in U.S. National Parks (May 2022) - Trip Trivia*
- *6 Great US Wine Regions You Haven't Visited Yet and Should in 2022 (April 2022) - Lonely Planet*
- *8 Pro Traveler's Best Road Trip Ideas (April 2022) - AARP*
- *8 Unexpected US Foodie Destinations (March 2022) - Lonely Planet*
- *Midwest Living's Best of the Midwest Winners 2022 (February 2022) - Midwest Living*
- *Top 50 Beaches in the US for 2022/Sleeping Bear Dunes (January 2022) - Randall "Mr. Beach" Kaplan*
- *8 Charming Great Lake Beach Towns (January 2022) - World Atlas*
- *22 Places You Need to Travel to in 2022 (January 2022) - Matador Network*

**Source:** <https://www.traversecity.com/meetings/media/accolades/>

area that will add nearly 800 new rooms to the local hotel room inventory (a 20 percent increase over the 4,000 now available).

Another dimension to the seasonal attributes of the region is the Flintfields Horse Park to the west in adjacent Acme Township. The Flintfields Horse Park sits on 130 acres and is a top equestrian destination in North America. Major events begin in June and conclude in September. The impact of this facility is felt as patrons of Flintfields seek local accommodations for extended periods and seek goods and services during their stay. A prime example is the fact that Whitewater Township will soon have two new veterinary clinics on M-72, which undoubtedly will help support the Flintfields Horse Park.

Nearby, Turtle Creek Casino, and the Grand Traverse Resort and Spa also draw many visitors from near and far. The Turtle Creek Resort just underwent a renovation project of its 137 guest rooms. The Grand Traverse Resort and Spa in Acme Township includes 579 hotel rooms, spa, dining, golf, and a conference center.

### **Major Nearby Development**

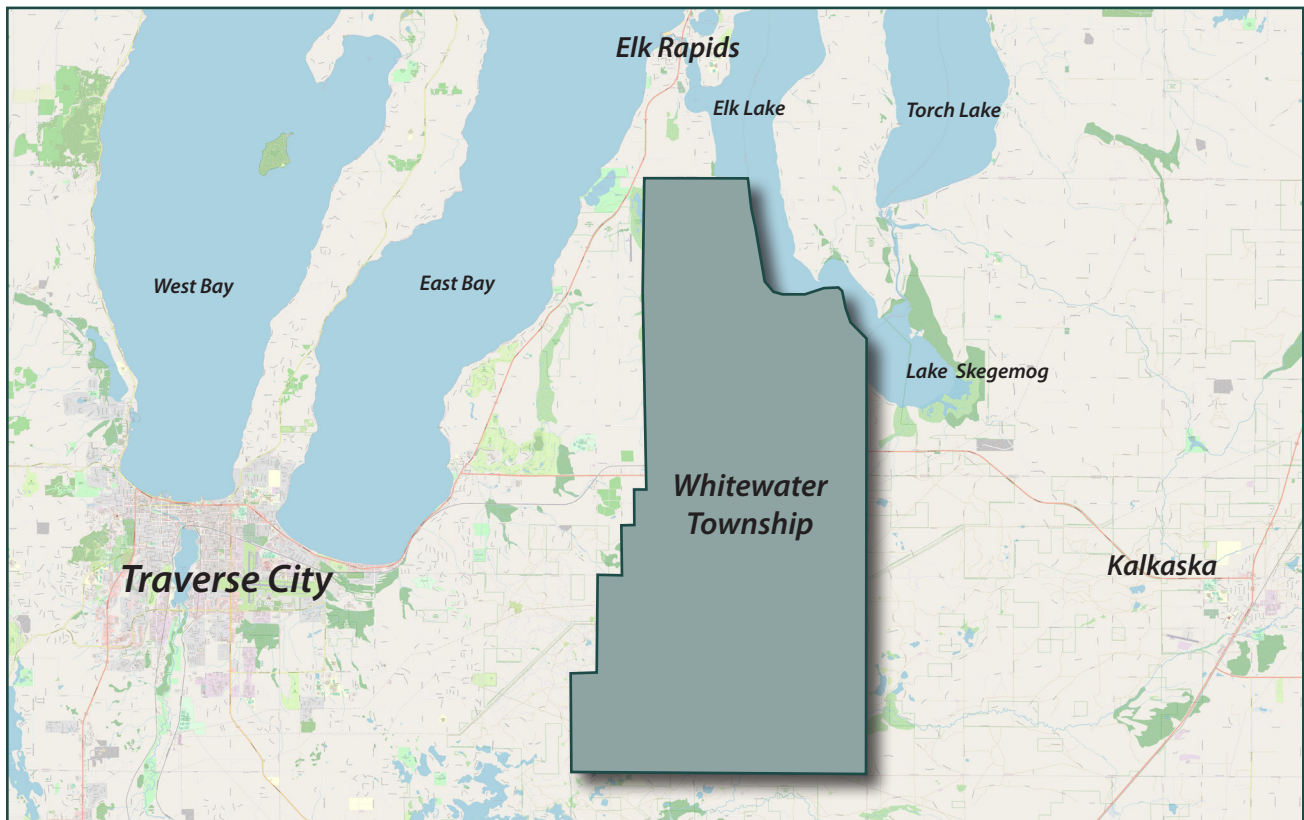
Slightly more than two miles west of Whitewater Township is the Grand Traverse Town Center development along the south side of M-72. This controversial development was initially proposed in 2004 as a mixed-use development. It includes 182 acres. Planned uses included retail, hotel, civic spaces, housing (multifamily, townhouses, row houses, senior housing, and single-family) and other uses. In 2015, Meijer opened its doors to a 195,000-square foot supercenter as part of this development. The much larger balance of the area has been improved with internal roads, street lighting, walkways, and utilities, but it is currently undeveloped. The significance of this development to planning

in the area is that the large undeveloped portions of Grand Traverse Town Center development represent more or less “shovel-ready” construction sites. This inventory of sites may help meet the growing demand for new building spaces in the area.

### **Organization and Geography**

Whitewater Township is one of 1,240 townships in Michigan. Township government is a common form of government in the Midwest that generally serves rural areas. Often, townships are 36 square miles in size (6 miles by 6 miles), but they can vary in size for several reasons. As a local government, townships are often regarded being “closest to the people” and most responsive to local needs. The legal

framework within which Michigan Townships operate is established primarily by State law (Michigan Compiled Laws or (MCL)). The elected officials who serve residents include a supervisor, clerk, treasurer, and two trustees (in some cases four trustees). Under Michigan law, townships can be “general law” townships, or “charter townships,” with additional governmental powers. Three townships in Grand Traverse County are charter townships and they include Garfield, East Bay and Long Lake. Whitewater Township is a General Law (or Civil) Township operating under Chapter 41 of the MCL.



Williamsburg is an unincorporated village. Unlike incorporated cities and villages such as Traverse City or the Village of Elk Rapids, which exist as a unit of local government with elected officials and legislative powers, Williamsburg is an identified place with a historically denser development pattern and an associated postal zip code of 49690. As shown on page 30, this zip code extends beyond Whitewater Township toward Elk Rapids, Acme and Kalkaska. Whitewater Township is the local government applicable to Williamsburg.

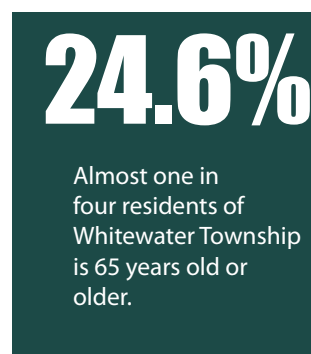
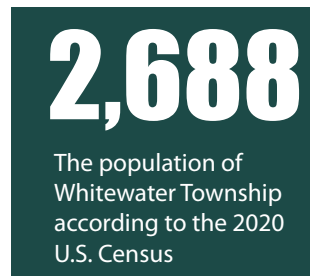


**Geography**

Whitewater Township is part of Grand Traverse County and next to Kalkaska County. It is almost midway between Traverse City and Kalkaska. The northern edge of Whitewater Township abuts Antrim County. Whitewater Township is larger than many Michigan Townships as it includes more than 53 square miles. Almost 6 square miles of Whitewater Township includes Elk Lake.

**Demographics**

Community demographics provide insight and understanding of the people who call Whitewater Township home. While the following statistics provide only a generalized view of local residents, it helps provide more understanding of the community and potential preferences. To provide greater meaning to Whitewater Township statistics, comparisons to other areas are also provided to provide context and contrasts.



<b>AGE</b>			
	Whitewater Twp.	Grand Traverse County	Michigan
Persons under 18 years	21.4%	19.9%	21.4%
Persons 65 years old and older	24.6%	21.3%	18.1%
Median Age (years)	51.4	43.4	40.2

The median age of a Whitewater Township Resident is about 8 years older than that of a Grand Traverse County resident, and more than 11 years older than that of a State of Michigan resident.

*Source: ACS 1-Year Estimates Data Profiles, 2021 and ACS 5-Year Estimates Subject Tables*



### INCOME (2021 Est.)

	Whitewater Twp.	Grand Traverse County	Michigan
All Households (mean income)	\$91,842	\$84,905	\$86,093
All Households (median income)	\$75,685	\$65,651	\$63,498

Whitewater Township residents generally have higher household incomes than the County and State as a whole.

*Source: ACS 5-Year Estimates Subject Tables and ACS 1-Year Estimates Subject Tables and ACS 5-Year Estimates Subject Tables*

# \$75,685

Household incomes are generally higher in Whitewater Township.

“Mean” refers to the average of a set of values.

“Median” refers to middle number in a sorted list of numbers

### HOUSEHOLDS

	Whitewater Twp.	Grand Traverse County	Michigan
Average Household Size	2.56	2.34	2.43
Owner-Occupied Housing Units	90.7%	76.3%	73.2%

Residents of Whitewater Township live in somewhat larger households.

*Source: ACS 1-Year Estimates Data Profiles, 2021 and ACS 5-Year Estimates Subject Tables*

# 90.7%

More than 9 out of 10 homes in Whitewater Township are owner-occupied.

### YEAR HOMES WERE BUILT (PERCENT OF OCCUPIED UNITS)

	Whitewater Township	Grand Traverse County	Michigan
2020 or later	.6%	.6%	.4%
2010 to 2019	3.5%	11.3%	5.2%
2000 to 2009	15.0%	19.8%	10.4%
1980 to 1999	44.2%	31.1%	22.1%
1960 to 1979	25.2%	21.4%	27.1%
1940 to 1959	4.0%	7.6%	21.1%
1939 or earlier	7.6%	8.2%	13.7%

More than 4 out of 10 occupied housing units that exist today in Whitewater Township were built between 1980 and 1999. This suggests that during this time, a local building boom occurred.

*Source: ACS 1-Year Estimates Data Profiles, 2021 and ACS 1-Year Estimates Subject Tables*

### Educational Attainment

	Whitewater Twp.	Grand Traverse Co.	Michigan
Population 25 years and older with a Bachelor's Degree	25.4%	21.8%	19.2%

*Source: ACS 1-Year Estimates Subject Tables and ACS 5-Year Estimates Subject Tables*

**25.4%**

About 1 in 4 adults in Whitewater Township have a Bachelor Degree.

### Labor Force By Industry

Civilian employed population 16 years and over	Whitewater Twp.	Grand Traverse Co.	Michigan
Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and mining	2.8%	1.5%	1.1%
Construction	13.8%	8.2%	5.6%
Manufacturing	10.3%	10.3%	18.7%
Wholesale trade	3.2%	2.0%	2.3%
Retail trade	14.3%	13.7%	10.8%
Transportation and warehousing, and utilities	3.4%	3.0%	4.6%
Information	0.9%	1.2%	1.3%
Finance and insurance, and real estate and rental and leasing	5.7%	6.8%	5.7%
Professional, scientific, and management, and administrative and waste management services	9.8%	9.9%	9.8%
Educational services, and health care and social assistance	21.1%	24.7%	23.3%
Arts, entertainment, and recreation, and accommodation and food services	7.4%	11.7%	9.0%
Other services, except public administration	5.3%	3.8%	4.5%
Public administration	1.9%	3.1%	3.4%

*Source: 2021 5-Year Estimates Data Profiles*

### Other Labor Force Characteristics

	Whitewater Twp.	Grand Traverse Co.	Michigan
Population 16 years and over in Labor Force	57.2%	62.0%	60.9%
Workers 16 years and over - Mean travel time to work (minutes)	26.7	21.3	23.8

*Source: ACS 1-Year Estimates Subject Tables and ACS 5-Year Estimates Data Profiles*

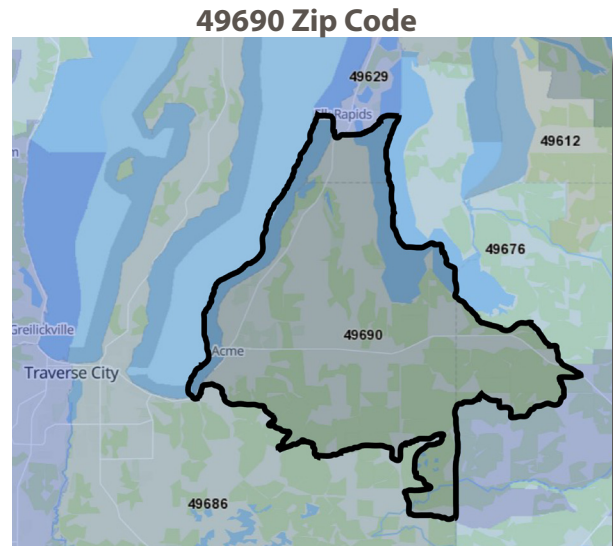
**26.7**

Minutes to get to work

Workers in Whitewater Township generally travel further for employment.

## Lifestyle Characteristics

Beyond basic demographics is a range of socioeconomic characteristics that suggest certain lifestyles and behavior. Considerable research often goes into understanding lifestyles for sophisticated business locational decisions. Such analysis is not needed to support a Master Plan, but it is helpful to briefly look at available information about resident lifestyles that can be associated with an area. One source of this data type is from ESRI, which classifies neighborhoods nationwide into 67 unique segments (Tapestry Segments) based on demographics and socioeconomic characteristics. This data is available by zip code, and while the 49690 zip code extends beyond Whitewater Township (as shown on the map to the right), it largely covers the general area associated with Whitewater Township.



Source: USPS.

Three tapestry segments dominate the zip code and include the following:

### Cozy Country Living - Green Acres (37.45%)

The Green Acres lifestyle features country living and self-reliance. Avid do-it-yourselfers, they maintain and remodel their homes with all the necessary power tools to accomplish the jobs. Gardening, especially growing vegetables, is a priority, again with the right tools, tillers, tractors, and riding mowers. Outdoor living features a variety of sports: hunting and fishing, motorcycling, hiking and camping, and even golf. Other traits include:

- Primarily (not exclusively) older homes with acreage;
- Residents pursue physical fitness vigorously, from working out on home exercise equipment to playing various sports.
- Residents are active in their communities and a variety of social organizations, from charitable to veterans' clubs.
- They are cautious consumers with a focus on quality and durability.
- An older market, primarily married couples, most with no children living at home, or no children at all.



### **Cozy Country Living - Rural Resort Dwellers (30.62%)**

Although the Great Recession forced many owners of second homes to sell, Rural Resort Dwellers remain an active market, just a bit smaller. These communities are centered in resort areas, many in the Midwest, where the change in seasons supports various outdoor activities. Retirement looms for many of these blue-collar, older householders, but workers are postponing retirement or returning to work to maintain their current lifestyles. Workers are traveling further to maintain employment. They are passionate about their hobbies, like freshwater fishing and hunting. Other traits include:

- Housing is owner-occupied, single-family homes, with some mobile homes. A strong market for second homes, these rural areas contain homes valued near the US median.
- Rural Resort Dwellers residents are close to retirement. They've accumulated wealth and begun to shift their portfolios to low-risk assets.
- Residents drive older domestic vehicles and prefer to spend their disposable income on gear to support their hobbies, which include freshwater fishing, hunting, and motorcycling.



### **GenXurban Comfortable Empty Nesters (19.72%)**

Residents in this large, growing segment are older, with nearly half of all householders aged 55 or older; many still live in the suburbs where they grew up. Most are professionals working in government, health care, or manufacturing. These Baby Boomers earn a comfortable living and benefit from years of prudent investing and saving. Their net worth is well above average. Many are enjoying the transition from child-rearing to retirement. They value their health and financial well-being. Other traits include:

- Married couples, some with children, but most without.
- Most households' income from wages or salaries, but a third also draw income from investments and retirement.
- Home maintenance a priority among these homeowners.
- Comfortable Empty Nesters residents are physically and financially active
- Residents enjoy listening to sports radio or watching sports on television.
- Physically active, they play golf, ski, ride bicycles, and work out regularly.



*For more complete information see-*  
<https://www.esri.com/en-us/arcgis/products/data/data-portfolio/tapestry-segmentation>



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## General Landscape and Watersheds

Whitewater Township is unique because it offers a diverse landscape with man-made features built on natural terrain with lakes and streams. The land itself is the product of glacial activity. Geologists estimate that the last ice sheet receded from the area thousands of years ago, carving out the deep lakes and leaving rolling hills and sandy soils.

The topography of Whitewater Township is such that higher elevations are found to the south. Rainfall that does not soak into the ground or evaporates, flows into streams and creeks that flow into Lake Michigan. Streams and creeks generally carry water northward into Elk Lake (and ultimately into the East Grand Traverse Bay in Elk Rapids) or south to the Boardman River (and ultimately into the West Bay of Grand Traverse Bay near Downtown Traverse City).

**Map 1** shows the topography of Whitewater Township. Darker shades illustrate higher elevations, while lighter ones show lower elevations. There is about 500 feet of elevation difference between the lowest areas and the highest areas.

**Map 2** shows the watershed associated with the Boardman River in southern Whitewater Township. Water in the blue areas drains south, and west toward downtown Traverse City, where it empties into West Bay.

The Boardman River is noteworthy because it is among Michigan's top ten trout streams. It is also designated as one of sixteen Natural River systems in Michigan. Natural River designation includes requirements for how land within the river corridor can be used. This is accomplished through zoning requirements that apply to properties within the river corridor.

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Substantial efforts are underway in the region to remove dams and return the Boardman River to a more natural state. According to the Great Lakes Fishery Trust, this dam removal project is the largest in Michigan's history and one of the most significant in the Great Lakes Basin. The benefits of dam removal and the return to natural conditions include restoring aquatic habitats and improved outdoor recreation opportunities. (*see: <https://www.glft.org/the-boardman-ottaway-a-river-reborn/>*)

## Five Regions

Breaking down Whitewater Township's diverse natural and man-made landscape reveals at least five distinctive and unique regions that look, feel, and function differently from others. These areas uniquely combine natural characteristics with the presence (or absence) of human activity. The planning implications of this are explored in future chapters, but for introductory purposes, the following five regions of Whitewater Township are listed below, illustrated on **Map 3**, and subsequently described.

**Region 1 - Northern Forests**

**Region 2 - Rural Agricultural**

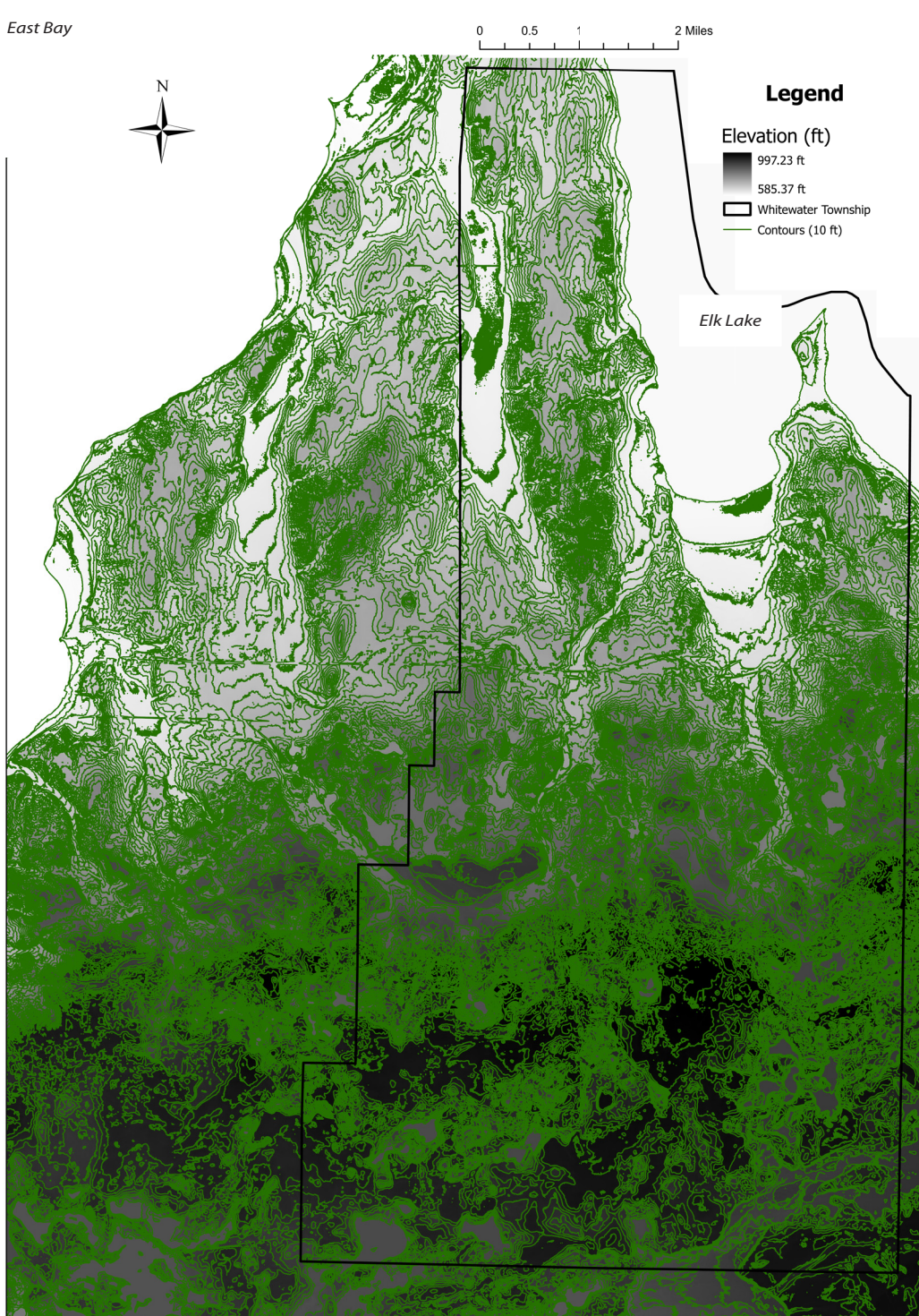
**Region 3 - The M-72 Corridor**

**Region 4 - Extensive Wetlands**

**Region 5 - Residential Lakeshores**

Map 1

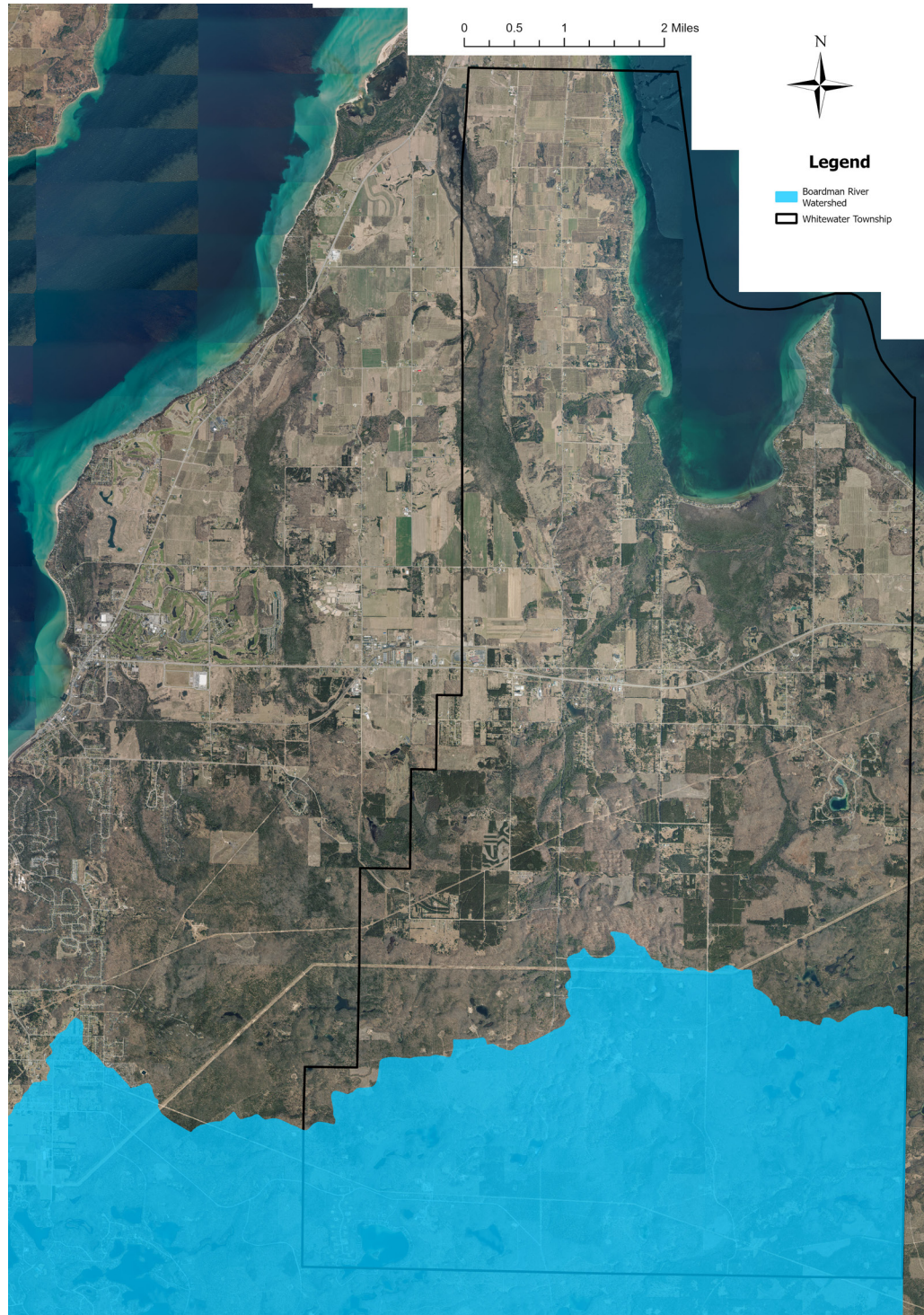
Whitewater Township  
Topography



This map is based on digital databases prepared by Grand Traverse County. Grand Traverse County does not warrant, expressly or impliedly, or accept any responsibility for any errors, omissions, or that the information contained in the map or the digital databases is currently or positionally accurate. Map created by GTC GIS/Equalization

Map 2

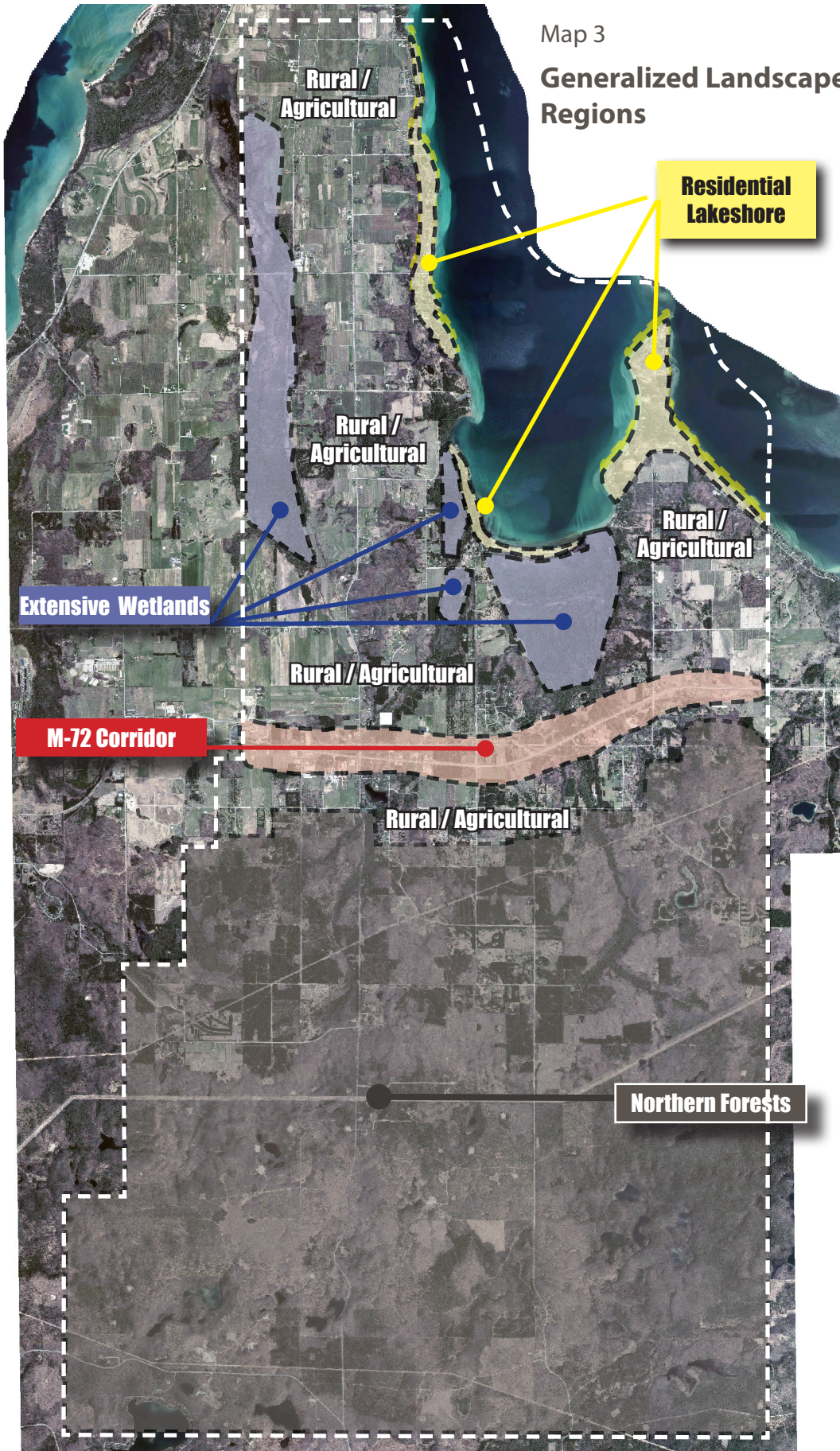
### Boardman River Watershed



*This map is based on digital databases prepared by Grand Traverse County. Grand Traverse County does not warrant, expressly or impliedly, or accept any responsibility for any errors, omissions, or that the information contained in the map or the digital databases is currently or positionally accurate.* Map created by GTC GIS/Equalization

Map 3

### Generalized Landscape Regions



### **Region 1 – Northern Forests.**

Generally, south of M-72, the landscape is heavily wooded, with trees extending across a gently rolling terrain. Tree species include northern hardwoods (maple, birch, oak, beech, etc.). Much of the land south of M-72 is part of the Pere Marquette State Forest, which extends throughout more than a dozen counties on the western side of Michigan's lower peninsula. Permanent and seasonal homes on larger lots, along with seasonal roads and recreational trails, are found throughout this region.

Also, within the Pere Marquette State Forest and Whitewater Township, the Sand Lakes Quiet Area is a place where motorized activity is banned. This area is nearly 2,800 acres, and the terrain includes rolling hills and lakes. Walking trails extend more than seven miles, and places to camp are provided in this area. Outdoor activities include cross-country skiing, fishing, hiking, hunting, mountain biking, snowshoeing, and wildlife watching.

