

# A Comprehensive Plan

Leighton Township, Michigan



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williams&works

# Leighton Township Comprehensive Plan

The Leighton Township Comprehensive Plan benefited from significant collaboration with Township staff, the Planning Commission, and citizens of the community. Without this support and input, completion of this plan would not have been possible.

## Acknowledgments

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# SECTION I

## Introduction



# Chapter 1: Introduction

## What is a Comprehensive Plan?

The Leighton Township Comprehensive Plan is the culmination of many months of work by numerous Township residents and officials. It reflects a deep concern for the preservation of the Township's natural features: its woodlands, farmlands, water resources, as well as its residential neighborhoods, businesses, industry, and recreational opportunities. The effort that went into this plan illustrates a strong commitment to retain and strengthen the quality of life in Leighton Township. This Comprehensive Plan outlines the preferred future for Leighton Township and sets forth comprehensive strategies to bring it to fruition. The Plan is reasonably general in scope, recognizing that planning for the future is a delicate blend of art and science and that sufficient flexibility will be needed to respond to the challenges of the future.

This Plan was developed in response to a desire in the community to measure its progress relative to the previous plan and to strengthen existing community assets. The earlier Comprehensive Plan was 15 years old and some of the policies and recommendations no longer reflected current conditions in the community. This Plan is based

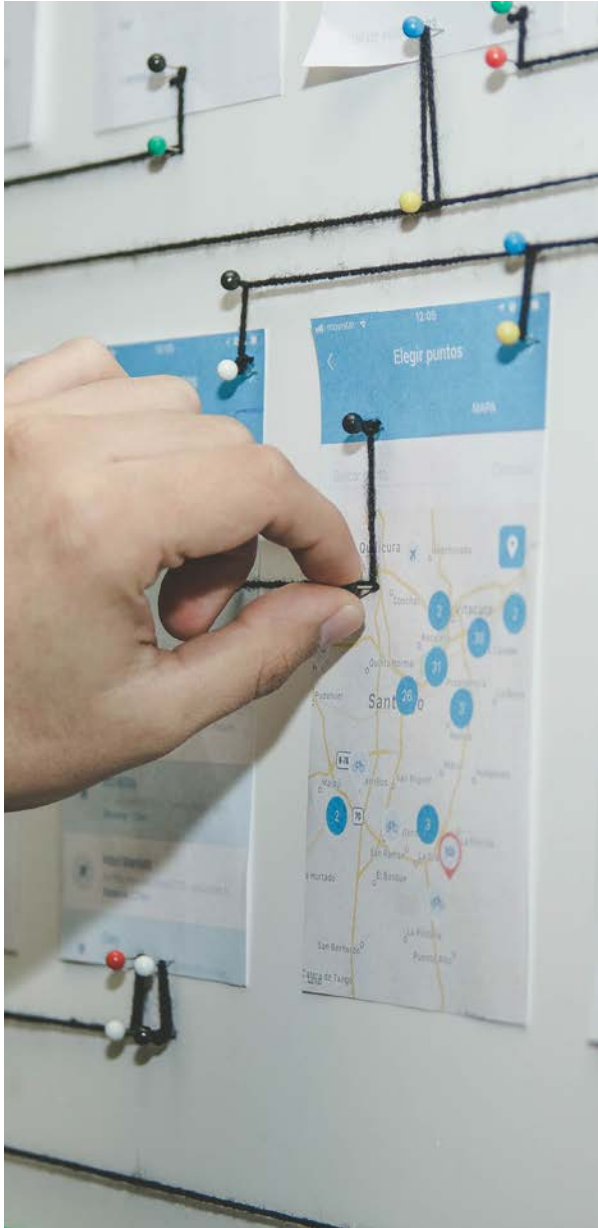
on the Planning Commission's recognition that it is important to view the Township's potential in the context of long term planning. Continuous change in our social and economic structure and activities requires that this Comprehensive Plan be maintained through regular review and occasional revision so that it reflects contemporary trends while maintaining the Township's overarching long-range goals.

The fundamental purpose of the Comprehensive Plan is to enable the Township's Planning Commission to establish a future direction for the Township's physical development. Once officially adopted and maintained, this Plan will serve as an advisory guide for the physical conservation of certain areas and for the development of other areas. It was developed and adopted pursuant to the Michigan Planning Enabling Act, Act 33 of 2008, as amended.



The Leighton Township Comprehensive Plan will serve the Township in the following ways:

1. It provides a comprehensive means of integrating proposals that look years ahead to meet future needs regarding general and major aspects of physical conservation and development throughout the Township.
2. It serves as the official, advisory policy statement for encouraging orderly and efficient use of the land for residences, businesses, and industry and for coordinating these uses of land with each other, with streets and sidewalks, and with other necessary public facilities and services.
3. It creates a logical basis for zoning, subdivision design, public improvement plans, and facilitating and guiding the work of the Planning Commission and the Township Board as well as other public and private endeavors dealing with the physical conservation and development of the Township.
4. It provides a means for private organizations and individuals to determine how they may relate their building and development projects and policies to official Township planning policies.
5. It offers a means of relating the plans of Leighton Township to the plans of other communities in the West Michigan region.



**THE PLANNING PROCESS.** The planning process occurred over several phases. During the first phase, demographic, economic, land use, and transportation data was gathered to support the Plan. The purpose of this effort was to develop a comprehensive impression of the Township as it exists today and to identify patterns of growth and development that will impact the Township in the future.

The objective of the second phase was to establish a policy basis for the Township's planning and land use regulations. This policy basis is founded on public input that was received in support of the Plan. An open house was held on February 26, 2019, to gather public input on the plan. An online community survey was also conducted that provided valuable information from residents regarding the future of the community. Using the output of the open house and the survey, the Planning Commission reviewed the 2003 Comprehensive Plan's policies, future land use recommendations, and implementation strategies.

At the conclusion of the fourth phase, the Planning Commission held a public hearing on the entire plan to garner public input on the complete draft Comprehensive Plan. On \_\_\_\_\_, the Planning Commission recommended approval of the Comprehensive Plan to the Township Board, and on \_\_\_\_\_, the Township Board adopted the new Leighton Township Comprehensive Plan.

# SECTION II

## Community Profile

This section of the Comprehensive Plan presents a general profile description of Leighton Township. Its purpose is to show general trends of the natural features, demographics, land use patterns, and infrastructure that exist within the Township. It is not intended to be an exhaustive inventory of all the numerous aspects of the community; rather, it offers a brief look at current conditions within the Township. This sets the stage for the finalization of plan goals and objectives, the future land use plan and map, and implementation strategies, which are set forth in Section III of this document.

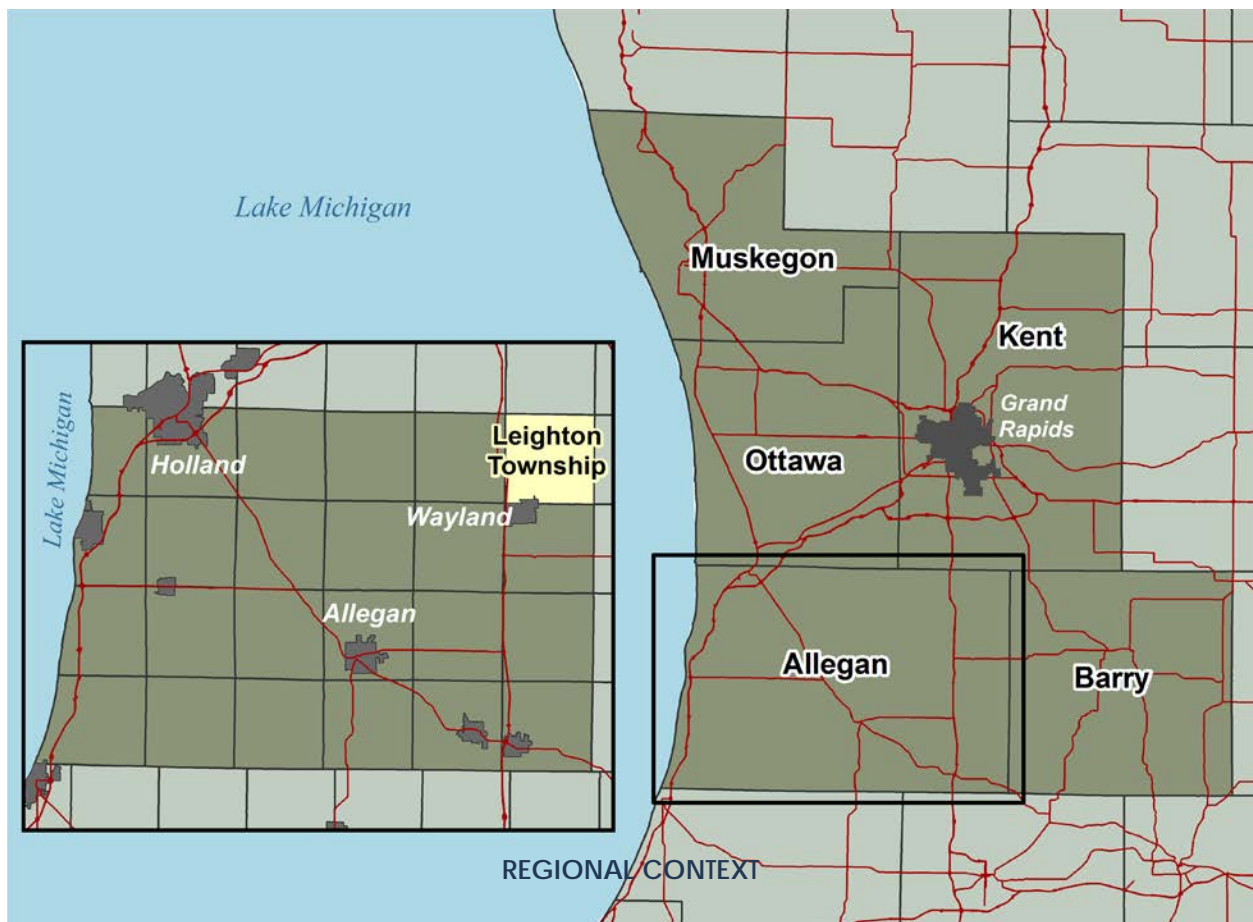
# Chapter 2: Natural & Cultural Features

## Regional Context

Leighton Township is a predominately rural community of approximately 5,000 people located in Allegan County in southwest Michigan. The Township has a history in agriculture; however, it is located on the outskirts of the Grand Rapids metropolitan area. This is the nearest major urban center, with a population of about 200,000 people. Due to its proximity to Grand Rapids, Leighton Township has been experiencing an increasing amount of growth.

Two other notable urban areas near Leighton Township are Holland and Kalamazoo.

Holland is located about 30 miles west of the Township with a population of about 34,000 people and Kalamazoo is located about 35 miles south of the Township with a population of about 74,000 people. Aside from various other small villages and cities, the regional landscape is predominately agriculture with scattered residential, forest, woodlands, and wetlands.



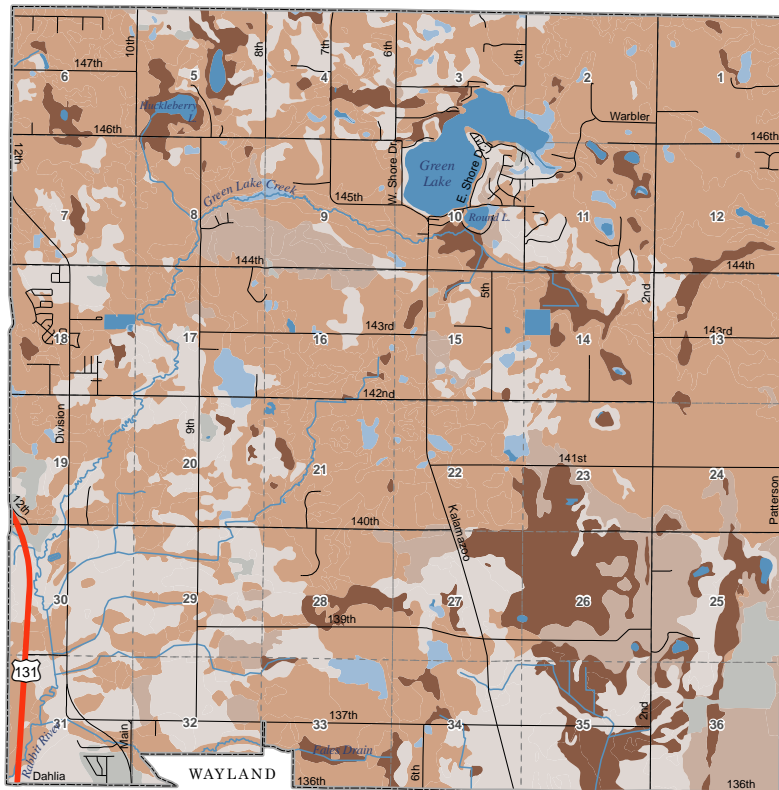




## Topography, Soils, & Woodlands





**TOPOGRAPHY.** Topography is a characteristic of soil that generally illustrates the slope or “lay of the land”. As the glaciers melted and receded to the north, they deposited debris (i.e., soils sediment and rocks) in the form of till and moraines. Till was typically deposited in a uniform manner as the glacier receded, while moraines were created when the glacier essentially “dumped” its debris in one particular location. The slopes and drainage of the area have, therefore, been determined by where and how much glacial debris was deposited in particular areas.

