

Charter Township of Highland Planning Commission

Micro-Area Analysis South Milford Road Corridor Lone Tree Road to Rowe Road

INTRODUCTION

Milford Road is a major north-south route connecting M-59 in Highland Township with I-96 in Milford Township. This route was considered as one of several alternatives for designation as a state trunkline as part of the West Oakland Corridor Study in 2001, an action that was ultimately blocked by the affected jurisdictions due to their concerns about the potential impact on the character of the community.

Highland Township recently undertook a study of the properties just south of M-59, as part of the “Highland Station” micro-area analysis. The study area for the Highland Station Area ended at Colasanti’s Farm Market, just north of Ayreshire Drive. It is the vision of the community to transform the Highland Station area into a walkable downtown community, with mixed land uses, a variety of housing styles, and thoughtful restoration and adaptation of existing historic homes in the area. The Highland Station area will be the focus of public investments by the Highland Downtown Development Authority as it seeks to revitalize the area and provide a “sense of place” for the community.

The current study area lies due south of the Highland Station Area. This area was previously studied in 1998, with no conclusive recommendations for changes to the comprehensive land use plan. Since then, there have been a number of office, commercial and residential developments both within the study area and in adjacent

Milford Township. In addition, the Huron Valley School District has completed additional work on their property, just west of the study area.

The Planning Commission initiated this fresh review of land use in this area in order to provide an examination of development trends in the corridor and to address a perceived need for additional multiple family housing opportunities to meet the changing needs of an aging population. This study provides a vehicle to determine what amendments, if any, are appropriate to either the Highland Township Comprehensive Land Use Plan and/or the Zoning Ordinance and Zoning District Maps.

DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY AREA

The study area includes parcels lying within one-half mile of South Milford Road, in Sections 27, 33 and 34. The study area is bounded by Rowe Road (the Township line) on the south, and by Ayreshire Lane on the north. The CSX Railroad corridor lies along the east edge of the study area. Figure 1 provides a recent aerial view of the study area. Figure 2 identifies current zoning classifications. Figure 3 identifies the current comprehensive land use plan designations.

Existing land uses within the study area include the Huron Valley School District complex, including Milford High School, the Administration Building and an elementary school; numerous office buildings, including several dental and medical clinics; two “strip” commercial developments, including the newly constructed Watkins Landing; some restaurants, small commercial buildings and single family homes. Tables 1 and 2 show the composition of parcels by zoning and land use plan classification

The only significant natural feature in the study area is a wetland of approximately four acres on the southwest corner of Milford and Lone Tree Roads. The drainage systems for subdivisions along the east edge of the study area are tributary to Pettibone Lake, which is located just east of the CSX Railroad.

Figure 1: Aerial Photograph of Study Area (2002)