**Map 4** illustrates the extensive land holdings of the State of Michigan in Whitewater Township, depicted in a shade of green. Whitewater Township, encompassing 34,957.99 acres, is significantly impacted by state land holdings, which include 15,044.8 acres. This represents approximately 43% of Whitewater Township.

### **Region 2 – Rural / Agricultural.**

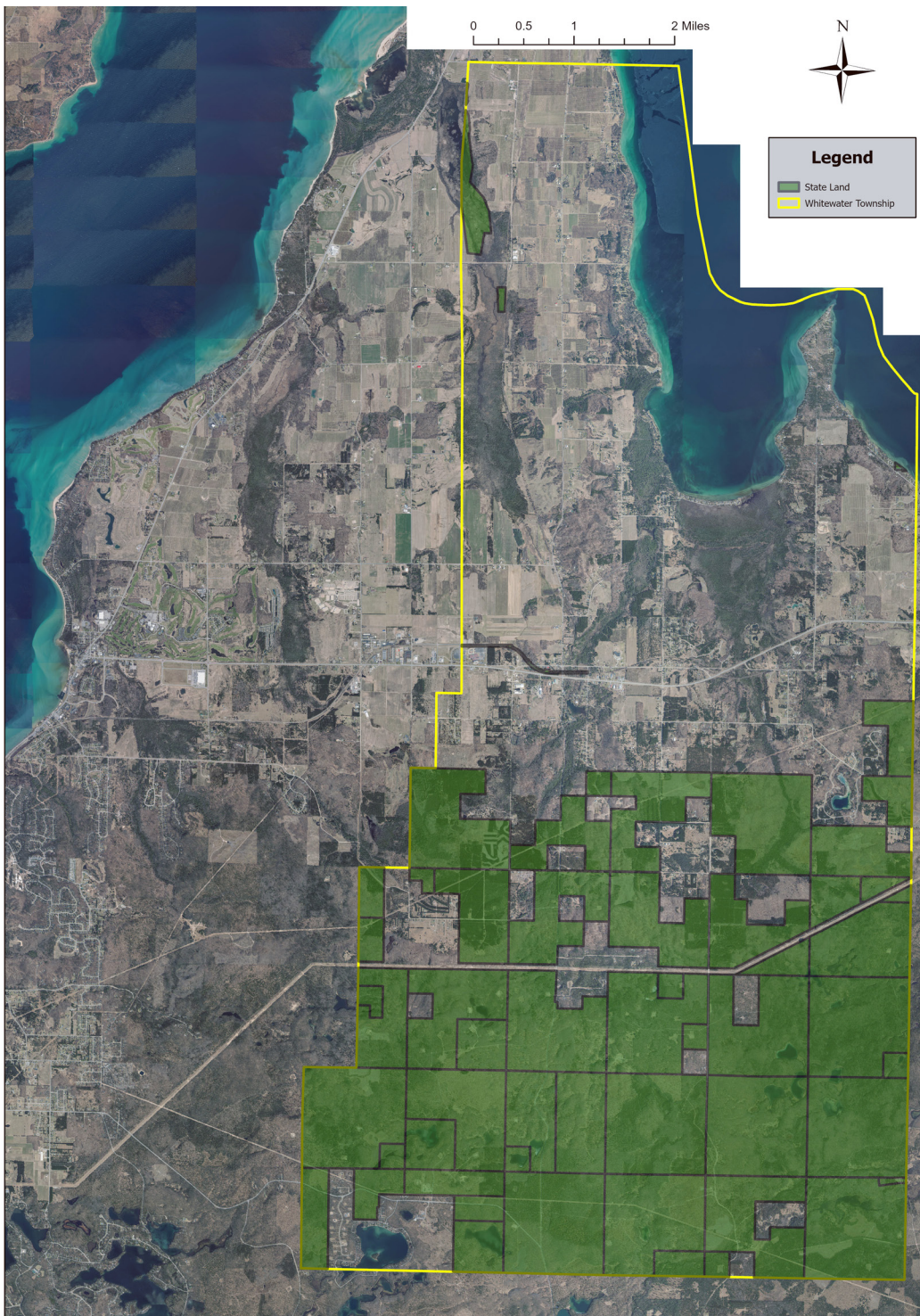
Most of the land just south of and north of M-72 is agricultural. Trees were removed long ago to make way for pastures and orchards in areas with gentle slopes. The agricultural productivity of landscapes in northern Whitewater Township is aided by the proximity of Lake Michigan and Grand Traverse Bay, especially for fruit production. Because waterbodies warm and cool slower than land, Lake Michigan and Grand Traverse Bay moderate the spring and fall temperatures on adjacent land. As a deep and large body of water, Lake Michigan retains summer warmth in the fall and remains cool longer into the spring. The result is a moderation of adjacent land temperatures as winds move air from the water across the land. This is beneficial for fruit production for various reasons. The suitability of the area for agricultural production is also aided and supported by the well-drained sandy soils found throughout the region.



# Whitewater Township

## Map 4

### State Land in Whitewater Township



*This map is based on digital databases prepared by Grand Traverse County. Grand Traverse County does not warrant, expressly or impliedly, or accept any responsibility for any errors, omissions, or that the information contained in the map or the digital databases is currently or positionally accurate.*

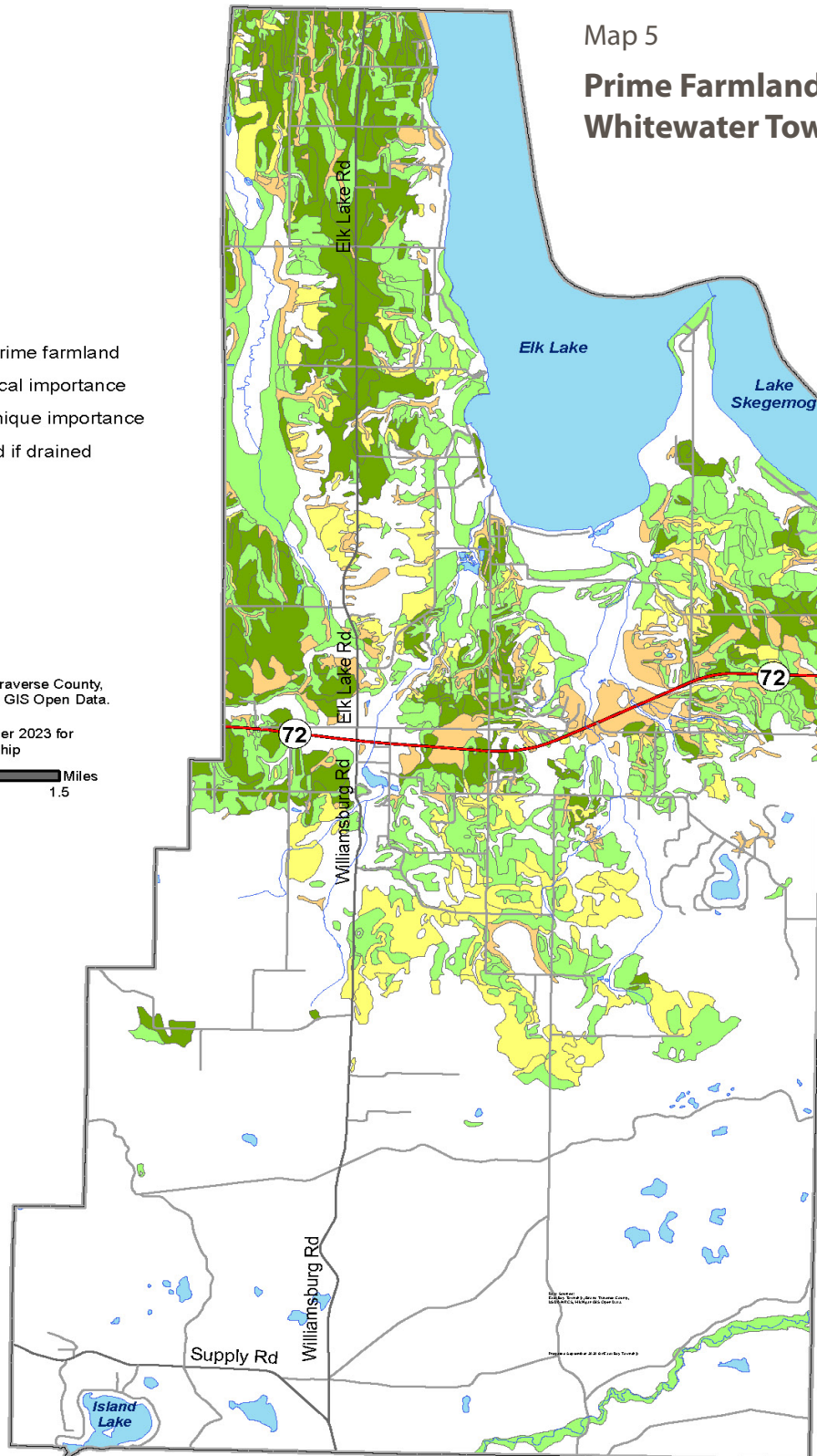
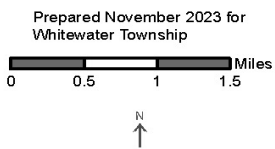
*Map created by GTC GIS/Equalization*

Map 5

Prime Farmland in Whitewater Township

- All areas are prime farmland
- Farmland of local importance
- Farmland of unique importance
- Prime farmland if drained

Data Sources: Grand Traverse County, USDA-NRCS, Michigan GIS Open Data.



**Map 5** illustrates Prime Farmland in Whitewater Township. Prime farmland, as defined by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, has the best combination of physical and chemical characteristics for producing food, feed, forage, fiber, and oilseed crops and is available for these uses. Farmland of Unique Importance is land (other than prime farmland) that is used for the production of specific high-value food and fiber crops. Farmland of Local Importance is farmland identified by the appropriate local agencies.

### **Region 3 - The M-72 corridor.**

M-72 more or less bisects Whitewater Township in an east-west direction. This heavily-traveled route includes a mixture of residential, commercial, and industrial land uses. M-72 is a primary gateway to the Traverse City area and therefore is important both locally and regionally.

### **Region 4 – Extensive Wetlands.**

Interspersed in the rural agricultural area and elsewhere are large tracts of land with ponds, standing water, and wetlands. Wetlands are valuable natural assets because they clean the water, recharge water supplies, reduce flood risks, and provide fish and wildlife habitats. State and federal laws require permits before dredging or placing fill material in wetlands, or construction activity in a regulated wetland.

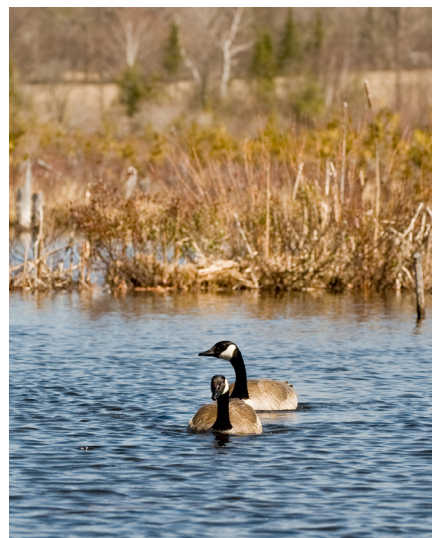
The presence of wetlands in and of itself is not unusual in the Midwest, but the amount of land locally identified as a wetland is. According to the National Wetlands Inventory, produced by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Whitewater Township has about 2,640 acres of wetlands (or about 7.5% of Whitewater Township). This is depicted in greater detail on **Map 6** (blue areas are wetlands). It should be noted that this map is intended to show the large areas of wetlands in the area and is not a substitute for site-specific wetlands studies to determine the boundaries of regulated wetlands for permitting requirements.

One area of extensive wetlands in Whitewater Township is the Petobego Natural Area and another is south of Elk Lake and Miami Beach Road where Battle Creek empties into Elk Lake. Both of these areas are visible on **Map 6**.

**M-72 Looking West Toward East Bay**

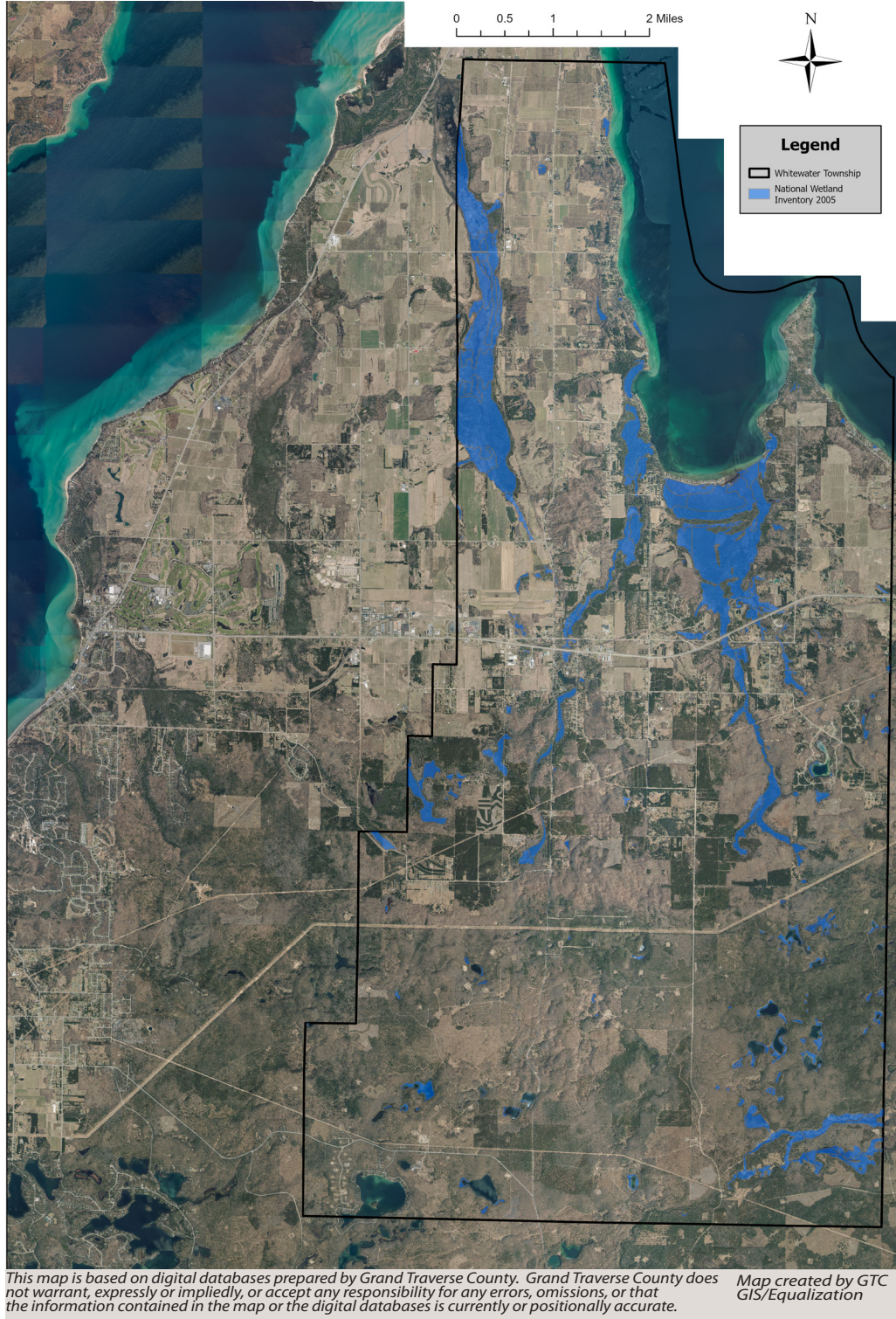


*Photo Credit - Horizon Drone Services*





### Map 6 Wetlands Map



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### Region 5 – Residential Lakeshores.

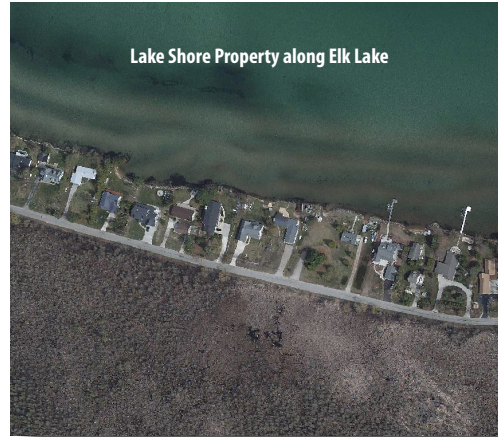
Finally, the land adjacent to Elk Lake and Lake Skegemog have shoreline characteristics all their own. Homes on smaller lots found here are on wooded or cleared lots, often with beaches or natural shorelines. Residential density (units per acre) is usually higher here compared with rural residential and agricultural homes further from the shore, but nearby. Waterfront property generally provides premium property values.

### Floodplains

Related to the issue of wetlands is the matter of land subject to periodic flooding. The floodplain is the land next to a water body, such as a lake, river, stream, or creek that is subject to flooding when significant rain events combine with other conditions to force water above normal levels. Floodplains have been mapped nationally by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) as part of the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) and are associated with a 100-year flood event. In other words, land included in the 100-year flood plain has a one percent chance of flooding in any given year.

The NFIP enables property owners to purchase flood insurance. In return, communities agree to adopt and implement local floodplain management regulations that contribute to protecting lives and reduce the risk of new construction and substantial improvements from future flooding. The recently completed 2022 Grand Traverse County Natural Hazard Mitigation Plan contains important floodplain-related information for all of Grand Traverse County.

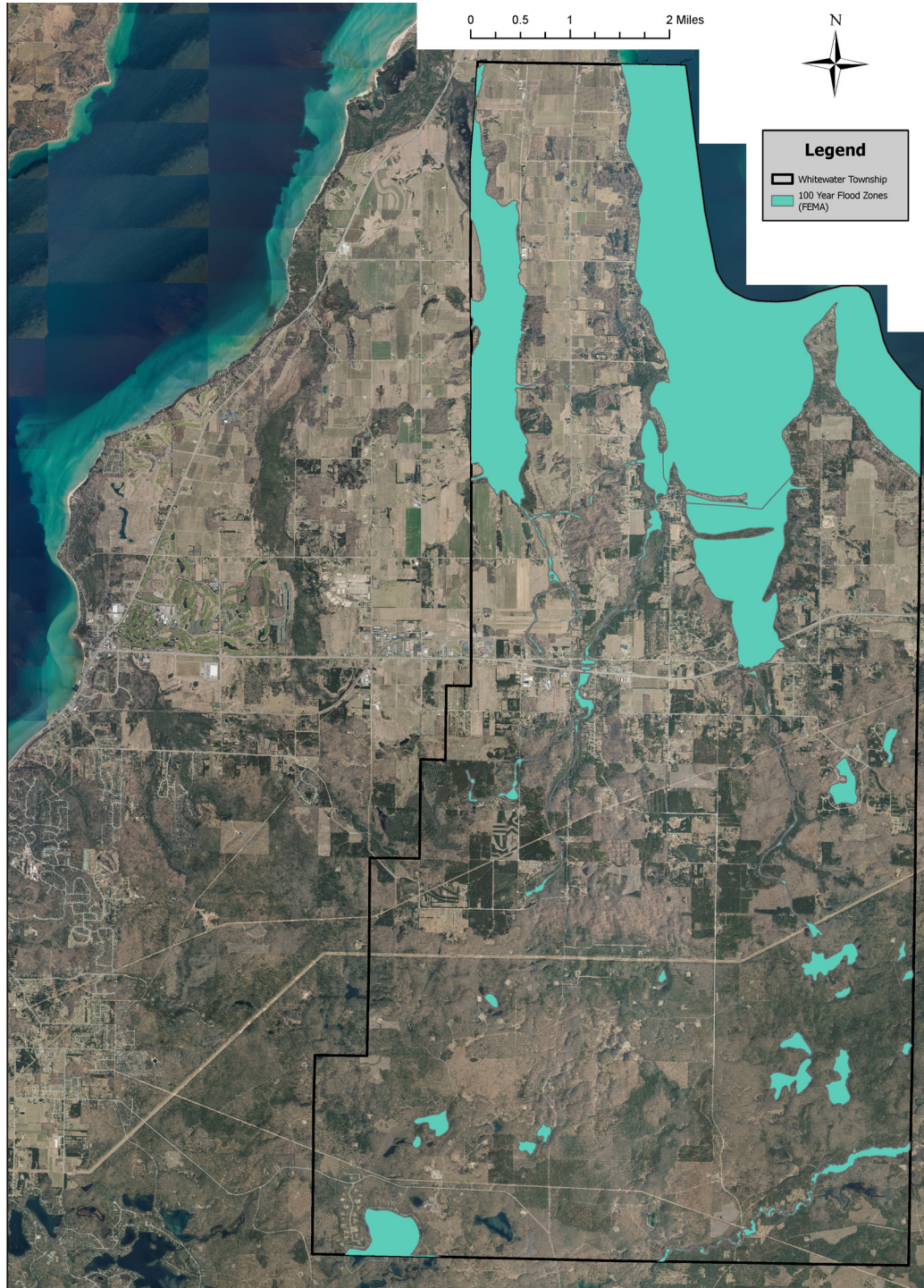
From a land use perspective, the identification of 100-year floodplain boundaries helps understand general limitations on future development. The 100-year floodplain



boundaries are depicted in greater detail on **Map 7**. This map is provided for general reference only and is based on the new Flood Insurance Rate Map (FIRM) that became effective in April 2023. However, any questions about whether a particular property is in the regulatory flood plain should be made using actual FIRM maps by qualified individuals.

It should also be understood that while flooding potential is an obvious and important limitation for how land can be used and built upon, land in the 100-year floodplain can be developed provided floodproofing measures are met. These include measures such as raising habitable floors above flood elevations. Whitewater Township is participating in the NFIP (pursuant to General Ordinance 53) and has an agreement with Grand Traverse County to enforce all Floodplain Management elements as FEMA requires. Grand Traverse County acts through its County Construction Code Office.

### Map 7 Floodplain Map



*This map is based on digital databases prepared by Grand Traverse County. Grand Traverse County does not warrant, expressly or impliedly, or accept any responsibility for any errors, omissions, or that the information contained in the map or the digital databases is currently or positionally accurate.* Map created by GTC GIS/Equalization

## Transportation and Mobility

Vehicular mobility on a roadway system is the primary means of transportation in Whitewater Township. The local public roadway system consists of a state trunkline (M-72) maintained by the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) and a system of county roads maintained by the Grand Traverse County Road Commission (GTCRC). There are also private roads that generally serve residential areas and are maintained with private funding.

M-72 is the primary east-west route and Elk Lake and Williamsburg Roads combine to provide the primary north-south route. The intersection of these two routes is more or less in the center of Whitewater Township and this intersection was recently signalized.

### M-72

Along with being the major road in Whitewater Township, M-72 connects with I-75 in Grayling and is a primary route into and out of the greater Traverse City area. As mentioned, M-72 crosses the Lower Peninsula from Lake Huron to Lake Michigan. M-72 connects to M-22 in Empire near the shore of Lake Michigan with US 23 in Harrisville near the shore of Lake Huron.

M-72 traffic volumes are the heaviest in Whitewater Township west of the Williamsburg/Elk Lake Road signal. Some current and recent traffic counts available from MDOT are as follows:

	2021 Annual Average Daily Traffic (AADT)	2020 Annual Average Daily Traffic (AADT)	2019 Annual Average Daily Traffic (AADT)	2016 Annual Average Daily Traffic (AADT)	2006 Annual Average Daily Traffic (AADT)
M-72 West of Signal	16,437	14,494	16,705	15,580	16,100
M-72 East of Signal to Baggs Rd.	14,638	13,187	14,718	12,382	12,700

Source: <https://gis-mdot.opendata.arcgis.com/datasets/mdot::traffic-volumes-2020/about>

While the total traffic volumes on M-72 seem to have generally increased over time, some recent fluctuations are likely related to the impact of the recent COVID pandemic. The total number of vehicles driven nationally declined substantially during the pandemic with work-from-home orders and related considerations.

### Road Network

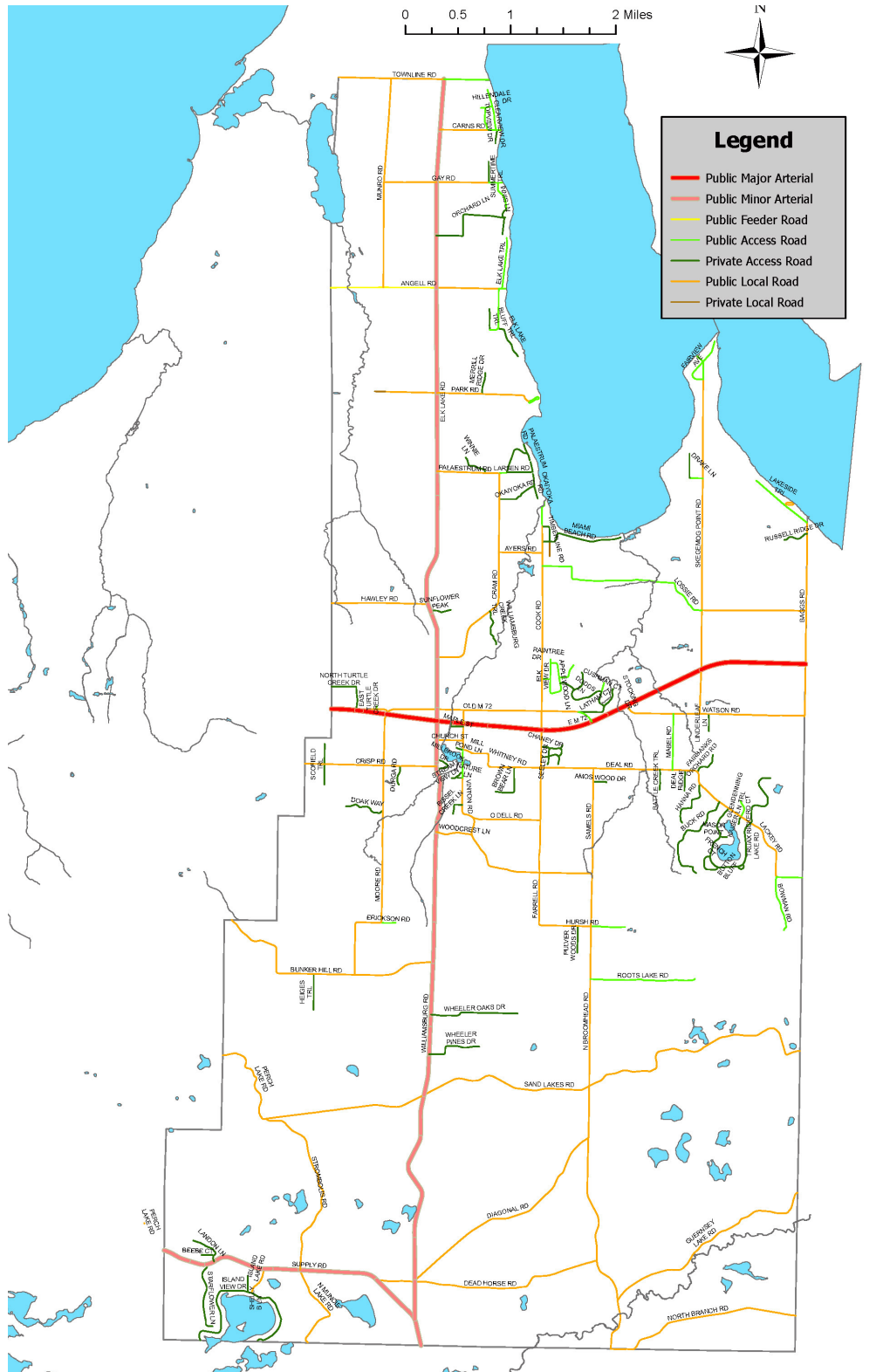
One way to look at a network of roads is to classify them according to a system according to function and other attributes. There is a hierarchy of roads, wherein roads called arterials are major roads that connect urbanized areas with higher speeds and traffic volumes. Local roads or streets typically have lower traffic volumes with the vital function of providing access to adjacent property.

The GTCRC has developed a roadway classification system for Grand Traverse County. Whitewater Township’s roadway network is illustrated on **Map 8**. Whitewater Township’s only major arterial is M-72, while minor arterials include Williamsburg Road, Elk Lake Road, and Supply Road.

### Seasonal Roads

Like many similar communities, Whitewater Township has several seasonal roads. Seasonal roads are county roads with signs designating them as such. Seasonal roads receive maintenance (grading) in the spring, but the Road Commission does not maintain or snowplow seasonal roads between the months

Map 8  
Road Classification Map



This map is based on digital databases prepared by Grand Traverse County. Grand Traverse County does not warrant, expressly or impliedly, or accept any responsibility for any errors, omissions, or that the information contained in the map or the digital databases is currently or positionally accurate. Map created by GTC GIS/Equalization

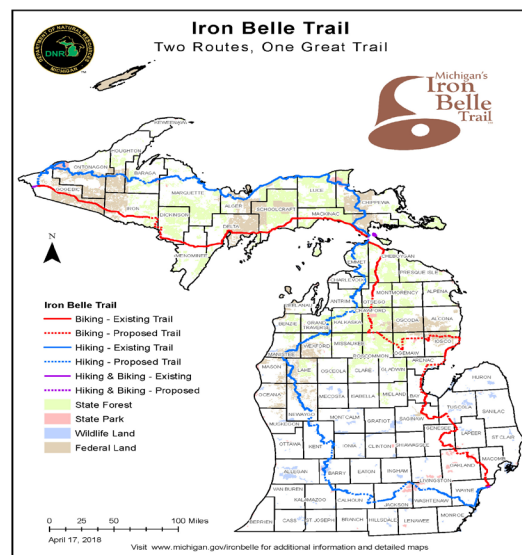
of November and April. A seasonal road may not be open to public travel during this time, and private landowners perform their own snow removal.

**Trails**

One significant trail in Whitewater Township is the Iron Belle Trail which connects Belle Isle (in the Detroit River near Downtown) to Ironwood Michigan in the western Upper Peninsula. The Iron Belle Trail is 2,000 miles long and it crisscrosses more than half of Michigan's counties along two distinct hiking and biking routes. The biking route utilizes many of the state's existing bike paths, bike lanes and designated biking routes as it travels up the east side of the state. The hiking route (which goes through Whitewater Township) utilizes sidewalks, trails, and the 1,000-mile plus North Country National Scenic Trail traveling up the west side of the Lower Peninsula. The trail is still under development and is more than two-thirds complete. When done, it will be the longest state-designated trail in the nation. The west leg of the Iron Belle Trail travels through southern Whitewater Township.

An illustration of all trails in Whitewater Township is provided on **Map 9**. It should also be noted that TART (Traverse Area Recreation and Transportation Trails, Inc.) is a local 501(c) (3) nonprofit organization. The mission of this organization is to provide and promote a trail network that enriches people and communities throughout the greater Traverse region. The TART Trail network is within and near Whitewater Township. The Boardman/Ottaway River Trail is a 24-mile trail that crosses Supply Road, west of Williamsburg Road. TART has many active trail development projects in and around the region, as described at: <https://traversetrails.org/>.