Topography can create limitations for development if the slopes are too extreme. The topography in the Township rarely exceeds twenty-percent slope and, therefore, does not create severe development limitations. Potential development limitations may exist in the Township flood plains, as these soils can experience constant or seasonal wetness and steeper slopes. The Rabbit River, having a large drainage area throughout much of northeastern Allegan County, has created some of these topographical attributes.



MAP 1. SOILS

## LEGEND

-  Sandy
-  Loamy
-  Complex
-  Muck
-  Aquents and Histosols
-  Water
-  Other

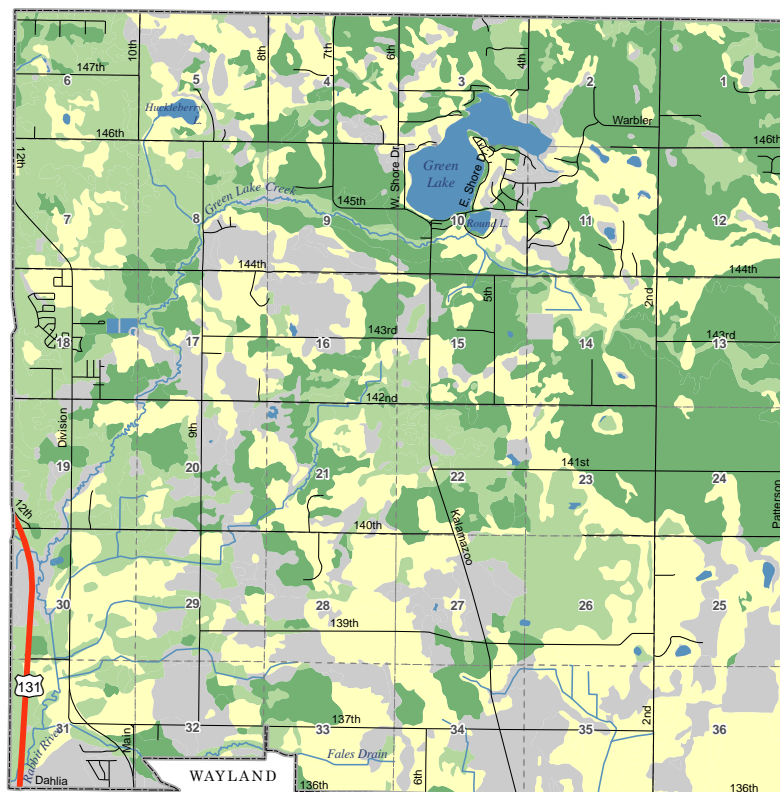
**SOIL.** Like many communities in West Michigan, Leighton Township's dominant soil types are loam and loamy sand soils. However, soil types in the Township range from very fine sand to silts and clay loams (Map 1). The south-eastern quadrant of the Township has a large area of Oshtemo-Chelsea soils. They are well-drained soils that are generally well-suited for development and are formed in sandy and loamy material. It is usually associated with land that is nearly level to gently rolling, on moraines, outwash plains, terraces, and valley trains. The south-western quadrant of the Township has the greatest amount of loamy sand and sandy loam soils, which have relatively good drainage.

Soil types can also provide insight into the productivity of farmland. The Natural Resource Conservation Service Soil Survey of Leighton Township contains predictions of soil behavior for selected land uses and highlights certain restraints in the soil. When determining whether or not land is prime farmland, consideration must be given to soil composition, slope, saturation, and nutrient levels to determine the soil status. Using the soils map and the soil characteristics from the soil survey, farmland classifications can be mapped in Leighton Township.







Map 2 shows farmland classifications based on soil types in the Township. The north-eastern corner of the Township has the greatest area with prime farmland, while much of the north-western corner has prime farmland if it is drained. The southern half of the Township has much of the farmland that is of local importance or areas that is not prime farmland. Current parcels in the Agricultural district generally align with prime farmland, prime farmland if drained, and farmland of local importance areas.

The types of farmland provide insight on important preservation areas. Prime farmland and prime farmland if drained usually have slight to severe septic system limitations. This is more justification for their preservation since land with septic and drainage issues should not be developed. Unique farmlands are lands that are well suited for specialty crops, adding to the diversity of Leighton's cropland. Knowing generally where prime and unique farmlands exist can give an impression of which areas to target for preservation.



MAP 2. FARMING CLASSIFICATIONS

#### LEGEND

-  All areas are prime farmland
-  Prime farmland if drained
-  Farmland of local importance
-  Not prime farmland



**WOODLANDS.** While much of the land of the Township was cleared for farming and development, remnants of original forest and significant second growth forest areas are still evident. About 20% of the Township's land cover is undeveloped forestland. Most of this is deciduous forest or wooded wetland, although there are numerous tracts of maturing evergreens originally planted for the purposes of soil conservation.

## Lakes, Watersheds, Wetlands, & Drainage

**GREEN LAKE.** The increased activity on Green Lake has caused concerns among lakeside residents regarding the lake's noise, crowding, and safety. Additional growth along the shoreline and elsewhere in its watershed has also increased concerns regarding water quality. These include the introduction of invasive species (e.g., zebra mussels), motorized watercraft fuel spills, fertilizer runoff, erosion, increased sediments, and wastewater discharge. Presently, the greatest risk is fertilizer runoff, as very few point sources exist.

Some concern about the quality of Green Lake has developed from early signs of eutrophication. This is an aging process from increased levels of dissolved nutrients in surface water, which foster excessive weed and algae growth. These nutrients, such as phosphorous, can be introduced through artificial fertilizers that are carried by irrigation and storm runoff into the lake. This can degrade the quality of invertebrates and fish species in the lake and can result in anaerobic conditions that foul the air and result in massive kills of aquatic animals, or "fish kills."



On the east side of the lake there is a small public boat launch and beach. The DNR office reports that weekends and holidays are the boat launch's busiest times. The parking lot can accommodate 18 motor vehicles, and parking spaces turn over 3 times per day on average, which equates to 54 automobiles on a busy summer weekend day. According to a Michigan State University study, the average day user has 4.7 persons in a motor vehicle, equating to 254 visitors who use the lake on a busy summer day. Residents around Green Lake have expressed a desire to limit boating activity since excessive boating can degrade the lake for recreational purposes and threaten water quality.

### LAKESIDE LIVING

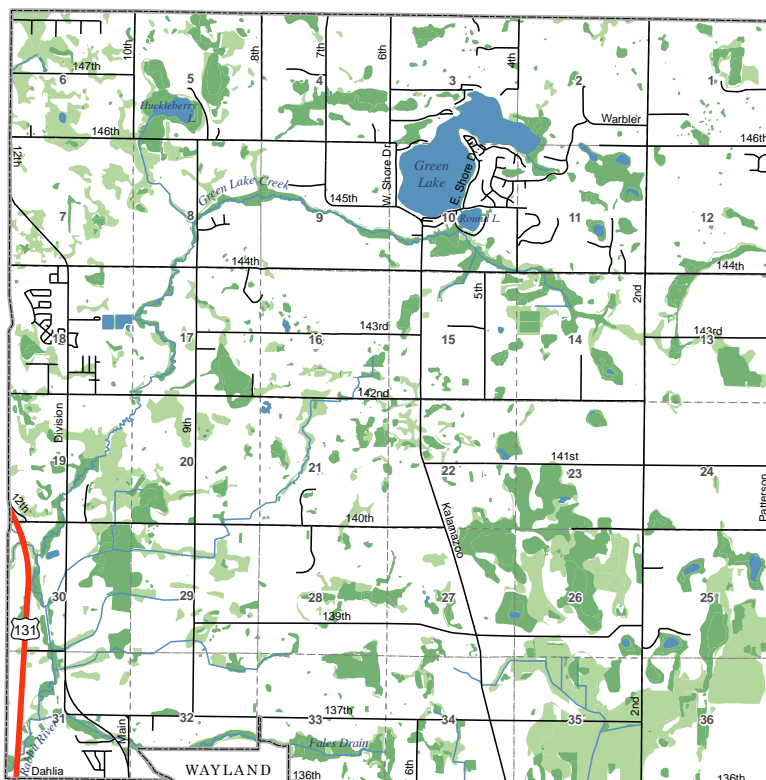
Another aspect of lake usage is the percentage of lakeside residents who live on the lake year-round.

As Leighton Township becomes suburbanized, it is likely that more seasonal dwellings will be converted into year-round dwellings, especially as land values increase and access to the area improves.

**WATERSHEDS.** The Kalamazoo River Watershed is the primary watershed in Leighton Township. It is fed by several sub-watersheds, including the Rabbit River Watershed. Other watersheds in the Township include the Thornapple River Watershed in the very northeast corner of the Township and the Grand River Watershed, which drains a tiny part of the Township just north of Huckleberry Lake.

Watersheds are a reminder that natural processes do not follow political boundaries, and planning for healthy environments can transcend the abilities of individual jurisdictions. Watershed projects in the area include the Rabbit River Watershed Planning Project in the northern portion of Allegan County. This project, in association with the Allegan Conservation District, will provide landowners, farmers, and residents an opportunity to establish goals for local water quality. The project will include the identification and establishment of critical watershed areas, propose best management practices, and produce a Watershed Management Plan covering the 187,200-acre watershed.

Water quality within a watershed is directly related to the land management practices within that watershed. For example, if a new development creates a large amount of impervious surface (i.e., asphalt) and stormwater is not properly managed, it is possible that the rate and volume of flow into the creek, stream, or river will increase to a point that stream bank erosion occurs. Stream bank erosion will increase silt material on the streambed, change the chemistry of the water with phosphates, nitrogen, and other chemicals, and alter the turbidity of the water. All of these changes may have an effect on the wildlife that is dependent on the stream or river for survival. Map 3 illustrates the rivers, streams, lakes, and wetlands in the Township.



**MAP 3. NATURAL FEATURES**

#### LEGEND

-  Wetlands
-  Potential Wetland Restoration
-  Streams
-  Lakes





**WETLANDS.** Wetlands are complex ecological systems that provide a number of important benefits. They reduce flood hazards by increasing water storage capacity, improve groundwater quality by filtering water, and protect surface water quality by filtering surface run-off. They are also highly productive ecosystems, which provide an essential habitat to much of Michigan's fish and wildlife.

According to the National Wetlands Inventory (NWI), much of the area around the Green Lake Creek is characterized as wetlands. There are also groups of wetlands located in the central part of both southern quadrants of the Township. Additionally, the NWI locates regions for potential wetland restoration. In Leighton, this includes a considerable portion of land in the southeast corner of the Township (Map 3).

## Open Space

Leighton Township has a considerable amount of undeveloped and unprotected privately held open space. In addition, there is a trend toward a patchwork of privately held open space as increasing numbers of developers incorporate protected common areas as elements of subdivision design. Nonetheless, there are no formal trail links between these areas.

Allegan County is planning to construct a trail that would run parallel to US-131 on an abandoned rail corridor. Such an amenity would involve the cooperation of Dorr Township, the City of Wayland, Wayland Township, and Leighton Township, and result in an attractive amenity for the entire region.



# Planning Implications

1. The Township should appreciate key unique features, such as Green Lake, as well as community identifiers, such as Moline, and develop methods through which to protect and enhance the usage of these critical areas. Preserving the water quality of Green Lake and the Township's other natural features will be a priority to protect property values and the amenity value of these important features.
2. The eutrophication of Green Lake should be evaluated and considered in the context of a growing community. The Township could attempt to address this problem by implementing a set of lake overlay provisions that limit the use of fertilizers or strongly encourage voluntary efforts by residents, possibly through a partnership with the Lake Association, to better manage fertilizer runoff. This could involve increasing natural vegetation in lakefront areas to promote the natural filtration of runoff and reducing impervious surfaces. These practices may retard the rate of runoff into the lake and also reduce erosion.
3. Due to the demand for water-based recreation on Green Lake and a desire of lakeside residents to limit lake activity, the Township must balance the demands of both interest groups. In order to achieve this balance, the Township should consider sites for public access, tenure, and the lake's carrying capacity. If it is shown that current boating and recreational activity may be damaging to the lake, the Township may be justified in establishing policies that restrict access.
4. It is important to balance the preservation of farmland and the rural character of the community while respecting private property rights and intentions to bring cultural, recreational, and social opportunities into the area. Such options as the transfer of development rights (TDR), and other farmland preservation techniques may be considered as methods through which to preserve farmland. The Township is in a good position to consider this now, since large-scale growth, such as shopping malls and apartment complexes, has not yet occurred in the community.