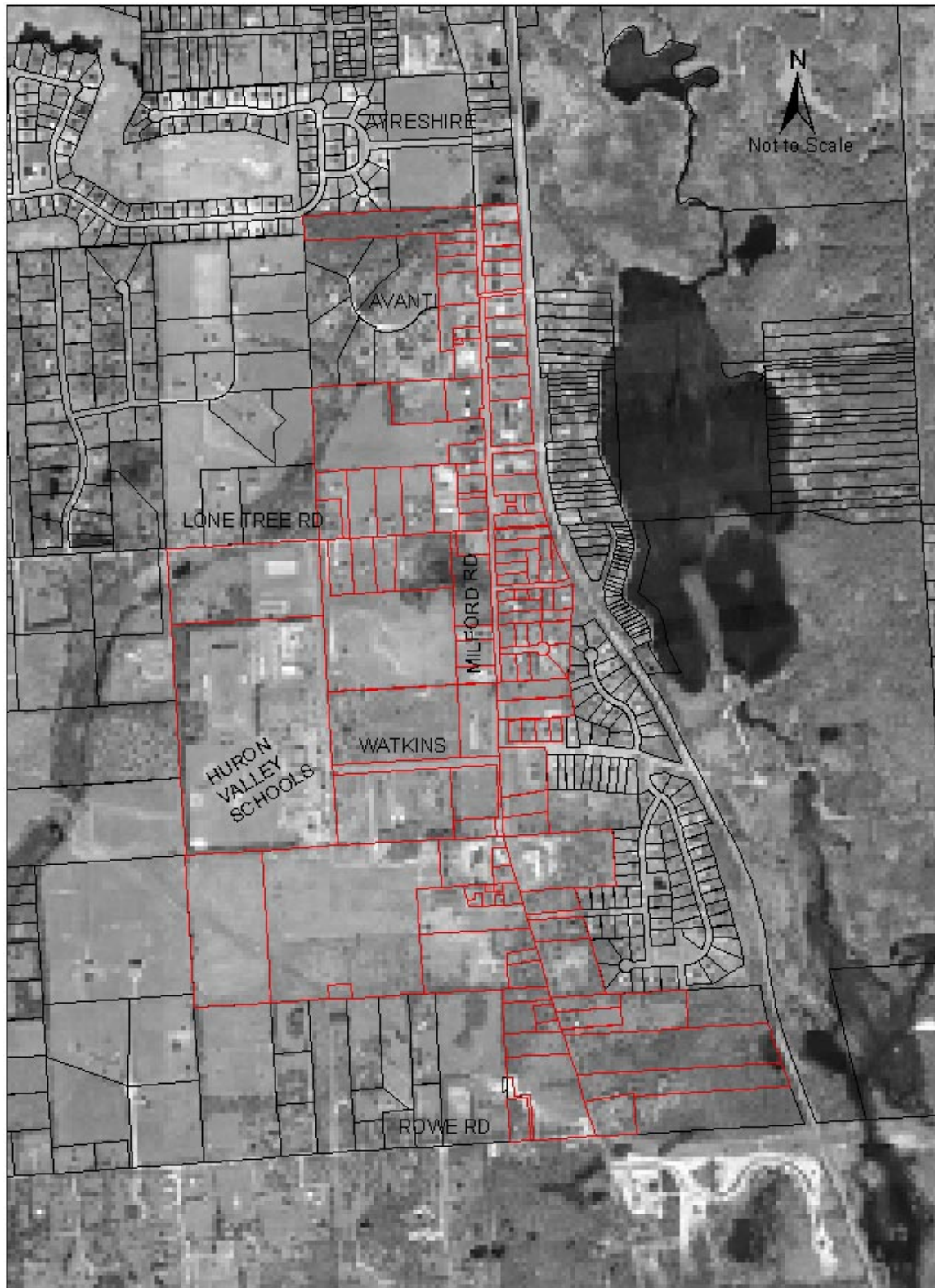


Figure 2 Existing Zoning