Another significant trail project in the area that is now underway is the Nakwema Trailway. When complete, this project will close a 45-mile gap between Charlevoix and the TART Trails' networks in Acme. This project begins near the

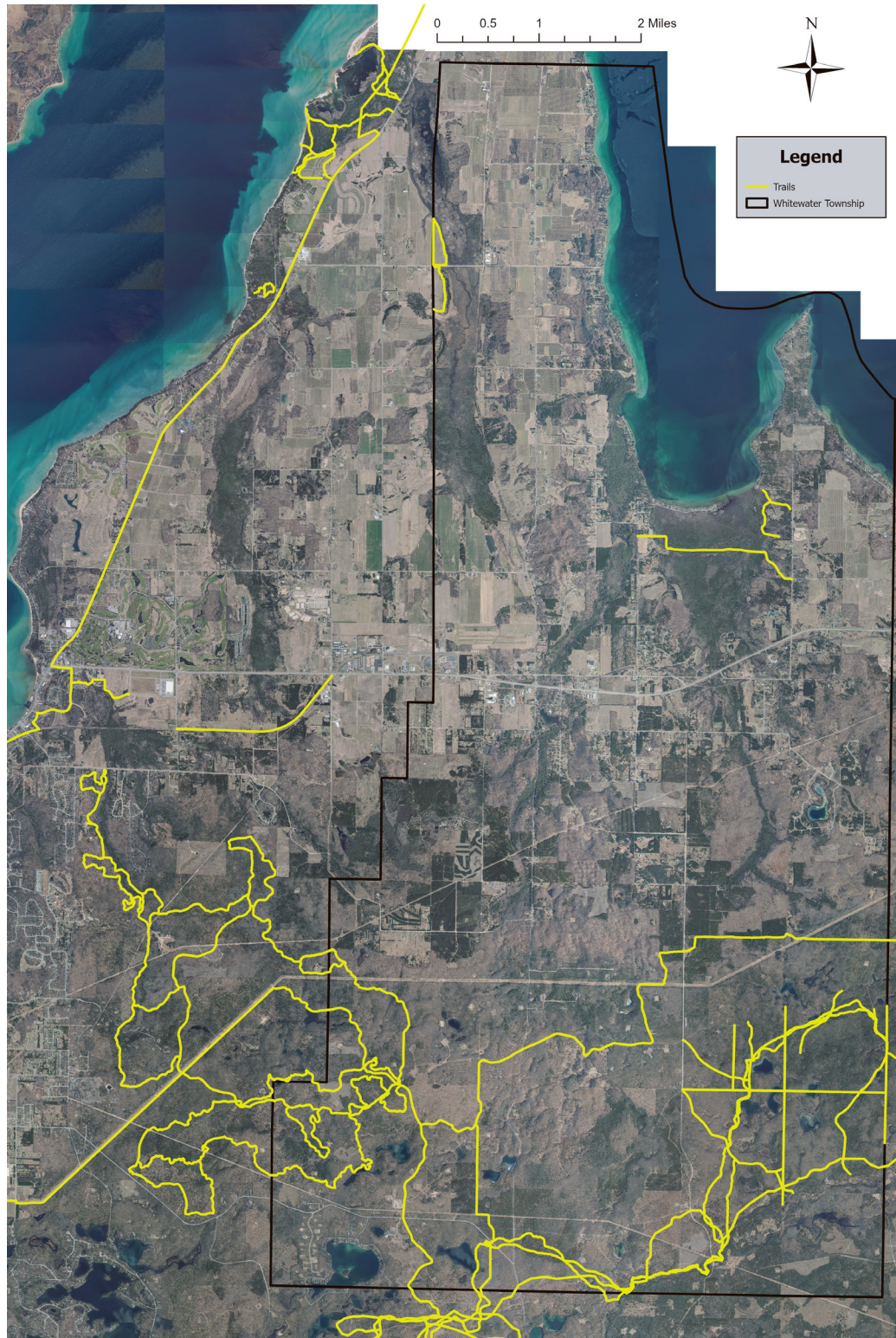


Deepwater Point Natural Area/Acme Bayside Park and continues north along US 31 through Elk Rapids, Eastport, Norwood, and Charlevoix.

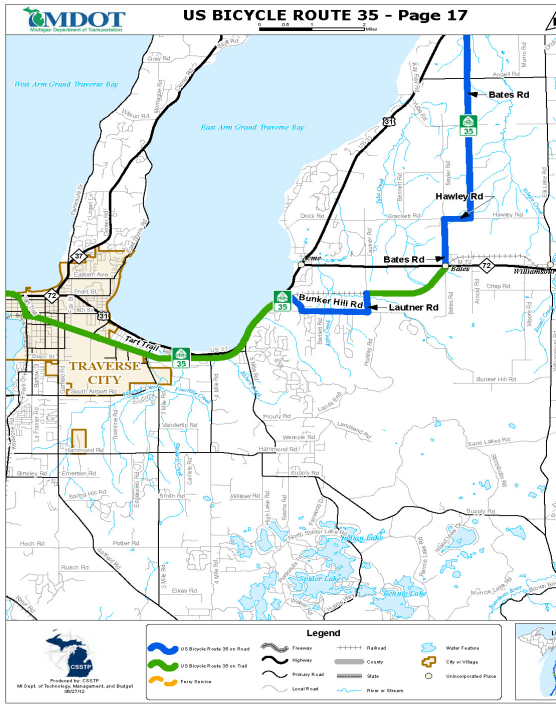
**Bike Route**

Just to the west of Whitewater Township is U.S. Bicycle Route 35. U.S. Bicycle Route 35 is a 500-mile route that runs from Indiana through Michigan to Sault Ste. Marie, Canada, generally follows the Lake Michigan shoreline and through the eastern Upper Peninsula.

Map 9  
Area Trails



*This map is based on digital databases prepared by Grand Traverse County. Grand Traverse County does not warrant, expressly or impliedly, or accept any responsibility for any errors, omissions, or that the information contained in the map or the digital databases is currently or positionally accurate.* Map created by GTC GIS/Equalization



**Access Management**

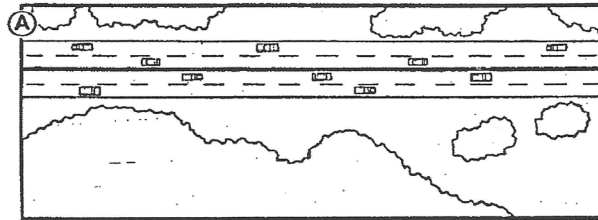
As noted, the jurisdiction over public road maintenance and building improvements is the responsibility of MDOT and the GTCRC. However, the relationship between road-related issues and local planning and zoning is important. While, work in the actual right-of-way falls under the jurisdiction of MDOT or the GTCRC, Whitewater Township regulates adjacent land uses and has associated development requirements through zoning. Ideally, there is coordination between driveway permitting and the site plan review at the township level to facilitate proper access management.

Roads have dual functions. They provide access to adjacent property and they provide a means to get from one place to another. These are conflicting purposes. An interstate highway efficiently moves large volumes of traffic at high speeds, but access is limited to every mile or more. A local road in a subdivision provides great access to each house but with low speeds and traffic volumes.

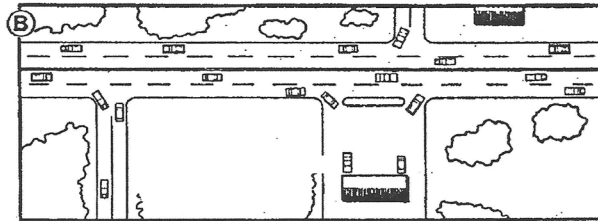
Each new drive is a potential conflict between moving traffic and left or right turning movements. Often, as development occurs in rural areas, major and minor arterial roads experience reduced capacity and safety as each new driveway introduces a new conflict point where traffic flow is potentially impeded by turning movements. Access management is the effort to carefully manage where access points (driveways) are placed to enhance safety and preserve the capacity of the roadway to move traffic. Access management tools include techniques such as limiting driveways, shared driveways, access roads, restricted turning movements, deceleration lanes, medians, passing lanes or flares, left turn lanes, etc.



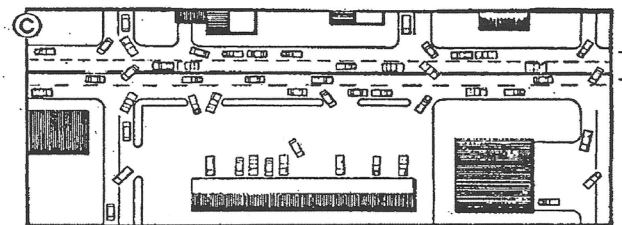
## Cumulative Impact of Increased Roadside Development . . .



## What happens when unrestricted development takes place . . .



## over time . . .



Source: Center for Transportation Research and Education, Iowa State University, *Iowa Access Management Guidebook*, October 2000, p. 19.

Source: *Reducing Traffic Congestion and Improving Traffic Safety in Michigan Communities: The Access Management Guidebook*, October, 2001 Prepared by the Planning and Zoning Center, Inc. under contract to MDOT.

## Complete Streets

In past decades, streets have been built primarily for vehicles. Efficient and safe movement of cars and trucks has been the primary focus, and when congestion and safety issues arise, the solution was often to add travel lanes. Pedestrian and bike travel in the public right-of-way was rarely an important consideration when roadways were built or upgraded. For the last 20 years or so, however, the term “complete streets” emerged (along with related terms such as “context sensitive solutions,” and “green streets”) to emphasize that the public right-of-way should try to blend the needs of vehicular travel with those of bikes and pedestrians, and design improvements accordingly.

This issue goes far beyond the recreational aspects of walking or biking, as an important underpinning for complete streets relates to health issues. Years ago, studies surfaced about the significant connection between public health, safety, and transportation. In the auto-dependent environment, streets are designed for vehicular travel and people seldom walk or ride bikes even for short trips. At the same time, obesity is one of the fastest-growing health issues in the US, along with diabetes (both of which can be delayed or prevented by being more active). In many places, opportunities to be physically active have been engineered out of daily life with a focus on near-total reliance on private

vehicles. If the public right-of-way was designed to also accommodate non-motorized transportation, it is likely that more would walk and ride bikes for both recreation and health benefits. Better design to blend vehicular and non-motorized transportation also leads to fewer crashes between vehicles, pedestrians, and bikes.

Complete streets issues often receive the most attention in urbanized environments where population density is higher, trip origins and destinations are short and walking or biking is a viable choice. However, in more rural areas, there are multiple opportunities to consider complete street designs, especially in terms of paved shoulders, pedestrian crossing markers, bike lanes near public lands, connections to schools, shared-use paths, and paved shoulders in key locations.

Like access management, planning for complete streets involves a partnership with MDOT and the GTCRC. The Michigan Public Act 134 of 2010 amended the Michigan Planning Enabling Act to expand the definition of “street” to include all legal users and expands elements that may be included in a master plan to include all forms of transportation and their interconnectivity. It also specifies that transportation improvements should be appropriate to their context and implemented in cooperation with the appropriate road agency.

## Road Plan

In 2004, Whitewater Township prepared a “road plan” which is available on the Whitewater Township website. While this document is nearly 20 years old, it speaks to several previously mentioned issues and is still relevant today. Some particularly relevant topics include:

- **Promote Context-Sensitive Design (CSD):** CSD promotes an interdisciplinary approach to the design of road or transportation and attention to the physical setting, while maintaining safety and mobility.
- **Design Principles for Township Roads:** These principles include drainage, width and scale, grading, shoulders, alignment and vegetation.
- **Roads with Scenic and Historical Significance:** Certain roads in the Township have exceptional character, beauty, and

historical significance and the Township should make special efforts to insure preservation in their current state.

- **Natural Beauty Roads:** A petition may be submitted to the Grand Traverse County Road Commission to designate certain roads as Natural Beauty Roads.
- **M-72 Corridor Study/Access Management and Boulevard:** References were made to the M-72 Access Management Plan completed in 2001. The scope of this study extended from Acme to Grayling.
- **Non-motorized Travel:** The need for well-planned pedestrian paths and bikeways can encourage non-motorized travel, is identified.
- **Funding Township Road Projects:** This includes funding from the Township general fund; establishment of special assessment districts, and levying a voted road millage; and finally, seeking grants for special projects.

## Public Transportation

The Bay Area Transportation Authority (BATA) provides over half a million rides to residents and visitors of Leelanau and Grand Traverse counties, including Whitewater Township and the city of Traverse City. BATA offers public transportation services to both counties from a voter-approved multi-year millage.

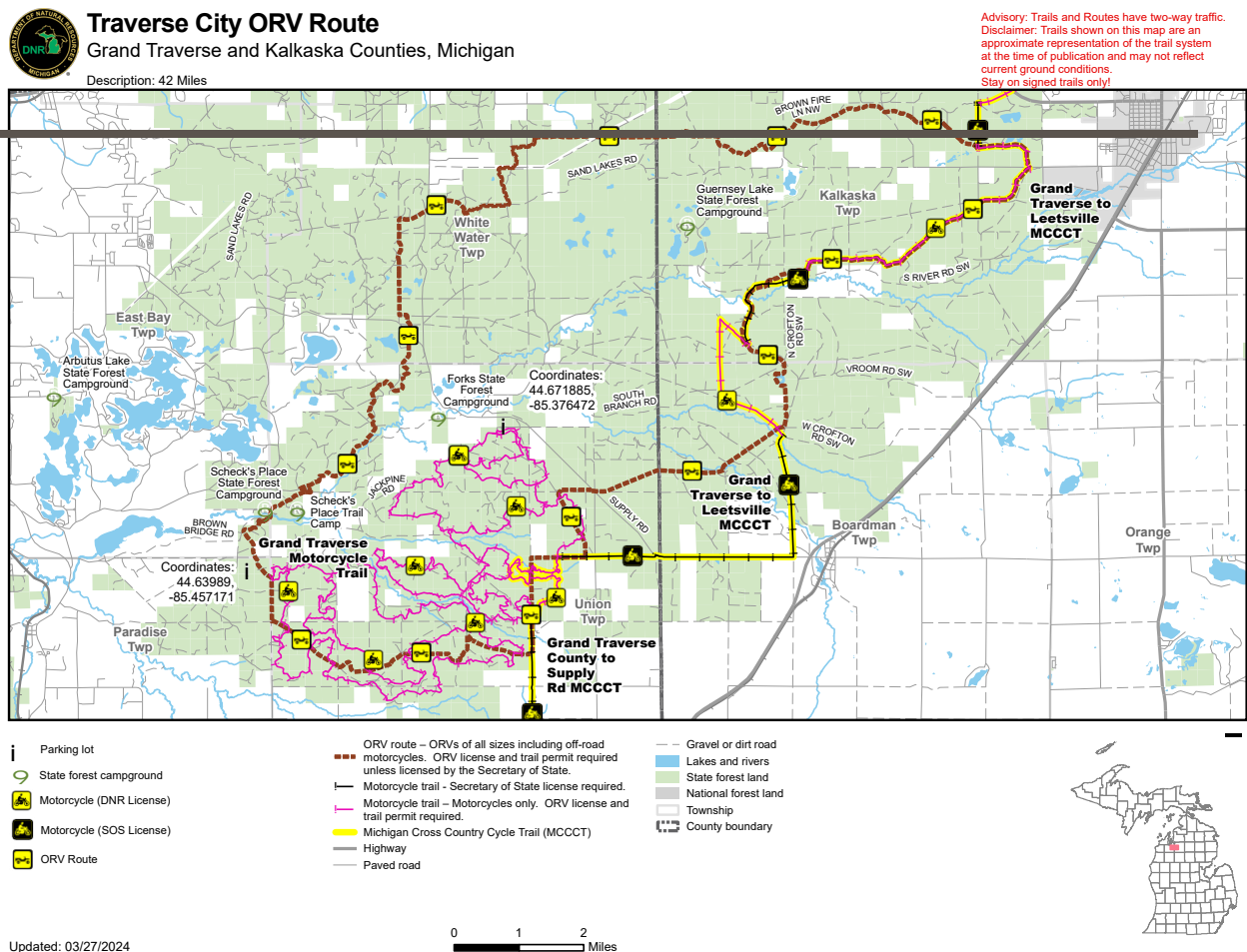
BATA provides on-line bus schedules and maps help regional riders find established loop pick-up locations. BATA also provides a fixed loop service for downtown Traverse City, and villages in Grand Traverse and



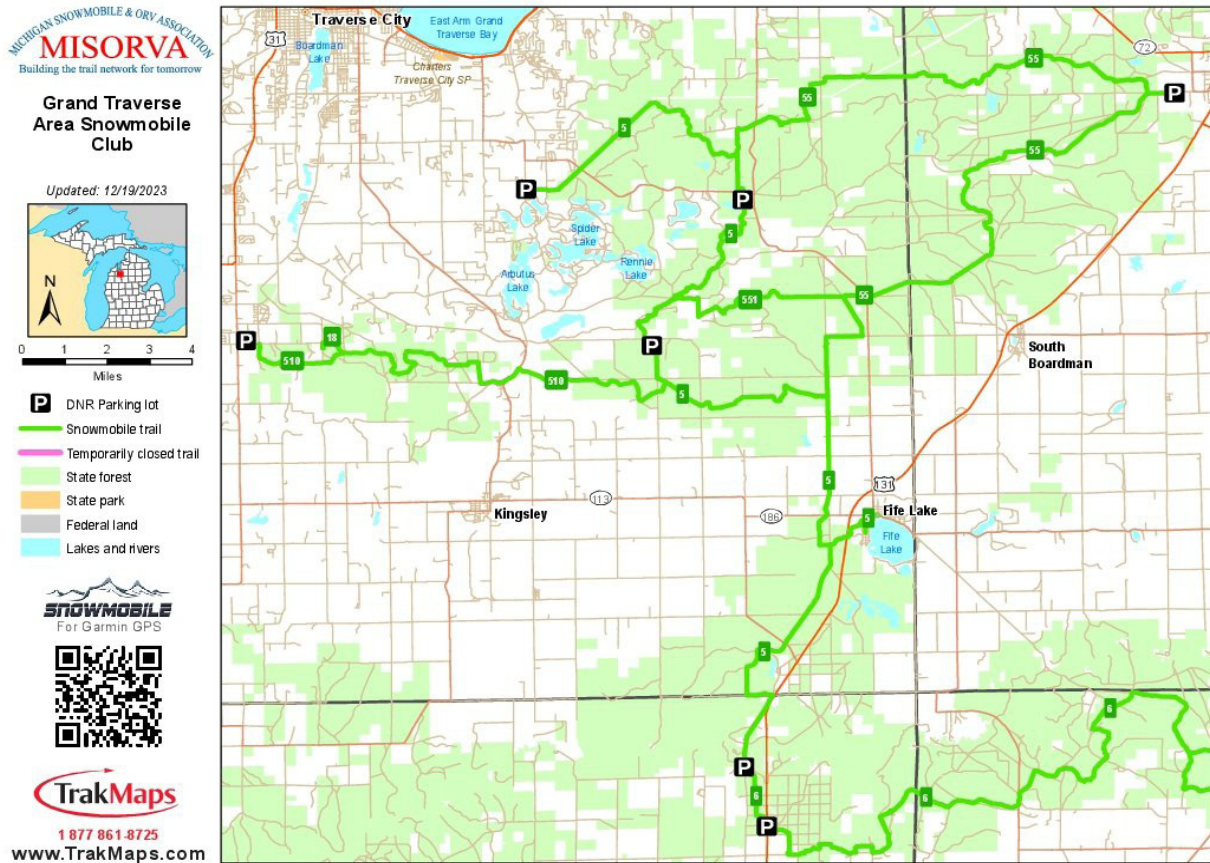
Leelanau Counties. Riders outside of fixed bus loops can link to on-demand services to request a ride, similar to Lyft or UBER, and BATA's Village Link service helps rural area riders communicate with BATA Dispatch Services to schedule connections and pick-ups. Since 2017 BATA has grown to employ 120 people and has acquired new, greener buses, and renovated transfer stations.

## Off-Road Vehicles and Snowmobiles

Northern Michigan is a popular destination for people who wish to ride off-road vehicles (ORVs). Clubs and organizations exist to promote this activity. The State of Michigan has more than 4,000 miles of ORV routes on public land. A portion of this network is included in Whitewater Township (just north of Sand Lakes Road in the southern part of the township). This network is shown on the following map titled Traverse City ORV Route, and ORVs of all sizes are permitted on this system with an ORV license and trail permit. The Traverse City ORV route creates a loop extending from Kalkaska to points southwest toward East Bay Township and Paradise Township. Another category of recreational travel involves snowmobiles. Snowmobiles are allowed to operate in the right-of-way of a public highway if operated at the extreme right of the open portion of the right-of-way and



with the traffic flow on the road. Snowmobiles also have access to a network of trails throughout Michigan with a certificate of registration, registration decals, and a trail permit sticker. As shown, the Grand Traverse Area Snowmobile Club (part of the Michigan Snowmobile & ORV Association) has developed a trail route that connects the Kalkaska area with areas south of Traverse City and extends well south of Fife Lake.



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## Public Facilities

Several public facilities support the local population. These facilities include local assets such as public buildings and utility systems. In late 2022, the Whitewater Township Board of Trustees hired C2AE to conduct a feasibility study of the township offices, fire station #3, and a potential water supply system. Some results of this study (identified as being in draft form and dated 8-1-22) are summarized below:

- **Township Offices:** The current township office building is about 2,400 square feet and it provides public meeting space, administrative offices, and storage. This building is located on a 1.5-acre site on the west side of Vinton Street and it includes a 20+/- parking lot with large recycling bins. This existing building has challenges regarding heating, cooling, and other physical conditions. It is also regarded as being too small for current space needs. The need for a new building, potentially about three times the size of the existing one (about 7,600 square feet), was identified.
- **Fire Station #3:** The Whitewater Township Fire Department Station #3 (located between the Post Office and the cemetery on Old M-72) is nearly 50 years old and is about 5000 sq. ft. in size. Many issues related to this building have been identified. A new building that would be close to 20,000 square feet is recommended to house necessary apparatus, equipment, and related spaces.
- **Combined Public Building (Offices/Fire/EMS):** For planning purposes, the concept of a combined township hall/fire station was identified as a possible option. Combining facilities is appealing because some spaces and site improvements can serve dual purposes, thereby reducing costs. A new fire/ems station (19,300 sq. ft.), together with a new administration building (7,600 sq. Ft), together with room for future additions, parking, stormwater detention, etc., creates the need for a site that is about 7.5 acres in size.
- **Water Supply:** Whitewater Township does not now have a public water system, which is important for both human consumption and

fire protection and to support commercial or industrial operations. One option to offer public water is to purchase water from an existing system. This might include connecting to the Turtle Creek Casino & Hotel system through an agreement with the Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians. A second option is to build a system consisting of groundwater wells, water storage, and a distribution system. The C2AE feasibility study identified a potential water district that would include water lines along M-72 from Moore Road to Cook Road and along Elk Lake/Williamsburg from Cram Road south to Church Street.

- **Sewer Systems:** There are no public sewer systems in Whitewater Township, except for the system operated by the Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians for the Turtle Creek Casino & Hotel system.

Other public facilities and utility systems that serve Whitewater Township include the following:

**Electric:** Consumers Power and Cherryland Electric Cooperative provide electric services in Whitewater Township

**Natural Gas:** DTE Energy provides natural gas in Whitewater Township.

**Library:** The Elk Rapids District Library is located in Elk Rapids, currently next to the harbor near Grand Traverse Bay. It is housed in the former residence of one of the town's founding families. Plans to move the library to a larger site on Cairn Highway are now underway. Fundraising efforts are taking place and the current timeline includes a summer 2027 opening.

The Traverse Area District Library is the major library system in the area, with the Main Library located at 610 Woodmere Ave., in Traverse City. Other libraries closer to Whitewater Township that are part of the Traverse Area District Library system include, the East Bay Branch Library at 1989 Three Mile Rd. and the Fife Lake Public Library at 77 Lakecrest Ln.

**Schools:** The Elk Rapids School District includes most of Whitewater Township. Mill Creek Elementary School (shown below) is located at 9039 Old M 72 Williamsburg, serving 227 children (K-5). Other Elk Rapids School District schools include Cherryland Middle School, Sunrise Academy, Lakeland Elementary, and Elk Rapids High School. Additionally, Woodland School, located at 7224 Supply Road, Traverse City, was one of the first charter schools in Michigan to include a K-8 educational program.

The Elk Rapid School District faces new challenges that are in part related to community development issues and considerations. In November 2023, Elk Rapids School Superintendent Bryan McKenna attended a Planning Commission meeting to share information. Some key points raised included:

- The School District is in a financial dilemma because the School District may go “out of formula.” Out-of Formula Districts are related to areas where taxable values of real estate increase while enrollment decreases. Elk Rapids is expected to join other districts in the area (Bellaire, Glen Lake, Frankfort, Northport, and Leeland) next year and be “out of formula.”
- Out of Formula essentially means that funding for student education becomes reliant on the local tax base, not state funding, based partly on enrollment.
- Elk Rapids School District is a “School of Choice.” This important policy allows families to send children to a school outside of the district in which they live, providing them with more educational options and flexibility. When a District funding source is based on taxable

property values and not student enrollment, “School of Choice” is typically no longer an option for regional families or is dramatically restricted.

- Whitewater Township has a growing older population, and households typically have fewer children than in years past.
- Real estate values have increased dramatically in the area. While this is welcome news to some, the increasing price of real estate and housing makes it very difficult for young families (often with children) to afford to move here. This has policy implications for Whitewater Township, as no known efforts are underway to deliver starter home projects or other forms of affordable housing.
- Real estate dynamics are also impacted by the short-term rental phenomena in the area and the growth of horse-related activities.
- The School Board has outlined several potential paths for the Elk Rapids School District. The district is currently at or near a pivotal point, and one option under consideration is the closure of a school, such as Mill Creek. Another option is the establishment of a School Academy, specifically the Mill Creek Academy, with oversight from the Elk Rapids School District. This transition to a Public School Academy would mean that the Mill Creek Academy’s funding would be based on student enrollment rather than regional taxable value, thereby allowing ‘school of choice’ options to continue for the surrounding area and ensuring the continued operation of Mill Creek for many years to come.



Mill Creek Elementary School North of Old 72

Photo Credit - Horizon Drone Services

# 4

## IMPORTANT TRENDS

Building on the previous description of Whitewater Township in the past and present, it is logical to briefly consider existing trends now at work shaping the future. Indeed, trends can and do change, but several trends identified below are quite evident. They are having an impact on Whitewater Township today and are likely to continue to affect how Whitewater Township changes in the future.

### Population and Housing Projections

Projecting the population of a smaller community is difficult because even limited development activity can be far more consequential. For example, a fifty-lot subdivision (housing about 150 people at build-out) boosts the population of a community with just 1,500 people by about 10%. That same project in a larger community of 15,000 only results in a population increase of 1%. Of course, many other factors contribute to local population growth or decline (birth rates, mortality rates, net migration), but physical development trends can be significant and less predictable in a small jurisdiction.

One way to deal with the difficulty of projecting the population of a small jurisdiction is to use the constant share method of population projection. In 2020, the population of Whitewater Township was reported to be 2,688, and the population of Grand Traverse County was 95,238. Whitewater Township, therefore, represented 2.82% of Grand Traverse County. The State of Michigan produced a report with population projections for each Michigan County in 2019. According to this report, Grand

**It's Difficult to Make Predictions, Especially About the Future**

- Niels Bohr

Traverse County will have 101,906 people by 2045. If Whitewater Township continues to represent 2.82 percent of Grand Traverse County, sharing proportionally in area growth, Whitewater Township will grow by nearly 190 people and will be approaching a population of 3,000 by 2045. Given the current average household size of 2.56, Whitewater Township will need about 75 more dwellings to house a growing population (apart from what may be required to replace units torn down or otherwise removed from the housing inventory). Given that these projections are based on state projections, they may be regarded as being on the "low side," given common local impressions of area growth pressure and demand for housing.

Area	2020 Census	2045 Projected	Change
Grand Traverse County	95,238	101,906 <sup>(1)</sup>	6,668
Whitewater Township	2,688	2,876	188
Whitewater Township as a % of Grand Traverse County	2.82%	2.82%	---

<sup>(1)</sup> *Michigan Population Projections by County Through 2045, September 2019. State of Michigan Department of Technology, Management and Budget, Bureau of Labor Market Information and Strategic Initiatives, Page 137.*

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## Aging Population

The trend toward an aging population is well known. According to the US Census, the share of the population that is 65 and older increased from 13.1% in 2010 to 16.8% in 2021. Further, by 2060, nearly one in four Americans will be 65 years and older. Interestingly, almost one in four residents of Whitewater Township is 65 years old or older **today** (see previous chapter). It is therefore likely that older residents will continue to represent a larger and larger segment of Whitewater Township's population in the future.

Given such dramatic national trends, it is perhaps unsurprising that the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) has been actively promoting and advocating policies to create livable communities for residents of all ages. AARP's Livable Communities Principles include encouraging the creation of mixed-use livable communities, with a range of housing and transportation options that meet the needs of people of all ages, ability levels, and backgrounds. They should also contain community features, such as parks, that meet the needs of all community members.



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## Remote Working

COVID-19 placed many workers into remote working arrangements. Many believe that remote work and hybrid work arrangements (work from home and an office) are here to stay. This is a significant societal change impacting both the workplace and some communities. If some workers no longer need to live close to a workplace, they can live anywhere they desire. This is especially true for “knowledge workers” in industries such as technology, finance, media, etc., whose primary needs are a computer, phone, and internet connection. The term “zoom towns” was coined to identify vacation areas that grew with an influx of workers. While there is only anecdotal evidence of this trend in Whitewater Township, it is evident nationally, in Michigan, and specifically in the Traverse City region (see for example: *The Rise of Remote Work in Rural America - A Report by The Center on Rural Innovation and Rural Innovation Strategies, Inc., October 2021*).



## APA Trend Report

In 2022 and 2023, the American Planning Association (APA) and Lincoln Institute of Land Policy began publishing reports that identify trends to recognize while planning for the future of communities and regions. Planners can use the identified trends listed as input to inform future decision-making. A



selected number of trends identified in 2022 and 2023 include the following:

- **Support for a growing green economy:** The climate change provisions in the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), totaling \$369 billion, constitute the single largest investment in climate mitigation and adaptation in U.S. history. The IRA, promises \$60 billion in incentives for wind and solar power generation.
- **Electric mobility:** Electric transportation is increasing and will continue to grow. Five states have banned combustion-engine cars by 2035, and the U.S. Department of Energy announced a new \$5 billion program to fund the expansion of the electric vehicle charging network over the next five years. These considerations point to a future in which charging stations are common and traditional gas stations become rare. A pilot project in Detroit is also underway to create a road with a wireless charging system that allows vehicles to charge while driving or idling.

*Note: While the trend toward electric mobility may be a national consideration, places like rural Northern Michigan will likely see a slower transition toward widespread acceptance of electric vehicles. In this area, charging stations are now few and far between, and important questions about the power grid and electric vehicle range still need to be answered favorably to support electric vehicle purchase decisions.*

- **U.S. manufacturing resurgence:** The U.S. is experiencing a boom in manufacturing fueled by a strong dollar, a desire by many companies to simplify logistics and on-shore their production, the availability of skilled workers and raw materials, and crucially, a series of enticing legislative actions from the federal



government. This creates local economic development opportunities.

- **Increasing entrepreneurship:** 2021 saw a record 5.4 million business applications, with another record likely in 2022. The largest jumps in business formation were in the field of e-commerce and online retail, with logistics, warehousing, transportation, and service businesses also seeing significant increases compared with previous years.
- **Retail Trends:** The rise of e-commerce, and the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, have led to a large-scale restructuring of how people shop. For example, in the 1980s, there were about 2,500 shopping malls in the U.S. Today, only about 700 malls remain.
- **Zoning Reform and Housing:** States and cities are rethinking zoning to make housing more affordable and accessible. Single-family housing is the dominant residential land use in the U.S., mainly due to local zoning codes and maps that have remained unchanged for decades. These regulations keep densities low but also limit overall supply, increasing housing costs in both suburbs and central cities. California and Oregon have banned single-family-only zoning at the state level, while some cities have revised their zoning codes to permit “missing middle” housing types in single-family districts. Missing middle housing is generally building types, such as duplexes, fourplexes, cottage courts, and courtyard buildings that help expand housing options.