# Chapter 3: Population

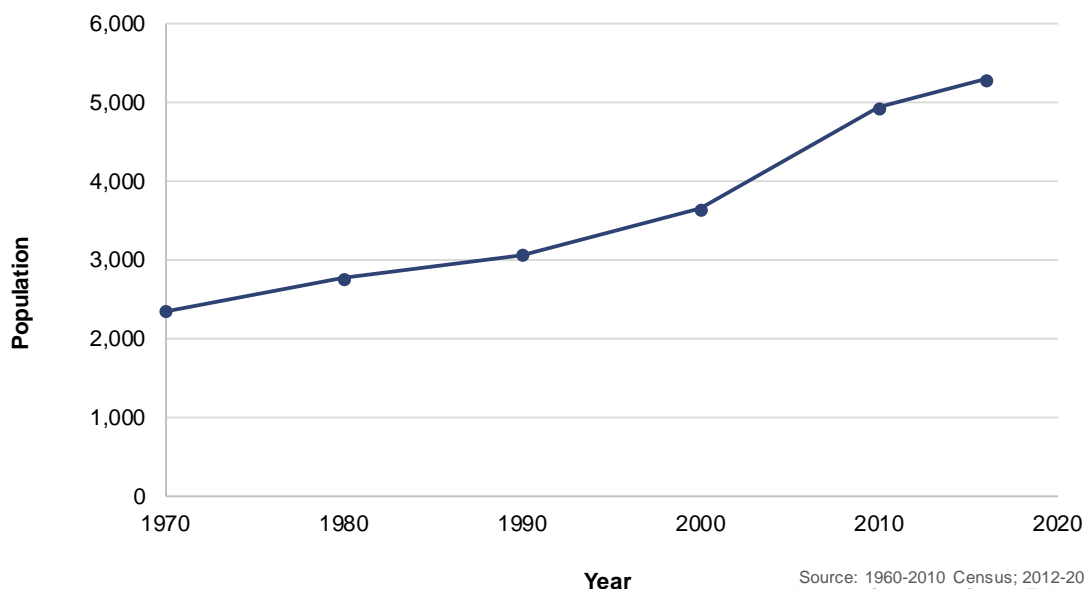
Population and demographic change are some of the most important measures to express growth and its likely impact on land uses in a community. This chapter of the Comprehensive Plan is intended to describe the characteristics of the Township's population and demographic trends. The data presented here will serve as an informational foundation for making conclusions about the Township's present and likely future.

## Population Growth Trends

The Township has primarily existed as a rural farming community, experiencing consistent growth since the 1970s. According to the American Community Survey, the Township's population was 5,295 in 2016. Strong growth occurred from 1990 to 2000 (+19.0%) and 2000 to 2010 (+35.1%). Leighton Township's percent growth from 2000 to 2010 was greater than neighboring Wayland Township (2.5%), Dorr Township (13.1%), Thornapple Township

(17.9%), and Gaines Township (25.0%). Leighton Township also experienced a significantly greater population increase when compared to Allegan County (5.4%) and the state of Michigan (-0.6%). Although population growth was lower for all municipalities between 2010 and 2016, Leighton Township still had the greatest percent increase compared to surrounding communities.

FIGURE 1. HISTORIC POPULATION TRENDS



The population percent increase from 2010 to 2016 was 7.3%, the smallest increase in Leighton Township since 1970. This was likely influenced by The Great Recession (2007-2013), during which time there was an economic decline in world markets and new development was significantly reduced. However, this is still a comparatively high number compared to surrounding communities, Allegan County (2.0%), and the state of Michigan (0.3%). This suggests that despite the economic decline, the Township was able to maintain a relatively healthy and stable economy.

In recent years, Leighton Township and every surrounding community have continued to see population growth. Similar to Leighton Township, strong growth between 2000 and 2010 was also experienced by Door Township, Thornapple Township, and Gaines Township. Most of the growth in these municipalities can be attributed to the overall pattern of out-migration from urban to suburban and rural areas around Metropolitan Grand Rapids, and a strong West Michigan economy.

TABLE 1. POPULATION COMPARISON

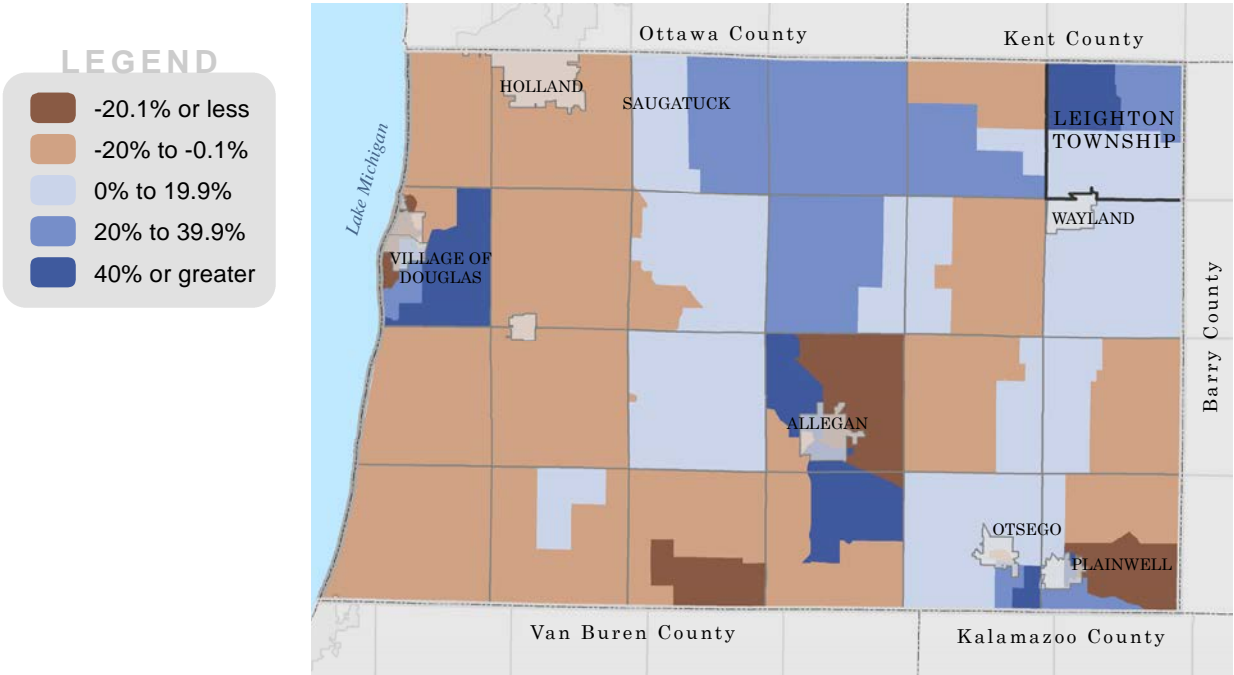
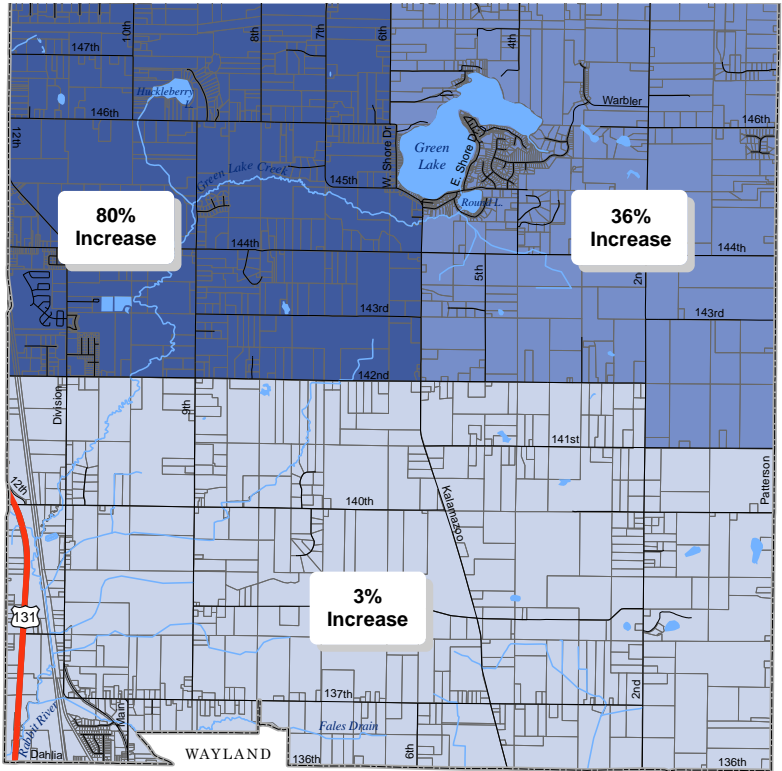
| Community           | Population |        |        | % Change  |           |
|---------------------|------------|--------|--------|-----------|-----------|
|                     | 2000       | 2010   | 2016   | 2000-2010 | 2010-2016 |
| Leighton Township   | 3,652      | 4,934  | 5,295  | 35.1%     | 7.3%      |
| Wayland Township    | 3,013      | 3,088  | 3,180  | 2.5%      | 3.0%      |
| Dorr Township       | 6,579      | 7,439  | 7,617  | 13.1%     | 2.4%      |
| Thornapple Township | 6,685      | 7,884  | 7,914  | 17.9%     | 0.4%      |
| Gaines Township     | 20,112     | 25,146 | 26,122 | 25.0%     | 3.9%      |
| City of Wayland     | 3,939      | 4,079  | 4,134  | 3.6%      | 1.3%      |

Source: 2000 & 2010 Census; 2012-2016 American Community Survey Estimates

Within Leighton Township, there was growth in all census block areas of the Township between 2000 and 2016, with the northern half of the Township experiencing very positive growth. The greatest percent change between 2000 and 2016 occurred in the northwest corner, with a 79.8% increase (Map 4). The smallest percent change occurred in the southern half of the Township, with a 3.2% increase over the 16 years. Compared to Allegan County, Leighton Township had positive increases in growth overall (Map 5).



MAP 4. PERCENT  
POPULATION CHANGE IN  
LEIGHTON TOWNSHIP



MAP 5. PERCENT POPULATION CHANGE IN ALLEGAN COUNTY

# Population Projections

Statistical averaging techniques were used to project the Township's population growth to the year 2040. These projections have implications regarding future land use requirements, the demand for various public services and capital improvements, and helping set realistic expectations for growth in a community. However, these approaches are meant to provide a very general sense of growth and are limited, particularly in communities that have rapid rates of growth or decline, which may run counter to past statistical trends.

**TABLE 2. CONSTANT PROPORTION METHOD**

|                   | 2010    | 2020    | 2030    | 2040    |
|-------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Allegan County    | 111,408 | 119,788 | 132,040 | 142,005 |
| Leighton Township | 4,934   | 5,305   | 5,848   | 6,289   |

Source: 2010 Census; Michigan Bureau of Labor Market Information and Strategic Initiatives

**CONSTANT PROPORTION (RATIO) METHOD.** This method assumes that Leighton Township will continue to represent the same percentage of Allegan County's projected population in the years 2020, 2030, and 2040 that it represents today. In 2010, Leighton Township comprised 4.43% of Allegan County's total population. Using the population projections for Allegan County prepared by the Michigan Bureau of Labor Market Information and Strategic Initiatives, Table 2 illustrates the results of the constant proportion method for Leighton Township.

**TABLE 3. GROWTH RATE METHOD**

| Average Annual Growth Rate (1980-2016) | 2010  | 2020  | 2030  | 2040  |
|--|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| 0.50%                                  | 4,934 | 5,186 | 5,452 | 5,730 |

Source: 1980-2010 Census; 2012-2016 American Community Survey Estimates

## GROWTH RATE (GEOMETRIC) METHOD.

This method projects future population growth or decline based on the past rate of growth in the Township. The growth rate method assumes that growth in the future will occur at the same average rate as has occurred annually since 1980. As indicated previously, the Township's population has grown every year, although the rate of increase has been relatively stable and predictable.

**ARITHMETIC METHOD.** This method is similar to the growth rate method in that population projections are based on growth that occurred in preceding decades. This method, however, bases population growth on the overall average increase in the number of persons per year, rather than on growth rates. The following projections are based on the average annual increase of 70 persons between 1980 and 2016 in the Township.

**TABLE 4. ARITHMETIC METHOD**

| <b>Average Annual Increase (1980-2016)</b> | <b>2010</b> | <b>2020</b> | <b>2030</b> | <b>2040</b> |
|--|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| +70 people                                 | 4,934       | 5,634       | 6,334       | 7,034       |

Source: 1980-2010 Census; 2012-2016 American Community Survey Estimates

Table 5 summarizes the preceding information. By averaging the results of these methods, it is reasonable to predict that the population will grow to approximately 5,375 persons by the year 2020; 5,878 by the year 2030; and 6,351 by the year 2040.