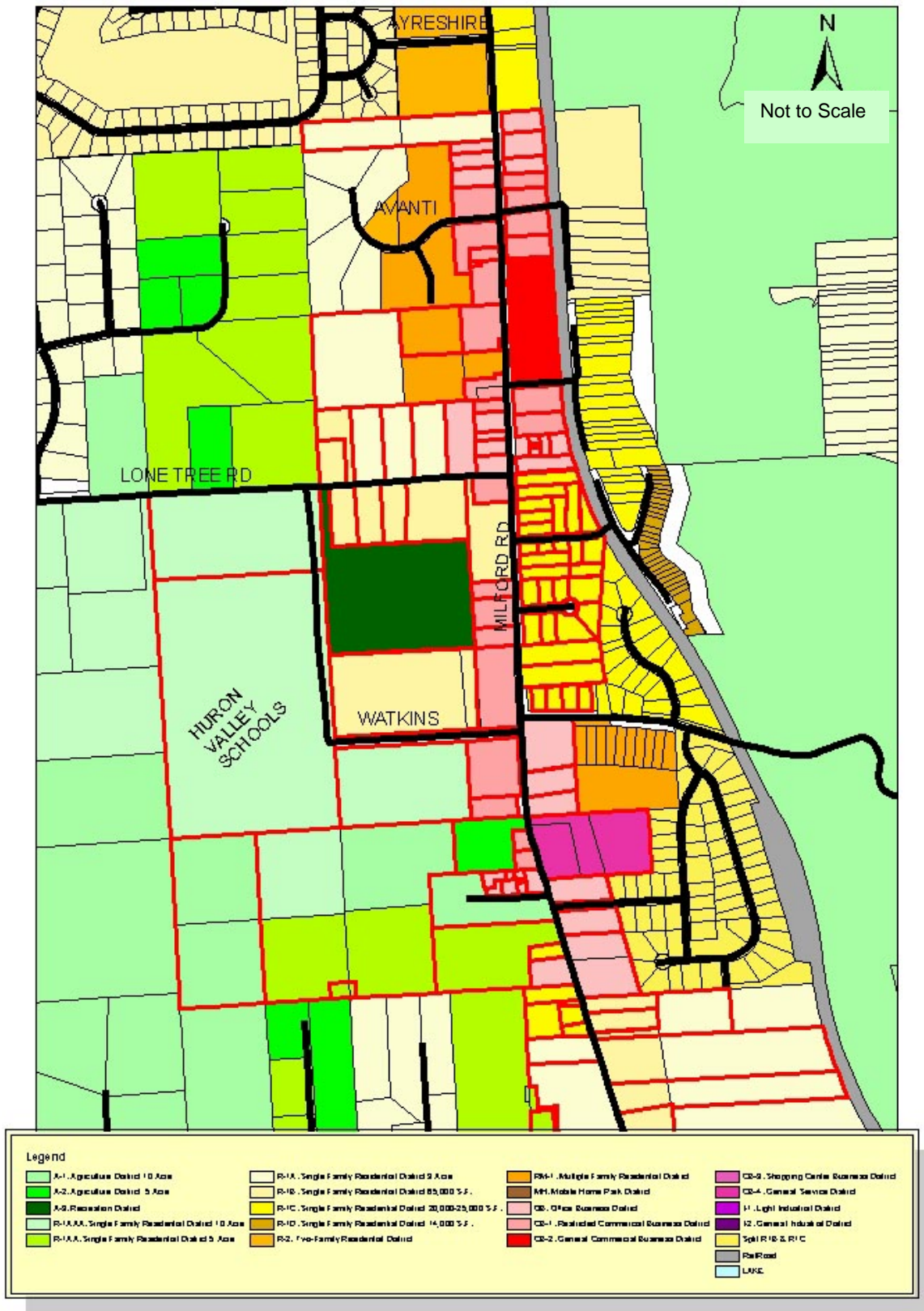


Figure 3 Comprehensive Land Use Plan (2000 Plan)