5

# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Public input is an essential element of the master planning process, and often, the value of a Master Plan can be traced back to the amount of meaningful, substantial, and collaborative public engagement. There should be little doubt that accumulated public attitudes and perceptions are the foundation for a Master Plan and its key principles.

## Recent Public Engagement

Public engagement is not new to Whitewater Township. Looking back several years, a history of reaching out to residents to learn about public attitudes and perceptions is evident. Recent efforts have included the following:

- General Public Survey (2009)
- Medical Marihuana Survey (2017)
- Event Barn Survey (2019)
- Park and Recreation Survey (2020)
- ARPA Fund Survey (2022)

While readers are encouraged to review the full reports from each survey, a summary of each is provided below.

### General Public Survey (2009)

In 2009, a general community input survey was conducted to support plans to update the Master Plan. While the subsequent Master Plan was not completed until 2015, the data generated in 2009 provided useful information. Surveys were mailed to 1,425 property owners in Whitewater Township. These included full-time and seasonal residents and those who do not live in the



Township but own property. A total of 564 completed surveys were received. Some general takeaways from this survey included:

- People think of Whitewater Township as “Rural,” “Agricultural,” and “Quiet.” (Q1)
- In the future, people wanted to continue to be “Rural,” “Agricultural,” and “Safe” (Q2)
- Residents wanted the Township to develop or improve shorelines and waterways, fire protection/EMS, farmland/open space. (Q4)
- Residents supported growth – but they want to plan for it. (Q5)
- Primary types of development people wanted township-wide included small-scale commercial (flower shop, bakery), agricultural tourism, and residential. (Q6)
- Residents were not sure about redevelopment in Williamsburg specifically – but they think the following uses should be encouraged - Small-scale commercial (flower shop, bakery), single-family residential, restaurants/cafés (Q7, Q8)

- Residents are least supportive of higher-density residential (multi-family housing), and most supportive of single family homes on acreage and seasonal homes (Q9)
- Residents supported residential development “scattered throughout the township,” in “areas of existing development,” and “on acreage.” (Q10)
- In terms of commercial and office uses, residents most wanted to see small-scale commercial (flower shop, bakery), sit-down restaurants, and café/coffee shops. generally in the township (Q11)
- New commercial development should occur along M-72 and in the Village of Williamsburg (Q12).
- This new commercial development should include agricultural tourism, service commercial, and clustered commercial with open spaces (Q14)
- There was strong support for agricultural-based tourism. (Q13)
- Residents wanted to see M-72 with natural open spaces and more or less the same as today (2009) (Q 15)
- Residents were split on the idea that accessory buildings (pole barns, garages) should be allowed on a lot without a home (Q16). They were similarly split on the notion that residential accessory buildings should be limited in size. (Q17)
- Residents generally supported home-based businesses. (Q18)
- Priority zoning issues included junk/trash, noise, odors, and signs. (Q19)
- Residents supported 5-acre minimum lot sizes in the southern parts of Whitewater Township (Q20)
- Residents supported new smaller lot sizes in Williamsburg and subdivisions (Q21)

- Residents supported more stringent septic tank regulations for property along shorelines and waterways (Q21)

### **Medical Marihuana Survey (2017)**

In late 2017, the Medical Marihuana Facilities Licensing Act (Public Act 281) took effect in Michigan. It allowed for ways to make the growing, processing, testing, transportation, and sale of medical marihuana a commercial business opportunity. It allowed local governments to decide if a business of this type was locally appropriate. Whitewater Township residents were surveyed and largely responded with comments that did not favor local growers, processors, transporters, sales, and safety compliance facilities.

### **Adult Use Marihuana and Commercial Marihuana Use**

In August 2022, a referendum was on the ballot to prohibit adult use marihuana establishments and retail establishments. The vote was Yes 696 to No 400.

### **Event Barn Survey (2019)**

In 2019, there was significant discussion on the topic of event barns. Event barns were defined as agricultural bars/structures transformed to provide a new venue for weddings, parties, or similar events. Because of the potential impacts of such facilities, the township reached out to residents to learn how to balance the rights of barn owners and general community interests and neighbors. A total of 390 surveys were returned, and highlights of key findings included the following:

- Zoning District most suitable for Event Barns: Commercial (29%), Agricultural (27%), Recreational (16%), Industrial (13%)

- Minimum acreage appropriate for Event Barns: 20+ Acres (26%), 6-10 Acres (20%), 11-15 Acres (15%), 16-20 Acres (14%).
- The appropriate number of events to be held during each calendar year: 0-10 (24%), Opposed (22%), 11-20 (18%), and 30+ (11%).
- Potential Benefits of Event Barns: Flexible Use of Barns/Structures (29%), Revenue Source for Owners (27%), Preserve Rural Character (15%), Increased Tourism (13%), No Benefits (13%).
- Types of Activities That Should Be Allowed: Weddings/Receptions (30%), Parties (29%), Picnics (24%).
- Have you attended an event at one of these facilities? Yes (51%), No (48%).

### **Park and Recreation Survey (2020)**

To support the development of the Whitewater Township Recreation Plan 2021-2025, a survey was conducted to define interest levels in a wide-ranging list of potential improvements at township parks. A total of 213 surveys were tabulated, and those opinions helped shape the goals and priorities in the 2021 Recreation Plan (See Page 12).

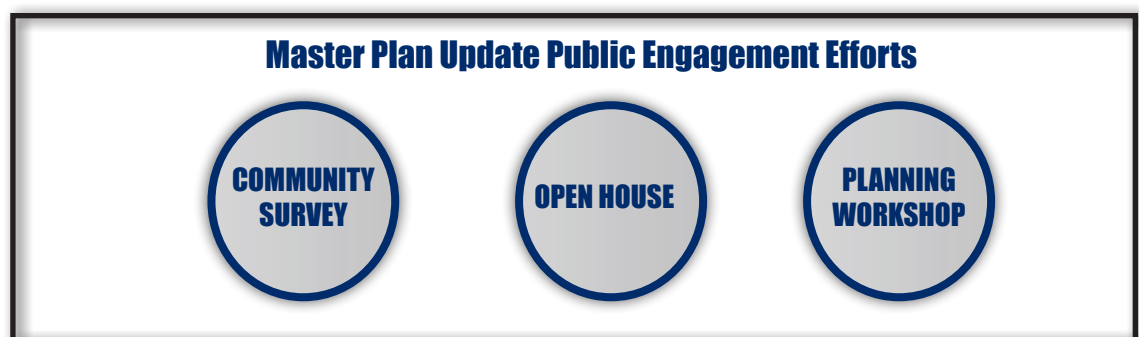
### **ARPA Survey (2022)**

To help define priorities concerning how to use available ARPA (American Rescue Plan Act) funds, Whitewater Township undertook a survey. About 1,500 surveys were mailed out, and 194 surveys were returned. Residents preferred to spend ARPA funds on road infrastructure, expansion of broadband internet for all, fire truck repair or replacement, recreation and park facilities, and public safety/enforcement.

### **Master Plan Update Public Engagement Efforts**

Building on the local tradition of public engagement, and placing a high value on citizen input to drive the Master Plan update, the Planning Commission created a subcommittee to help determine how best to reach out to residents. This subcommittee, known as the Resident Outreach Subcommittee (ROS), was formed in early 2023, and it included Planning Commission members and citizens at large who graciously volunteered their time at meetings.

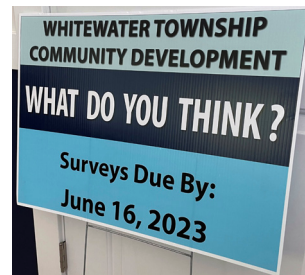
Ultimately, the subcommittee recommended a three-phased community outreach effort, including an updated community survey, an open house-type community planning event, and a planning workshop. The consensus among ROS and Planning Commission members was that while the 2009 community



survey (and more recent surveys focused on certain topics) were helpful information, more current and focused survey data was needed. There was also the belief that while a community survey reaches most residents with questions, it lacks opportunities for dialog, learning, and collaboration. Consequently, it was decided that two in-person events were needed to provide more substantial opportunities for actual dialogue. These events occurred in September and November 2023, and positive feedback was received about all three efforts to reach out to residents for input. It should also be noted that to help maintain impartiality, Networks Northwest was hired to assist with the 2023 survey and the Land Information Access Association (LIAA) was hired to assist with the open house and workshop.

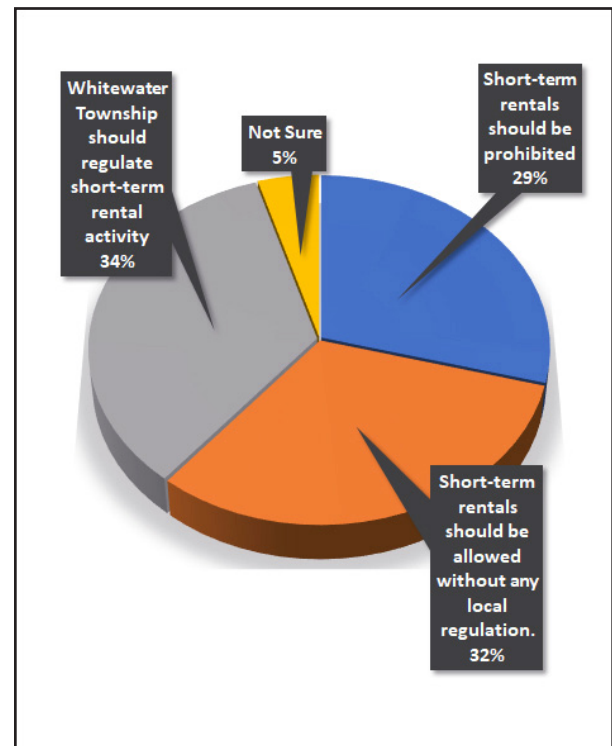
### Community Survey

About 620 surveys were returned by mail and electronically. One survey was mailed to 1092 residences from a mailing list developed by combining a list of property owners and registered voters. The survey was also available at [www.whitwatertownship.org](http://www.whitwatertownship.org) and was available at the township hall so that additional copies of the survey could be obtained by a household. Survey responses were sent back to the township by mail and were also provided online. The questions in the survey included a mix of multiple-choice questions and areas of open-ended comments. The number of responses varied slightly for each question. The survey was well publicized with email blasts, distributed flyers, website postings, and signs placed at strategic locations around the township. A complete report with all survey results was created and posted on the Whitewater Township website. In summary, the following can be said about the results:



- Reflecting that Whitewater Township has an older population, about **three out of four survey respondents were 55 or older.**
- **Nearly eighty percent were full-time residents,** and most were **from east of Elk Lake Road and north of M-72.**
- **When asked whether Whitewater Township has changed for the better or worse over the last ten years, the most common responses were neutral.** This was in terms of the development quality, the rate or pace of development occurring, the kinds of development happening, and the adequacy of infrastructure to support growth.
- When asked about the existing pattern of township development and areas respondents think Whitewater Township should address to improve the quality of life, popular answers included the need to **address traffic congestion/dangerous intersections, developing convenient bike trails and walking paths, affordable housing or local housing options and property maintenance.**
- On the subject of what **features contribute to rural character, the most popular responses were the presence of orchards, farm stands, and other agricultural land, woodlots and forests, and extended views of undeveloped land across the landscape.**
- Residents were asked to identify the most scenic view from a public road in Whitewater Township. Most commonly, views of Elk Lake, Lake Skegemog, Elk Lake Road, Williamsburg Road, Supply Road, Palaestrum Hill, M-72, and Angel Rd were mentioned (see also next page that expands on this).

- On the topic of a required minimum lot size in the Agricultural Zoning District, **residents narrowly indicated that the existing minimum lot size of about an acre is too small.**
- Respondents support the requirements that lots in the RC-1 Zoning District should be at least 5 acres.
- **There is strong support for agricultural tourism as a broad category of activities that includes roadside stands, u-pick operations, and other activities incidental to the operation of a farm that brings members of the public to the farm for educational, recreational, or retail purposes.**
- Generally speaking, **residents want to see commercial development along M-72 have smaller building footprints (75,000 square feet or less), mixed uses (potentially retail, services, office, residential, etc.), controlled signage, limited numbers of driveways, and extensive landscaping.**
- **There is support (three out of four residents) for encouraging redevelopment of Williamsburg, north of M-72, into a downtown-type setting with small-scale retail, commercial services, restaurants, and upper-floor housing.**
- **Community opinions regarding short-term rentals fall into three main categories.** About one-third want to prohibit, about one-third want to allow without any regulation, and about one-third want to enable with some form of regulation (such as a licensing mechanism, limits for how many short-term rentals a property owner could operate, limits on how many short-term rentals can be approved in a community, etc.)
- **Residents generally support large solar or wind facilities,** but with basic approval conditions to minimize impacts on the rural landscape.

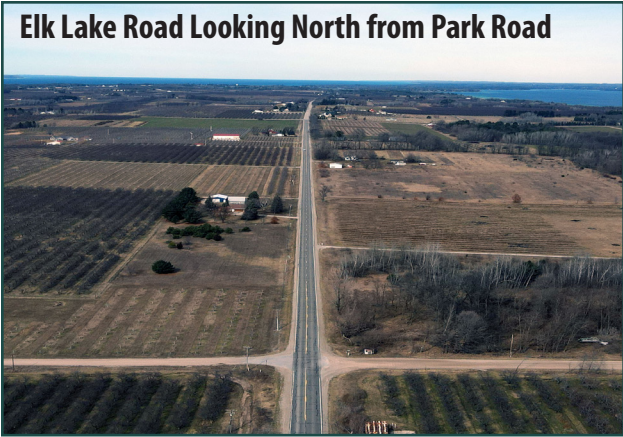


### Scenic Views

Residents were asked to identify the most scenic view from a public road in Whitewater Township. The purpose of this question went beyond general interest. When people identify scenic views that come to mind, they express a special connection to a place and indicate what they value and appreciate. These considerations have land use planning implications since identified areas deserve closer attention regarding how they might change with future development. Extra consideration and attention are warranted when considering future land uses and possible preservation initiatives.

By far, the **Elk Lake Road** corridor was identified as the most scenic view from a public road in Whitewater Township. About 70 respondents identified Elk Lake Road as offering the most scenic views, mentioning views of the agricultural fields, orchards, and glimpses of Elk Lake to the east. Additionally, as noted below, roads that connect to Elk Lake Road were also popular choices.

**Elk Lake Road Looking North from Park Road**



*Photo Credit - Horizon Drone Services*

**Elk Lake Road Looking South from Park Road**



*Photo Credit - Horizon Drone Services*

Approximately 35 people drew attention to **the M-72 corridor**. Some drew attention to locations outside Whitewater Township (such as the scenic overlook about 1.75 miles east of Baggs Road) but identified the view looking west into Whitewater Township, including Lake Skegemog. Others noted views of places further west toward Williamsburg.

**M-72 Looking West from Baggs Road**



*Photo Credit - Horizon Drone Services*

Approximately 18 people identified **Williamsburg Road** as offering scenic views from M-72 to Supply Road. Comments included the trees and rolling beautiful landscape. Most of the land on either side of this corridor is under state ownership.

**Williamsburg Road Looking North Toward M-72**



*Photo Credit - Horizon Drone Services*



Approximately 14 people said **Palaestrum Road** was the most scenic. Generally, comments included an appreciation of views of Elk Lake to the east.

Approximately six people chose **Baggs Road** because of its views of water.

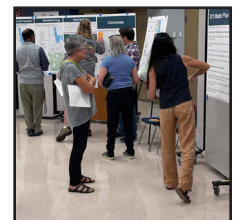
Approximately 13 chose **Angell Road** as the most scenic, primarily looking east toward Elk Lake.

Approximately five people mentioned **Carnes Road**, which affords a view of Elk Lake.

Approximately six people chose **Broomhead Road** for its views, primarily toward the north. Again, views of Elk Lake were mentioned.

## Open House

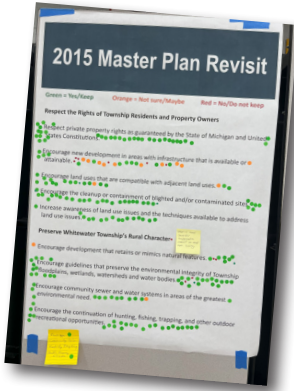
An Open House was held on September 28, 2023, at Mill Creek Elementary School. Between 80 and 100 people attended (not all participants signed in, so an exact number is unavailable). This event was well publicized with email blasts, distributed flyers, website postings, and signs at strategic locations around the township before the event. This session was a walk-through style open house where participants could attend at their convenience anytime between 4-7 pm. Five stations were set up throughout the room, each focusing on a specific topic. Each station had multiple poster boards containing information, with opportunities to vote on certain questions and leave open-ended feedback. A complete report with all Open House results was created and posted on the Whitewater



Township website. This includes photos of all boards taken at the end of the Open House to preserve a record of comments and feedback. Readers are encouraged to review the whole report. However, in summary, the following offers key results:

**2015 Master Plan Revisit**

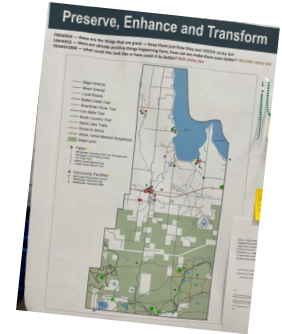
One of the first boards open house participants encountered addressed the existing 2015 Master Plan. This exercise aimed to help identify the continued relevance of existing community goals. Specifically, the goals identified in that document were listed, and participants were asked to “vote” to keep (green dots), not to keep (red dots), or indicate that they were unsure (orange dots). Participants were supportive of the goals from the 2015 Master Plan. As shown, the most significant area of disagreement pertained to streamlining the application process for development. Similarly, there was softer support for “encouraging new development in areas with infrastructure that is available or attainable.”



<b>Respect the Rights of the Township Residents and Property Owners</b>	<b>Green</b>	<b>Orange</b>	<b>Red</b>
Respect private property rights as guaranteed by the State of Michigan and United States Constitutions.	35	0	0
Encourage new development in areas with infrastructure that is available or attainable.	12	10	6
Encourage land uses that are compatible with adjacent land uses.	17	2	0
Encourage the clean-up or containment of blighted and/or contaminated sites.	31	0	0
Increase awareness of land use issues and the techniques available to address land use issues.	15	0	0
<b>Preserve Whitewater Township's Rural Character</b>			
Encourage development that retains or mimics natural features.	7	1	2
Encourage guidelines that preserve the environmental integrity of the Township floodplains, wetlands, watersheds and water bodies.	29	0	2
Encourage community sewer and water systems in areas of the greatest environmental need.	12	1	0
Encourage the continuation of hunting, fishing, trapping, and other outdoor recreational opportunities.	24	0	0
<b>Build a Sense of Community</b>			
Encourage social and cultural activities for year-round and seasonal residents.	26	0	0
Recognize and preserve the scale and compact nature of the commercial district.	16	4	1
Support and encourage the development and implementation of a recreation plan.	19	0	0
Encourage preservation of historically significant features within the Township.	15	0	0
<b>Encourage Economic Opportunities</b>			
Support property owners who engage in home occupation activities which are in character with the area/neighborhood.	19	6	0
Support business, agricultural production and agri-tourism.	22	2	0
Streamline the application process for development.	5	3	10
Encourage municipal infrastructure for the benefit of the Township and areas of the greatest need.	12	1	1

## Preserve, Enhance, and Transform

Participants were provided with a map of Whitewater Township and asked to identify what areas they would like to preserve (keep as is) and areas they would like to enhance (make even better) or transform (change in some way). People identified areas around Williamsburg, Petobego Creek Natural Area, Battle Creek Natural Area, and Whitewater Township Park as areas that could be made better. Also identified were traffic issues near the corner of Crisp and Moore and concerns over the proposed development near M-72 and Baggs Road.



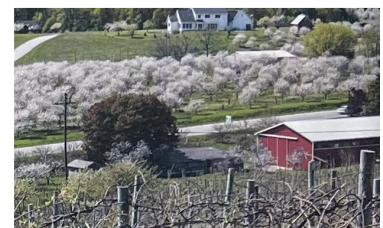
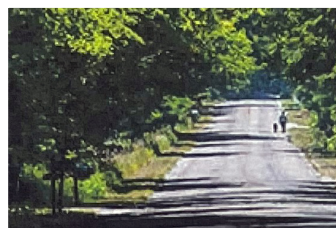
## Alternative Energy

Information was provided about alternative energy, and people were asked how they felt about the potential for such developments in Whitewater Township. There was a mix of support and dissent for alternative energy, specifically solar fields, and concerns about siting and visual impact. There were also comments about wind energy (similar concerns to solar regarding visual impact) and some comments and interest received regarding net-zero emissions housing. According to the 2023 community survey, 54% of residents support alternative energy, but also want to see basic approval conditions to minimize impacts on the appearance of the local rural landscape. About a third of residents do not support alternative energy systems at all

However, this topic became moot in November 2023, as the State of Michigan took action to preempt local regulation of alternative energy facilities by local governments in favor of state-level approval and control over regulating such facilities. Governor Whitmer signed House Bill 5120 and House Bill 5121, which amended the Clean and Renewable Energy and Energy Waste Reduction Act and Zoning Enabling Act. The general intent is to streamline permitting for renewable energy projects to make them easier to build in Michigan. House Bill 5121 amends the Michigan Zoning Enabling Act to make zoning ordinances subject to House Bill 5120. Specific implementing regulations are expected in 2024.

## Rural Character

As noted, residents could weigh in on what landscape elements contribute to the rural character in the community survey. Popular responses were “orchards, farm stands, and other agricultural land,” “woodlots and forests,” and “extended views of undeveloped land across the landscape.” Other similar popular answers were “roadways with limited development on either side” and “open fields.” These survey choices were validated when visuals were provided on boards at the open house. Images of various landscape features were provided, and open-house participants were asked to show support for images provided on boards with green or red dots. Popular images included those shown below.



**Housing Development**

Given the premise of projected growth in Whitewater Township, residents were asked to show support for housing development designs and preferred locations. Support for higher-density residential development was found along M-72 and near the Elk Lake Road/M-72 intersection.

In terms of development design, higher-density subdivisions received less support. What did gather support were rural homes located along existing roads and subdivisions with low-density single-family housing units that might also be clustered to allow for common open spaces.

Regarding non-single-family housing units, residents are less supportive of high-density residential development. When presented with images of townhouses and multi-family housing complexes, several red dots appeared, indicating a level of disapproval of these types of building formats. Generally, more red dots were associated with higher-density, three-story multi-family complexes (such as townhouses and apartment complexes) compared to housing developments with less density and building mass, such as duplexes or similar housing structures. Similar housing structures include single-family units on individual lots, but with one or both sides of the structure actually on the side property line (zero lot line).



*Support for Rural Large Lot Subdivisions Indicated*



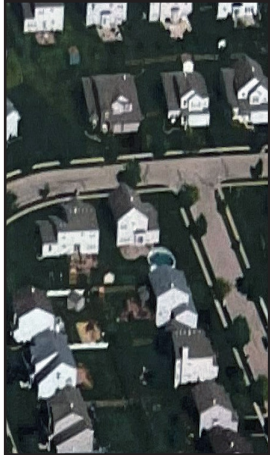
*Support for Rural Large Lot Development Along Existing Roads*



*Preferences for duplexes and zero lot line housing formats*



*Less Support for Higher Density Multi-family Housing Complexes*



*No Support for Smaller Lot "Cookie Cutter" Subdivisions*

## Commercial Development

Broadly speaking, the M-72 corridor was identified as the only area considered for commercial development in Whitewater Township. When asked about desired types of development, residents were clearly in favor of rural architectural building designs and less enthusiastic about typical commercial buildings frequently found along major commercial corridors (i.e., those with a distinct corporate or franchise identity). These results are generally consistent with resident survey data wherein the most popular features of desired future commercial development were smaller building footprints, mixed uses, and limited signage.



## Downtown

Like the survey data, workshop results supported developing (redeveloping) a more traditional downtown area in Williamsburg. While the exact locations were not defined, people generally favored creating (or recreating) a downtown with new or renovated buildings. Using the term “recreating” is accurate, given the historical development patterns described in Chapter 2. Such a downtown area would have features that consist of two or three-story buildings, little or no setback between the right-of-way and the building façade, walkable spaces, and pedestrian orientation. Substantial window glazing at the street level, with pedestrian-scale street lighting, were also features that residents support in terms of new development or redevelopment.



## Infrastructure

Infrastructure is divided into the subtopics of trails, roads, and public facilities. Workshop participants consider trails to be a positive attribute of Whitewater Township but also want to see better signage and some separation of bike and walking trails. Regarding roads, residents focus on M-72 and want to see access managed as development occurs. Efforts to reduce or combine curb cuts to enhance vehicular safety on M-72 with new development (or redevelopment) is supported.



Regarding facilities, workshop participants identified the need for improvement in EMS/Fire facilities. They also noted the potential to construct a new EMS/Fire/Town Hall facility to utilize shared spaces. Most agreed that a new Township Hall (as a stand-alone building) was not needed at this time.



Water and sewer infrastructure did not receive considerable attention, except that the topic of septic field inspections along lakefront property was raised as a general comment. This comment received eleven yes votes and four no votes.

**General Feedback**

General open house feedback included topics related to short-term rentals and the need for more ordinance enforcement. As with the survey data, opinions are divided on short term rentals in terms of allowing them, regulating them and prohibiting them.

**Master Plan Workshop – Goals and Strategies**

On November 7, 2023, a workshop was held at Mill Creek Elementary School. This event was advertised in much the same way as the prior survey and open house, with email blasts, web postings, signs, and flyers. The turnout was very good, with about 60 people in attendance. This session differed from the prior open house as it was intentionally more structured. It began with a brief presentation that recapped the recent survey and open house results. One important highlight during this presentation was the strong evidence of continued support for the goals and general direction set in the 2015 Master Plan (See Page 66). However, it was also explained that the 2015 Master Plan lacked clear information on the steps necessary to achieve community goals. Given this context, the workshop was oriented toward discovering possible steps forward that align with the goals that residents support. Workshop participants were organized into four groups and tasked with discussing possible policies and initiatives for Whitewater Township. Possible policies and initiatives were provided to represent starting points for conversation and organized under the goal headings found in the 2015 Master Plan. Participants were placed into groups to facilitate conversations, and each group was free to agree, disagree, edit draft policies and initiatives, or suggest new ones. They were also asked to provide thoughts on priorities.





**Workshop Results and Planning Terminology:** A summary of workshop results is provided in the following pages. Before presenting this, however, clarifying the terminology used from this point forward is helpful. Master plans define **what should be done** to make a community more livable and then describe **how to** make progress toward a more desirable future. The term “what should be done” relates to community goals or principles that paint a picture of what a community should be like in the future. The term “how to” relates to initiatives to be taken to support those goals and principles. Planning policies are also a means to achieve community goals.

**Planning Principles:** Planning Principles define the overarching desired future of community development in Whitewater Township. They are intentionally general and broad.

**Planning Goals:** Planning goals more specifically define what we want to achieve as a community. Goals can often be categorized. To be most useful, planning goals should be “Smart Goals.”

**Smart Goals:** Smart goals are a framework for goal-setting that utilizes the acronym “SMART” to make matters clearer and more actionable. **SMART** stands for:

<b>Specific:</b>	The goal should be well-defined and clear.
<b>Measurable:</b>	The goal should have criteria for measuring progress and success.
<b>Achievable:</b>	The goal should be attainable and not impossible.
<b>Realistic:</b>	The goal should be within reach and relevant.
<b>Time-bound:</b>	The goal should have a clear start and end date.

**Planning Initiative (Action Step):** Steps to make progress toward a community goal may be a specific initiative to be undertaken. Initiatives are action items or tasks to be completed to achieve something. This might include developing new zoning standards, procedures, or similar actions to address an issue. Defined initiatives should be associated with a sense of priority and timeframe.

**Planning Policy:** Planning policies help define courses of action given future circumstances. For example, a planning policy may guide how to respond to future rezoning requests, or may provide direction for action when opportunities present themselves (i.e., possible property acquisitions, funding opportunities, etc.).

The following material provides a summary of workshop results reported out by group. A complete report with all workshop results was created and posted on the Whitewater Township website. Subsequent Chapters provide additional detail and background on goals and strategic steps forward. Workshop participants were given 45 minutes in group conversations to consider proposed goals, policies, and initiatives. Each group then made presentations toward the end of the evening to share areas of consensus. While a detailed report of the findings is available on the Township website, highlights included the following:

1

**Planning Principle: Respect the Rights of the Township Residents and Property Owners.**

Topics of conversation included the need to balance land use regulation with private property rights and the need for guardrails to help ensure that how one person uses and enjoys their property does not substantially impact another. More specifically, workshop participants indicated support for these potential goals, policies, and initiatives....

- Continuing to clarify and improve the organization of the existing Zoning Ordinance.
- A review of areas zoned R-1 in the township. This includes considering more areas to be zoned R-1 and taking a close look at the appropriateness of R-1 zoning areas along the streams in northern parts of the township.
- Addressing blight with the ability to enforce an existing or updated ordinance.
- Review the uses permitted in each zoning district and eliminate the “cumulative” nature of the existing zoning ordinance.
- Improve landscaping and buffering regulations in the zoning ordinance to help minimize off-site impacts resulting from noise or lighting.
- Reviewing and updating regulations concerning high-density residential development.
- Creating practical regulations concerning alternative energy facilities in Whitewater Township. *(note: after the workshop, the State of Michigan passed legislation that essentially pre-empted local zoning authority over alternative energy facilities).*





2

**Planning Principle: Preserve Whitewater Township's Rural Character**

As indicated in the past surveys and the open house, preserving Whitewater Township's rural character is important to most residents. Workshop participants indicated support for the following potential goals, policies, and initiatives:

- To create and/or update regulatory tools that preserve and maintain rural character. This happens at several levels.
  - Additional study of the appropriate minimum lot size in the A-1 district. While some support for increasing the required minimum lot size so that more land would be needed for new homes was expressed in the survey, there are also important concerns. These concerns include the fact that larger minimum lot sizes convert more farmland to non-farm purposes and burden farm owners who simply want to sell off a few parcels for family members.
  - Maintaining the 4 to 1 width-to-depth ratio.
  - Elimination of the R-1 Zoning District along tributaries
  - Reevaluate the elimination of zoning requirements previously in the repealed Article 27: Regulations for Environmentally Sensitive Areas.
  - Create an improved PUD Zoning District that developers are inclined to use
  - Review and update zoning requirements to further support agricultural tourism
  - Develop more consensus about the desirability of voluntary or mandatory architectural design guidelines (for non-residential buildings).
- Land east of Cook Road on M-72 is zoned Agricultural. To maintain the rural qualities of this area, land should remain zoned Agricultural.
- There is a road plan for Whitewater Township that should be updated.



3

**Planning Principle: Build a Sense of Community**

Building a sense of community is aided by having places where people can socially interact. Like most rural townships, Whitewater Township does not have a large urban center. It does however have parks, public buildings, and Mill Creek School, where people see their neighbors and attend events. Years ago, Williamsburg was more of a place to do business and socially interact (See Chapter 2). Recreating a community center in Williamsburg as a social and business hub is an idea people are drawn to, but there are challenges. Workshop participants indicated support for the following potential goals, policies, and initiatives....

