

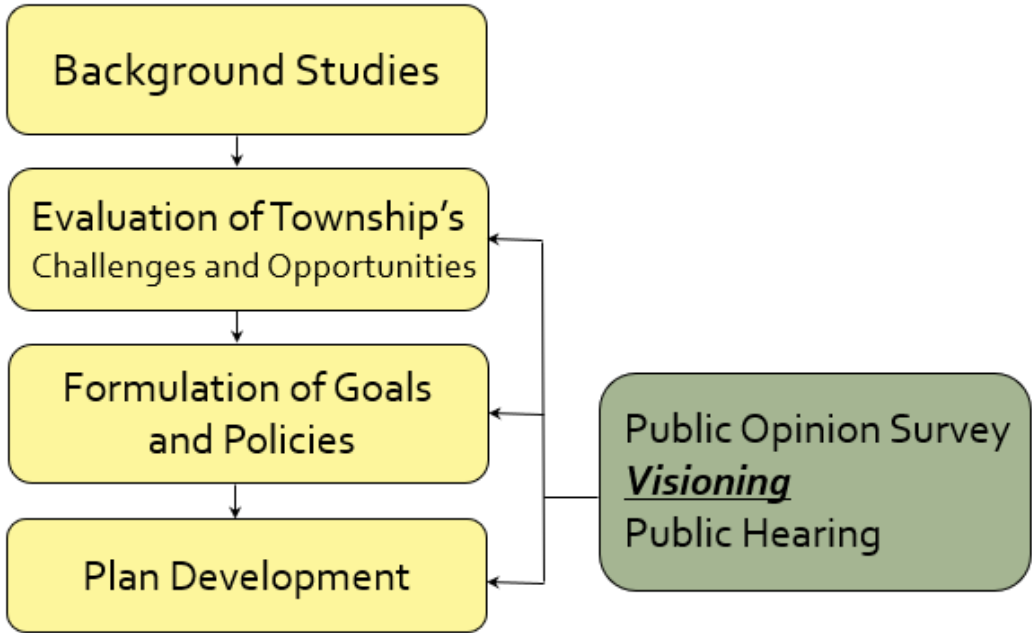
Goals and Policies

Introduction

The purpose of a Master Plan is to establish a broad framework of goals, and within that, a plan of action that is well suited to the community’s wants and needs. As the crux of the Master Plan, the Goals and Policies chapter is informed by research, an analysis of the existing landscape, and most importantly, feedback from the community. The following goals and policies are also supported by The Township DDA Plan, the Parks & Recreation Master Plan, and other documents cited in the appendix of this plan.

Early in the planning process, the community was asked to describe the Township’s strengths, its challenges, and its vision for the future. From this comprehensive discussion, the Planning Commission has identified goals-- general statements that define the character of and direct land use preservation and development. Fore each, goal, this chapter recommends a set of policies—a plan describing how the goals can be put into action. With the understanding that a community is organically ever-changing, the broadest statements in this Master Plan—its vision and goals---are the most resolute. The policy framework, although well researched, does not commit the Township to any recommendation. Rather, policies represent the Township’s commitment to achieving its goals by a creating a path for action. The Township can review its progress and build upon the following recommendations and/or correct its course of action while remaining steadfast to its goals.

Figure. X



Creating a Vision

Phase 1 of Public Engagement – The Survey

Prior to the May 18th Visioning Session, the Township invited a randomized sampling of residents to complete a survey that was mailed to select households. The survey received 417 responses. Of note, 82% of respondents were satisfied with access to goods and services, with a similar majority wanting to limit commercial development to strategic locations such as the Livingston/Milford Road area. When asked which new service the Township should prioritize, the most common response was “pedestrian/bike paths.” The second most common response was “improving local roads.” Overall, most respondents expressed that Highland Township is a safe, quiet, family-friendly place with rural charm.

Phase 2 of Public Engagement- The Visioning Session

The Visioning Session was designed by Carlisle Wortman & Associates (CWA), the planning consultation firm hired by the Township, and was hosted by the planning commission. Mr. Doug Lewan, the Township Planning Consultant, was supported by Ms. Anna Wysocki, also of CWA. To kick off the session, Mr. Lewan presented on the purpose of a master plan and the importance of public engagement. He then dismissed participants to the event’s four “stations,” where attendees held lively discussions. To close the evening, Mr. Lewan thanked everyone for their participation and the planning commission formally adjourned the meeting.