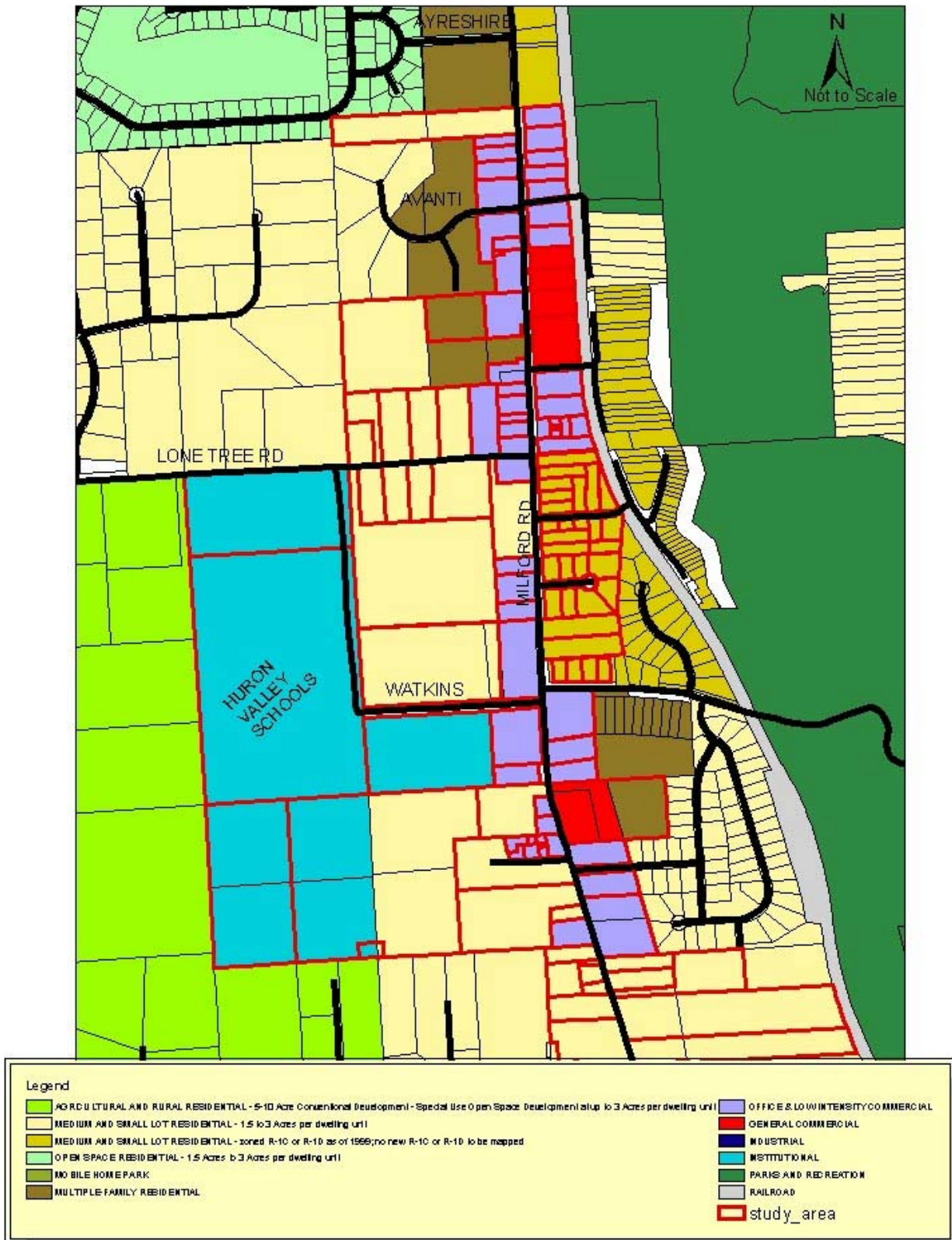


Table 1 Existing Zoning Classifications

Zoning District Designation	Acreage	No. of Parcels	Percentage
*Agriculture (A-1 to A-3)	75	3	17%
*Single Family Residential (R-1AAA to R-1B)	269	66	62%
Multiple-Family Residential (MF)	4	2	1%
Office & Low Intensity Commercial (OB, CB-1 to CB-2)	77	52	18%
General Commercial (CB-3)	10	1	2%
TOTAL	435	124	100%

*includes 157 acres owned by the Huron Valley School District

Table 2 Comprehensive Land Use Plan Designations

Land Use Designation	Acreage	No. of Parcels	Percentage
Medium and Small Lot Residential	208	59	48%
Multiple-Family Residential	16	6	3%
Office & Low Intensity Commercial	69	49	16%
General Commercial	13	5	3%
Institutional	129	5	30%
TOTAL	435	124	100%

GENERAL TOWNSHIP PLANNING OBJECTIVES AS APPLIED TO STUDY AREA

The Comprehensive Land Use Plan for Highland Township describes a number of planning objectives aimed at preserving “rural character” and open space while providing reasonable alternatives for residential development. The land use policies represent incremental changes to previous plans, with a stated objective that future residential development patterns in the township should respect long standing practices. Other objectives are focused on concentrating commercial activity within existing activity centers.

South Milford Road provides an exceptional opportunity within the Township to provide for the infrastructure needs of more intense land uses such as office, institutional, commercial and multiple-family residential. Milford Road is a major north/south arterial, and is already the focus of commercial activity both within Highland Township and Milford Village to the south. Watermain is already available to some properties within the study area, and could be made readily available for extensions. In addition, the area is designated for service in the recently formulated Township Master Sanitary Sewer Plan.

The Township Comprehensive Land Use Plan clearly articulates planning objectives for commercial land use. Specifically, the Township intends to strengthen existing commercial bases, provide adequate convenience and comparison retail, services and office space within easy access to population concentrations, and prevent the proliferation of scattered strip commercial development. The Plan also recognizes that there are currently many under-utilized commercial properties, as well as an excess amount of area zoned and utilized for commercial needs in relationship to the theoretical demand as calculated by standard analytical methods based on current population projections.