**TABLE 5. POPULATION PROJECTION AVERAGES**

| <b>Method</b>       | <b>2010</b>  | <b>2020</b>  | <b>2030</b>  | <b>2040</b>  |
|---------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Constant Proportion | 4,934        | 5,305        | 5,848        | 6,289        |
| Growth Rate         | 4,934        | 5,186        | 5,452        | 5,730        |
| Arithmetic          | 4,934        | 5,634        | 6,334        | 7,034        |
| <b>Average</b>      | <b>4,934</b> | <b>5,375</b> | <b>5,878</b> | <b>6,351</b> |

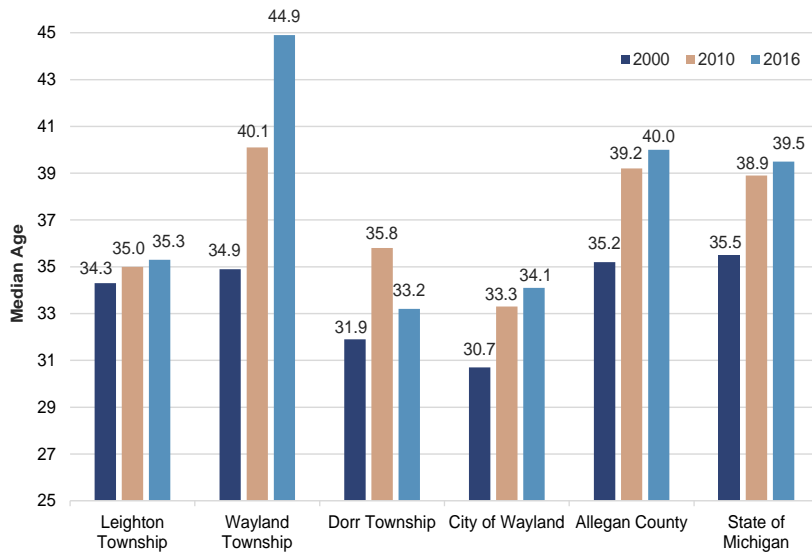
It is reasonable to assume that Leighton Township will continue growing. The ample land available for subdivisions, natural beauty, and close proximity to choice employment centers acts as a pull that leads to residential growth. However, projections summarized above assume that past trends will continue into the future, and are limited by such a supposition.

Since 2000, the Township has approved several large developments. The Green Lake Ridge Planned Unit Development was approved for 200 lots. Harvest Meadows is presently being improved, and when completed, will have 73 lots. Hunter's Glen, a manufactured housing community, will offer 400 sites when completed. Green Lake Cove will offer 32 lots and Horse Shoe Estates will offer 31 lots. These communities have the potential to develop into over 730 households. The average household size in the Township in 2016 was 2.98 persons. This equates to as many as 2,175 new residents, based on new developments that have been recently approved.

Byron and Gaines Townships have also experienced significant growth in the past which will likely move into Leighton Township. Therefore, the population estimates may not provide realistic estimations based on changing economic and geographic factors.

# Age Characteristics

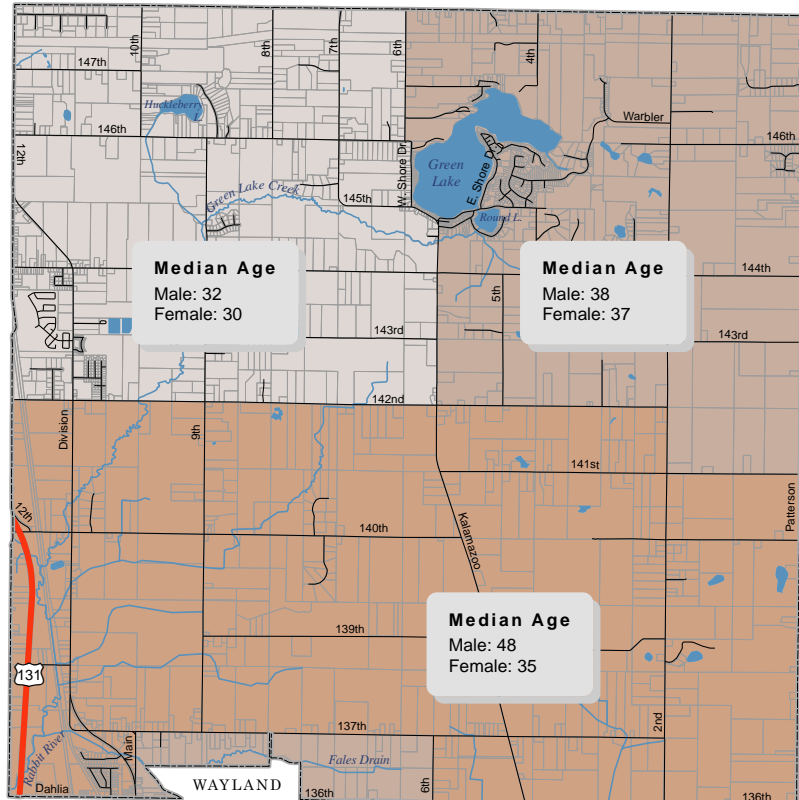
FIGURE 3. MEDIAN AGE COMPARISON



Source: 2000 & U 2010 Census; 2012-2016 American Community Survey Estimates

In 2016, the American Community Survey estimated that the median age of Leighton Township residents was 35.3 years, slightly younger than the County (40.0 years), state of Michigan (39.5 years), and the U.S. (37.7 years). Although Leighton Township has a relatively young median age, the populations of the Township and Allegan County are aging overall. This resembles national and statewide trends.

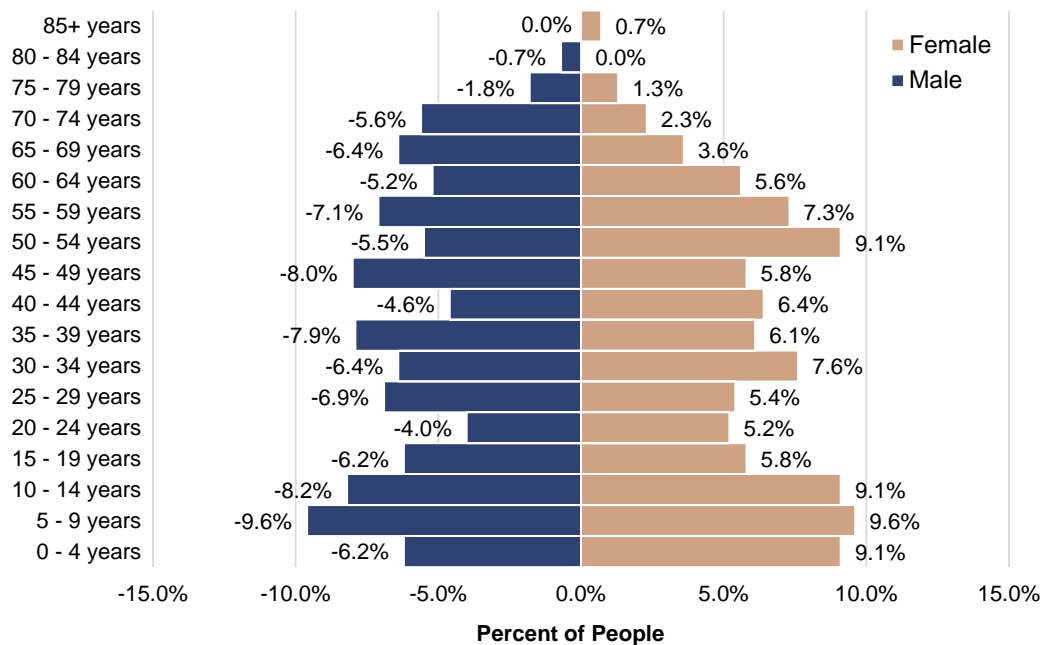
Within the Township, residents with the youngest median age are geographically located in the northern half of the Township, while those with the oldest median age reside in the southern half of the Township (Map 6). By living in the northern half of the Township, the younger population is closer to Green Lake and larger cities such as Grand Rapids in Kent County.



MAP 6. MEDIAN AGE IN CENSUS BLOCKS

A population pyramid provides a visualization of the distribution of ages by gender. The largest cohorts for Leighton Township are from 30 to 59 years and less than 14 years. About 40.8% of the Township's population falls in the 30 to 59-year age group and about 25.8% is under 14 years old. This suggests that there are many families with children who live in the Township. There is also a notable decrease in the 20 to 24-year age cohort, suggesting that many young adults leave the Township for college or work opportunities. About 11.1% of the population is over 65 years, indicating retirees and seniors. Overall, the Township accommodates a variety of age groups that will desire different living and recreational opportunities.

**FIGURE 4. POPULATION PYRAMID**



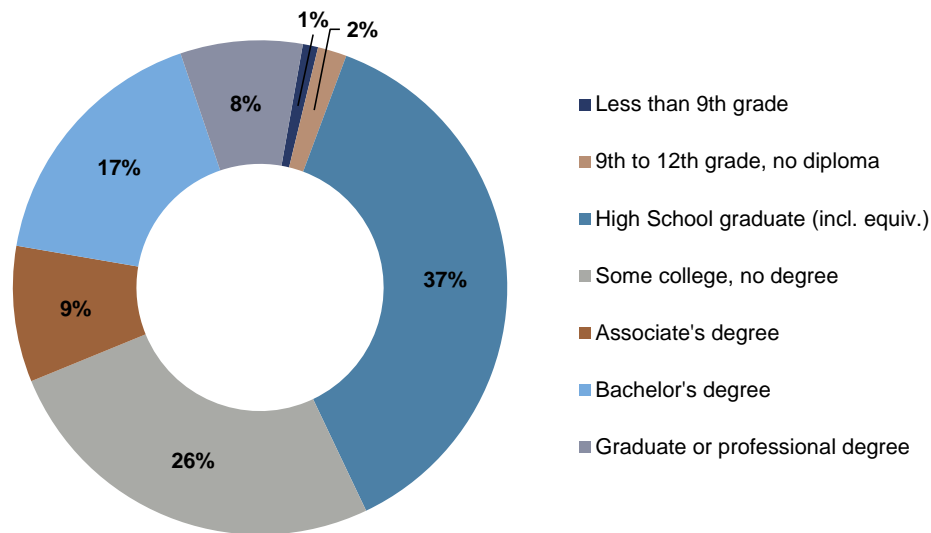
Source: 2012-2016 American Community Survey Estimates

## Education

The 2016 American Community Survey indicates that approximately 97.1% of the Township's population over 25 years of age has attained a high school education or higher, which is higher than Allegan County (90.1%) and the state of Michigan (89.9%). About 25.1% of the population in Leighton Township has a bachelor's degree or higher, which is also higher than Allegan County (21.4%), but lower than Michigan (27.4%).

Therefore, a greater percentage of the population in Leighton Township has attained at least a high school education when compared with the State, but a slightly greater percentage of the State's population has attained advanced degrees at the college or graduate level.

FIGURE 5. EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT IN LEIGHTON TOWNSHIP

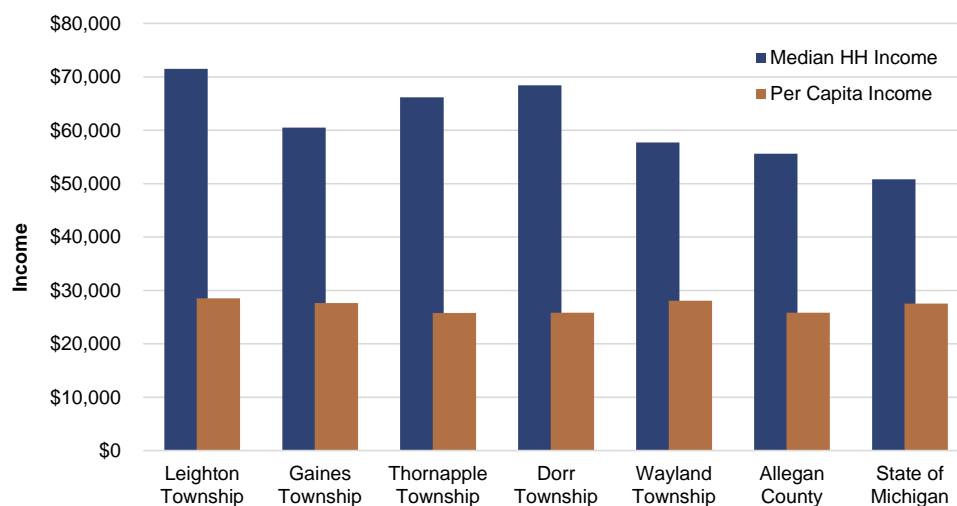


Source: 2012-2016 American Community Survey Estimates

## Income

Median household income is traditionally used to measure the economic strength of an area. Comparatively, it is a helpful indicator to identify disparities among jurisdictions. Income can also have land use implications, since people with high incomes usually invest more in their houses, and therefore typically expect more from local government. In 2016, the median household income in Leighton Township was \$71,497, compared to \$55,630 in the County and \$50,803 in Michigan. In 2010, Dorr Township had a higher median household income than Leighton Township and neighboring Townships; however, in 2016, Leighton Township held the highest median income after a 28.8% increase between 2010 and 2016. In 2016, Leighton Township also held the highest per capita income of \$28,508 compared to surrounding communities, the County (\$25,840), and Michigan (\$27,549).