- Attract and encourage redevelopment in the “V” Village Zoning District (North of M-72 and west of Elk Lake Road).
- Evaluate permitted uses and development standards in the “V” Village Zoning District (North of M-72 and west of Elk Lake Road) to ensure they align with the development concept of a downtown-type setting with small-scale retail, commercial services, restaurants, and upper floor housing. The “V” Zoning District should allow for a mix of residential and commercial uses and could include townhomes.
- Encourage discovering feasible central water and sewer options to support more intensive development in Williamsburg. Sewer and water would be costly without a partnership with the tribe/casino and/or grant funding sources.
- Blight also needs to be addressed in Williamsburg.
- Development of a M-72 corridor plan with the new Metropolitan Planning Association should be pursued.
- Development of a non-motorized plan for Whitewater Township supports building a sense of community to the extent that it promotes travel options such as bikes and walking, where social interaction is much more likely.
- Create a local community development foundation (CDF) or establish partnerships with existing CDF’s.
- Maintain and develop partnerships with the Elk Rapids School District

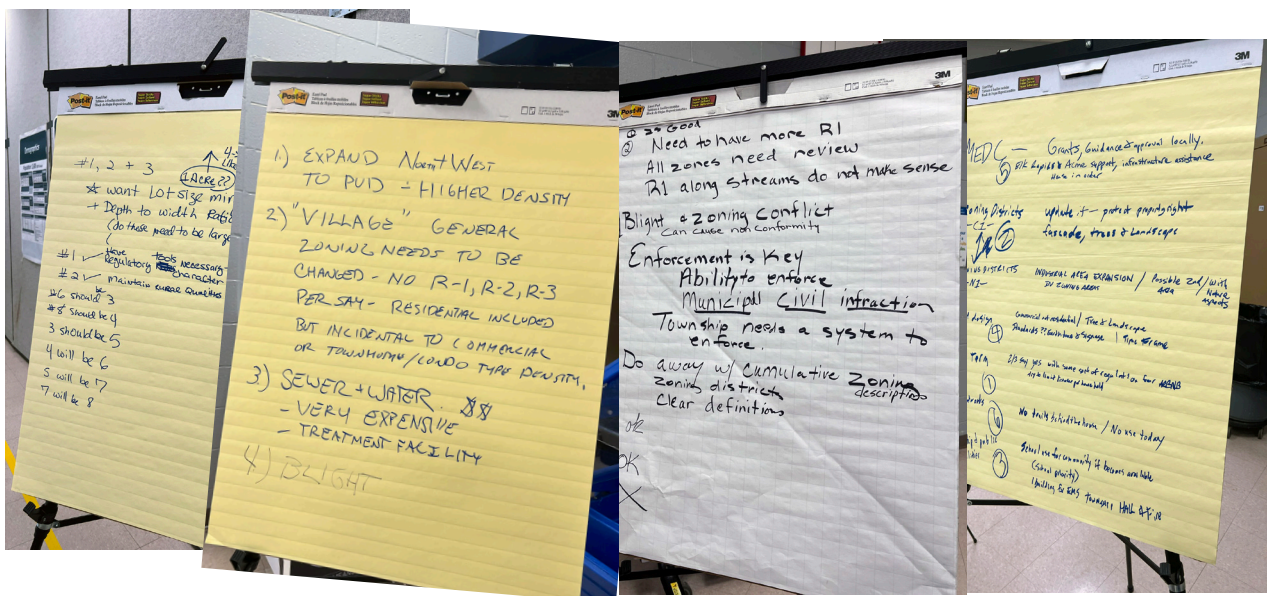


4

**Planning Principle: Encourage Economic Opportunities**

There is clear support for the idea that Whitewater Township should be a place that cultivates economic opportunities of all types. From a land development perspective, the township can support this ideal with clear zoning regulations and a predictable and efficient development review process. Workshop participants indicated support for the following potential goals, policies, and initiatives....

- Pursue designation as a “Redevelopment Ready Community” through the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC). Grants and other assistance can be a key to redevelopment in Williamsburg and possibly infrastructure funding.
- To create and/or update regulatory tools that cultivates economic opportunities. This happens at several levels.
  - Update the C-1 (Commercial) Zoning District regarding permitted/special uses, development standards and landscaping requirements.
  - Update the N-1 (Industrial) Zoning District regarding permitted/special uses and development standards. Possibly expand the N-1 Zoning District.
  - Develop greater consensus about voluntary or mandatory architectural design guidelines in C-1 (Commercial).
  - Develop greater consensus on the level of regulation needed for Short-term Rentals (STR) in Whitewater Township. About two-thirds of residents agree to allow short-term rentals with or without regulation.
  - Explore ways better to utilize the rail track west of the post office.
  - Invest in township facilities as development catalysts and work with the School District to find ways to partner in meeting community needs.



See separate report for high resolution images of these flip charts on the township website

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6

# Vision and Goals for Whitewater Township

As described in the prior chapter, the foundational elements that define what Whitewater Township should be like in the future are planning goals and principles. Together, they create a vision for Whitewater Township. The information generated at the Open House provided compelling reasons to carry the goal headings in the 2015 Master Plan forward as a good framework to build upon. Those goal headings were redefined as Planning Principles, as they generally represented a general statement of desirable community attributes (rather than actual goals that can be used to chart a course forward).

Building on the Planning Workshop results, actual goals have been defined, expanded, updated, and developed to make them clearer and detailed enough to be useful and actionable. The following material builds upon the workshop results with detailed community goals that support each planning principle. Chapters 7, 8, and 9 provide more in-depth strategies associated with many of these goals.

## Whitewater Township Planning Principles



**Principle #1**  
**Respect the Rights of the Township Residents and Property Owners**

**Context:** Respecting the rights of residents and property owners is fundamental to good governance. Residents and property owners have their rights respected most when:

- The zoning ordinance is clear and easy to understand.
- The zoning ordinance is equally and consistently enforced.
- Permitted and special uses in zoning districts are compatible and diminish the potential for land use conflicts.
- Landscaping requirements effectively mitigate visual and noise impacts between dissimilar land uses.
- Blight conditions are addressed with clear, enforceable regulations.

Goal 1-A	
Have a clear and well-organized Whitewater Township Zoning Ordinance. <b>Initiative (Action Step)</b>	
<b>Specific:</b>	Improve the clarity of the existing zoning ordinance so that requirements and standards are clear. This includes incorporating amendments into one document, and preparing, updating, and adopting a Zoning Map that is part of the Zoning Ordinance and plainly defines the boundaries of all zoning districts. <i>Strategy Reference: Page 106</i>
<b>Measurable:</b>	This goal is attained with the adoption of a new clarified Zoning Ordinance
<b>Achievable:</b>	This goal is attainable. Lead Responsibility- PC
<b>Realistic:</b>	This goal can be realized.
<b>Time-bound:</b>	Work toward this goal actually began in 2023. <b>This is a short-term goal to be met in 1 year.</b>

Goal 1-B	
Revisit the “cumulative” nature of the zoning ordinance in terms of permitted and special uses to avoid future land use conflicts. <b>Initiative (Action Step)</b>	
<b>Specific:</b>	The Whitewater Township Zoning Ordinance is a “cumulative-type” ordinance that allows property zoned for specific uses also to be used for less intensive uses. For example, an area zoned for multi-family use also allows a single-family use. An area zoned for industrial use also allows residential uses. While some cumulative elements are desirable, best zoning practices generally include removing totally cumulative zoning systems and replacing them with a more intentional list of permitted and special uses for each zoning district that are appropriate to the character and scale of that district. This helps eliminate land use conflicts. <i>Strategy Reference: Page 106</i>
<b>Measurable:</b>	This goal is attained with the adoption of a zoning amendment.
<b>Achievable:</b>	This goal is attainable. Lead Responsibility- PC
<b>Realistic:</b>	This goal can be realized.
<b>Time-bound:</b>	<b>This is a short-term goal to be met in 1-2 years (after Goal 1-A).</b>



**Goal 1-C**

Improve landscaping and buffering regulations in the zoning ordinance to better minimize off-site impacts resulting from noise or lighting. **Initiative (Action Step)**

<b>Specific:</b>	Landscaping regulations in zoning ordinances require buffer zones, landscaping, and screening to reduce negative impacts of incompatible land uses. They also help enhance and preserve the natural character of the community. Existing requirements in the Whitewater Township Zoning Ordinance can be improved in multiple ways (especially in terms of commercial, high-density residential, and industrial land uses) to provide adequate protection between incompatible uses and advance general community appearance. Clarification about the use of native plant material is also needed. <i>Strategy Reference: Page 103 -106</i>
<b>Measurable:</b>	This goal is attained with the adoption of a zoning amendment.
<b>Achievable:</b>	This goal is attainable. Lead Responsibility- PC
<b>Realistic:</b>	This goal can be realized.
<b>Time-bound:</b>	<b>This is a medium-term goal to be met in 2-3 years</b>

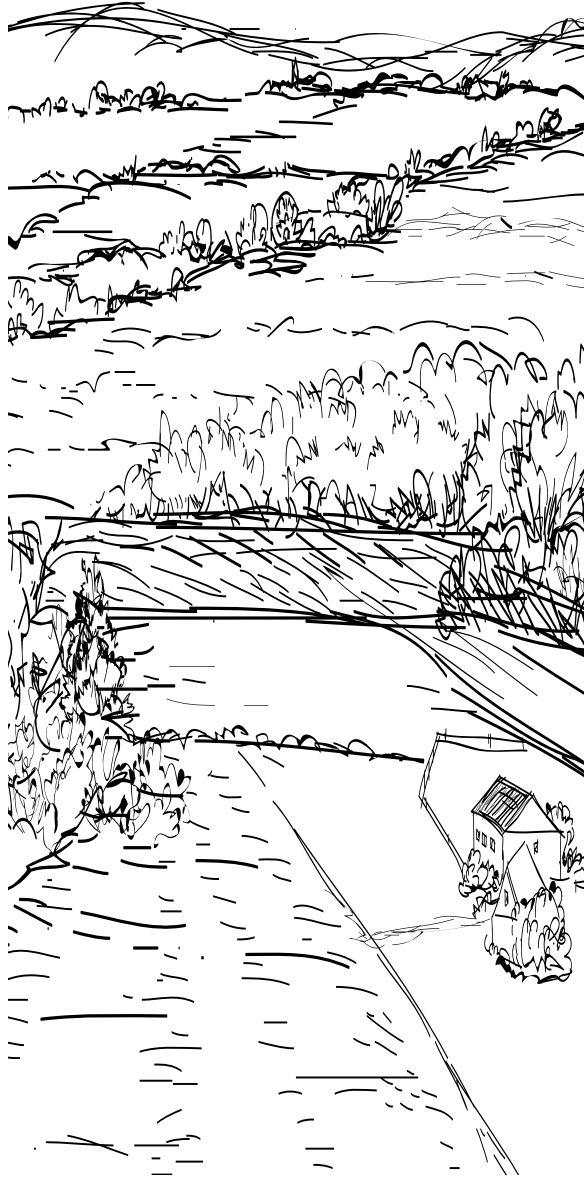
**Goal 1-D**

Provide updated zoning regulations concerning high-density residential development. **Initiative (Action Step)**

<b>Specific:</b>	Accommodating high-density residential development is challenging in Whitewater Township, as central sewer and water systems are not generally available to support such development. However, over the long term, updated regulations are needed to provide basic development standards and requirements for high-density residential development. High-density residential development includes many building formats and could include senior care facilities and assisted living. <i>Strategy Reference: Page 99,100,106</i>
<b>Measurable:</b>	This goal is attained with the adoption of a zoning amendment.
<b>Achievable:</b>	This goal is attainable. Lead Responsibility- PC
<b>Realistic:</b>	This goal can be realized.
<b>Time-bound:</b>	<b>This is a medium-term goal to be met in 2-3 years.</b>

Goal 1-E	
Eliminate junk and blight conditions in Whitewater Township <b>Initiative (Action Step)</b>	
<b>Specific:</b>	Update regulations pertaining to junk and blight and provide resources necessary to address and correct unsightly, unsafe, or hazardous conditions as a result of waste, scrap, junk, debris, scrap or similar material on a property. Ordinance #38 is the existing junk ordinance, passed in 2005. <i>Strategy Reference: Page 102</i>
<b>Measurable:</b>	This goal is attained with amendment(s) to Ordinance 38 and increased levels of ordinance enforcement.
<b>Achievable:</b>	This goal is attainable. Lead Responsibility- TB/PC
<b>Realistic:</b>	This goal can be realized.
<b>Time-bound:</b>	<b>This is a short-term goal to be met in 1-2 years.</b>

Goal 1-F	
Address Short-Term Rentals (STR) in a way that is consistent with public opinion. <b>Initiative (Action Step)</b>	
<b>Specific:</b>	Whitewater Township does not now allow STR's, but about 2/3 of residents think STR's should be allowed with or without some type of local regulation. Local policy should be updated.
<b>Measurable:</b>	This goal is met by an amendment to the Zoning Ordinances, and/or development of another type of regulatory mechanism, coupled with necessary enforcement.
<b>Achievable:</b>	This goal is attainable. Lead Responsibility- TB/PC
<b>Realistic:</b>	This goal can be realized.
<b>Time-bound:</b>	<b>This is a short-term goal to be met in 1-2 years.</b>





**Principle #2**  
**Preserve Whitewater Township’s Rural Character**

Preserving Whitewater Township’s rural character is important to most residents, and they support actionable steps toward this goal. Rural character is generally associated with “orchards, farm stands, and other agricultural land; “woodlots and forests,” and “extended views of undeveloped land across the landscape.” As some forms of development activity are regarded as threatening rural character, future initiatives, and action steps are geared toward basic zoning changes that would help protect the rural character. This includes preserving landscape features such as wetlands, floodplains, and water bodies. An updated zoning ordinance should support protections for such features as local rural character landscape elements. Some requirements existed in previously in repealed zoning language (Article 27).

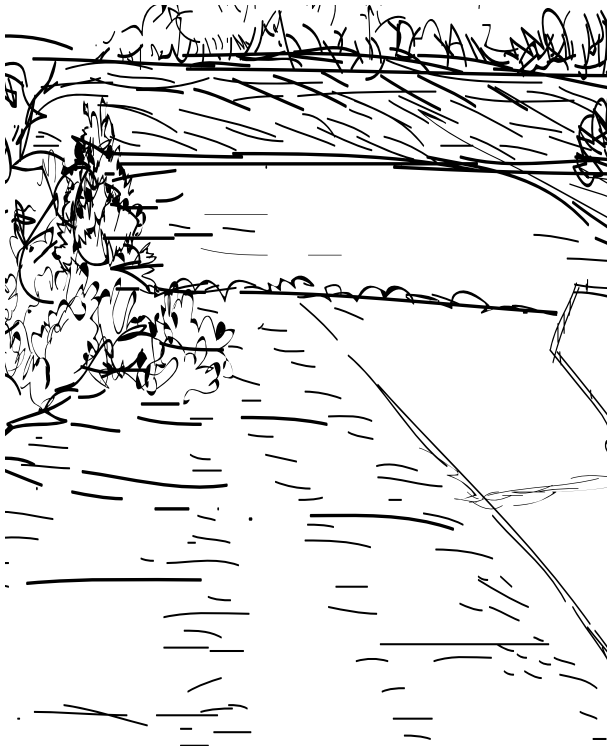
<b>Goal 2-A</b>	
Have regulatory tools in place to preserve and maintain rural character. <b>Initiative (Action Step)</b>	
<b>Specific:</b>	<p>Needed regulatory updates address the following specific issues (and are described more fully in the following chapter):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Determining the appropriate minimum lot size in the A-1 district.</li> <li>• Defining land divisions allowed and width-to-depth ratios.</li> <li>• Elimination of the R-1 Zoning District along creeks and tributaries.</li> <li>• Reconsider eliminating some zoning requirements previously in Article 27 (regulations for Environmentally Sensitive Areas). These zoning requirements are related to issues such as wetlands, steep slopes, groundwater recharge areas, areas subject to erosion, etc. Reinstating certain requirements would protect sensitive areas and help preserve rural character.</li> <li>• Create an improved PUD Zoning District that developers are inclined to use.</li> <li>• Create a rural design manual to articulate recommendations concerning rural subdivision and individual lot design.</li> <li>• Review and update zoning requirements to further support agricultural tourism.</li> <li>• Update required setbacks along roads to accommodate new GTCRC road classifications for collector and arterial roads, as appropriate.</li> <li>• Determine if voluntary or mandatory architectural design guidelines are needed for non-residential uses (Primarily C-1).</li> </ul> <p><i>Strategy Reference: Page 90-97, 106.</i></p>
<b>Measurable:</b>	This goal is attained with the adoption of zoning amendments.
<b>Achievable:</b>	This goal is attainable. Lead Responsibility- PC
<b>Realistic:</b>	This goal can be realized.
<b>Time-bound:</b>	<b>This is a short-term goal to be met in 1-2 years after Goal #1A is accomplished.</b>

<b>Goal 2-B</b>	
Adhere to the Generalized Future Land Use Plan that illustrates agricultural areas where rural qualities of the landscape are to be preserved. <b>Policy</b>	
<b>Specific:</b>	Chapter 7 contains a Generalized Future Land Use Plan that includes agricultural areas (Map 10). These areas are not considered “holding areas” waiting for more intensive development opportunities. Agricultural areas are planned to remain in agricultural use. Rezoning to other more intensive zoning districts is discouraged. More intensive zoning districts such as R-1, R-2, R-3, Commercial or Industrial would allow more substantial development and diminish rural character. <i>Strategy Reference: Page 91.</i>
<b>Measurable:</b>	Progress toward this goal is measured by the absence of rezonings contrary to the Generalized Future Land Use Plan (Map 10).
<b>Achievable:</b>	This goal is attainable. Lead Responsibility- PC
<b>Realistic:</b>	This goal can be realized.
<b>Time-bound:</b>	Ongoing policy.

Goal 2-C	
If found to be eligible and appropriate after further investigation, designate one or more Whitewater Township Roads as a Michigan Natural Beauty Road(s) to help preserve rural character. <b>Initiative (Action Step)</b>	
<b>Specific:</b>	The 2004 Road Plan for Whitewater Township identifies the fact that the Grand Traverse County Road Commission can designate a Natural Beauty Road. Once designated, protections related to mowing, grading, herbicide use, tree removal, dust control, signage, etc. are provided. More investigation is needed to see what local roads may qualify, to weigh benefits and drawbacks, learn more about public attitudes toward this issue. <i>Strategy Reference: Page 117</i>
<b>Measurable:</b>	Evaluative steps to determine local applicability.
<b>Achievable:</b>	This goal is attainable. Lead Responsibility- PC
<b>Realistic:</b>	This goal can be realized.
<b>Time-bound:</b>	<b>This is a long-term goal to be met in 4-5 years.</b>

Goal 2-D	
Pursue farmland preservation efforts in concert with the Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy and Whitewater Township Ordinance 33. <b>Initiative (Action Step)</b>	
<b>Specific:</b>	Whitewater Township adopted a Farmland and Open Space Development Rights Ordinance which lays a foundation for a program that could purchase development rights from farmers who wish to keep their land in agricultural production (rather than develop it). <i>Strategy Reference: Page 93</i>
<b>Measurable:</b>	Evaluative steps to determine local applicability.
<b>Achievable:</b>	This goal is attainable. Lead Responsibility- TB/ PC
<b>Realistic:</b>	This goal can be realized.
<b>Time-bound:</b>	<b>This is a short-term goal to be met in 1-2 years.</b>

Goal 2-E	
Re-adopt a private road ordinance <b>Initiative (Action Step)</b>	
<b>Specific:</b>	Whitewater Township is without a private road ordinance that defines standards and procedures to create new private roads. Such an ordinance is important in terms of making sure that new private roads are built to appropriate standards. <i>Strategy Reference: Page 109</i>
<b>Measurable:</b>	Evaluative steps to determine local applicability.
<b>Achievable:</b>	This goal is attainable. Lead Responsibility- TB/ PC
<b>Realistic:</b>	This goal can be realized.
<b>Time-bound:</b>	<b>This is a short-term goal to be met in 1-2 years.</b>



**Principle #3**  
**Build a Sense of Community**

Like many small rural communities, Whitewater Township lacks a defined downtown and sense of place common in cities and villages. However, Williamsburg was once a more substantial community center with venues for business activity and social/cultural interaction. While many buildings that provided this community center are now gone, some support is evident for redevelopment into a “downtown-type” setting with small-scale retail, commercial services, restaurants, and upper-floor housing. Additionally:

- Most, if not all, of the land uses in Williamsburg (south of M-72) are now residential (except for the Township Hall and the Methodist Church).
- The area west of Elk Lake Road and North of M-72 is zoned “V” and this Zoning District is intended to “maintain and enhance the traditional character of Williamsburg.”
- Places for social and cultural activities and interaction (farmers market, car shows, concerts, senior programs, etc.) are limited (except for the township park).
- Residents point to the need to develop more convenient bike trails and walking paths in Whitewater Township. More non-motorized transportation options in Whitewater Township would help build a sense of community, as people walking or biking are much more inclined to interact with others. The Williamsburg area should be a hub for non-motorized transportation in Whitewater Township.

Goal 3-A	
Attract and encourage redevelopment in the “V” Village Zoning District (North of M-72 and west of Elk Lake Road).	
<b>Policy</b>	
<b>Specific:</b>	As a general policy, Whitewater Township should support steps to attract and encourage redevelopment of Williamsburg (North of M-72 and west of Elk Lake Road). Apart from progressing toward other related goals, Whitewater Township should continue to improve and upgrade Hi-Pray Park, and invest in public infrastructure (such as drainage improvements, sidewalks, lighting, etc.) as opportunities present themselves. <i>Strategy Reference: Page 100-102</i>
<b>Measurable:</b>	Progress toward this goal is measured by the value of new public or private investment in this area.
<b>Achievable:</b>	This goal is attainable. Lead Responsibility- PC
<b>Realistic:</b>	This goal can be realized.
<b>Time-bound:</b>	This goal is on-going Policy

Goal 3-B	
Ensure that permitted uses, special uses and development standards in the “V” Village Zoning District reflect the desired development pattern. <b>Initiative (Action Step)</b>	
<b>Specific:</b>	Conduct a thorough review of the “V” Zoning District regarding uses permitted by right and those permitted by special use permit. Development standards concerning building sizes, height, setbacks, and parking locations should also be reviewed. These requirements should match the desired development and redevelopment pattern supported by residents. <i>Strategy Reference: Page 100-102</i>
<b>Measurable:</b>	Adoption of a zoning amendment.
<b>Achievable:</b>	This goal is attainable. Lead Responsibility- PC
<b>Realistic:</b>	This goal can be realized.
<b>Time-bound:</b>	<b>This is a short-term goal to be met in 1-2 years.</b>

Goal 3-C	
Continue to investigate feasible central water and sewer options to support development in Williamsburg. <b>Policy</b>	
<b>Specific:</b>	Sewer and water service in Williamsburg would be costly. Exploring opportunities for grants and/or opportunities to partner others, such as Tribal interests, should be ongoing. Strategy Reference: Page 102,120.
<b>Measurable:</b>	Progress toward this goal is measured by future efforts to investigate options.
<b>Achievable:</b>	This goal is attainable. Lead Responsibility- TB/PC
<b>Realistic:</b>	This goal can be realized.
<b>Time-bound:</b>	This goal is on-going Policy

Goal 3-D	
Develop a general non-motorized plan for Whitewater Township <b>Initiative (Action Step)</b>	
<b>Specific:</b>	Develop a general non-motorized plan for Whitewater Township with a list of long and near-term projects. This non-motorized plan defines opportunities for bike and walking trail connections within a regional non-motorized network and community facilities such as parks and schools. Williamsburg should be the hub of such a system, and it may include paved road shoulders and standalone trails. Important and emerging partnerships include TART and the Grand Traverse County Road Commission. Strategy Reference: Page 110,112.
<b>Measurable:</b>	Progress toward this goal is measured by completion and adoption of a plan.
<b>Achievable:</b>	This goal is attainable. Lead Responsibility- PC
<b>Realistic:</b>	This goal can be realized.
<b>Time-bound:</b>	<b>This is a long-term goal to be met in 4-5 years.</b>

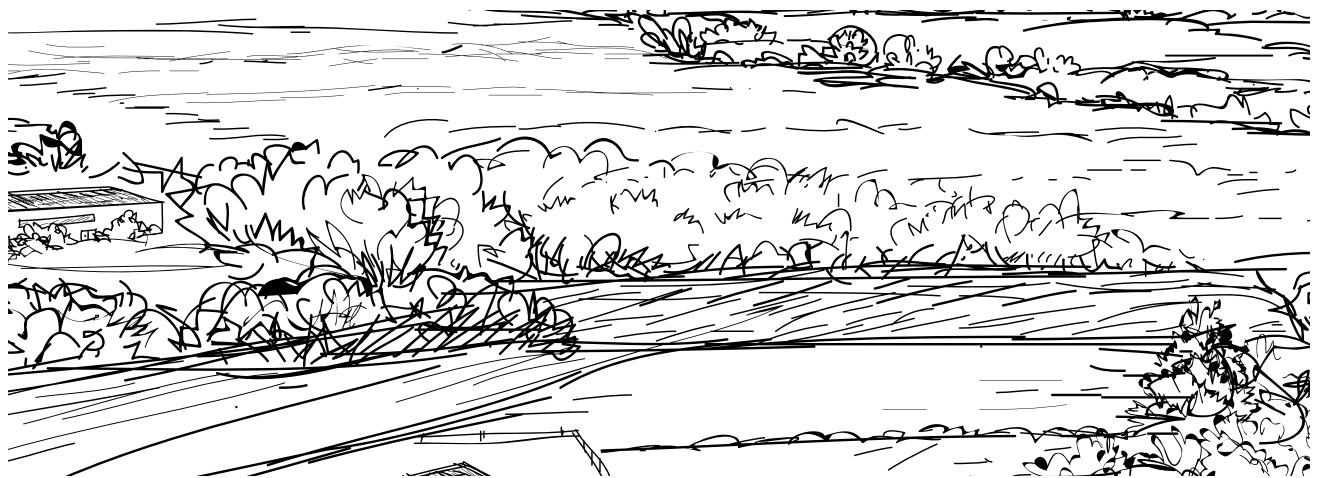
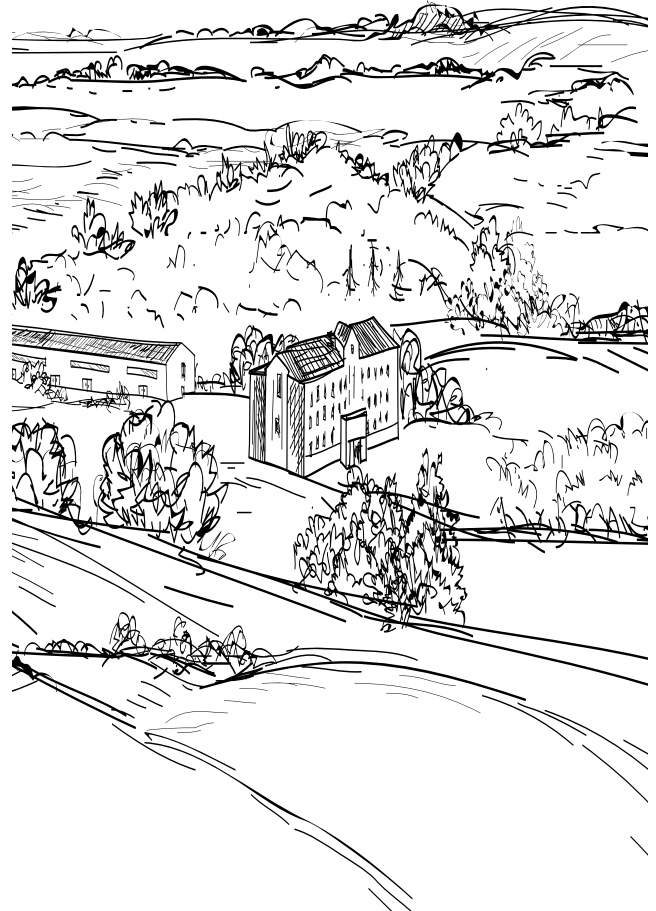
Goal 3-E	
Encourage and support the use of a Community Development Foundation (CDF) to assist with community projects. that could support education, environmental projects, or economic development efforts. <b>Policy</b>	
<b>Specific:</b>	A local CDF, or relationship with a larger regional CDF would provide a vehicle to accomplish community development projects of an educational, environmental or economic development nature. Strategy Reference: Page 102.
<b>Measurable:</b>	Progress toward this goal is measured by existence of an engaged CDF, or similar entity.
<b>Achievable:</b>	This goal is attainable. Lead Responsibility- TB/PC
<b>Realistic:</b>	This goal can be realized.
<b>Time-bound:</b>	This goal is on-going Policy

Goal 3-F	
Maintain a strong partnership with the Elk Rapids School District. <b>Policy</b>	
<b>Specific:</b>	The Elk Rapids School District is a foundational part of Whitewater Township with major facilities and relationships to community development needs. Today, enrollment trends at Mill Creek School point to the need to rethink many issues. Ongoing dialog and collaboration between Whitewater Township and the Elk Rapids School District is essential to making sure that local needs are met. Strategy Reference: Page 119.
<b>Measurable:</b>	Regular communication and collaboration with the Elk Rapids School District.
<b>Achievable:</b>	This goal is attainable. Lead Responsibility- TB/PC
<b>Realistic:</b>	This goal can be realized.
<b>Time-bound:</b>	This goal is on-going Policy



# Master Plan

Goal 3-G	
Educate the community about how the Grand Traverse Road Commission has increased the township's fiscal responsibility for maintaining and future rehabilitation of Whitewater Township Roads	
Initiative	
<b>Specific:</b>	Identify and implement (if feasible) local financial strategies to address the 50% local financial match placed on the township by the Grand Traverse County Road Commission. This involves developing a better understanding of how road millage monies are presently utilized and how those dollars might be leveraged for local use. This initiative may include the formation of an advisory committee.
<b>Measurable:</b>	Constructive collaboration with appointed officials and staff of the Grand Traverse County Road Commission.
<b>Achievable:</b>	This goal is attainable. Lead Responsibility-Township Board and newly formed Advisory Committee.
<b>Realistic:</b>	This goal can be realized if Whitewater residents accept more financial responsibility for road maintenance and rehabilitation programs
<b>Time-bound:</b>	This goal could be met in the next 3-5 years.



**Principle #4**  
**Encourage Economic Opportunities**

The desire to provide an environment wherein people can succeed economically is important to residents. Additionally, the M-72 Corridor through Whitewater Township is a place with attributes that can provide jobs and a tax base for the larger region. Whitewater Township has an industrial area (generally south of M- 72, West of Williamsburg Rd, and east of Moore Road) that is home to several light industrial uses. Along with this, the M-72 corridor (west of Cook Road) presents opportunities for new commercial development (in accordance with local desires for smaller building footprints, mixed uses, controlled signage, limited driveways, limited site lighting, and extensive landscaping).