Stations

With assistance from the planning commission, CWA created four stations for the session. Each station used posters to highlight a topic that is applicable to land use and will most likely affect Highland Township during the next five to ten years. These four topics are: Residential Development, Transportation and Infrastructure, Natural Features, and Business. Following introductions, the attendees divided themselves into four groups, which rotated through each station. The goal of this format was to stimulate group conversation, while allowing every attendee an equal opportunity to comment on each topic. Throughout the evening, two planning commissioners remained at each station to facilitate discussion and to transcribe participants’ comments onto large sheets of paper. Images of each poster are copied at the end of this report.

Voting

After spending about twenty minutes at each station, participants “voted” for comments that held the most importance to them by placing stickers next to the comments that were handwritten on large sheets of paper. Each participant was given twelve stickers. Each comment is now tallied at the end of this report, under “Stations” and “Results.”

Conclusion

The desire to preserve the rural character of Highland was the prevailing sentiment of the evening. Participants voiced opposition to small residential lots and multi-family dwellings. Though regional housing shortages and market trends tend toward new housing development, participants wanted to avoid the addition of suburban housing and large commercial footprints to remain distinct from neighboring communities and to preserve the Township character.

Some participants contemplated how to grow strategically. For example, participants discussed the aging population and the need for affordable assisted living facilities. Some discussed how business development might be concentrated in major transportation corridors and how the town center should attract smaller businesses. Participants who desired improvements largely focused their comments on transportation and infrastructure. For example, participants suggested the development of non-motorized pathways, while high speed internet and sewer expansion were popular but contested propositions. Comments that were transcribed by each station’s facilitators are recorded below.

By hosting a live event in addition to the survey, the planning commission provided different points of access for residents and stakeholders to voice their opinions. In doing this, the planning commission is working to create an authentic framework for the Master Plan, with buy-in and consensus from Township citizens.

Goals and Policies: The Preservation, Development, and Success of Highland Township

Goals and subsequent policies form the basis upon which more detailed decisions can be made. Several of the following policy recommendations are supported by the white paper titled, “Agricultural Uses in Highland Township: Preserving Rural Character by Expanding Economic Opportunities.” This paper was published in April 2018 and will be included in the appendix of this Master Plan.

1. **Maintain the rural, historic character of Highland Township while supporting contemporary necessities/requisites by managing growth, preserving natural resources, and upholding agricultural land use.**
 - a. Support small- and large-scale farming and agricultural uses.
 - b. Establish a utility service district to Limit expectations of where future sanitary sewer service and water would be extended by public investment and where it would not.
 - c. Implement design guidelines that incorporate natural, historic, or community-oriented features in non-residential districts.
 - d. Preserve agricultural and open space views along the road corridors that contain visually prominent rural open spaces. The corridors containing visually prominent rural open spaces are identified in the map on page 5 (Copied from 2000-2020 Master Plan: *The Economic Viability of Agricultural Lands*, January 2019).
 - e. Encourage residents with property in natural environments to work with a land conservancy to establish an easement to protect the land from future development.
 - f. Amend the Zoning Ordinance to implement design guidelines that serve to maintain or promote natural, historic, or community-oriented elements in non-residential districts. Consider the use of special zoning districts or overlay zoning districts (i.e., regional corridor district and/or neighborhood corridor district). Promote a small-town or rural image at the Township’s core intersections by considering additional standards for

elements such as landscaping, streetscape, sidewalk furniture, lighting, architecture, and/or signage.

- g. Encourage the long-term protection of farmland resources. Create a Solar Zoning Ordinance through which the Township can specify desired regulations, such as those regarding soil quality, groundcover, and decommissioning.

2. Advocate for the enhancement and preservation of natural features and a healthy ecosystem within and surrounding the Township. Protect environmentally sensitive areas. Maintain the quality of greenways, waterways, and open space. Promote healthy freshwater ecosystems and reduce harmful runoff.