FIGURE 6. MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD AND PER CAPITA INCOME COMPARISON



Source: 2012-2016 American Community Survey Estimates

# Planning Implications

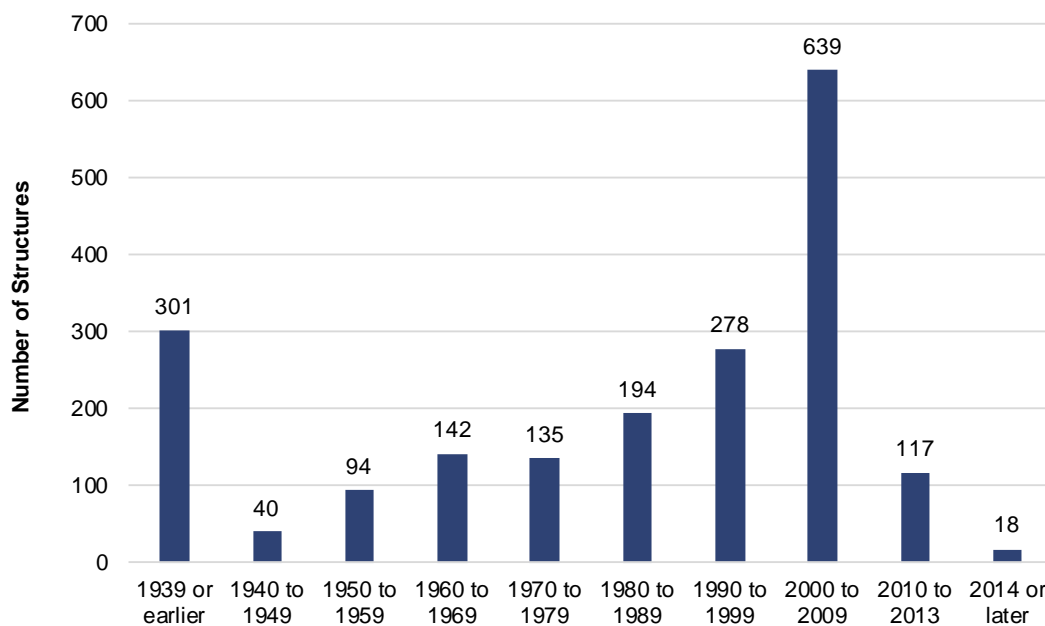
1. The historic growth of the Township's population indicates that there will be continued growth in the future. Although this rate may slow down compared to historic rates, the growing population will require more goods, services, and facilities. This may include recreation, roads, police and fire protection, and health services. The Township should be proactive in guiding development toward the most suitable locations.
2. The increasing median age of Leighton Township's residents should be considered when determining new community accommodations. A community with a higher median age may require senior housing, health care facilities, and passive recreational facilities to accommodate an older population. Additionally, the incorporation of universal design principles in walkways and trails will provide more opportunities for older residents to utilize recreational facilities.
3. Despite the trend of increasing median age, the Township's largest age cohorts are from 30 to 59 years and less than 14 years. This indicates that there are many families in the community. Therefore, different recreational opportunities and family-friendly activities will be needed to accommodate this age group, such as community centers, hiking and biking trails, and sports fields.
4. Leighton Township has a higher median household income and per capita income compared to surrounding townships, the County, and the State. This suggests that the township is more affluent than the surrounding areas; however, the Township's population has a lower percentage of people with advanced degrees, which is usually associated with lower incomes. This combination could be representative of an affluent senior or retired community comprised of people who did not go to college when they were younger. This combination of higher incomes and fewer advanced degrees may require the Township to be flexible and provide varying types of recreation and accommodations to suit different population needs.



# Chapter 4: Housing & Economic Development

As is the case with most bedroom communities, the primary dwelling type in Leighton Township is single-family homes. A sizeable percentage (87%) of the dwelling units are owner-occupied homes. This provides a healthy housing base and establishes stability. Out of 1,958 total structures built, 29.5% were constructed before 1970 and 70.5% were built after 1970. Most plurality of homes were either built before 1939 (15.4%) or from 2000 to 2009 (32.6%). This results in a housing stock of both old and new homes.

FIGURE 7. YEAR STRUCTURE BUILT

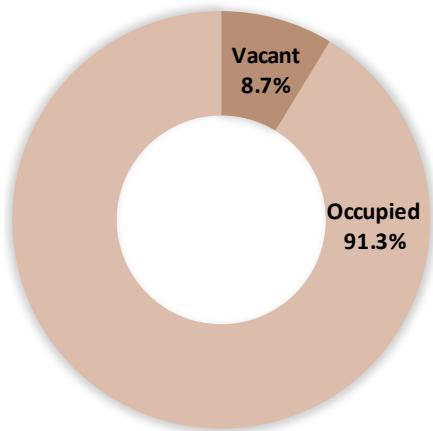


Source: 2012-2016 American Community Survey Estimates

The ratio of renter-occupied housing to owner-occupied housing can also provide an indication of community health. Generally, urbanizing communities strive to achieve a 2:1 or 3:1 ratio of owner-occupied to rental housing within the market. The Township's ratio of slightly less than 7:1 is more reflective of a rural, low-density community with fewer rental opportunities.

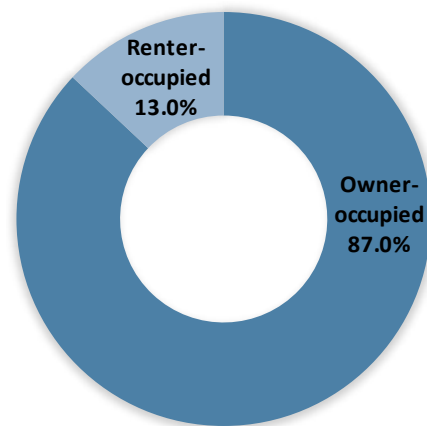
Of the 1,958 housing units in the Township, the American Community Survey estimated that 171 (8.7%) were vacant in 2016. When housing vacancy rates exceed 5%, there may be neighborhood stability issues; if vacancy rates exceed 10%, the community is probably experiencing blight. However, the relatively high number of seasonal homes in the Township and around Green Lake is a major factor in creating a high vacancy rate. In the 2010 Census, 89 vacant homes (54.9% of total vacancies) was a result of seasonal, recreation, or occasional use.

FIGURE 8. 2016 HOUSING OCCUPANCY



Source: 2012-2016 American Community Survey Estimates

FIGURE 9. 2016 HOUSING TENURE



Source: 2012-2016 American Community Survey Estimates

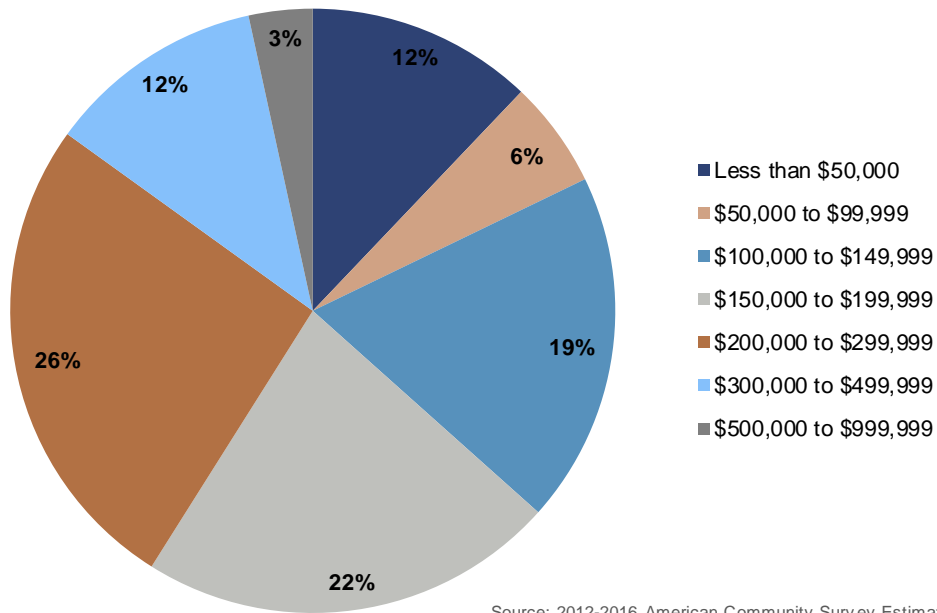
## Housing Value

As the Township has become more suburbanized, the median value of housing units has increased. In 2016, the median home value was \$174,600, which was a 3.89% increase from 2010. However, the greatest percent increase in median home value was from 2000 to 2010. During this time, the median home value increased by 48.0%, from \$113,400 in 2000 to \$167,800 in 2010.

The 2016 American Community Survey reported that the largest percentage of owner-occupied homes in the Township is valued between \$200,000 and \$299,999

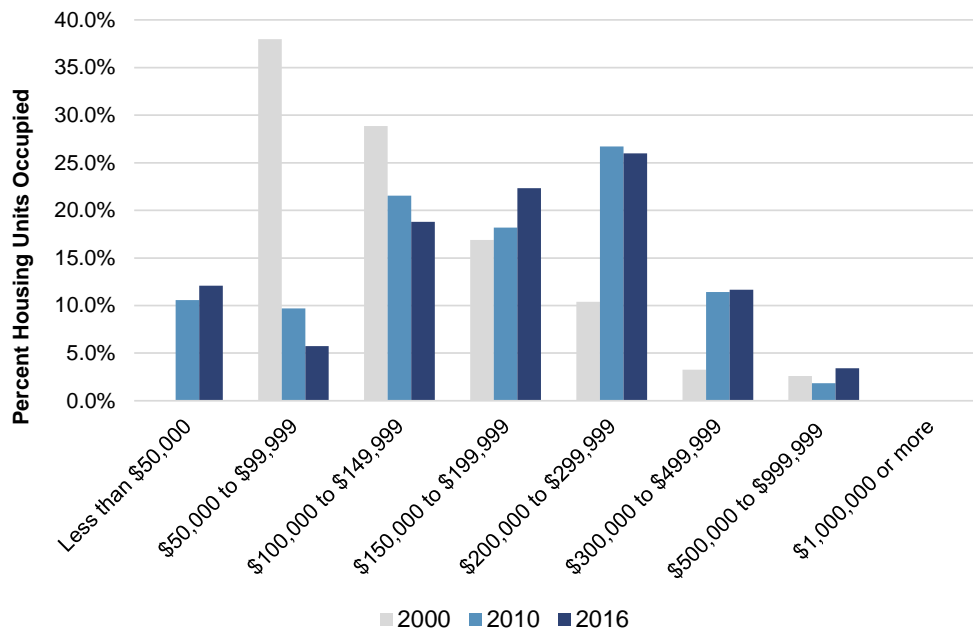
(26.0%). Between 2000 and 2016, there is a substantial increase in home value. In 2000, the largest percentage of homes were valued between \$50,000 and \$99,999 (38%). This value dropped by 32.3% so that homes valued \$50,000 to \$99,999 in 2016 only made up 5.7% of occupied units. This corresponds to the majority of homes being built from 2000 to 2009. These new homes likely had higher values and replaced the old lower-valued homes. This change between 2000 and 2009 suggests that housing in the area has become more valuable.

FIGURE 10. HOUSING VALUE OF OWNER OCCUPIED UNITS IN 2016



In 2016, there were 67.1% of homes valued between \$100,000 and \$299,999. Therefore, there is a substantial number of expensive homes in the community. However, it is worth noting that 12.1% of the homes in 2016 are valued less than \$50,000, while in 2000 there were no homes valued under \$50,000. The older homes have most likely depreciated in value since 2000, as newer more updated homes have been built.

FIGURE 11. HOUSING VALUE 2000 TO 2016



# Employment

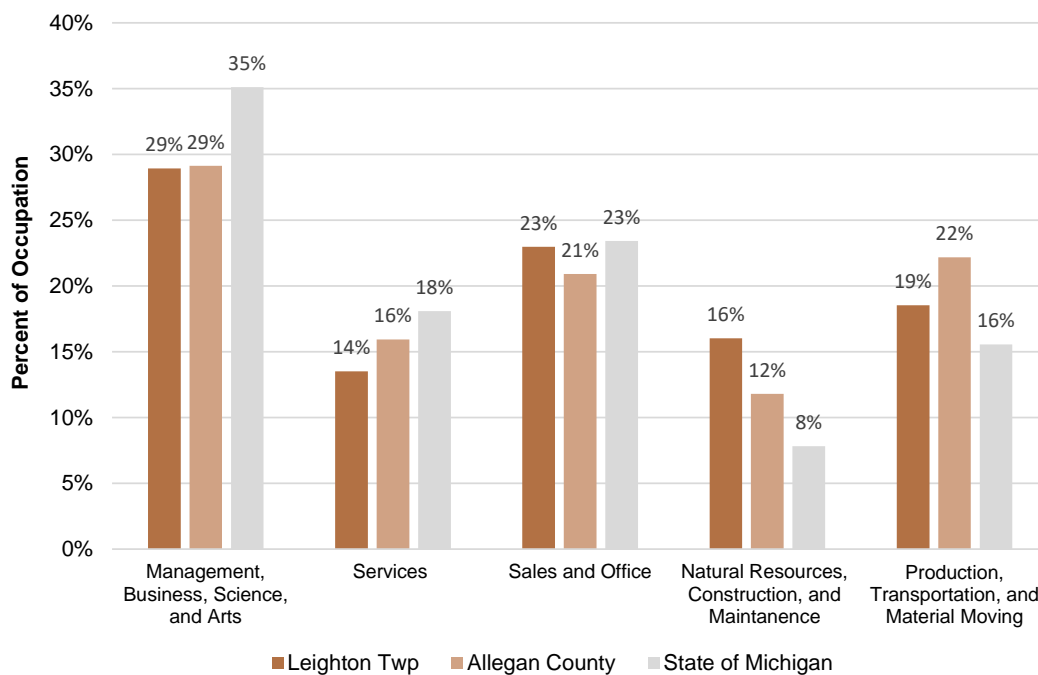
Leighton Township exceeds Allegan County and Michigan in the percentage of total people working in natural resource and construction jobs. This is the only occupation category in which Leighton Township surpasses both the County and State, with 16% of total workers in this category. Leighton Township is relatively similar to Allegan County with the percentage of employees in management/business and sales/office jobs. There are fewer workers in production/transportation and service jobs than the County.