Goal 4-A	
Pursue designation as a “Redevelopment Ready Community” through the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC). This certification process signals that a community has clear development policies and procedures, a community-supported vision, a predictable review process, and compelling sites for developers to locate their latest projects. <b>Initiative (Action Step)</b>	
<b>Specific:</b>	Redevelopment Ready Community (RRC) designation can be a challenging endeavor containing many thresholds, but it is regarded as a long-term goal for Whitewater Township. RRC defines best practices related to planning, zoning, and economic development efforts. <i>Strategy Reference: Page 102</i>
<b>Measurable:</b>	Progress toward RRC designation is measured by specific program thresholds
<b>Achievable:</b>	This goal is attainable. Lead Responsibility- PC/TB
<b>Realistic:</b>	This goal can be realized.
<b>Time-bound:</b>	<b>This is a long-term goal to be met in 4-5 years.</b>

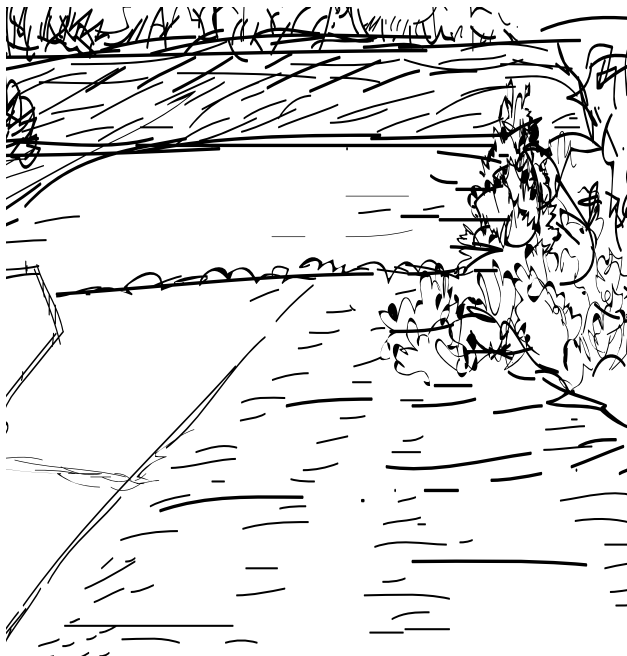
Goal 4-B	
Update the C-1 Zoning District to ensure permitted uses, special uses, and development standards (lot sizes, setbacks, and maximum building size limitations) align with desired development scenarios. Additionally, determine if formal architectural design guidelines (voluntary or mandatory) are appropriate to further rural character of new non-residential buildings in the C-1 Zone. <b>Initiative (Action Step)</b>	
<b>Specific:</b>	The C-1 Zoning District should be updated to align with development attributes supported by residents (as expressed in the community survey). This includes elements of Goal #2-A. <i>Strategy Reference: Page 103-104.</i>
<b>Measurable:</b>	Adoption of a zoning amendment.
<b>Achievable:</b>	This goal is attainable. Lead Responsibility- PC
<b>Realistic:</b>	This goal can be realized.
<b>Time-bound:</b>	This is a short-term goal to be met in 1-2 years.



Goal 4-C	
Update the “N” Zoning District to ensure permitted uses, special uses, and development standards (lot sizes, setbacks, and maximum building size limitations) align with desired development scenarios. <b>Initiative (Action Step)</b>	
<b>Specific:</b>	The “N” Zoning District should be updated to ensure that allowed industrial development is compatible with the area and that development standards allow for appropriate building forms and placement. <i>Strategy Reference: Page 105.</i>
<b>Measurable:</b>	Adoption of a zoning amendment.
<b>Achievable:</b>	This goal is attainable. Lead Responsibility- PC
<b>Realistic:</b>	This goal can be realized.
<b>Time-bound:</b>	<b>This goal should be met in the next 1-3 years.</b>

Goal 4-D	
Develop a corridor plan for M-72. Such a plan will identify ways to manage access to adjacent property as development and traffic generation occurs. This potentially includes topics such as future signals, roundabouts, access roads, turn lanes, deceleration lanes, etc., and allows for coordinated land use and transportation planning. <b>Initiative (Action Step)</b>	
<b>Specific:</b>	A new corridor plan for M-72 should be done in collaboration with MDOT and the new MPO (and perhaps adjacent Acme Township) so that issues related to access and new development are dealt with concurrently. New requirements for traffic impact studies are also related to this issue as such studies could support the development of access roads or similar measures. <i>Strategy Reference: Page 114-116.</i>
<b>Measurable:</b>	Completion of a new corridor plan.
<b>Achievable:</b>	This goal is attainable. Lead Responsibility- PC/TB
<b>Realistic:</b>	This goal can be realized.
<b>Time-bound:</b>	<b>This goal should be met in the next 3-5 years.</b>

Goal 4-E	
Develop and maintain strong partnerships with other entities to better coordinate transportation-related planning. Partners include the new MPO, passenger rail planning entities, the Grand Traverse County Road Commission, TART, NORTE. <b>Policy</b>	
<b>Specific:</b>	Local planning efforts will be most effective when conducted in coordination with other partners with interests in mobility in Whitewater Township. Specifically, M-72 corridor planning, passenger rail service in the area and non-motorized mobility planning will be enhanced when conducted in partnership with regional partners and stakeholders. <i>Strategy Reference: Page 109-117.</i>
<b>Measurable:</b>	Regular and constructive collaboration with partners
<b>Achievable:</b>	This goal is attainable. Lead Responsibility- PC/TB
<b>Realistic:</b>	This goal can be realized.
<b>Time-bound:</b>	This goal is on-going Policy



# Master Plan

## SUMMARY OF COMMUNITY GOALS

No.	Goal Name	Time Frame	Measureable Outcome
<b>Principle #1 Respect the Rights of the Township Residents and Property Owners</b>			
1-A	Have a clear and well-organized Whitewater Township Zoning Ordinance.	Short-term goal to be met in 1 year (work actually began in 2023).	Adoption of a new zoning ordinance
1-B	Review the “cumulative” nature of the existing zoning ordinance	This is a short-term goal to be met in 1-2 years (after goal 1-A).	Adoption of a zoning amendment.
1-C	Improve landscaping and buffering regulations	Medium-term goal (2-3 years).	Adoption of a zoning amendment.
1-D	Update zoning regs concerning high-density resident. develop.	Medium-term goal (2-3 years).	Adoption of a zoning amendment.
1-E	Eliminate junk and blight conditions in Whitewater Township	This is a short-term goal to be met in 1-2 years.	This goal is attained with amendment(s) to Ordinances 38 and increased levels of ordinance enforcement.
1-F	Address Short-Term Rentals (STR) in a way that is consistent with public opinion.	This is a short-term goal to be met in 1-2 years.	Zoning ordinance amendment, or other type of regulations and enforcement.
<b>Principle #2 Preserve Whitewater Township’s Rural Character</b>			
2-A	Have regulatory tools in place to preserve and maintain rural character.	This is a short-term goal to be met in 1-2 years (after goal #1-A)	Adoption of a zoning amendment(s).
2-B	Adhere to the Generalized Future Land Use Plan illustrating agricultural areas where rural qualities of the landscape are to be preserved.	Ongoing policy.	Progress toward this goal is measured by the absence of rezonings contrary to the Generalized Future Land Use Plan.
2-C	Designate one or more Township Roads as a Michigan Natural Beauty Road(s) if appropriate.	This is a long-term goal to be met in 4-5 years.	Evaluative steps to determine local applicability.
2-D	Pursue farmland preservation efforts concert with the Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy.	This is a short-term goal to be met in 1-2 years.	Evaluative steps to determine local applicability.
2-E	Re-adopt Private Road Ordinance	Short-term goal (1-2 years).	New Private Road Ordinance
<b>Principle #3 Build a Sense of Community</b>			
3-A	Attract and encourage redevelopment in the “V” Village Zoning District	Ongoing policy.	Progress toward this goal is measured by new public or private investment.
3-B	Review permitted uses, special uses and development standards in the “V” Village Zoning District.	This is a short-term goal to be met in 1-2 years.	Adoption of a zoning amendment.
3-C	Continue to investigate feasible central water and sewer options in Williamsburg.	Ongoing policy.	Progress toward this goal is measured by future efforts to investigate options.
3-D	Develop a general non-motorized plan for Whitewater Township	This is a long-term goal to be met in 4-5 years.	Progress toward this goal is measured by completion and adoption of a plan.
3-E	Encourage and support the use of a Community Development Foundation (CDF)	Ongoing policy.	Existence of an engaged CDF, or similar entity.
3-F	Maintain a strong partnership with the Elk Rapids School District.	Ongoing policy.	Regular communication and collaboration with Elk Rapids School Dist.
3-G	Educate the community about Grand Traverse Road Commission funding. Formation of an advisory committee.	This is a long-term goal to be met in 3-5 years.	Constructive collaboration with appointed officials and GTCRC.
<b>Principle #4 Encourage Economic Opportunities</b>			
4-A	Pursue designation as a “Redevelopment Ready Community”	A long-term goal to be met in 4-5 years.	Progress toward RRC designation is measured by specific program thresholds
4-B	Update the C-1 Zoning District to ensure permitted uses, special uses, and development standard align with desired development scenarios.	This goal should be met in the next 1-3 years.	Adoption of a zoning amendment.
4-C	Update the “N” Zoning District to ensure permitted uses, special uses, and development standards align with desired development scenarios.	This goal should be met in the next 1-3 years.	Adoption of a zoning amendment.
4-D	Develop a corridor plan for M-72.	Long-term goal (4-5 years).	Completion of a new Corridor Plan.
4-E	Develop and maintain strong partnerships with other entities to better coordinate transportation-related planning.	Ongoing policy.	Regular and constructive collaboration with partners



7

# Strategy & Implementation - Land Use

This Chapter and the following two chapters explore the steps necessary to achieve community goals. Prior Chapters addressed existing and past conditions, trends, community attitudes, and goals. In some ways, those prior Chapters may be thought of in terms of “what is and what should be.” This chapter focuses on “how” and more deeply examines planning strategies and necessary steps toward community goals. It also provides more of a geographic focus.

Three general topics represent the building blocks of any community. They include:

- Land Use
- Transportation
- Public Facilities

This Chapter addresses land use and zoning, while subsequent Chapters address transportation and public facilities. Before continuing, three terms need a clear definition to discuss land use and zoning in the proper context.

**The Future Land Use Plan** is part of a Master Plan showing a classification and allocation of land for various purposes. This map should align with a community’s goals and vision for physical development and represent an image of a desirable land use pattern in the future. Because land development is a long-term proposition as the useful life of new construction lasts generations, the Future Land Use Map should offer a long-term perspective, looking 20 years or more forward. The Future Land Use Plan is typically generalized and does not normally provide extensive detail on specific parcels or buildings. Land use types are often grouped into categories.

**A Zoning Plan** is also part of a Master Plan. It describes the zoning ordinance and how land use categories relate to the Future Land Use Plan Map. Differences between the Future Land Use Plan Map and the existing Zoning Ordinance are to be expected and not uncommon. The Zoning Plan bridges this gap and describes how the Zoning Ordinance should change to better align with the Future Land Use Plan Map. This allows the Zoning Ordinance to be an effective tool for implementing the Master Plan.

**The Zoning Ordinance** is the actual law that regulates land uses, densities, setbacks, and other land development design criteria. Whitewater Township adopted its Zoning Ordinance in 1972 and has been amended about 80 times since. The Zoning Ordinance should be a document that evolves and changes with community attitudes and goals. An up-to-date Master Plan should guide substantial changes.

The distinction between the Future Land Use Plan and the Zoning Ordinance is important. The Future Land Use Map does not directly represent regulations or establish district boundaries. The Future Land Use Plan only shows a general desirable land use patterns for the future as a guide for deciding on changes to the Zoning Ordinance. Zoning changes include those that the township might propose. They also include changes that might originate from applicants wishing to rezone a property to suit development proposals.

Preparing a Future Land Use Plan and a Zoning Plan are two important requirements of the Michigan Planning Enabling Act (125.3833).

**Future Land Use Plan Map**

The future land use plan map is provided on page 90. It is accompanied by a description of each area and associated planning strategies. It overlaps with the prior Chapter regarding community principles and goals to the extent that it presents many planning issues from a geographical perspective. The planning strategies include zoning elements (described in the Zoning Plan that follows) and other public policies.

**Recreation and Conservation (Associated with RC Zoning District)**

The Recreation and Conservation area is a substantial portion of the southern half of Whitewater Township. The State of Michigan owns much of the land in this area, which is associated with the Pere Marquette State Forest. Except for areas around Island Lake and Truax Lake, many privately owned tracts throughout this area provide home sites on larger lots (5 acres or more). Land use in this area is not expected to change much in the future, given the large amount of State Forest Land and the fact that much of the privately held property has already been developed with homes. Any undeveloped parcels could be developed under requirements set forth under the RC Zoning District. This area of Whitewater Township is well-suited for very low-density residential uses and outdoor recreation activities, such as campgrounds

and golf courses. This area also substantially contributes to the rural character of Whitewater Township, with gently rolling topography, extensive forested areas, and views of small lakes.

**Planning Strategies:** Generally, maintain and protect the Recreation and Conservation Area. Minor Zoning updates may be needed to fine-tune zoning requirements to ensure that future development aligns with the desire for an outdoor-recreational atmosphere and character.

**Agricultural (Associated with A-1 Zoning District)**

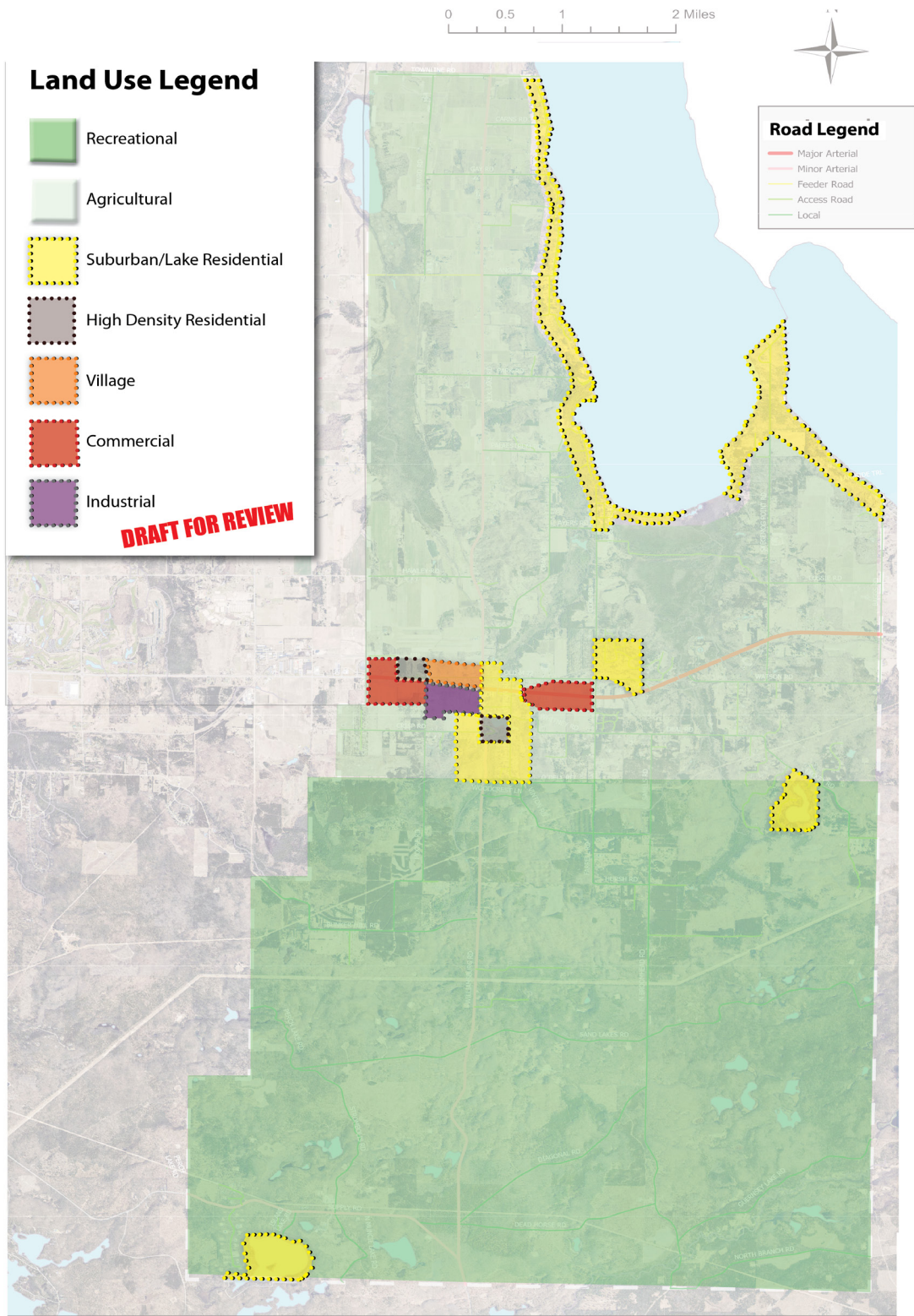
Most of the Northern half of Whitewater Township is planned for agricultural use. This is perhaps one of the most challenging planning areas for two reasons.

- Residents want to preserve rural character, defined by features such as orchards, farm stands, agricultural lands, woodlots, forests, and extended views of undeveloped land across the landscape. The agricultural area offers many of these features. Unsurprisingly, the Elk Lake Road corridor (offering some of the best views of many of these features) was recognized as the most scenic area



Photo Credit - Horizon Drone Services

# Master Plan



**Map 10 Generalized Future Land Use Plan**

*BACK OF FUTURE LAND USE MAP - Intentionally Blank*

in Whitewater Township. Urbanization and development in agricultural regions displace many attributes that create rural character.

- Farming is an increasingly difficult endeavor from the standpoint of profitability, given fluctuations in production costs and commodity prices. This can encourage farmers to sell off farmland as home sites for income. Farmers may also explore other options for additional revenue streams generated by roadside stands or other related endeavors. Farms are fundamentally businesses that do not exist solely to provide rural character for a community.

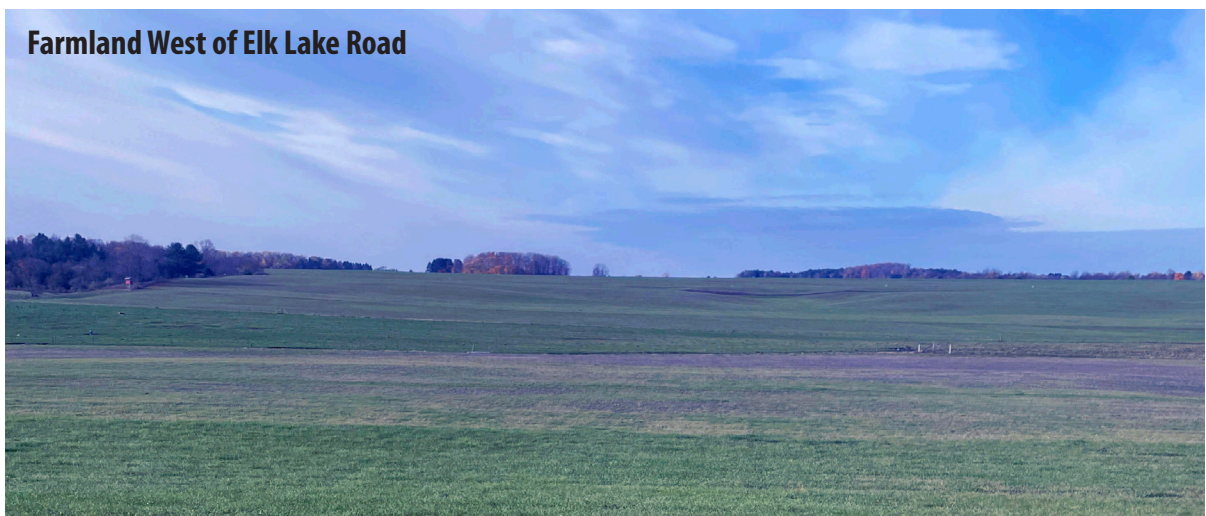
As previously noted, land designated as “Agricultural” should not be regarded as a “holding category” that awaits more intensive development possibilities. Agricultural areas are intended to remain agricultural, producing food and income while providing the valued rural character elements that residents appreciate. Therefore, the basic challenge centers on taking reasonable and measured steps to preserve rural character while respecting the need for farming profitability. A large amount of land in the Agricultural category includes land that is likely part of a wetland and

regulatory floodplain (See Maps 3, 6, and 7 in Chapter 3). Therefore, land in these categories has important development limitations. However, the current zoning map illustrates R-1 Zoning along the creek and stream channels in northern Whitewater Township. This is regarded as inappropriate, given that it allows more intensive development along these environmentally sensitive areas in Whitewater Township.

A significant project recently approved in the Agricultural District (but next to the Recreation and Conservation area) is the High Pointe Golf Club. This golf course closed in 2008 during the Great Recession but is now part of a 24-million-dollar renovation project in Whitewater and Acme Township. This project (about 120 acres in Whitewater Township) would be an exclusive small private membership golf course designed by a world-renowned architect. Access to this facility would be from Moore Road in Whitewater Township.

### Planning Strategies:

- Pursue Farmland Preservation Programs in partnership with the Grand Traverse County Regional Land Conservancy. This would allow purchasing development



rights to compensate farmers who wish to sell a conservation easement, leaving the land perpetually limited to agricultural uses. Whitewater Township has a Farmland and Open Space Development Rights Ordinance (33) passed in 2004. Around that same time, a millage was on the ballot in Whitewater Township to pay for the cost of buying conservation easements. This ballot measure did not pass. However, similar measures were passed in neighboring Acme Township and Peninsula Township, and active programs are in place to buy conservation easements from willing agricultural landowners.

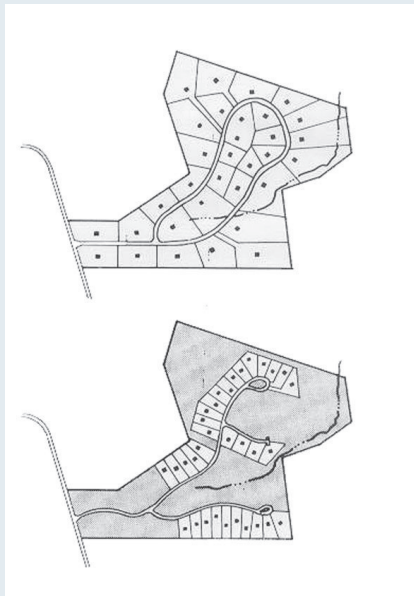
- Update Planned Unit Development Regulations in the Zoning Ordinance to make this development approach more appealing to developers. This could mean providing incentives such as a modest density bonus under PUD provisions, or other approaches. When residential units can be clustered, open-space networks can be created to preserve existing natural features (woodlots, ponds, small wetlands, etc.). See Page 95 for a more extensive explanation of PUD's.
- Further investigate increasing the minimum lot size in the Agricultural Zoning District from 40,000 square feet to a larger parcel. This will require more investigation into public attitudes, consideration of the impact on farmers, and consensus-building among planning commission members and the township board.

- Eliminate R-1 Zoning along stream and creek channels in northern Whitewater Township.
- Review and update land division regulations concerning the number of splits allowed and related dimensional standards.
- Further update provisions that relate to requirements for condominium subdivisions. Updated provisions can relate to additional steps to protect natural features on a site, and traffic-related measures.
- Develop an advisory rural design manual for people building homes or laying out subdivisions to assist them in making good choices concerning preserving rural character elements when developing property. Such a manual would address issues such as limiting the installation of high-maintenance turf grass, installing landscape plantings (with native plant material) as visual blocks to screen or frame landscape elements, limiting impervious surfaces, etc. Pages 96 and 97 provide a sample of considerations to include in such an advisory manual for individual lots and whole subdivisions.



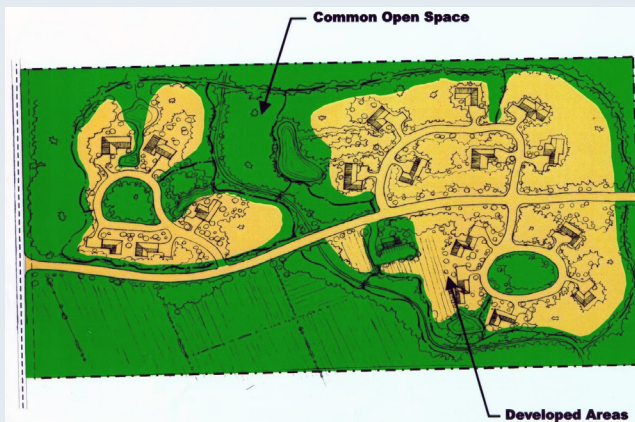
## Planned Unit Developments (PUD)

A PUD is a broad category of zoning that allows for more creativity in land planning, site design, and the protection of environmentally sensitive lands not possible with conventional zoning and development practices. A PUD can allow for more compact development with common open space making, it easier to preserve environmental and scenic attributes of a site. PUDs often allow for smaller lots on some parts of the site in exchange for permanently preserved common open space elsewhere on the site. They can also allow for mixed uses (different housing types and non-residential uses).



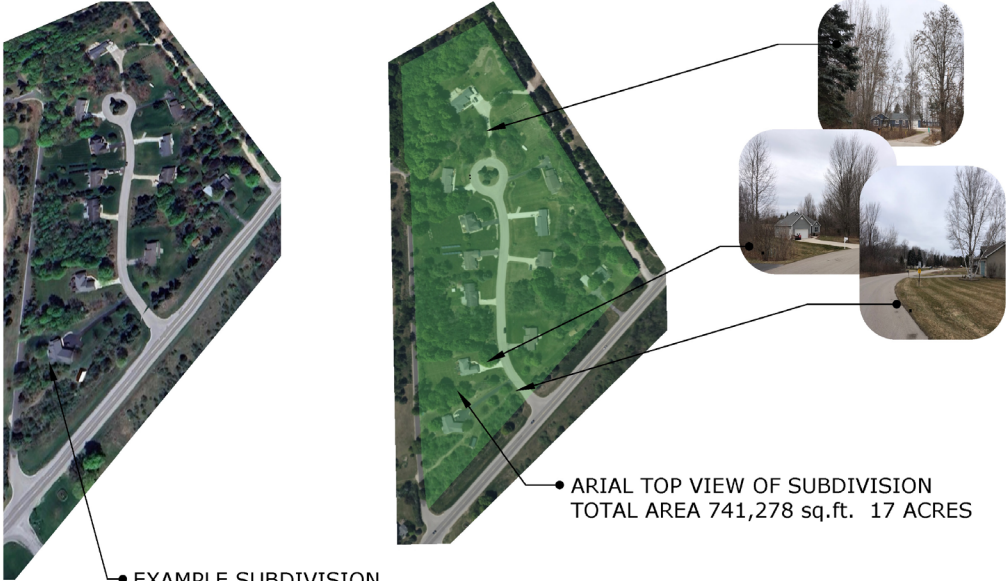
*Conventional Development/ Subdivision*

*PUD - Cluster Option  
Same number of units as above with open space network.*

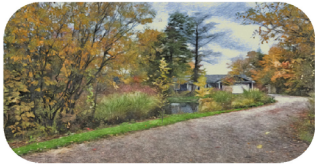
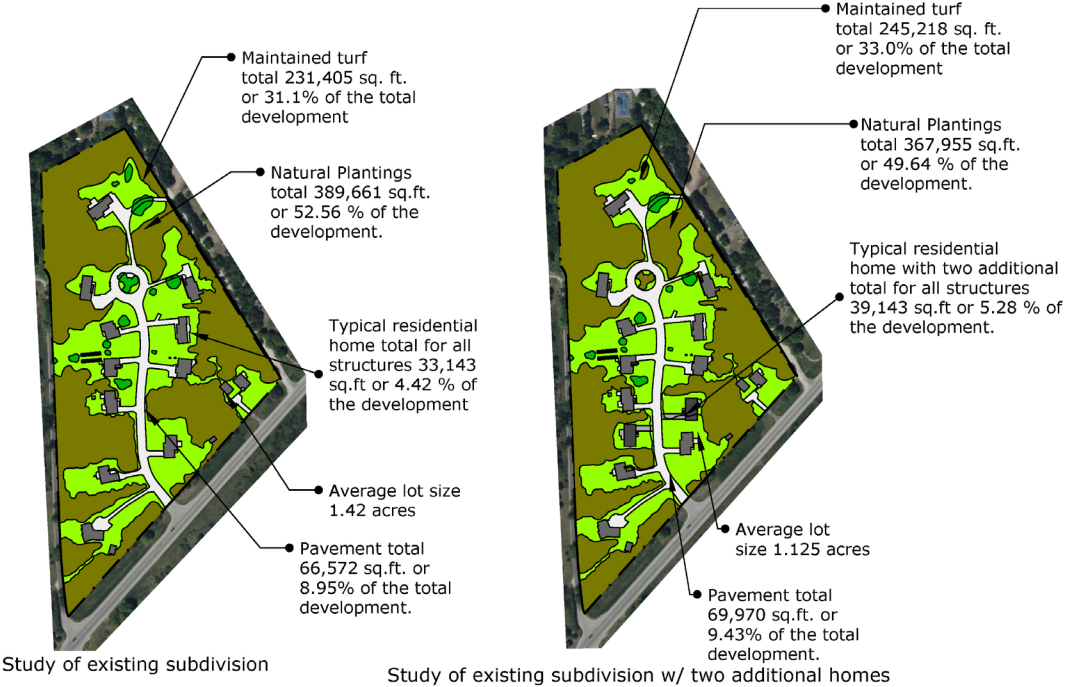


Rural Design Considerations for Subdivisions

CONCEPTUAL GRAPHIC DEFINITION OF RURAL CHARACTER



Source: Graphic study of rural character elements provided by Gary Buczkowski. Rural character elements includes 50% of the development with natural plantings and limited turf grass.



Example of mass tree & shrub planting.



Example of natural bed planting instead of maintained turf.

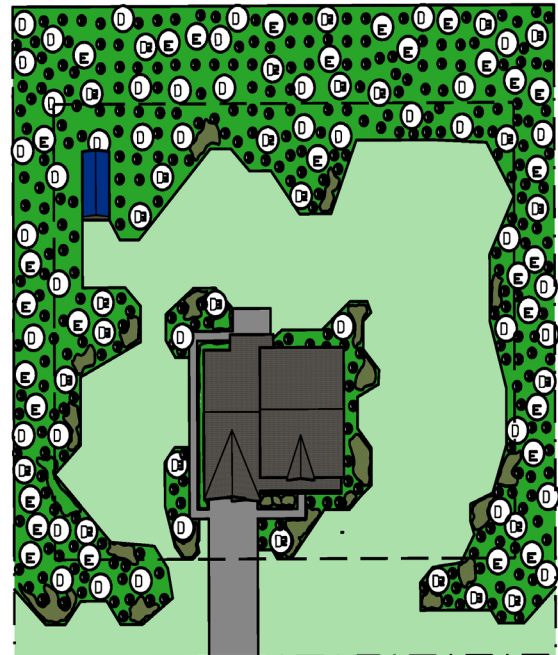
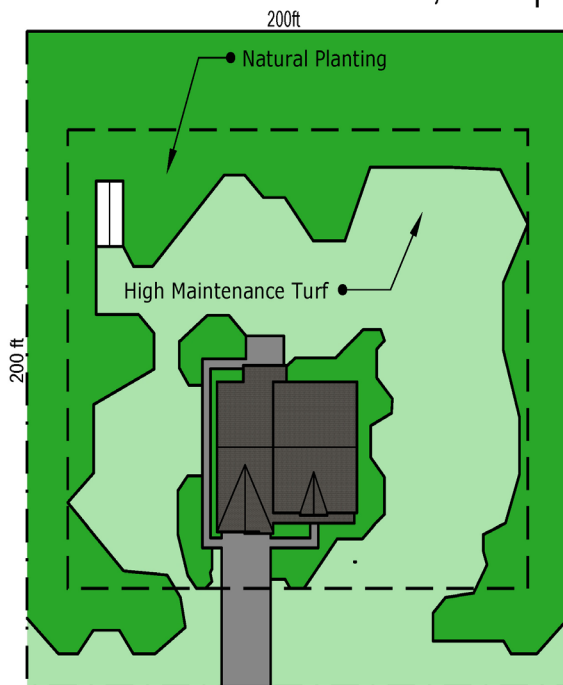


# Master Plan

## Rural Design Considerations for Individual Lots

### Rural Character Landscape Planting Concept

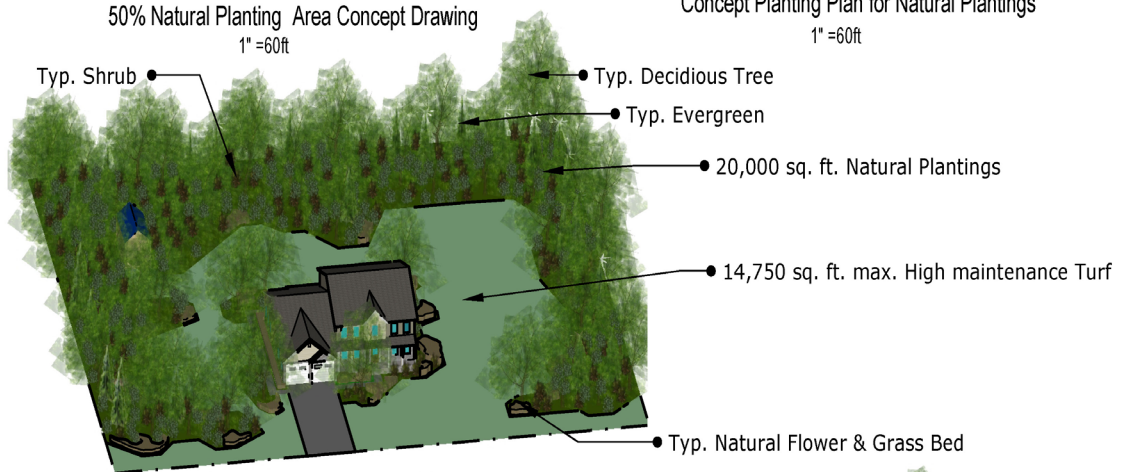
40,000 square foot lot



50% Natural Planting Area Concept Drawing  
1" = 60ft

Concept Planting Plan for Natural Plantings  
1" = 60ft

Source: Graphic study of rural character elements provided by Gary Buczkowski. Rural character elements includes about half of the site covered with natural plantings.