The Township Comprehensive Land Use Plan speaks to planning objectives for residential land use as well. Specifically, it is the intent of the Township to locate multiple-family residential development in areas which provide the greatest amenity and accessibility. The South Milford Road Corridor provides exceptional accessibility to

shopping, services such as medical and dental care, recreational opportunities available through the public school system and state recreational area. The area provides an excellent opportunity to provide a “walkable” community, with pedestrian connections to the Highland Station area to the north.

Other principles utilized in determining residential use boundaries in the 2000 Comprehensive Land Use Plan include a desire to “round out” existing residential development to logical boundaries and providing sufficient acreage for each residential type. The 2000 Comprehensive Land Use Plan called for a transition zone of multiple-family residential properties lying between the commercial properties on Milford Road, and the single-family properties lying farther off the major thoroughfare, but was not carried very far south of Livingston Road.

It should also be noted that much of the property within this study area lies within the Highland Downtown Development District. While the Highland Downtown Development Authority (HDDA) does not plan to focus its public investment dollars in this study area, the HDDA is dedicated to working towards the successful retention and expansion of businesses throughout the District.

DEVELOPMENT PATTERNS IN THE SOUTH MILFORD ROAD CORRIDOR

The character of South Milford Road corridor is shaped in part by current development patterns. Since the last micro-area analysis of this study area (1998) and the Comprehensive Land Use Plan (2000) were prepared, the Township has witnessed reinvestment in some under-utilized properties, such as the demolition of the former home of “American Speedy Print”, and replacement with a strip commercial center; and the renovation of “Duke’s” restaurant.

There have been a number of successful office projects, including dental offices for Dr. Allain and Dr. White; and the Stonecrest and Saddlebrook office developments. The Maverick Office Park is also under development.

In nearby Milford Township and the Village of Milford, there have been a number of medical/dental and office buildings constructed in the corridor, including the Huszti Dental Care building. More significantly, two housing developments are under construction. "Bridge Valley" in Milford Township will contain 131 senior apartments, 24 townhouse and attached condominiums and 86 single family homes, all served with a community sewage disposal system and community well. "Uptown Village" in the Village of Milford will include 80 attached condominium units.

These recent developments indicate a trend towards more dense development patterns, which is consistent with the function of Milford Road as a connector route between M-59 and I-96. Single-family subdivisions are situated behind the more visible South Milford Road frontage. Multiple family housing provides a suitable buffer between the office/commercial uses and the single-family subdivisions.

One development constraint is the lack of adequate drainage facilities along Milford Road, which is currently a two-lane paved road with poor ditches and little or no stormwater retention facilities. Poor drainage can actually be mitigated in part through the design process for development projects. The center turn lane proposed for Milford Road can also be effectuated through permitting of office/commercial or multiple family drive approaches, provided the traffic generation potential justifies such requirements.

A second development constraint is the lack of municipal sanitary sewer and water service. Sanitary sewer service is planned for the area, as indicated in the recently completed Township Sanitary Sewer Master Plan. Sewer service could be made available to the area as soon as 2007. Municipal water is available within the study area, and would likely be extended as part of a utility construction project.

In planning, the community should also consider the influence and impact of the Huron Valley Schools complex in Section 33. The school property houses administration offices, a high school, an elementary school, a bus garage, sports and recreation facilities. The school property is surrounded, for the most part, by large lot residential properties off

Lone Tree and Rowe Roads. There are essentially no existing homes within very near proximity of the school (1000 feet), although many residents in the area are impacted by the traffic patterns of the school.

School activities have the potential to create light and noise nuisances, and intrusions into privacy not compatible with single-family home sites. The properties immediately adjacent to the school might be better used as low intensity office or commercial uses, or a multiple family use where the expectation for quiet and solitude are lessened.

HDDA BUILDOUT ANALYSIS

As part of the recent analysis for the Tax Increment Financing Plan, the Highland Downtown Development Authority completed an analysis of the buildout potential of parcels in their district based on the 2000 Comprehensive Land Use Plan, and an understanding of development constraints such as wetlands. The HDDA District includes 134 acres within this study area, including 38.2 acres currently used for single-family residential purposes, and 22.6 acres currently standing vacant. The remaining property is a combination of office and commercial uses. Some parcels are underutilized.