Although Leighton Township is a rural community, there were only 21 farm-related occupations in the Township in 2016. This is a 50% decrease from 2000, where there were 42 farm-related occupations. In 2016, 5.3% of the natural resource/construction category consisted of farm related jobs. Compared to all the other occupations, this made up

only 0.85% of the total jobs. This decline is consistent with the trend of farms to be utilized for other purposes as populations continue to grow and suburbanize rural areas.

The Leighton Township industrial tax base is growing, and so is employment associated with these facilities. While non-residential development has increased due to two industrial parks in the Township, most residents still commute to Metropolitan Grand Rapids, Kalamazoo, or Hastings for work. According to the 2016 American Community Survey, 75% of workers traveled outside Allegan County to work, while only 24.4% worked within the county. The mean travel time to work was 23.9 minutes, which reflects the increased travel times for jobs held outside Allegan County. This commuting pattern can be expected for a rural community, especially since the Township is located adjacent to Barry and Kent County borders.

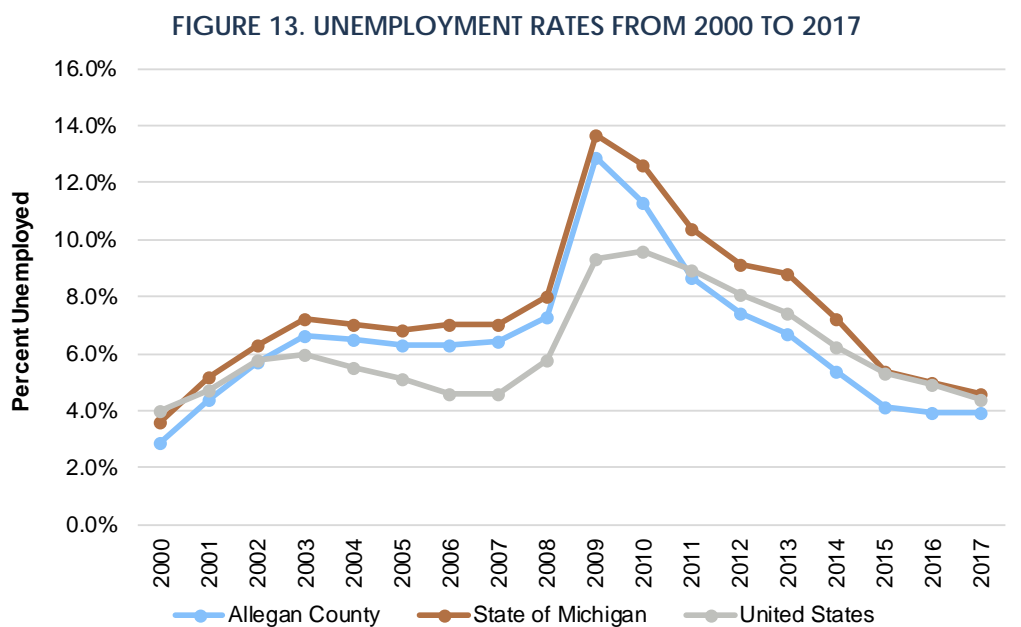
**FIGURE 12. OCCUPATION BY PERCENT IN 2016**



Source: 2012-2016 American Community Survey Estimates

## Unemployment

Unemployment rates have exhibited great variation between 2000 and 2016 in Leighton Township, the County, and the State. Leighton Township's unemployment rate of 2.2% in 2000 increased to 5.6% in 2016. This higher rate was likely a result of the Great Recession in the late 2000s, which significantly increased unemployment rates. Unemployment rates in the County, State, and United States all significantly increased during this time. In 2017, Allegan County's rate of 3.9% was lower than Michigan and the United States, almost recovering to its rate of 2.9% in 2000. Although Leighton Township's unemployment rate has improved since the Recession, it is still higher than the County's rate. This suggests that the Township has had a slower recovery from the Recession than the County.



## Equalized Value Growth

Property values provide a measure of economic growth and the financial strength of a community by reflecting new development. The total real property state equalized value (SEV) for Leighton Township in 2012 was \$197.5 million and by 2018 it increased by over 52% to reach \$300.5 million. Tables 6 and 7 compare the overall growth in SEV for Leighton and surrounding municipalities. Substantial increases in equalized values occurred for Leighton Township, Dorr Township, Hopkins Township, Wayland Township, and Allegan County from 2014 to 2018. However, Leighton's increase of 39.13% during this five-year period was the greatest.

**TABLE 6. CHANGE IN TOTAL REAL PROPERTY EQUALIZED VALUES (IN MILLIONS)**

| <b>Municipality</b> | <b>2012</b> | <b>2014</b> | <b>2017</b> | <b>2018</b> | <b>2017-<br/>2018 1<br/>YR %<br/>Change</b> | <b>2012-<br/>2014 3<br/>YR %<br/>Change</b> | <b>2014-<br/>2018 5<br/>YR %<br/>Change</b> |
|---------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|---|---|---|
| Leighton Township   | \$197.50    | \$216.01    | \$281.16    | \$300.53    | 6.89%                                       | 9.37%                                       | 39.13%                                      |
| Dorr Township       | \$224.85    | \$236.59    | \$229.46    | \$309.69    | 34.96%                                      | 5.22%                                       | 30.90%                                      |
| Hopkins Township    | \$94.61     | \$115.10    | \$127.65    | \$137.33    | 7.59%                                       | 21.66%                                      | 19.31%                                      |
| Wayland Township    | \$110.76    | \$123.58    | \$157.44    | \$158.19    | 0.48%                                       | 11.58%                                      | 28.00%                                      |
| Allegan County      | \$4,570.71  | \$4,820.94  | \$5,768.72  | \$6,005.91  | 4.11%                                       | 5.47%                                       | 24.58%                                      |

Source: 2018 Allegan County Equalization Report

**TABLE 7. COMPARISON OF 2018 REAL PROPERTY VALUATION**

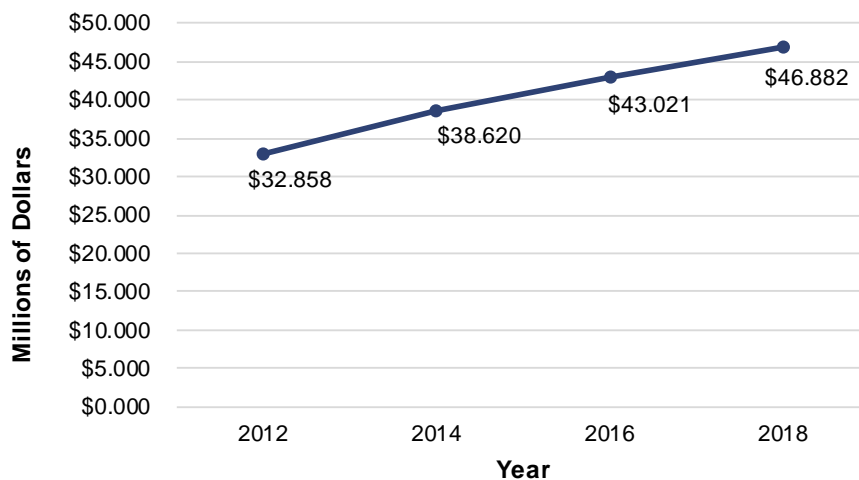
| <b>Municipality</b> | <b>Agricultural</b> |               | <b>Commercial</b> |               | <b>Industrial</b> |               | <b>Residential</b> |               |
|---------------------|---------------------|---------------|-------------------|---------------|-------------------|---------------|--------------------|---------------|
|                     | SEV<br>(millions)   | % of<br>Total | SEV<br>(millions) | % of<br>Total | SEV<br>(millions) | % of<br>Total | SEV<br>(millions)  | % of<br>Total |
| Leighton Township   | \$46.882            | 15.6%         | \$16.182          | 5.4%          | \$13.359          | 4.4%          | \$224.104          | 74.6%         |
| Dorr Township       | \$ 46.131           | 15.4%         | \$25.541          | 8.5%          | \$4.842           | 1.6%          | \$223.179          | 74.5%         |
| Hopkins Township    | \$67.449            | 50.0%         | \$6.524           | 4.8%          | \$0.996           | 0.7%          | \$60.039           | 44.5%         |
| Wayland Township    | \$24.345            | 15.4%         | \$9.832           | 6.2%          | \$0.946           | 0.6%          | \$122.556          | 77.7%         |

Source: 2018 Allegan County Equalization Report

The composition of the tax base for Leighton Township is roughly comparable to that of neighboring communities in Allegan County. The majority of its tax base is residential (74.7%). Leighton also has more industrial real property value than other communities, with 4.5% of the total real property value being comprised of industrial activity. Hopkins Township has a greater percentage of agricultural property value (15.4%) and a lower residential property value (44.5%). However, the communities are fairly similar overall.

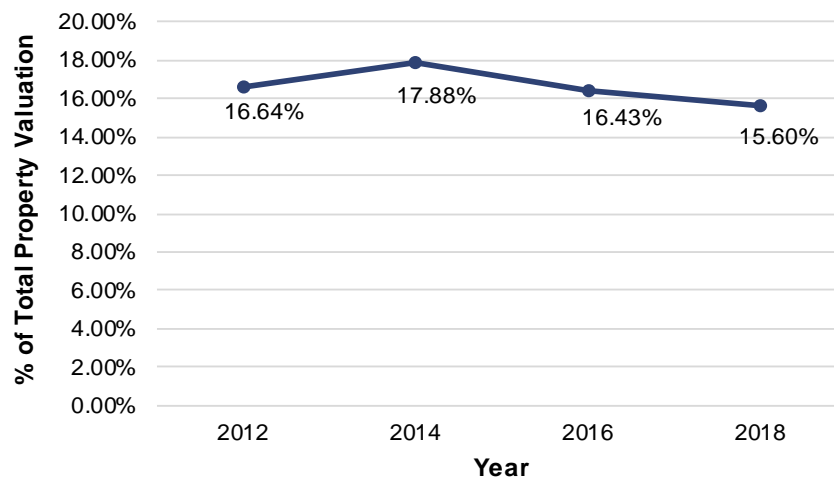
While the value of the Township's agricultural land continues to rise (Figure 14), the percentage it comprises of the total real property value is decreasing (Figure 15). The equalized value increases naturally due to the expected and incessant rise in property values. The percentage is decreasing because agricultural land is continually being subdivided and converted to other uses. Therefore, this supports the diminishing interest in farm-related work in the Township.

**FIGURE 14. AGRICULTURAL REAL PROPERTY VALUATION**



Source: 2012, 2014, 2016, & 2018 Allegan County Equalization Reports

**FIGURE 15. AGRICULTURAL REAL PROPERTY PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL VALUES**



Source: 2012, 2014, 2016, & 2018 Allegan County Equalization Report



# Planning Implications

1. There is a high percentage of vacancies (8.7%) in the Township, which is related to homes purchased for seasonal use. This suggests that the community is valued for its rural charm and heritage, as families and individuals may frequent second homes for privacy or to “get away” from metropolitan areas like Detroit, Chicago, or even Grand Rapids. However, as the area becomes more developed and the population continues to increase, homes around the Green Lake area have been converted from second homes to permanent dwellings. The variety of seasonal use homes and a growing suburb population provides a unique situation. The Township should consider how to balance this growth and the needs of both types of residents, such as more services and facilities that will accommodate different residents.
2. With the increase in home values and population, the Township will become more crowded. Often, people move to rural areas for the clean air, green open space, and a quiet environment, such as that in Leighton Township. In order to preserve these rural characteristics in Leighton Township, the Township should plan for increased development.
3. Agricultural real property values are increasing, but the percentage of agricultural land contributing to the Township's total real property value is decreasing. As this pattern continues in the future, Leighton Township's rural character may face challenges with respect to an increase in rezoning requests for denser developments and associated land use implications such as traffic congestion.
4. The relatively low number of rental housing units in the Township reflects a lack of diversity in opportunity. Without enough low cost and short-term units, younger residents and the elderly may be forced to leave the Township as their living situations change. There are a few developments such as Harvest Meadows condominiums and Hunter's Glen, a manufactured housing community, that do offer some opportunities for new families in the community. However, a lack of affordable and short-term rental dwellings may make living in the Township difficult for some young professionals and elderly citizens.