- a. Amend the Landscape section of the Zoning Ordinance to include measurable, quantitative standards for greenbelt development.
- b. Provide education for residents and business owners, especially those who own farmland or land with natural features. Access relevant information from the Huron River Water Council and/or the statewide departments such as MDARD, or MEGLE.
- c. Maintain restrictions to the area of impervious surfaces in all districts, as the majority of the Township land is in one of three creek sheds.
- d. Maintain the existing Wellhead Protection Program, as recommended by EGLE's drinking water and environmental health division.
- e. Amend the Zoning Ordinance to minimize erosion and nutrient runoff by requiring a 25-foot wide non-mowed, vegetative strip along bodies of water, especially where land is used for agricultural production. Establish the percentage of waterfront property that should utilize such a buffer, per parcel.
- f. Encourage Farmers to plant cover crops or perennial species to prevent periods of bare ground on farm fields when the soil (and the soil and nutrients it contains) are most susceptible to erosion and loss into waterways.
- g. Protect the Township's air quality.
 - i. Limit high intensity industrial uses
 - ii. Review building filtration standards. Amend the standards as needed to promote consistent and quality air filtration in all living/work/recreational spaces.
 - iii. In an amendment to the Zoning Ordinance, allow the planning commission to request an air quality protection plan for proposed developments.
 - iv. Prohibit the burning of plastics and other hazardous materials, unless done so in a regulated manner, for some reasonable purpose.
- h. Additional considerations for open space
 - i. Amend the Zoning Ordinance to regulate the intensity of LED lighting.

3. Maintain the integrity of housing by promoting accessibility to people of different ages, physical abilities, and socio-economic status, while maintaining the Township's rural and historic character.

- a. Explore allowing detached accessory dwelling units (ADUs), especially considering the improved quality and supply of prefabricated ADUs for sale.
- b. Explore allowing mixed residential/commercial uses, to a limited scale, in select districts such as local commercial and Highland Station.
- c. Residential areas should be separated from high density commercial and industrial areas by functional elements such as open space, parkland, landscaped streets, or other buffer elements. This strategy is not meant to preclude thoughtfully executed mixed-use projects wherein residential and commercial elements are combined.
- d. Promote the accessible, affordable housing opportunities for Highland's senior citizens at appropriate locations in the Township. Maintain proximity to parks, walking paths, and public facilities when determining appropriate locations. Promoting affordable senior housing should include the following strategies:
 - i. Offer incentives for the development of senior housing in the Township, such as density bonuses in PUD developments where units for seniors are proposed.
 - ii. Encourage public/private partnerships for senior housing in the Township, to increase its affordability.
 - iii. Consider expanding municipal sewer lines to locations planned for senior housing.
- e. Establish architectural standards and style guidelines that support Township character, for future multi-family developments, including senior housing and attached single-family, within reason.
- f. Require thoughtful placement of open space in future developments where density is also greater, to maintain Township character by maintaining green spaces along major thoroughfares and between developments.
- g. Consider attached single-family residential, where appropriate.

4. Remain distinct from neighboring communities by maintaining identity as a reprieve from suburban sprawl and a regional destination for parks.

- a. Limit new commercial development to that of a local, neighborhood scale and intensity, except along M-59.
- b. Honor the Township's historic horseback riding tradition as central to the Township character.
- c. Consider establishing a Park District or Resource Conservation District in the Zoning Ordinance.

5. Provide the high-quality public facilities and services while maintaining an affordable rate for residents and business owners throughout Highland Charter Township.

- a. Continue to cluster Township and other public facilities and maintain a vibrant presence in the Highland Station District.
- b. Continue to partner with HVSK and the HDDA to utilize existing green spaces and parking lots to facilitate public events such as festivals, Farmer's Markets, and other opportunities for residents to gather.
- c. Maintain the quality, efficiency, and safety of existing infrastructure.
- d. Consult this Master Plan when drafting the yearly Capital Improvements Plan.
- e. Support partner organizations such as the FOHRA (Friends of Highland Recreation Area), Six Rivers Land Conservancy, Community Sharing, and the Highland/White Lake Business Association in their ongoing endeavor to recruit and celebrate volunteers.
- f. Consult with the Township's planning consultant and the Parks & Recreation Plan to identify public grants for enhancements to parks and other public facilities.
- g. Participate in regional and statewide efforts to expand broadband availability.
- h. Assist neighborhoods in exploring options to maintain and improve their streets and drainage systems.

