

2013 Master Plan Review

Township government is guided in its land use policies and decisions through a series of "living documents" collectively known as the Master Plan. For Highland Township, the heart of this guidance is found within the "*Highland Township Comprehensive Land Use Plan 2000-2020*". This document was adopted in 2000, after a lengthy period of study and analysis which included visioning sessions with the public, a resident land use opinion survey, and considerable debate about the future of Highland Township.

Since then, a number of "microarea analyses" have been completed to evaluate either specific small areas (e.g. one square mile centered on a specific intersection) or to discuss specific land uses (e.g. where it is appropriate to focus multiple family development). Such studies are generally initiated by the Planning Commission in response to recognized trends in land use in our Township or region, or as a vehicle to evaluate the appropriateness of development proposals that might vary from those envisioned when the zoning ordinance and zoning map were crafted.

The Township is called to reevaluate its Comprehensive Land Use Plan at least every 5 years after adoption of the plan as required by State Law (P.A. 33 of 2008, Michigan Planning Enabling Act, MCL 125.3801 et. seq.) Some of the tasks undertaken include the following:

- In 2005, the Township conducted an updated land use opinion survey, which affirmed the goals and objectives of the earlier plan.
- In 2007, the Planning Commission issued a notice of "Intent to Plan". The Planning Commission worked on a consolidated map, incorporating all the approved micro-area analyses and discussed the appropriateness of the goals and objectives as currently published in the various documents on multiple occasions.
- In 2007-2008 the Highland Downtown Development Authority conducted some independent visioning sessions which were supported by members of the Planning Commission and staff. The document that was generated as a result of these efforts was ultimately adopted by the Planning Commission as the official "Master Plan" for that subarea.
- In 2007-2008 Oakland County Planning facilitated a "Green Infrastructure" visioning effort that resulted in publication of a map and document. Planning Commission members, the Highland Land Conservancy and the Highland Equestrian Conservancy were all key players in this planning process. While the documents have not been formally adopted by the Planning Commission, they are a valuable resource that has been incorporated into a County-wide visioning map.
- In 2008, the Parks and Recreation Committee facilitated a Parks and Recreation plan update.

In 2008, the United States suffered an unprecedented economic slowdown. Some have come to refer to this recession and the very slow economic recovery as "The Great Recession". Development projects dried up, existing buildings went vacant, and Oakland County suffered a home foreclosure crisis. Given that the Planning Commission was satisfied with the Master Land Use Plan, it was decided that this lull period would be better utilized to completely revamp the Zoning Ordinance, simplifying language and processes, relaxing standards where appropriate, introducing some new tools to assist the community in preserving and protecting the environmental assets and community assets that we value. The new Zoning Ordinance was

adopted at the end of 2010, the culmination of an intense two year planning effort.

Staff efforts have since been concentrated on a similar process to restate the General Code of Ordinances. The General Code of Ordinances adopted in November, 2012 also incorporates the Zoning Ordinance as Chapter 25.

Now, in 2013, there are signs of hope that an economic recovery is underway. The backlog of foreclosed homes is clearing, and new home starts are on the rise. In 2005, before the recession, Highland Township issued 84 permits for new housing starts. In 2008, at the beginning of the recession, Highland Township issued only 6 permits for new homes. In 2010, only 2 permits were issued for new homes. In 2012, Highland Township issued 22 such permits and for 2013, the Building Department expects to exceed that number.

Similarly, in the years before 2008, the Township approved significant expansions of automobile dealerships, the redevelopment of the corner of M-59/Duck Lake Road and new “strip style” commercial development on South Milford Road, as well as several office parks. There have been no new commercial development projects since the beginning of the recession. Yet the existing commercial space vacated during the recession is beginning to be reoccupied (based on review of staff issued land use permits and building permits for remodels).

That is not to say that Highland Township is experiencing any serious development pressure, or that there is any reason to question the integrity of the existing Master Land Use map. In fact, the population of Highland Township remains stable (2010 population of 19,202 represented a 0.2% increase from 2000).

At a Planning Commission meeting on June 20, 2013, the Planning Commission determined the following:

- a) The Consolidated Master Land Use Plan Map (June 2013) reflects the Master Land Use Plan Map adopted July 6, 2000 and incorporates all adopted micro-area analyses through December, 2010. This map accurately reflects the future land use vision for the community and shall now be designated the Official Master Land Use Map.
- b) Based on Planning Commission review of development trends (as discussed above) the Planning Commission will not commence a procedure to amend the master plan or adopt a new master plan. This review and its findings shall be recorded in the official minutes of the Planning Commission.
- c) This review document shall be attached to any new copies of the Highland Township Comprehensive Land Use Plan (2000) and shall be posted on the website at <http://www.highlandtwp.com>