Concept Plantings Front ISO View  
Conceptual growth estimate 20 yrs. after planting  
1" = 60ft

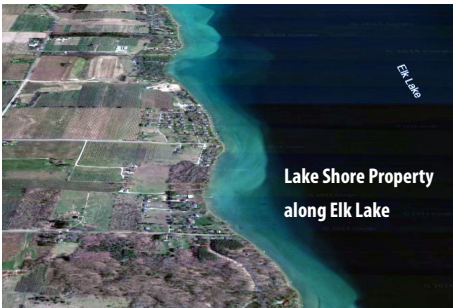


Street view of Concept Plantings & Home  
Conceptual growth estimate 20 yrs. after planting  
1" = 100ft

**Single Family Suburban/Lake Residential  
(Associated with R-1 and R-2 Zoning Districts)**

The eastern edge of Whitewater Township includes many miles of shoreline along Elk Lake and Lake Skegemog. Many of these waterfront properties are seasonal single-family dwellings on lots ranging from about 1/2 of an acre to an acre or more. Per square foot, these properties are among some of the highest property values in Whitewater Township. The R-1 Residential Zoning District applies to Elk Lake and Lake Skegemog shoreline areas, and a minimum lot size of 20,000 square feet is required for a single-family home. Some larger parcels exist in this area that could conceivably be subdivided further, but the waterfront area on Elk Lake and Lake Skegemog seems to be near "buildout" for the most part. A central sewer system does not serve these areas, and concerns over pollution of the lakes from failing septic systems have surfaced. In December of 2023, the Tip of the Mitt Watershed Council and the Elk Skegemog Lakes Association hosted a workshop to discuss septic tank and shoreline management issues in Elk Rapids. The Tip of the Mitt Watershed Council also has an extensive list of resources about Elk Lake and Lake Skegemog conditions, and this material includes the Elk River Chain of Lakes Watershed Property Owner's Permit Guide, which describes all required permits associated with development in the area.

Like the properties with frontage on Elk and Skegemog Lake, Whitewater Township has inland lakes surrounded by waterfront lots, such as Island Lake (SW portion of the township) and Truax Lake (east-central portion of the township). These areas



are similar to waterfront lots on Elk Lake and Lake Skegemog and are also zoned R-1.

The R-1 Zoning District also applies to areas along streams and creeks in the northern half of Whitewater Township. Applying R-1 Zoning along stream and creek corridors is problematic as it allows higher-density residential development (about 1/2 acre lots) in areas generally associated with floodplains, wetlands, and other sensitive areas. As noted previously, this is regarded as inappropriate.

Whitewater Township has inland areas (not next to Lakes) with comparable single-family residential densities and waterfront areas (1/2 of an acre to an acre or more). These include areas in Williamsburg proper (associated with original settlement patterns) and the Wintergreen Heights Subdivision off Cook Road. These areas are still primarily single-family neighborhoods. Most of the places in the unincorporated Village of Williamsburg are zoned R-2. R-2 allows for single and two-family dwellings, and the minimum required lot sizes are smaller.

**Planning Strategies:**

- Support efforts to educate homeowners and property owners about being good stewards of lakefront property.
- Eliminate the R-1 Zoning now shown along stream and creek corridors in northern Whitewater Township.



Photo Credit - Horizon Drone Services

## Master Plan

- Review and update dimensional requirements in both the R-1 and R-2 Zoning Districts.

### High Density Residential (Associated with R-3 Zoning District)

Whitewater Township has one High-Density Residential area on the North side of new M-72 just east of the Turtle Creek Casino. This area is around 30 acres, and it is largely undeveloped. The R-3 Zoning District applies to this area, and with a minimum required lot size of 11,000 square feet per housing unit as required in R-3, this area could theoretically be developed with more than 100 multi-family housing units (30 acres = 1,306,800 square feet / 11,000 square feet per unit). The term “multi-family” applies to many housing types and formats, including apartments, condo complexes, row houses, tri-plexes, townhomes, etc. Typically, high density residential areas are associated with the availability of central water and sewer systems

It should also be noted that the requirement of 11,000 square feet per unit for multi-family housing developments is large compared to similar developments elsewhere. For example a comparable multi-family zoning district in neighboring Acme Township requires less than 4,000 square feet per unit.

Whitewater Township’s High-Density Residential Area can be associated with the broader topic of the need for “missing middle housing” locally, state-wide, and nationally. Missing middle housing refers to a lack of medium-density housing compared to demand driven by demographic trends that include shrinking household sizes resulting from rising numbers of single-person households, childless households, and empty nesters. Adding to this are considerations driving demand for missing middle housing, such as upward pressure on housing costs and general preferences for housing units with low maintenance obligations. The issue is so acute that the State of Michigan recently created a Missing Middle Housing Program to aid housing production (The MSHDA Missing Middle Housing Program). For more information about missing middle housing, see [www.missingmiddlehousing.com](http://www.missingmiddlehousing.com).

### Planning Strategies;

- Review and update dimensional requirements in the R-3 Zoning District to ensure sensible development standards. Along with required minimum lot size, some areas that warrant attention include considering new/updated requirements for common-use areas (refuse collection, mail distribution,



laundry, recreational space, office space, etc.), parking area design, site lighting, and interior vehicular circulation.

**Village (Associated with V Zoning District)**

The Village is an area along old M-72, west of Elk Lake Road and East of new M-72. It is a significant planning area with much potential to be transformed into a unique and desirable place in Whitewater Township. As described in Chapter 2, this area was once a center of commercial activity in Whitewater Township. It was a place for numerous businesses, a school, and even a train station. While only small reminders of this past development pattern exist today, residents support the redevelopment of this area and recognize opportunities. According to the recent resident survey (question #12), residents hope to see a transformed area with an upgraded appearance and new development with downtown-type characteristics and attributes. Specifically, a substantial majority of residents (nearly three out of four) want to encourage redevelopment into a downtown setting with small-scale retail, commercial services, restaurants, and perhaps upper-floor

housing or office space. Given its history and proximity to the busy M-72 corridor, this area seems uniquely suited for this redevelopment opportunity.

This Master Plan introduces a redevelopment concept that should be further refined and developed once this Master Plan is completed. The Michigan Planning Enabling Act provides for the creation of subarea plans to deal with unique areas and conditions that may present themselves. This could allow a process to move forward with direct property owner engagement and steps to bring other resources and expertise to develop ideas further. Setting aside more focused work also allows this full Master Plan update to be completed and not held up by the time needed to fully deal with the complexity of one unique area.

The planning concept for the Village area is to reclaim a portion of Williamsburg’s heritage and recreate a sense of place and community with commerce and social activity. Regarding physical redevelopment, the building format is similar to

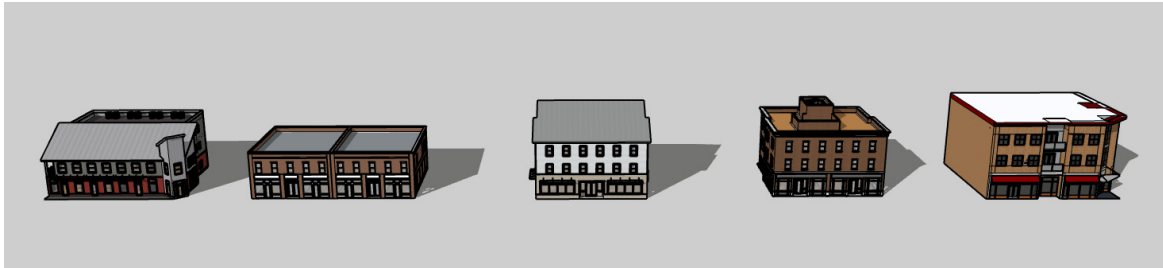
**Old 72 Looking West from Elk Lake Road**



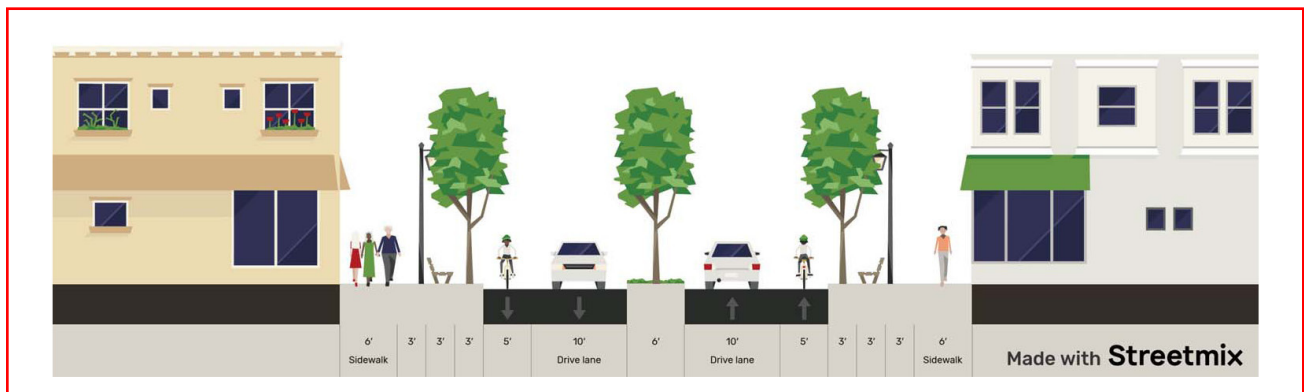
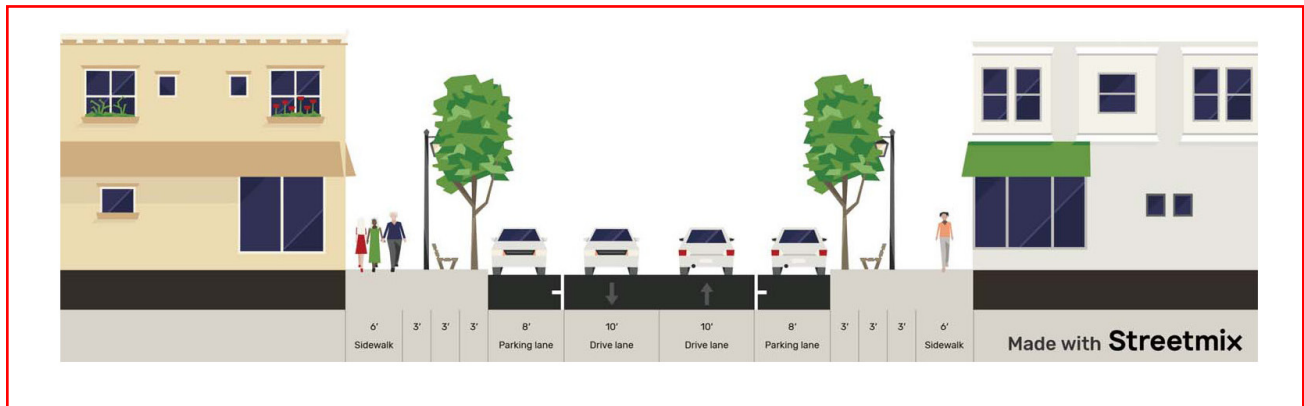
*Photo Credit - Horizon Drone Services*

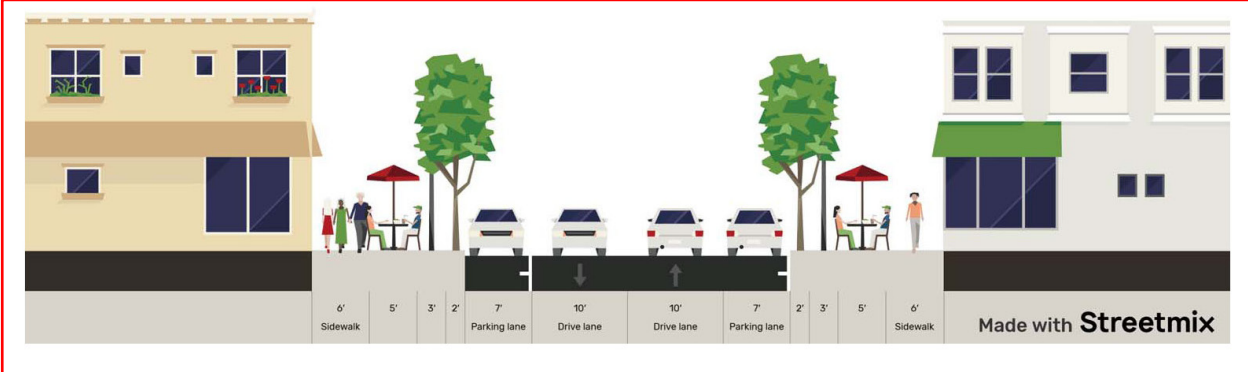
## Master Plan

a “downtown” to the extent that new construction should continue to be located at or near the right-of-way with parking behind buildings. Buildings themselves should be two or three stories. Placement of parking areas behind buildings (rather than in front) is desirable to help create a more active and human-scale public space in the right-of-way. This better accommodates pedestrian movement, street cafés, and similar outdoor spaces. Specific building designs are undetermined, but ideally, they include smaller building footprints that look similar to the images below:



The vision for redevelopment includes not only future private buildings but also future improvements to the public right-of-way. Old 72, between Elk Lake Road and new M-72 to the west, is currently a two-lane road without sidewalks, lighting, or landscaping. Reimagining how the public right-of-way could be reconstructed is an important part of stimulating and encouraging redevelopment. The existing right-of-way of Old 72 is 66 feet wide, and this space can be reimagined in many ways. Three examples are provided in the sample street cross sections below (many more options are also likely possible).





The transportation dimensions of these concepts will be addressed further in the Transportation element of this Chapter. However, comparing the existing condition of Old 72 with the alternatives shown above illustrates how the public right-of-way can be reimagined to balance the desire to create a pedestrian and human-scale environment with the need to accommodate vehicle movement and convenient parking. It also displays the important relationship between building form and mobility.

**Planning Strategies:**

Progress toward more vibrant and significant redevelopment of the Village area will require advancement along several paths.

- More concept development with the benefit of property owners and other stakeholders. This potentially includes partnerships with non-profits and/or a community development corporation.
- Updates to the “V” Zoning District are needed. Key areas include the need to review permitted land uses, adding language about establishing a “build to” line, and requirements that parking areas be located behind buildings (rather than between the building and the road right-of-way (as is often the case along heavily traveled commercial corridors). A “build to” line is a requirement that is the opposite of a front setback, wherein a building must be placed at or near the road right-of-way. Consideration should also be given to a form-based code for this area. A form-based code is a relatively new land-use regulatory technique that shapes the physical form of specific regions or whole communities. There are many parts to a form-

based code, but a key part is the development of building form standards that regulate how far buildings are from sidewalks, how much window area at minimum a building must have, how tall buildings are in relation to the width of the street, how accessible and welcoming front entrances are, and where a building’s parking goes. Compared to conventional zoning, form-based codes are much more illustrative and place less emphasis on regulating land use types and more on building form, placement, and relationships to the street and other public spaces.

- Engineering evaluation of drainage conditions and challenges to be overcome with more intensive development. This includes the potential need for sanitary sewers/and or other approaches to handle wastewater. ee Goal 3-C.
- Identification of potential grant sources to fund infrastructure improvements. This strategy also connects with Goal 4-A which is to pursue “Redevelopment Ready Community Status” which would also help to encourage new investment.
- Update and enforce regulations pertaining to junk and blight conditions.

**Definition of a Form-Based Code:** A form-based code is a land development regulation that fosters predictable built results and a walkable public realm by using physical form—rather than separation of uses—as the primary basis and focus for the code and standards. Communities can apply form-based codes in different contexts and scales. Form-based codes are legally binding regulations, not optional guides, and offer municipalities an alternative to conventional zoning for shaping development.

*Source: Form-based Codes Institute, <https://formbasedcodes.org/>*

## Master Plan

### Commercial (Associated with C-1 Zoning District)

Whitewater Township provides a considerable amount of land zoned for commercial purposes on either side of the Village of Williamsburg, along M-72. This includes about 80 acres on the west side of Whitewater Township (across from and including Turtle Creek Casino) and about 100 acres west of Broomhead and Cook Roads. Both areas include land north and south of M-72. Some of these areas are already developed, but more development can be expected.

The most significant planning issue in the commercial area is the need to better align zoning requirements with preferences expressed by residents in the survey. Residents strongly preferred smaller building footprints (less than 75,000 square feet) and various uses (retail, services, office, residential, etc.), sign controls, limited driveways, extensive landscaping, and limited site lighting. As previously described, there is evidence of a preference for rural building design elements. Some attributes are not adequately articulated and expressed in the Zoning Ordinance. Issues related to access management and limited curb cuts are contained in the transportation section.

### Planning Strategies

Several primary planning strategies relate to the commercial area as follows.

- Update the Commercial Zoning Standards to better align zoning requirements with preferences expressed by residents in the survey, as described above.
- Pressure to expand the Commercial Zoning District eastward is expected, given the exposure and accessibility that land on either side of M-72 offers. This Master Plan discourages commercialization of M-72 east of the Cook Road/Broomhead Road intersection. This is illustrated on Map 10.
- Investigate the desirability of adding voluntary or mandatory building design criteria for new commercial buildings and substantial renovation. Residents expressed a desire and preference for rural design elements.
- Update landscape requirements to provide clear and intentional standards.

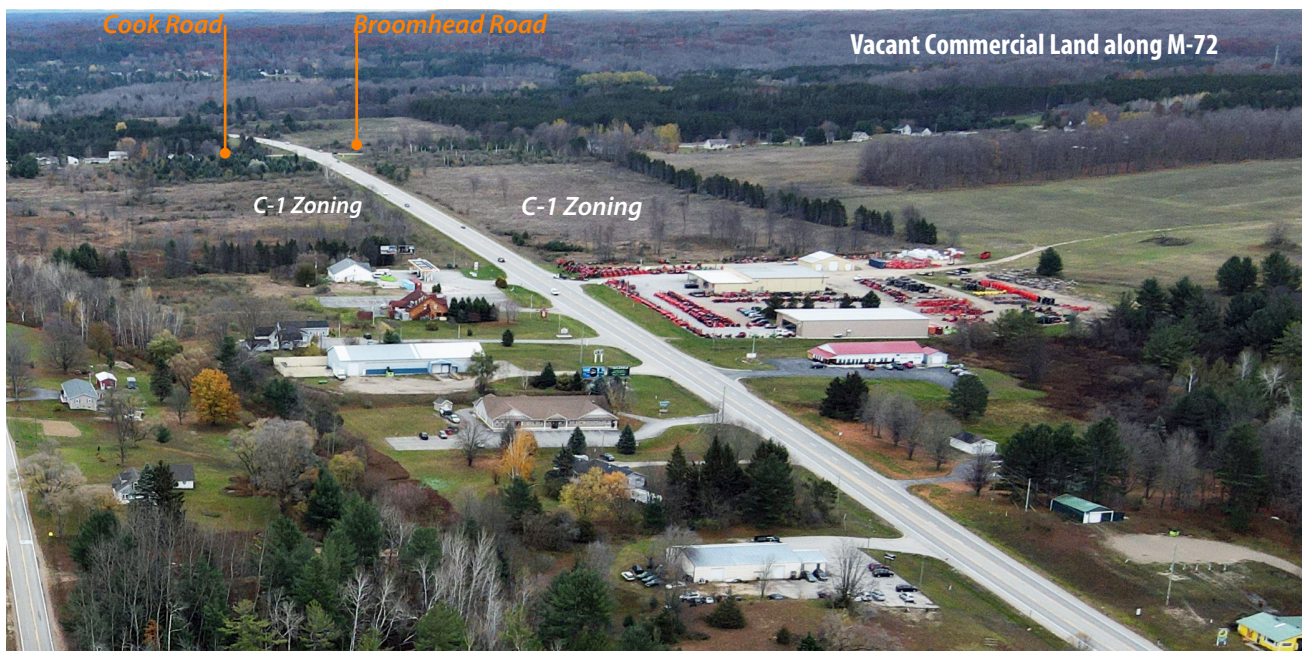
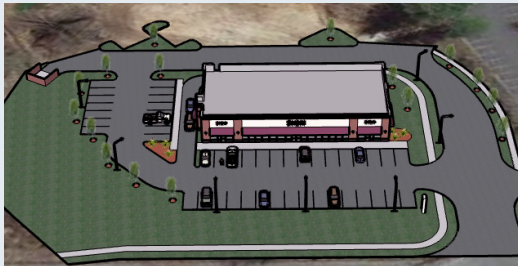
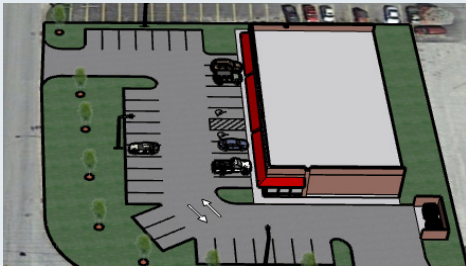


Photo Credit - Horizon Drone Services

# Desireable Commercial Development Features

## 1 Smaller Building Footprints



## 2 Rural Building Designs



## 3 Landscaping, Site Lighting, Signage





## Master Plan

### Industrial (Associated with N Zoning District)

Whitewater Township has one industrial area south of M-72 and east of Moore Road. This area is home to several local businesses that provide a local tax base and jobs. Existing industrial operations have access to M-72 directly and via Moore Road and Williamsburg Road. The “N” Zoning District applies to this industrial area, and most of this industrially zoned land is developed with industrial buildings and uses. There is one undeveloped 12.6-acre parcel that is Zoned “N” with frontage on Moore Road.

### Planning Strategies –

- The principal planning strategy related to the Industrial area is to update “N” Zoning requirements. Presently, some development standards should be reviewed and revised. Additionally, it is noted that the “N” Zoning District abuts agricultural and residential areas to the south and west. For this reason, landscape buffering requirements are particularly important to help minimize noise, traffic, and lighting impacts. The “N” District

is near “Build Out” regarding some level of utilization of all parcels, but building expansions, renovations, or replacements are likely in the future.

- The boundaries of the “N” District should be reviewed, and there is reason to believe that they need to be adjusted. For example, the Heights Truck Equipment facility (Southwest corner of M-72 and Williamsburg Road is not Zoned “N”).
- The flow of truck traffic is often an issue in industrial areas. Some limited access to industrial parcels exists directly on M-72 (as with AIS Construction Equipment). However, most other access to M-72 exists indirectly via Williamsburg Road and Moore Road. Williamsburg Road and Moore Road are paved (the Williamsburg Road/M-72 intersection is signalized) and, therefore, can handle some truck traffic. However, Crisp Road to the South is unpaved and not designed to accommodate industrial truck traffic. Given the current road conditions, no “N” District expansion involving truck access on Crisp Road should occur.



Photo Credit - Horizon Drone Services

**Zoning Plan**

The Zoning Plan describes the zoning ordinance and how it relates to the Future Land Use Plan Map. Differences between the Future Land Use Plan Map and the existing Zoning Ordinance are to be expected and not uncommon as a Master Plan is updated. The Zoning Plan bridges this gap and describes how the Zoning Ordinance should change to ensure that requirements and standards are implemented in the Future Land Use Plan Map. The Zoning Ordinance is the main tool to implement this Master Plan and explains why zoning regulations are what they are.

**The Existing Zoning Ordinance**

Like most Michigan Townships, Whitewater has a Zoning Ordinance. It was first adopted in 1972, dividing the township into 11 Zoning Districts. Each zoning district allows certain land uses. Some are “permitted uses,” and others are “special uses.” Special uses require Planning Commission review and approval. Each zoning district has development standards (minimum lot sizes, building setbacks, etc.).

**Revising the Existing Zoning Ordinance - General**

The need to revise the Whitewater Township Zoning Ordinance is divided into general and district-specific Issues. General issues are not zoning district specific, and may relate to more than one zoning district. These are listed below and cross-referenced to other sections of this Master Plan to provide context.

**Revising the Existing Zoning Ordinance – General**

Item	Goal References
Reorganize the Ordinance with a Map and all Amendments	Goal 1-A
Reconsider the cumulative nature of the Zoning Ordinance	Goal 1-B
Create a rural design manual to articulate recommendations concerning rural subdivision and individual lot design.	Goal 2-A

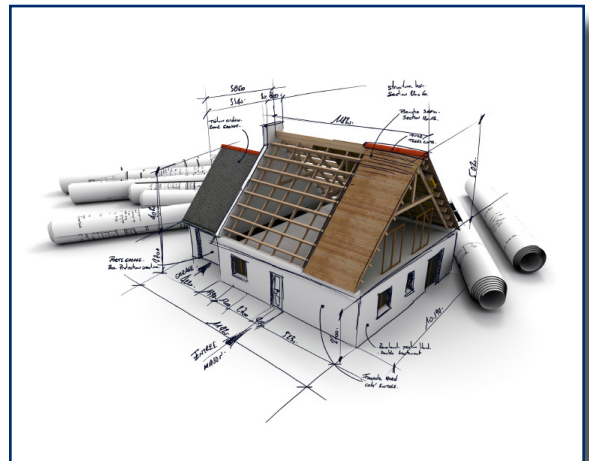
Determine if voluntary or mandatory architectural design guidelines are needed for non-residential uses	Goal 2-A
Update landscaping regulations to clarify requirements for buffer zones, landscaping, and screening to reduce the negative impacts of incompatible land uses.	Goal 1-C
Reconsider eliminating some zoning requirements previously in Article 27 (regulations for Environmentally Sensitive Areas).	Goal 2-A
Create an improved PUD Zoning District that developers are inclined to use.	Goal 2-A

**Revising the Existing Zoning Ordinance – By Zoning District**

Item	Goal References
R-1	
Eliminate R-1 Zoning along stream and creek corridors	Goal 2-A
R-3	
Updated R-3 regulations are needed to provide improved development standards and requirements for high-density residential development.	Goal 1-D
A-1	
Determining the appropriate minimum lot size in the A-1 district.	Goal 2-A
Review and update zoning requirements to support agricultural tourism further.	Goal 2-A

# Master Plan

<b>C-1</b>	
Determine if voluntary or mandatory architectural design guidelines are needed for non-residential uses.	Goal 2-A
The C-1 Zoning District should be updated to align with development attributes supported by residents (as expressed in the community survey).	Goal 4-B and 2-A
<b>V</b>	
Conduct a thorough review of the “V” Zoning District regarding uses permitted by right and those permitted by special use permit. Development standards concerning building sizes, height, setbacks, and parking locations should also be reviewed.	Goal 3-B
<b>N</b>	
The “N” Zoning District should be updated to ensure that industrial development allowed is compatible with the area and that development standards allow for appropriate building forms and placement.	Goal 4-C



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8

# Strategy & Implementation - Transportation

Historically, the bulk of responsibility for roadways in Whitewater Township rested with the Grand Traverse County Road Commission (GTCRC). More recently, however (2022), the GTCRC adopted an Asset Management Plan to help it manage its responsibilities. An important focus of this work relates to the paved county local road network and many factors, such as deteriorating road conditions and increased costs. Of particular importance is the fact that more attention will likely shift toward township contributions for projects that provide road reconstruction, overlay, and culvert replacement. The GTCRC local road match policy (Appendix B in the Asset Management Plan) indicates that a 50% match is required for future projects.

These circumstances indicate a shift of focus on road funding toward townships like Whitewater. This occurs simultaneously as road conditions were the most commented-on item in the recent community survey and throughout the planning process. These circumstances create the need for the development of greater local consensus, funding strategy, and, ultimately, local township policy on road funding.

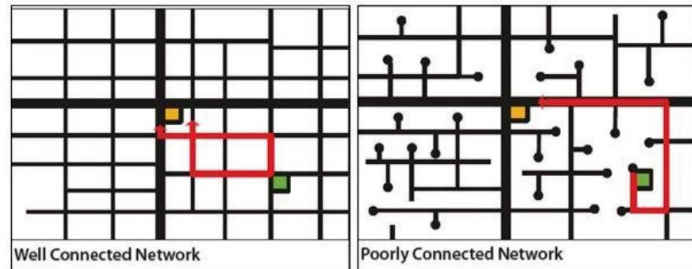
Because the bulk of responsibility for roadways in Whitewater Township rests with the Grand Traverse County Road Commission and the Michigan Department of Transportation, transportation issues to be addressed in this Master Plan are limited to several key issues. These include private roads, non-motorized travel/complete streets, setbacks along major roads, rail travel, the new MPO, and M-72 Corridor Plan, traffic impact studies, and the Township Road Plan.

## Private Roads

Whitewater Township had an adopted Private Road Ordinance (Ordinance 32, adopted in 2003). However, it was repealed in 2019. This has left Whitewater Township without regulations addressing how private roads are engineered and constructed. Private roads are common in new developments in the area and are privately maintained by property owners with private road maintenance agreements. Road maintenance is, therefore, not a public concern. However, the initial road design is very important as it potentially impacts considerations such as emergency vehicle access, grades, road surface durability, utility line placement, and drainage. A private road must be fully constructed before adjacent parcels are sold to new homebuilders (or there is a guarantee to assure completion). Otherwise, it is possible that a developer will not make all necessary private road improvements. Road naming is also important to avoid duplications. To help prevent future problems with private road construction in Whitewater Township, steps should be taken to re-adopt a new Private Road Ordinance. The Grand Traverse County Road Commission has a document titled Standard and Specifications for Subdivisions and Other Development Projects with Public and Private Roads (2009) that contains useful information that should be incorporated into an updated township ordinance.

When a private road ordinance is re-adopted, it should also promote connectivity. Increasingly, communities recognize the importance of ensuring that new developments are interconnected rather than a series of separate

developments. The desirability of a residential dead-end street is clear to most people, as streets without through traffic are popular. However, every road can't be a dead end, and the more isolated each development is, the greater the impact on route options and travel times. Larger developments should have more than one way in and out, and stub streets should be provided to connect developments where possible. Single entrances to subdivisions and large numbers of cul-de-sacs minimize route choices, increase trip distance, and impact emergency vehicle response times.