# Chapter 5: Land Use & Development Patterns

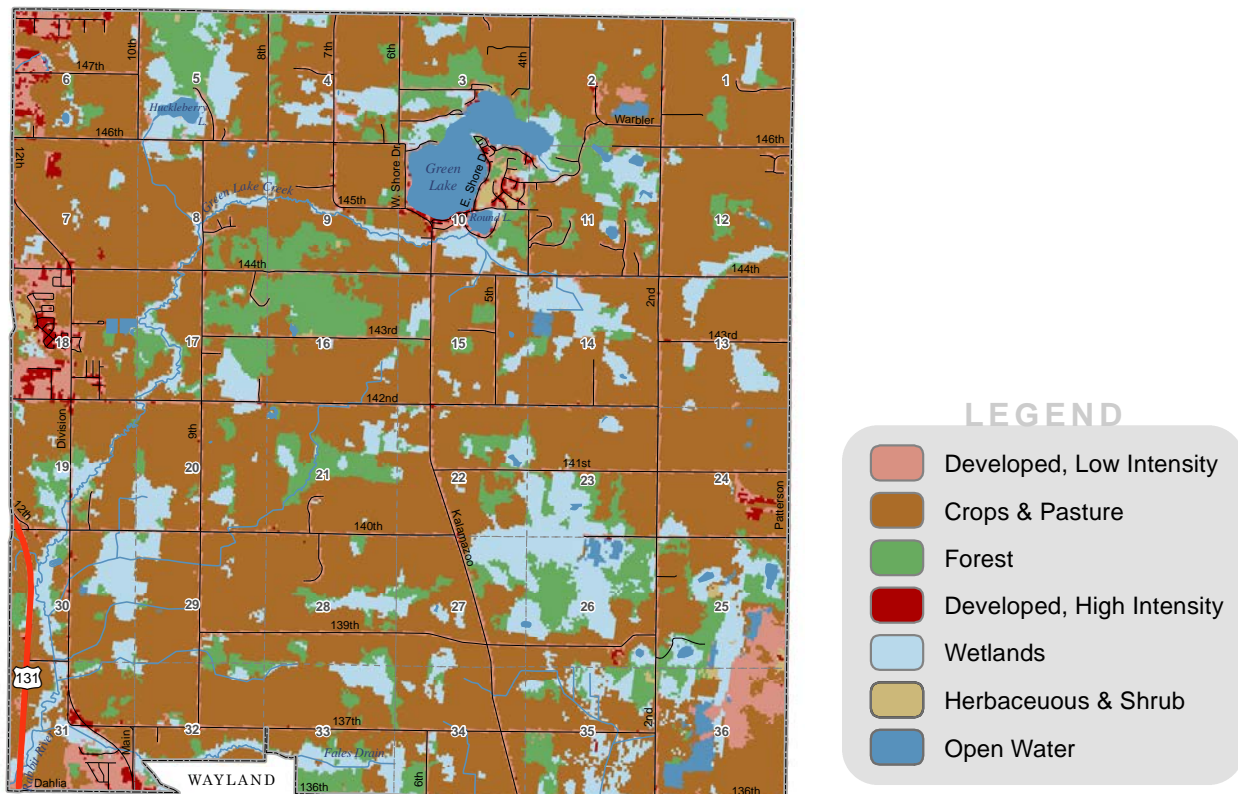
Leighton Township is slightly less than 36 square miles or 23,040 acres. The City of Wayland encompasses roughly 184 acres of former Township land. The Township is divided into 36 sections. Leighton has remained a rural bedroom community with farmland and woodlands scattered throughout the Township. There are some relatively concentrated residential uses in the Moline area, near Green Lake and Hidden Lake, and north of the City of Wayland. More intense land uses, such as commercial and industrial, are found along the western border of the Township, while the northwest corner of the Township has experienced the most industrial growth in recent years. The northern portion of the Township is experiencing the greatest pressure for housing development.



The land cover in the Township has been categorized into six groupings with the acreage percentage for each general category estimated in Table 8.

### TABLE 8. LAND COVER CATEGORIES

| Classification            | Percentage of Total Area |
|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| Developed, Low Intensity  | 8.1%                     |
| Developed, High Intensity | 1.2%                     |
| Crops & Pasture           | 62.6%                    |
| Forest                    | 11.6%                    |
| Wetlands                  | 13.7%                    |
| Herbaceous & Shrub        | 0.4%                     |
| Open Water                | 2.4%                     |
| <b>TOTAL</b>              | <b>100.0%</b>            |



## MAP 7. LAND COVER

# Land Use & Zoning

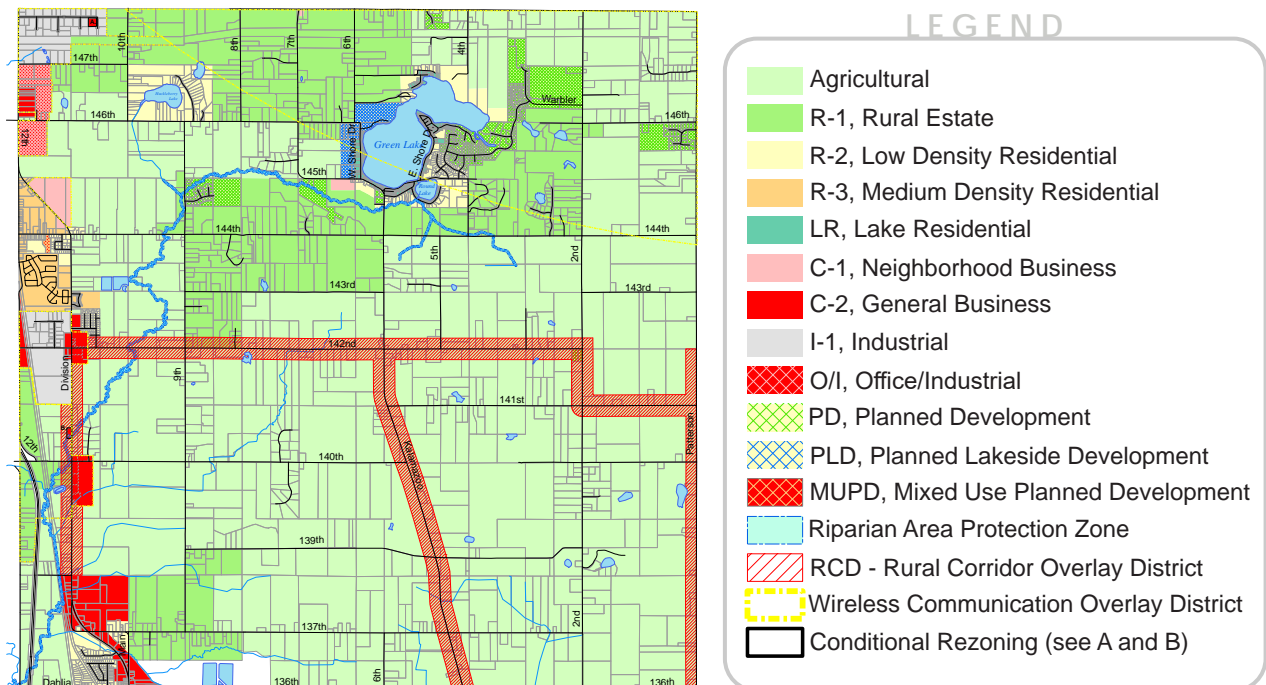
Most of the Township is zoned for agricultural uses. The other primary zoning district in Leighton Township is the Agriculture and Rural Estate district, which is found principally in the northern half of the Township, where pressure for farmland subdivision is strongest. The zoning classifications intended for more intense residential development are chiefly found around the Green Lake area and Moline area. Clustering in Sections 31 and 32 of the Township, north of the City of Wayland, are the Agricultural and Rural Estate district, Low Density Residential district, and General Business district. Along the western edge of the Township are the Medium Density Residential, Agricultural and Rural Estate, Low Density Residential, Neighborhood Business, General Business, and Industrial districts.

The Rural Estate and Agricultural districts dominate the map for Leighton. Minimum

lot sizes in these zones were changed from 3 acres and 1 acre, respectively, to 2 acres in January 2003. The Township realized that large minimum lot sizes are a key contributor to the loss of farmland, as large portions of former farms become unused yards for new homes.

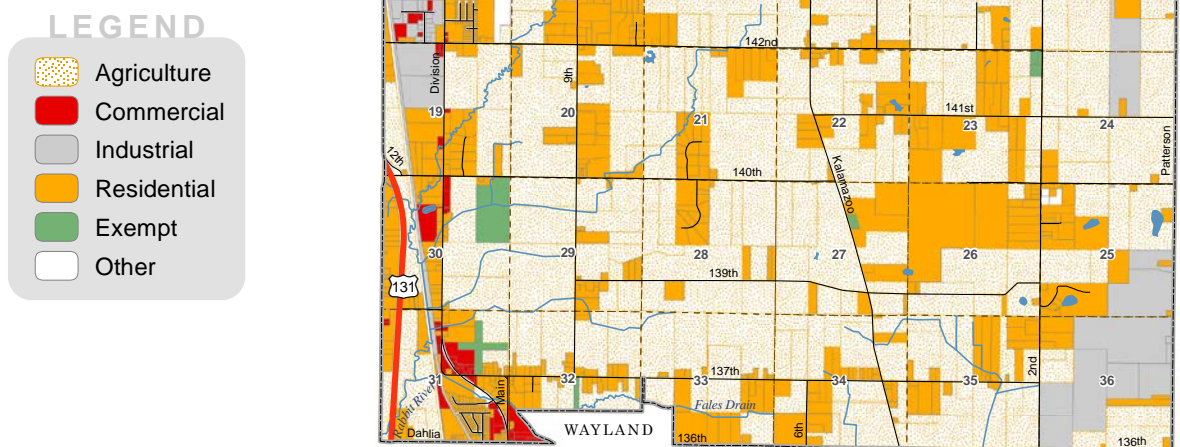
Very low-density residential development may appear to be "rural" by design, but this type of sprawling land use absorbs farmland quickly. The Township has recognized this and modified the zoning ordinance to allow provisions for higher density housing clusters in exchange for protected open space. The Township has also developed a sliding scale for determining residential densities. Under this approach, the number of building permits allowed on a property in the Agricultural district is based on land split rights, and therefore a developer cannot develop more units than permitted under legal divisions.

**MAP 8. EXISTING ZONING MAP, JANUARY 2020**





MAP 8. LAND USE, 2016



Similar to zoning, land use in the Township is dominated by agriculture and rural development patterns. A small neighborhood commercial area is found southwest of Green Lake. Lakeside residential development is compact and abutting the roadways, and as one travels away from the lake, residential development becomes less dense. Around Huckleberry Lake and north of the City of Wayland is medium and low-density residential development. Map 8 shows the Township's land use in 2016.

Township residents have indicated that the agriculture industry is not as rewarding as it once was. The combination of US-131 with the Southbelt (M-6) in northern Gaines Township provides opportunities for more extensive growth, which increases property values and

therefore increases the tax burden on farmers. If the property values increase extensively, farmers would have more of an incentive to sell land to developers, and the process repeats itself.

According to the 2018 Allegan County Equalization Report, approximately 15.6% of the Township's acreage is classified as agricultural. This value has greatly decreased since historical values. In 2003, agricultural property constituted 18.0% of the total value and in 1988 the agricultural property values contributed to 25.8% of the total property values. This disparity can be explained in part by a decline in the amount of land in production and by the assessing process that may classify some properties based on their development potential.

## Regional Perspective

Comparing the future land use maps of Leighton Township and surrounding municipalities provides insight into land use planning relationships beyond municipal borders. Dorr's Future Land Use Map (2007) indicates that the Township is planning for industrial development along the north-eastern border. Leighton's 2004 Future Land Use Map also expects industrial development in this area along its border of Dorr Township. The area south of 142nd Avenue in Dorr is planned for Mixed Use Planned Unit Development and Rural Estates, while Leighton has zoned for Multiple-Family Residential, Mixed Use/Town Center, and Industrial uses. Overall, these planned uses are generally compatible with each other.

Wayland Township's Future Land Use Map (2018) indicates a plan for Low Density Residential and Agriculture uses to primarily border Leighton Township. Leighton Township has planned for Agricultural zoning along this border. Therefore, Wayland's plan presents no conflicts with the current Leighton Comprehensive Plan.

Thornapple Township's Future Land Use Map (2012) has planned for agricultural, rural residential, and wetland land uses along their border with Leighton Township. Leighton Township's eastern sections are zoned Agricultural. Therefore, there should be no conflicts along this boundary.

According to Gaines Charter Township's Future Land Use Map (2008), the southwestern portion of the Township is mostly planned as a 100th Street Subarea that involves Business-Technology, Open Space Development, and Wetlands/Woodlands. One of Leighton's industrial parks is found at Division Avenue and 108th Street, which is compatible with the Business-Technology use planned in Gaines Township. To the east, Leighton is zoned for Rural Estate and Agricultural development, while Gaines is zoned for Rural. Therefore, the uses between the two Townships are compatible.





# Planning Implications

1. As the population increases in Leighton Township, there is more pressure to subdivide rural farmland. This is especially apparent in the north as people move just outside the greater Grand Rapids area. Since most of the Township is zoned for agricultural uses and farming jobs are decreasing, this land is the most vulnerable to experience land use changes. With careful planning, the Township can develop more diverse businesses, attractive neighborhoods, and a stronger tax base while still preserving high-quality farmland.
2. Over 66% of the Township land is characterized by crops or land with pasture and hay. The Township's history is founded in agriculture and it is still evidenced by the current landscape. Therefore, when planning for a growing population, the Township should still consider the rural characteristics of the area and incorporate them into planning measures. By placing higher density residential development in strategic areas around the Township (i.e., where dense residential development already exists and where utilities are available), farmland and open space can be preserved in the Township's agricultural areas. This helps to meet the housing needs of the region but still places a priority on preserving farmland. Such a task will require inter-governmental planning and/or utility expansion. Balancing the preservation of the Township's history and future growth will be essential to maintaining a quality rural living experience.
3. The general agreement between future land use plans in neighboring Townships represents more consistency than was present during the 2004 Comprehensive Plan. Updated future land use plans have considered land uses in neighboring areas and there are few concerns between uses across municipal boundaries. Continued awareness of surrounding land use plans and communication with neighboring municipalities will minimize future land use conflicts.