In the office and commercial properties, the total floor area is approximately 212,000 square feet, with a potential for a total of 324,000 square feet at buildout. In addition, there is a potential for approximately 344,000 square feet in office and commercial land uses if all residentially used and vacant parcels designated for low intensity office and commercial land uses were developed. In other words, with no changes at all to the Comprehensive Land Use Plan, there is a potential to triple the existing office and commercial activity, from a current area of 212,000 square feet to a future buildout of 668,000 square feet.

While the HDDA is relying on this growth to fuel the economic vitality of the community and therefore finance public improvements in their development area, the HDDA is also relying on residential growth to support new businesses. An intensification of housing density around the HDDA district would support HDDA goals and objectives.

DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS

The population of Highland Township, as measured in the 2000 U.S. Census, is 19,169 persons. The Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG), our regional planning agency, forecasts the population for 2030 at 21,681 persons, for a relatively modest fourteen percent increase. Given decreasing household sizes, the Township would have to accommodate 1871 new households over the next 25 years.

Across the state, and across the nations, communities are beginning to prepare for the aging of the population. In 2000, there were 1395 residents aged 65 or older in Highland Township. In 2030, SEMCOG forecasts show 3066 residents aged 65 or older (119 percent increase).

The increased percentage of “senior” residents has several implications for planning. First, the increased percentage of senior residents is reflected in the declining household size. Secondly, today’s active seniors are attracted to housing opportunities with lesser maintenance demands (such as condominium developments or smaller homes); greater access to recreational opportunities such as walking trails, swimming pools and fitness centers; and convenient access to shopping and services.

Currently, Highland Township offers a somewhat limited mix of housing types. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, Highland Township has 7,179 housing units, with a mix of 79 percent single family, 1 percent duplex, 3 percent apartments and 17 percent mobile homes. This is due, in part, to the inherent difficulties in siting multiple family housing projects in areas served by septic systems.

Another consideration in planning for an increase in senior households is to consider the cost of existing housing stock. Currently, the median cost of housing in Highland Township is \$215,382 (based on 2001 SEMCOG studies), whereas the median income of a Highland Township household is \$62,805 (1999 U.S. Census data). Little or no new

housing is being constructed below the current median value. More affordable options would be desirable to accommodate the needs of the future.

TRANSPORTATION CONSIDERATIONS

As noted above, the Road Commission for Oakland County, working with a Steering Committee composed of community representatives, completed a feasibility report and transportation study to identify a primary north/south route through Western Oakland County for designation as a state trunkline. As a result of actions of the Steering Committee, it was determined that no route would be singled out for conversion to a state trunkline, and that multiple routes would undergo safety or capacity improvements initiated locally. For the South Milford Road corridor, the recommended cross-section is a three lane roadway, with a center left turn lane.

The Steering Committee adopted a number of land use and transportation management recommendations that serve Highland Township well. These include access management practices; encouraging a complementary mix of land uses to foster internal trip making for some purpose; incorporation of transit stops, bike storage and other amenities, and better vehicle connections between businesses and developments.

These recommendations should be considered as part of site plan design for individual sites, and as part of any discussion for future zoning ordinance revisions. In particular, multiple family residential developments should consider small transit stops suitable for handicap accessible vans such as the Senior Center van and “Ride with Pride”.

Also, all development should consider facilities for bike parking, since Highland Township and neighboring communities have agreed, in concept, to work towards a connected, common safety path to link Kensington Lake through Highland Township to Indian Springs Metropark.

PROPOSED LAND USE MAP

The land use mix along the South Milford Road corridor would be well served by introducing additional opportunities for multiple family housing.

Figure 4 illustrates proposed changes to the Comprehensive Land Use designations for properties within the study area. The primary changes include adding multiple family residential as a buffer between the commercial uses on South Milford Road and the school property, as well as expanding the acreage identified as institutional land use to better conform with actual land holdings of the school district. Table 3 summarizes the proposed composition of the study area by land use designation.

Table 3 Proposed Comprehensive Land Use Plan Designations

Land Use Designation	Acreage	No. of Parcels	Percent	change
Medium and Small Lot Residential	122	55	28%	-20%
Multiple-Family Residential	73	8	17%	+14%
Office & Low Intensity Commercial	70	50	16%	<1%
General Commercial	13	5	3%	0
Institutional	157	6	36%	+6%
TOTAL	435	120	100%	

Figure 4: Proposed Land Use Map