Source: (Source: City of Las Vegas, 2013)

## Non-motorized Travel/Complete Streets

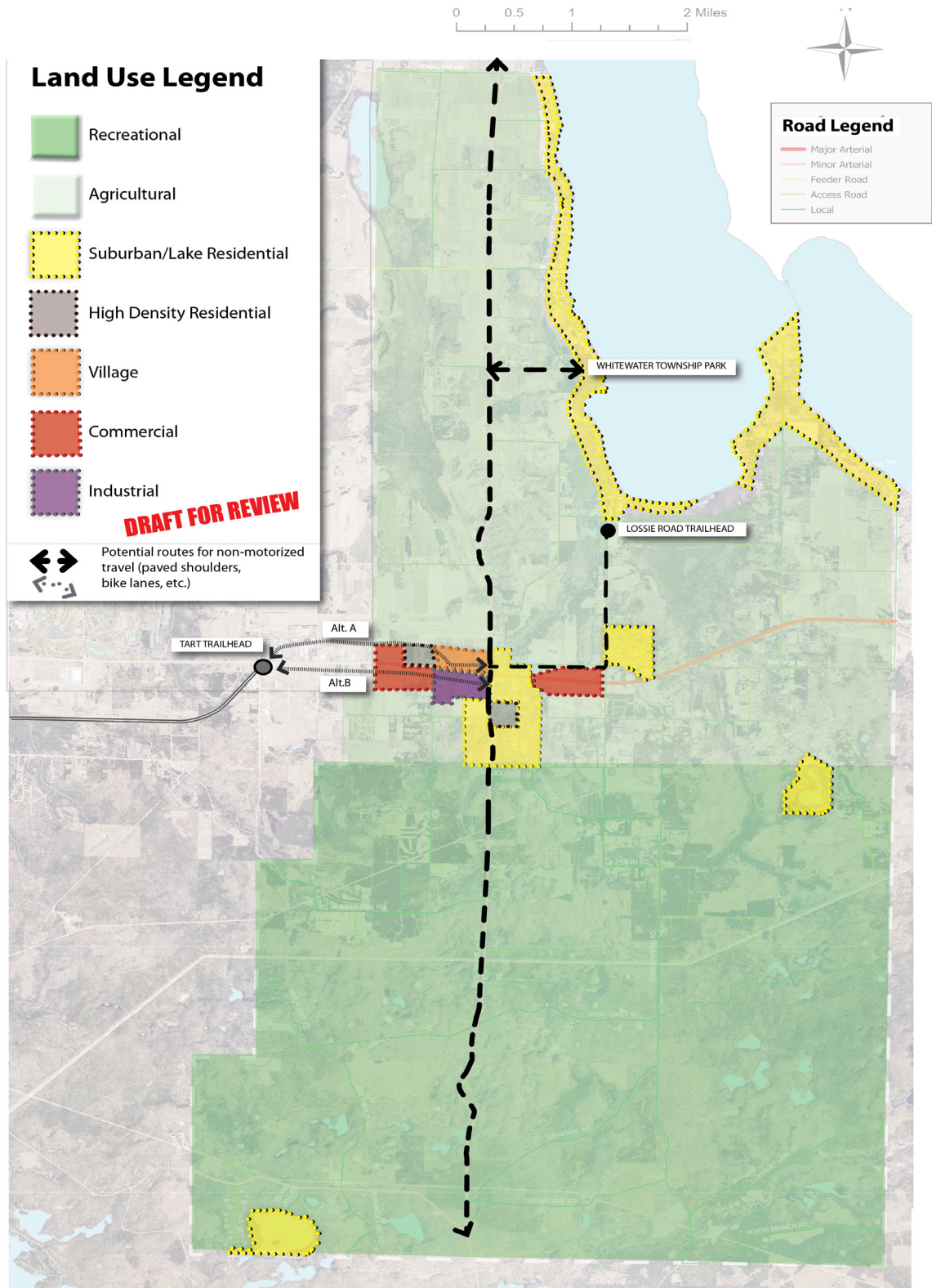
One somewhat surprising result from the community survey (and open house) was the support for non-motorized travel in Whitewater Township. As a rural community, most residents' trips are expected to involve a vehicle. Sidewalks and bike lanes are sparse, and Whitewater Township (like most other areas in rural Grand Traverse County) has a very low walkability index (see tools such as the National Walkability Index (USEPA) and walkscore.com). Chapter 3 (pages 44-45) notes that Whitewater Township has many recreational trails, including the Iron Belle Trail and the TART trail network. Still, options to walk or ride a bike to a destination are limited. Ultimately, Whitewater Township would benefit from a complete non-motorized transportation plan (See Goal 3-D) in Chapter 6. Such a plan could go into greater depth about future bike lanes, paved shoulders, new sidewalks, etc. In the meantime, this Master Plan can identify a framework driven by known circumstances and conditions. Linking the Whitewater Township community to the existing and developing regional trail network is a priority. Four specific ways shown on Map 11 can accomplish this. Listed in no order of priority, these include:

1. Elk Rapids and Elk Rapids Township have Master Plans that discuss the value of bike and pedestrian mobility. The Draft Elk Rapids Township Master Plan specifically discusses assessing the feasibility of a bike path along Elk Lake Road. No detail is provided, but this bike path may be a dedicated bike lane or a paved shoulder. A bike path along Elk Lake Road can continue south past M-72 through Whitewater Township along Williamsburg Road to potentially connect with the Iron Bell Trail (near the Supply

Road/Williamsburg Road Intersection) and the TART Trails further west off Supply Road. Portions of Williamsburg Road have paved shoulders now.

2. With a non-motorized connection along Elk Lake Road and Williamsburg Road, desirable connections to the east can be made to the Lossie Trail/Battle Creek Natural Area. This could be accomplished with a dedicated trail or a paved shoulder along Old M-72 and Cook Road.
3. Connecting Whitewater Township Park to an Elk Lake Road non-motorized trail is also desirable as it would offer visitors/campers a non-motorized option to travel to Elk Rapids or other destinations on foot or on a bike. Park Road is unpaved today, but should it be upgraded to provide a paved surface, it should incorporate a paved shoulder or other accommodations for non-motorized travel.
4. A non-motorized connection between the intersection of Elk Lake Road and Old M-72 to the existing TART Trail near Bates Road and M-72 to the west is desirable. A connection may be possible using the railroad tracks that cross Old M-72 (east of Elk Lake Road) and lead behind the Turtle Creek Casino property toward Bates Road and New M-72. The idea of non-motorized travel options on Old M-72 also dovetails well with redevelopment concepts discussed in the previous chapter. If such a route is not feasible, an alternative route along M-72 may be possible, subject to variables such as the possibility of a signal at Bates Road and the possible future use of the railroad tracks (discussed later). The connection between the TART Trailhead along the south side of New M-72 and Williamsburg Road provides a safe signalized crossing at New M-72 and the Elk Lake/Williamsburg Road intersection. Both options to connect to the TART Trail System provide residents access in multiple directions and allow a linkage to the greater Traverse City region and the Nakwema Trailway that will ultimately reach Charlevoix.

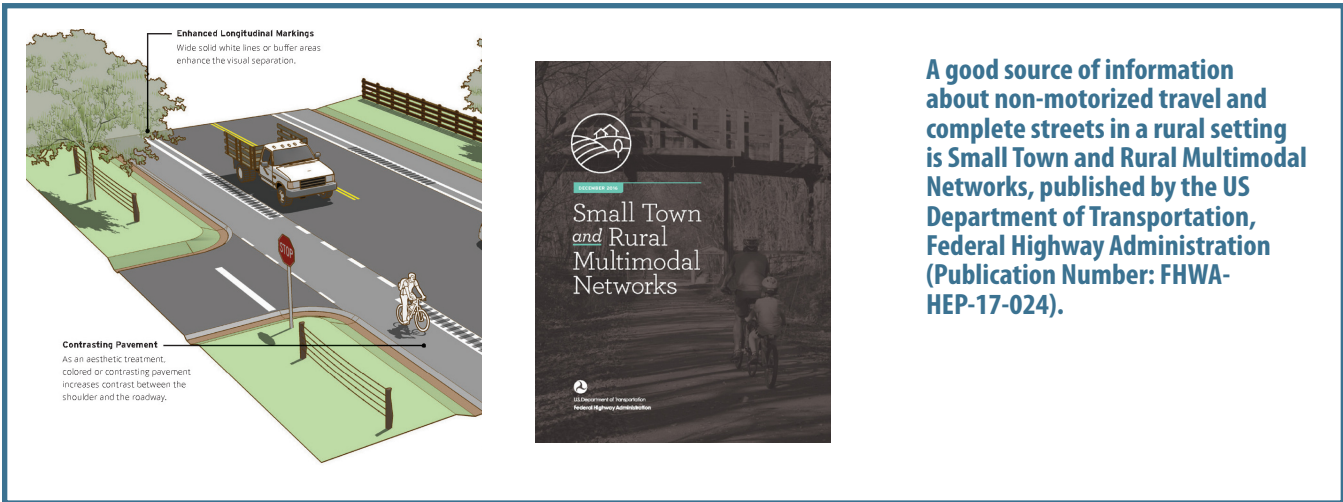
# Master Plan



This map is based on digital databases prepared by Grand Traverse County. Grand Traverse County does not warrant, expressly or impliedly, or accept any responsibility for any errors or omissions or for the fact that the information contained in the map or the digital databases is currently or positionally accurate. Base Map Created by GTC GIS Equalization

**Map 11 Generalized Future Land Use Plan and Potential Routes for Non-Motorized Mobility**

These concepts are illustrated in Map 11. More investigation is needed to explore non-motorized transportation options and alternatives fully. It is important to note that future improvements are commonly and economically completed along with other road upgrades (such as road resurfacing or rebuilding). Efforts to refine and develop a non-motorized plan for Whitewater Township should include efforts to forge partnerships with organizations such as TART Trails, Inc. and NORTE.



**Enhanced Longitudinal Markings**  
Wide solid white lines or buffer areas enhance the visual separation.

**Contrasting Pavement**  
As an aesthetic treatment, colored or contrasting pavement increases contrast between the shoulder and the roadway.

**Small Town and Rural Multimodal Networks**  
A good source of information about non-motorized travel and complete streets in a rural setting is Small Town and Rural Multimodal Networks, published by the US Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration (Publication Number: FHWA-HEP-17-024).

### Road Right-of-Ways and Building Setbacks

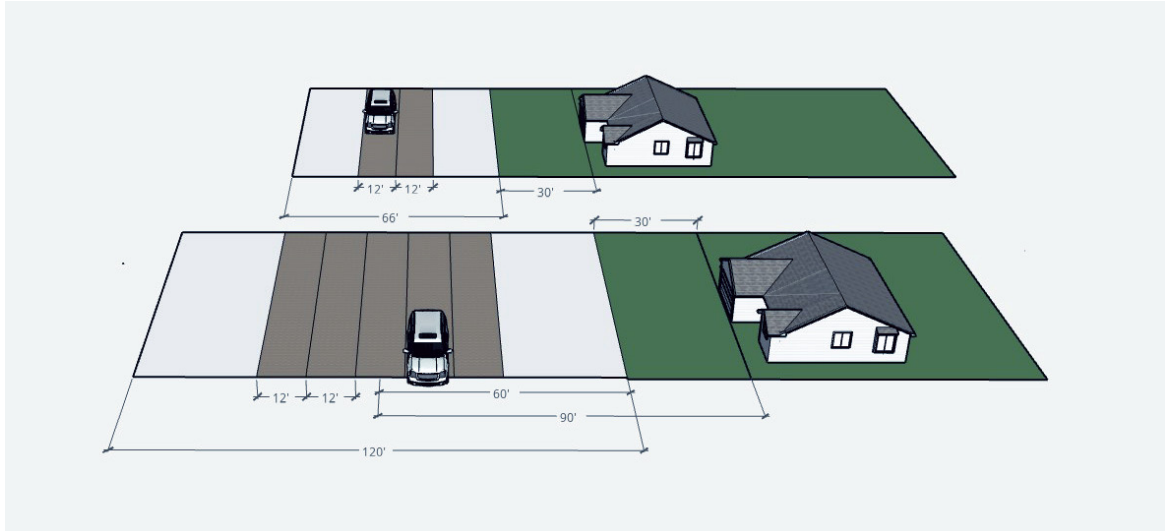
The Grand Traverse County Road Commission is currently studying several corridors throughout Grand Traverse County. Corridors in Whitewater Township under study currently include Elk Lake Road/ Williamsburg Road and Angel Road. This work includes accumulating data such as traffic volumes, crashes, right-of-way widths, national functional classification, and pavement surface evaluation and rating (PASER). This work is not completed, but it suggests that desired right-of-way widths may be redefined in a way consistent with the national functional classification system. For example, as shown, Elk Lake Road and Williamsburg Road are identified as a "Major Collector," and Supply Road is classified as a "Minor Arterial." According to the current draft material, major collectors are associated with right-of-way widths of 120 feet. Minor arterials are associated with right-of-way widths of 150 feet.

Whitewater Township is not directly involved in acquiring additional right-of-way to accommodate the

need for future additional turn lanes at intersections, center turn lanes, or travel lanes to relieve congestion. Still, Whitewater Township requires a front yard setback for new construction in the Zoning Ordinance, and the placement of new construction relative to a future right-of-way line is important. Given the potential for the right-of-way to be widened (i.e., the right-of-way line moving), it is important that front yard setbacks be reviewed. Pending completion of work by the Road Commission, the Planning Commission should consider adjustments to the minimum front yard setbacks and change how it is measured such that the required dimension is from the right-of-way centerline. This likely applies to major roads such as Elk Lake Road, Williamsburg Road, and Supply Road. This would enable new construction to be setback from a new road right-of-way and the appropriate amount of space should the right-of-way expand. The graphic below illustrates a hypothetical situation where the right-of-way expands from 66 feet to 120 feet. It should be noted that the Whitewater Township Zoning Ordinance presently requires a 150-foot setback from the existing right-of-way line along Supply Road.



## Master Plan



## Rail Travel

In October 2018, The Groundwork Center for Resilient Communities released a study titled Northern Michigan Rail Ridership Feasibility and Cost Estimate Study. This study (<https://groundworkcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Northern-Michigan-Rail-Ridership-Feasibility-and-Cost-Estimate-Study.pdf>) examined the opportunity to re-establish passenger rail service between Detroit, Ann Arbor, Petoskey, and Traverse City. Some key deliverables included an assessment of potential routes and stations, a high-level estimate of community benefits to provide input to stakeholders and community groups, and a conceptual-level pre-feasibility report for assessing the project viability.

Some locally significant results from this report include identifying an existing rail line extending beyond Traverse City to Williamsburg, the Turtle Creek Casino & Hotel area, and beyond toward Mancelona to connect with a route to Petoskey. The identified rail line crosses Old 72 west of the Post Office in Williamsburg. See the graphic below from pages 2-2 of this report and the aerial photo showing the adjacencies of important elements.



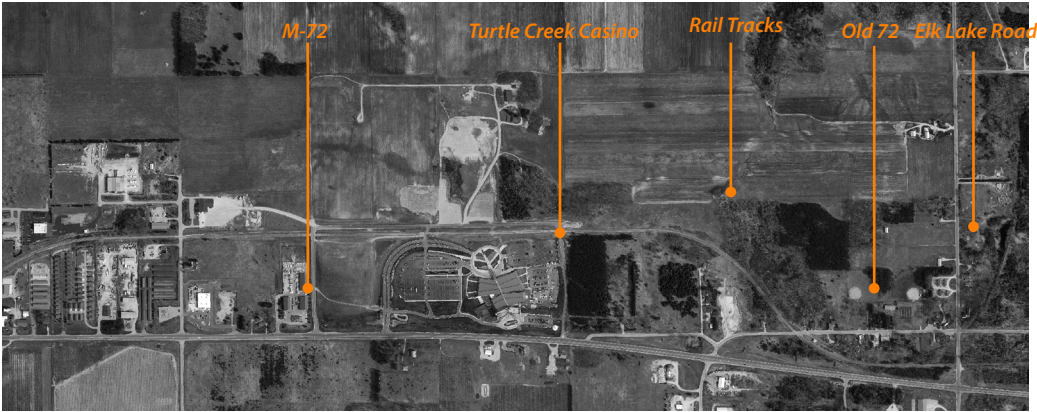
According to the TICKER (2-16-2024), (<https://www.traverseticker.com/news/locally-led-passenger-rail-project-takes-its-biggest-step-yet/>) steps to hire a consultant are underway to lead a Phase II study that will define an actionable roadmap for how to go about fixing up railways, establishing rail stations, getting rail service up and running. The consultant is expected to be hired in May 2024, and the work should require 16-18 months to complete.

Although there are many unanswered questions at this point (and it will likely take years for issues to be fully addressed), the topic of passenger rail in Williamsburg will require ongoing monitoring to ensure developing plans are coordinated with Whitewater Township. The potential for train service in Whitewater Township could dramatically impact the area.



Source: Northern Michigan Rail Ridership Feasibility and Cost Estimate Study. BATA, The Groundwork Center for Resilient Communities, MDOT, Transportation Economics & Management Systems, Inc., October 2018. Page 2-2.

### Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO)



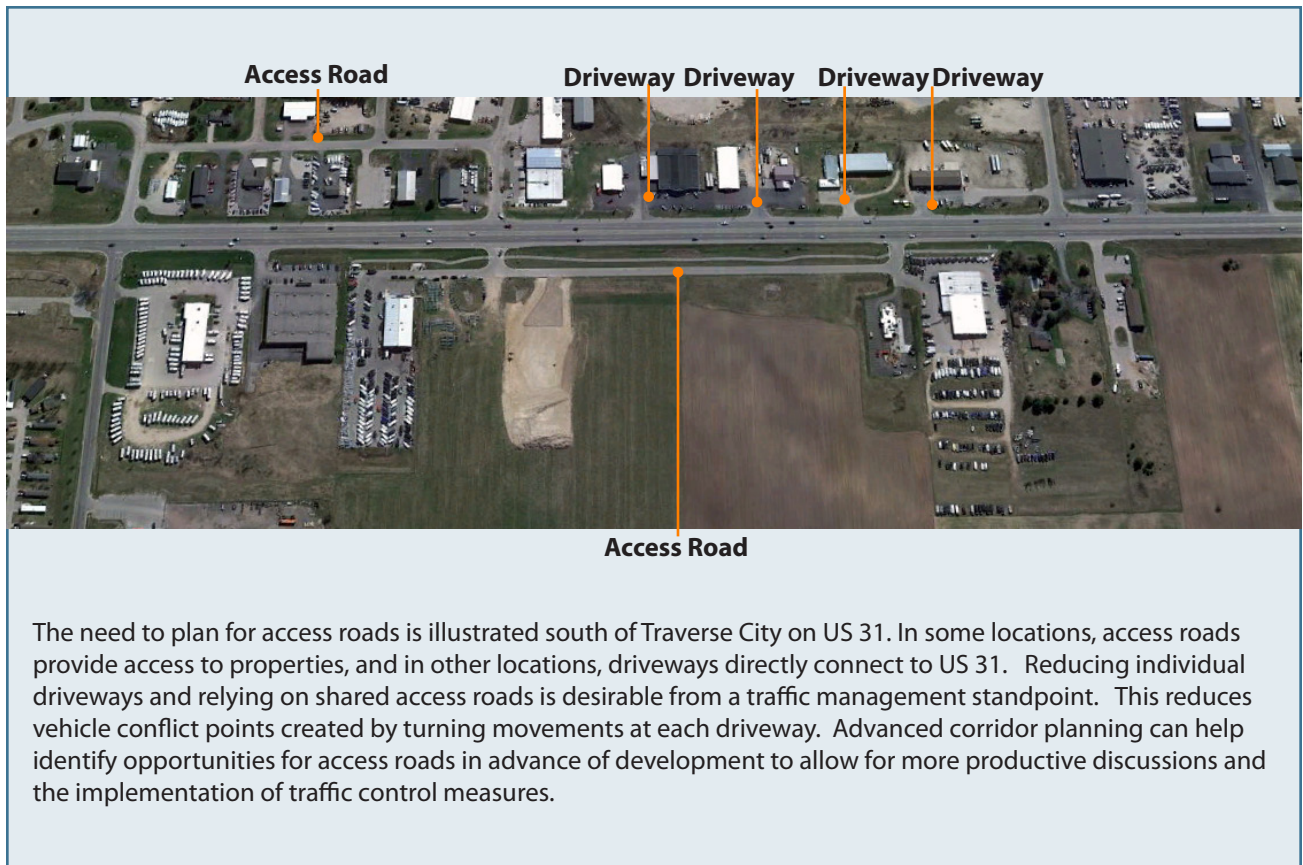
The Traverse City region recently reached the population threshold necessary to become a Metropolitan Planning Organization. This means more federal dollars for road projects and a new entity that enables local governments and agencies to collaborate on transportation decisions. Whitewater Township is located within the Metropolitan Planning Area (MPA) and is eligible for inclusion in the MPO." As this Master Plan comes together, this MPO is being formed and organized. Ultimately, the new MPO will produce both a long-range transportation plan (LRTP) that describes transportation projects 20 or more years out and a short-term transportation improvement plan (TIP) that is updated annually and tied to funding sources. The local roads that the new MPO most impacts include M-72, Elk Lake/Williamsburg Road, Supply Road, and Angell Road. Coordination of planning efforts is important.

## Master Plan

### M-72 Corridor Plan

M-72 is a major eastern gateway to the Traverse City region. Past planning efforts have included an M-72 Corridor Study completed in 2001 for TC Talus. This study includes multiple jurisdictions (Acme, Clearwater, Kalkaska, and Whitewater townships, along with Grand Traverse County and the Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians). This work inventoried natural and manmade features along the corridor and discusses multiple planning issues. Additionally, before this, an Access Management Plan was prepared to look at maintaining access by eliminating unnecessary driveways, carefully spacing access drives, using shared driveways, and using a median to control turning movements.

This planning work is important, but it is also about 25 years old and should be updated, especially from an access management standpoint. Future development in western Whitewater Township can potentially add many more driveways onto M-72. Each new driveway is a conflict point that will introduce new turning movements, which slow traffic flow and create new potential accident locations. An updated corridor plan is needed (perhaps in coordination with adjacent townships) and with the participation of the new MPO.



The need to plan for access roads is illustrated south of Traverse City on US 31. In some locations, access roads provide access to properties, and in other locations, driveways directly connect to US 31. Reducing individual driveways and relying on shared access roads is desirable from a traffic management standpoint. This reduces vehicle conflict points created by turning movements at each driveway. Advanced corridor planning can help identify opportunities for access roads in advance of development to allow for more productive discussions and the implementation of traffic control measures.



**Broomhead Road**

**M-72**

**Cook Road**

Along M-72, west of Cook Road and Broomhead Road, there is the potential to create an access road. This land is currently vacant and zoned Commercial (C-1). A corridor plan could further investigate the feasibility of an access road and address topics such as the necessary spacing between M-72 and a new access road to provide adequate stacking distance. An access road could give safer access to future commercial development and preserve the capacity of M-72 to carry high traffic volumes. This example is for illustrative purposes only and subject to much more study and investigation. There are other examples of opportunities for access roads elsewhere along M-72. Some could include using Old M-72 as an access road.

**Traffic Impact Studies/Access Management**

The Grand Traverse County Road Commission and MDOT have primary jurisdiction over new driveways and improvements in the right-of-way. However, at the same time, local governments have authority over zoning and development approval. Consequently, both have a role in reviewing development with substantial impacts on traffic and access. One way to manage the traffic impacts associated with new development is to require a formal traffic impact study completed as proposed development is under consideration. Whether part of the zoning ordinance or as a stand-alone ordinance, local governments can require a formal evaluation of the projected impacts of a proposed development. This

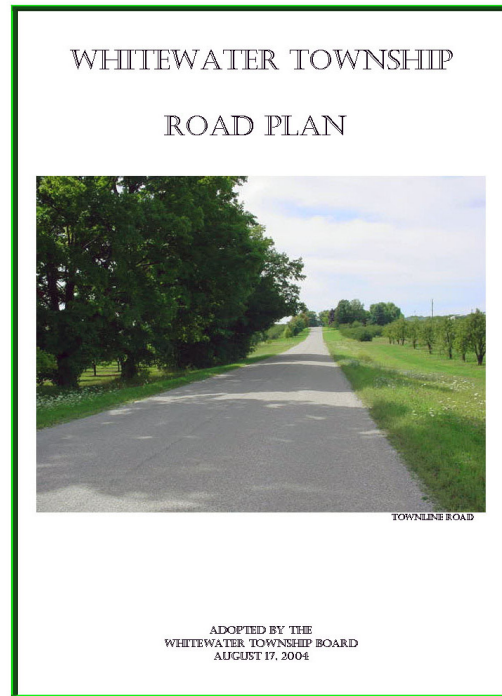
can include projections of traffic generation, peak hour volumes, turning movements, etc. Traffic impact studies are also related to the implementation of corridor plans and can also identify measures such as opportunities for shared drives and the need for turn lanes. The Planning and Zoning Center, Inc. and MDOT produced an access management manual called Reducing Traffic Congestion and Improving Traffic Safety in Michigan Communities: The Access Management Guidebook. This guidebook provides sample ordinance language to define standards and procedures for reviewing larger-scale development with potential impacts on traffic flow.

## Master Plan

### Township Road Plan

The 2004 Road Plan should be updated to address several important considerations. First, as noted, the Grand Traverse County Road Commission can designate a Natural Beauty Road. Designated protections related to mowing, grading, herbicide use, tree removal, dust control, signage, etc. (Goal 2-C). More investigation is needed to see what local roads may qualify, to weigh benefits and drawbacks, and to learn more about public attitudes toward this issue. Designation of Natural Beauty Roads can help promote and protect rural character.

Second, residents frequently raised the issue of road conditions in Whitewater Township. There is frustration with the number of road segments that needed repair and confusion about the roles and responsibilities of the Road Commission and the Township. More information and work are needed to identify options and alternatives. This may require the formation of an advisory committee to identify the issues, educate the citizens, and build consensus. This effort could also explore the potential to increase revenue to fund road projects with a township-wide millage and to clarify options to create Special Assessment Districts for specific projects (including road projects). To facilitate the use of Special Assessment Districts some local governments have created a "Citizen's Guide to Special Assessment Districts." Neighboring East Bay Charter Township created such a document that informs residents of the steps needed to define a project so that the steps and process are clear. This guide includes forms, worksheets, and related materials to help residents and groups navigate the steps needed to accomplish necessary projects.



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# Strategy & Implementation - Public Facilities

Major public facilities and infrastructure include public buildings and potential water and sewer systems. As noted previously, Whitewater Township hired C2AE to conduct a feasibility study of Township Facilities and Water Supply for Whitewater Township. This study is dated August 1, 2022. Some important takeaways from this report regarding community facilities include:

- The existing township hall (built in 1889) is about 2,400 square feet and is considered small for current needs.
- Future community growth likely places additional demands for space going forward.
- Whitewater Township owns the parcel north of the existing Township Hall, which could allow for building and parking lot expansion.
- Plans to add township hall space should also weigh the advantages and drawbacks of combining administrative offices with a new fire station. The combination of facilities potentially allows for shared spaces such as restrooms and meeting rooms.
- C2AE's recommendation (in this report) is to build a new township office facility in a commercial district, potentially in combination with the new fire department, and repurpose the current building into a Community Center for smaller gatherings/activities that are more appropriate for the surrounding residential neighborhood.
- Whitewater Township Fire Department Station (8380 Old M-72 Hwy) is close to 50 years old. It has 5,000 sq. ft. and is considered too small to hold the current fire vehicles, equipment,

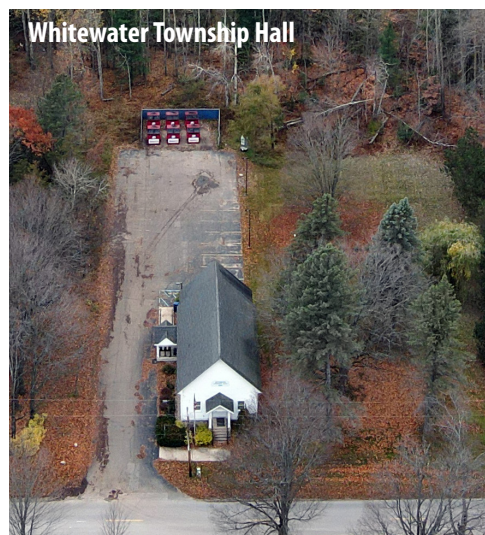


Photo Credit - Horizon Drone Services



and amenities needed for a modern fire department.

- A new site is recommended to be in the range of 5 acres with a new building of nearly 20,000 square feet.
- A combined facility of Township Offices and Fire/EMS, and a maintenance building is stated to require a site that is 7.5 to 8.5 acres and a combined building size of 28,200 square feet and 75 parking spaces.

Clearly, important decisions concerning township facilities need to be made in the years ahead. The decision to combine or not to combine administrative offices with fire/EMS is important, along with the locational decision(s) about where to place new facilities. These decisions also relate to future land use, as a new public investment can encourage growth and redevelopment in the area.

A public water system that could include groundwater wells and a new system was also studied. Additionally, purchasing water from a nearby system (owned by the Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians) was identified as an option. Related issues such as elevated storage, water pressure for firefighting, and a distribution system were also addressed. A proposed water district boundary encompassed much of Williamsburg between Cook/Broomhead Road to the east, Moore Road on the west, Cram Road on the north, and just past Church Street on the south. Developing a water system for the abovementioned area is costly and will require much more study and investigation.

A public wastewater system was not discussed in this report. However, the Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians operate both a water treatment plant and a water system and distribution system. The elevated water tank is pictured to the right. Additionally, the service area for the Grand Traverse County Septage Treatment Facility includes all townships in Grand Traverse County and Elmwood Township in Leelanau County. Both Acme and East Bay Townships rely on a sanitary sewer collection system that connects to the wastewater treatment plant in Traverse City.

### Capital Improvements Plan

One requirement of the Michigan Planning Enabling Act (MPEA), Section 125.3865, is that after a Master Plan is adopted, a Planning Commission can prepare a formal Capital Improvements Plan (CIP). The CIP describes public structures and improvements (in general order of their priority) that need to be undertaken within the following 6-year period. The CIP can be an important tool for implementing a community's master plan, as it addresses capital investments, such as utility extensions and road improvements. Any township may prepare and adopt a CIP, but it is only mandatory if the township, alone or jointly with one or more other local government units, owns or operates a water supply or sewage disposal system.





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# Conclusion

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As emphasized at the beginning of this document, this Master Plan is a collaborative, forward-looking document that outlines the desired direction for community development in Whitewater Township. It considered local history, current conditions, and trends and presents a long-range vision for growth, redevelopment, and preservation. This vision is not only a product of the Planning Commission’s efforts but a testament to the substantial community engagement and public input that shaped it.

The form and content of this Master Plan are guided by the Michigan Planning Enabling Act described in Chapter 1. **Notably, this act (Section 125.3845) mandates that the Planning Commission review the master plan at least every five years.** The purpose of this review is to determine whether to commence the procedure to amend the master plan or adopt a new one. These findings are to be recorded in the minutes of the relevant meetings of the Planning Commission. The legislative intent underscores the need to ensure that Master Plans, like this one, are regularly updated to prevent them from becoming obsolete and irrelevant.

Furthermore, the Michigan Planning Enabling Act also introduces the concept of a “Subplan.” This refers to the ability to prepare a plan for a limited area within a political jurisdiction. Section 125.3835 authorizes a Planning Commission to, by a majority vote of the members, adopt a subplan for a geographic area less than the entire planning jurisdiction. The need for such a plan may arise from the unique physical characteristics of an area and the need for more intensive planning to address localized conditions and planning issues. A Subplan can be developed at any time and it becomes an integral part of this overall Master Plan.

As noted initially, this is not the first Master Plan for Whitewater Township and is unlikely to be the last. Community planning should always be a forward-looking process that revisits established planning issues and helps identify new ones with fresh and healthy community engagement and participation.