6. Expand the pedestrian, non-motorized pathway system in a manner consistent with the Township's desired character.

- a. Prioritize mobility and transportation as a capital improvement and public service during the life span of this plan.
- b. Develop and enhance pedestrian and other non-motorized circulation between parks, public facilities, and along select corridors. Refer to the *Highland Township Parks & Recreation Master Plan 2021-2025*, adopted in January 2021, and the *Charter Township of Highland Non-Motorized Pathway Master Plan*, adopted July 11, 2012.
- c. Establish standards that provide adequate pathway width, shade from the sun or other elements, and pathway maintenance to keep pathway users healthy and safe.
- d. Refer to the Township survey and Visioning Session when implementing pathway development, as a reminder of public support. Continue to involve residents and other stakeholders in the planning stages of pathway enhancements or expansions.
- e. Provide sidewalks on both sides of the street in all new developments.
- f. Partner with Milford Charter Township to establish a non-motorized bike path between downtown Milford and Downtown Highland.
- g. Give special attention to creating an accessible, barrier-free environment using crosswalks and ramps, and other universal design standards.

7. Promote limited commercial development by aggregating commercial uses to the Township's central corridors, supporting agricultural commercial development, and/or supporting small-scale enterprises.

- a. Create an environment appealing to businesses that service residents and attract visitors, with an emphasis on the service industries, such as barbers/salons, dining and hospitality.
- b. Review existing sub-area plans and determine which elements still support the community vision. Create an actionable timeline for actions consistent with that vision.
- c. Coordinate with the DDA to implement the 2003 DDA Plan, to cooperate with future plans, and to activate the Highland Station area.
- d. Explore agricultural uses such as outdoor markets, wedding venues, etc.
- e. Review ordinances for opportunities to accommodate home based industry while maintaining safety, wellbeing and peace of neighboring residents.

8. Promote the limited development of industrial uses in appropriate areas of the Township that generate little or no environmental impact.

- a. Consider requiring environmental impact studies when new industrial uses and/or industrial improvements are proposed.
- b. Encourage Low Development Impact standards and alternative designs for stormwater retention that work also to preserve green space and provide visually pleasing buffers to surrounding areas.

Summary of Policies that Propose Changes to the Zoning Ordinance

1. Amendments to Agricultural Residential Zoning District:
 - a. Consider parsing the map to re-establish zones specifically aligned with agricultural commerce and home based industry as distinct from large lot residential and hobby farmin
 - b. residential and hobby farmin
 - c. Establish an agricultural commercial and tourism category in the Zoning Ordinance for future uses such as outdoor markets, wedding venues, seasonal events, etc.
 - d. Amend regulations relative to large scale solar utilities to address issues regarding soil quality, groundcover, and decommissioning.
 - e. Add 'Agricultural processing and food storage' as special land use.
 - f. Address tasting rooms for vineyards, distilleries, or micro-breweries on farm operations
 - g. Develop regulations to permit agricultural commercial kitchens as a special land use
2. Amendments to Corridor Areas
 - a. Promote a small-town image at the Township's core intersections by considering additional standards for landscaping, sidewalk furniture, lighting, and/or signage, expressed special districts or through a zoning overlay district (i.e., regional corridor or neighborhood corridor district)
 - b. Require more beautification standards in the office district.
 - c. Allow mixed residential/commercial use in the local business district.
 - d. Allow mobile food establishments.
 - e. Specifically allow craft production, clothing production, or food production (less than 2,500 square feet)
 - f. Specifically allow microbrewer/small distiller/small wine maker (less than 2,500 square feet) in local business area/ industrial area (currently allows "processing and packaging of beverages"
 - g. Implement design guidelines that incorporate natural, historic, or community-oriented features in non-residential districts.
3. Amendments to Industrial Manufacturing and Research & Technology & Research
 - a. Review setback requirements where land abuts a non-similar use or a public right of way, increasing where appropriate.
 - b. Encourage Low Impact Development methods in design of stormwater controls.
4. Changes to Zoning Map
 - a. Establish an institutional or public facility district.
 - b. Evaluate whether a PUD ordinance will benefit the Township's goals.

- c. Consider establishing a Park District or Resource Conservation District in the Zoning Ordinance.