# Chapter 6: Community Facilities & Services

Community facilities, such as schools, parks, and libraries, play a significant role in preserving quality of life. This chapter addresses these facilities, as they exist at present.

## Schools, Parks, & Facilities

Three public school systems serve Leighton Township: Caledonia, Wayland Union, and Thornapple Kellogg. The three school districts serving Leighton Township had a combined enrollment of over 11,000 students in the 2017-2018 school year. Most of the Township is served by Wayland Union Schools, with the northeastern sections being served by Caledonia, and the eastern sections being served by Thornapple Kellogg. These districts collectively offer four high schools, four middle schools, and 12 elementary schools.

Paris Ridge Elementary is the only public school facility in the Township. In 2018, there were 419 total students enrolled. Enrollment has increased by about 50% since 2010, when enrollment was 279 students. While the rest of the public school facilities are outside the jurisdictional boundaries of the Township, three private schools may serve the Leighton community: Moline Christian, Saint Theresa, and South Christian. These facilities may also serve portions of the broader metropolitan area.

Although there are no opportunities for higher education in the rural Township, several colleges are within an hour's driving distance. Kalamazoo College, Kalamazoo Valley Community College, and Western Michigan University are located in Kalamazoo. Schools located in and near Grand Rapids include Grand Valley State University, Aquinas College, Calvin University, Cornerstone University, Grand Rapids Community College, and Davenport University.



Park facilities are extremely limited in Leighton Township. The State of Michigan maintains a small boat launch along the east side of Green Lake, but there are not any official parks in the Township. Township residents have expressed the need for more recreation opportunities, such as a community trail.

More recreational opportunities exist outside the Township. The City of Wayland presently serves the younger population with facilities such as Wayland City Park (20 acres), which provides a playground and benches for the public. Bysterveld Park (70 acres) near Moline is a natural area with two miles of nature trails, a picnic shelter, playground, catch

and release fishing pond, grass recreation area, and restroom facilities. The amenities are also ADA accessible. The Yankee Springs State Recreation Area, approximately 5 miles southeast of the Township, provides lakes, beaches, trails, historic information sites, and boating, and attracts patrons from Michigan, Indiana, Ohio, and Illinois. Holland State Park and other Lake Michigan resort and beach amenities about thirty miles west also attract people from all over the region.

Public facilities generally impart the opportunity for educational experiences, cultural events, and meeting spaces. These facilities in Leighton Township include:



- Leighton Township Library, 4451 12th Street
- Leighton Township Hall, 4451 12th Street Suite A

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## Public Safety Services

Leighton Township is too sparsely populated to have its own fully staffed police and fire departments. Two fire stations serve Leighton Township with approximately 25 on-call firefighters who volunteer their time. One station is located at 1110 144th Avenue and the other at 4475 Kalamazoo Drive. For police protection, the Township contracts with the Allegan County Sheriff's Department in a joint agreement with neighboring Dorr Township. Through this municipal contract, two deputies provide public safety services to Leighton Township residents. This arrangement saves community funds since the Township relies on the County to train, equip, and pay the deputies.



# Chapter 7: Transportation & Public Utilities

## Roadways

Typical of most townships in Michigan, major roadways follow section lines. County Primary Paved Roads include 136th Avenue, 141st Avenue east of 2nd Street, 142nd Avenue west of 2nd Street, 145th Avenue, 146th Avenue east of 7th Street, 7th Street, and Kalamazoo Drive. County Local Paved Roads include 2nd Street north of 142nd Avenue, 137th Avenue west of Kalamazoo Drive, 9th Street south of 142nd Avenue, 6th Street, 108th Street, and 144th Avenue west of Kalamazoo Drive. These roads provide the greatest connections throughout the Township and between neighboring townships.

The transportation connection between US-131 and 142nd Avenue makes development in the Township more attractive. 142nd Avenue is the Township's only connection with an expressway and is a vital transportation route for the community. Additionally, as neighboring communities develop (e.g., Dorr and Thornapple), 142nd Avenue will become a popular corridor to access US-131, which directly leads to Grand Rapids and Kalamazoo.

Also, the eastward extension of 142nd Avenue to Patterson Road is proposed by the Allegan County Road Commission. The Barry County Road Commission has indicated that once that connection is made, they will consider the improvement of Finkbeiner Road (the eastern counterpart of 142nd Avenue in Barry County). The plan is to improve Finkbeiner Road all the way to M-37, north of Middleville. This will create an improved link between US-131 and M-37, resulting in improved accessibility to the Township, and likely more through traffic, making commercial development more appealing.

According to the 2016 American Community Survey, 75.1% of Township residents worked in Allegan County, while 24.4% worked outside Allegan County. This large percentage of residents working outside the County suggests that Leighton Township residents commute to Kent County for work due to its proximity to Grand Rapids area employment centers. The mean travel time to work for a Leighton resident in 2017 was 23.9 minutes, which is another indicator that residents leave the Township for employment.



## Air Transportation

The Wayland Area Pilots Association owns Calkins Field Airport, situated in Section 31 of Leighton Township, formerly operated by the City of Wayland. Ultra-light aircraft use the facility's 1,875 turf runway as do some general aviation aircraft suitable for such a facility.

Padgham Field, located in the City of Allegan, offers general aviation services, primarily serving corporate and recreational aviation needs.

Commercial passenger air service is available through the Gerald R. Ford International Airport and the Kalamazoo-Battle Creek International Airport. The Gerald R. Ford International Airport is Michigan's second-busiest commercial airport, offering 14 passenger airlines that served over two million travelers in 2016. Both facilities provide daily service to regional hubs throughout the Midwest.



## Utilities

The Dorr-Leighton Sewer Authority established in 1978 provides sewer collection and treatment for the western Sections of the Township, including the Moline area. This system was formed as an agreement between the two Townships to build a public collection and treatment system and was originally funded through a grant from the EPA. The Dorr-Leighton facility collects approximately 150,000 gallons per day, with a treatment capacity of 250,000 gallons per day. This facility was expanded in 2001 from a lagoon plant to a sequencing batch reactor plant, which increases efficiency in operation. The upgraded treatment facility is located in Leighton Township about one half mile southeast of the Division and 144th Street intersection.

There is also a private water facility that provides water for domestic and commercial use, though most of the Township receives water via individual wells. There is currently no connection between this private water system and the Dorr-Leighton Wastewater Authority or the Green Lake Sewer Authority that serves Green Lake.





The Green Lake system controlled by Leighton Township was built in the 1970s to alleviate failing septic systems around the lake. The most recent data from the Green Lake facility indicates the average daily flow is approximately 70,000 gallons per day. The sewage lagoons have a rated capacity of 150,000 gallons per day. A clarifier was recently added at the plant to improve phosphorus removal, and the facility recently switched from a land irrigation discharge to a seasonal surface water discharge. The land irrigation system was at the end of its expected life cycle for such a system; it is no longer necessary to use the irrigation field with a surface water discharge. There is a plan to expand this facility; however, the timetable for expansion will depend on growth in demand and financing capacity.

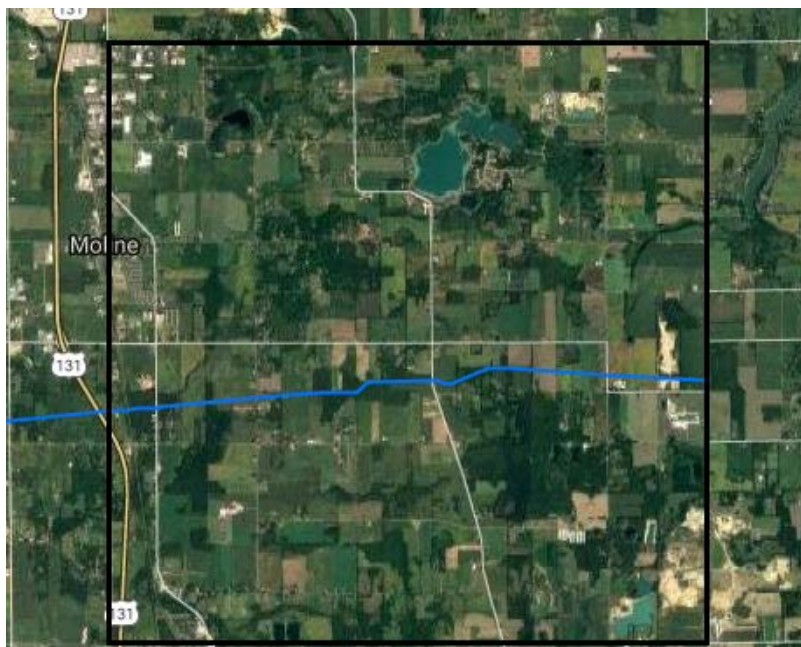
Several residents and businesses in the extreme southwest corner of the Township are also serviced by a short extension of the City of Wayland's sanitary sewer system. The City's extension comes northward along Dalia Street.

A natural gas pipeline also runs through the Township west to east, south of 142nd Avenue. This pipeline is operated by Consumers Energy and used to transmit natural gas to the surrounding homes and businesses through an underground right-of-way. Although pipeline operators are required to post brightly-colored markers along the right-of-way, this does not necessarily mark the exact location of the pipeline.

In order to reduce damage to a pipeline, the law requires all excavators and the general public to call 811 before digging, which is the Michigan One-Call Center. This ensures that people and property are protected during any excavation.

In order to help protect pipelines, the Pipeline & Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA) defined nine elements for effectively preventing pipeline damage and assesses state programs based on their integration. Congress also cited these elements in the Pipeline Inspection, Protection, Enforcement and Safety (PIPES) Act of 2006. During the PHMSA State Damage Prevention Program Characterization initiative in 2014, Michigan had implemented all program elements except 4 and 9. These two elements were partially implemented/marginally effective.

1. Enhanced communication between operators and excavators.
2. Fostering support and partnership of all stakeholders.
3. Operator's use of performance measures for locators.
4. Partnership in employee training.
5. Partnership in public education.
6. Enforcement agencies' role to help resolve issues.
7. Fair and consistent enforcement of the law.
8. Use of technology to improve the locating process.
9. Data analysis to continually improve program effectiveness.



## Planning Implications

1. The transportation connection between US-131 and 142nd Avenue may increase the amount of development that occurs within the Township, as it provides the only access point to the highway. Additionally, with the eastward extension of 142nd Avenue to Patterson Road, more traffic may use this route. There may be an increased need for larger infrastructure and services along this route. Therefore, the Township should consider this prominent transportation route in future land use planning decisions.
2. More residential development in the vicinity of the lake may justify periodic upgrades and expansions to the sewer system, and may also lead to more discussion about a public water system. The Township currently provides sanitary sewer but not public water to property in the Green Lake area, so each residence utilizes a private well. With additional growth likely around Green Lake, serious discussions about public water service may be imminent.

A decorative dotted line in white, starting horizontally from the left edge, curving downwards at the right, and then continuing vertically down the right edge.

# SECTION III

## Future Land Use Plan

# Chapter 8: Goals & Objectives



The Comprehensive Plan will be founded on the following goal statements, each supported by more specific objectives. The goals are intended to describe a desirable end state of the Township about twenty-five years into the future. The objective statements are more specific descriptions that may be regarded as milestones to achieve the broader goal.

The goal statements, or the policy foundation for the Comprehensive Plan, essentially define the values and visions the Plan must support and achieve. As such, goal statements need to be as clear as possible, stated in compelling terms to inspire action. The most effective goal statements will meet the following four criteria:

- Define a desired end;
- Be stated in positive terms;
- Be bold, but realistic; and
- Reflect a consensus.

With these standards in mind, the following goal statements have been crafted based on comments from community involvement workshops to guide growth and development in the Township over the next twenty to thirty years. The following objectives suggest activities that must be accomplished if the broader goal statements are to become reality. Most are specific activities or programs that will require the active effort of the Township or other agencies in the area.



# Natural Features & Recreation

## GOAL 1

The residents of Leighton Township will enjoy connected open spaces, active recreation, including playgrounds and fields for competitive sports, and a Township-wide bicycle trail system. Public access to these recreation resources and natural amenities will be protected and current and future generations of all ages will enjoy their benefits.

- A. Inventory and record significant natural features and open spaces within the Township to help identify priorities for private conservation and potential land acquisition.
- B. Establish a Parks and Recreation Board and complete a Parks System Master Plan. The Plan will identify future land acquisition areas for playfields, define and support a trail network, and include a capital plan for any implementation.
- C. Develop and promulgate regulations for trail facilities to be integrated with natural features and new developments.



## GOAL 2

Leighton Township will have significant areas of unspoiled open space that provide natural wildlife habitat and protect valuable features and resources, such as the community's rolling hills, stream corridors, lakes, roadway viewsheds, wetlands, forestlands, and pastoral character.

- A. Establish collaborative partnerships with agencies such as the MDNR and the local land conservancies to preserve natural systems.
- B. Adopt policies that encourage the use of conservation easements.

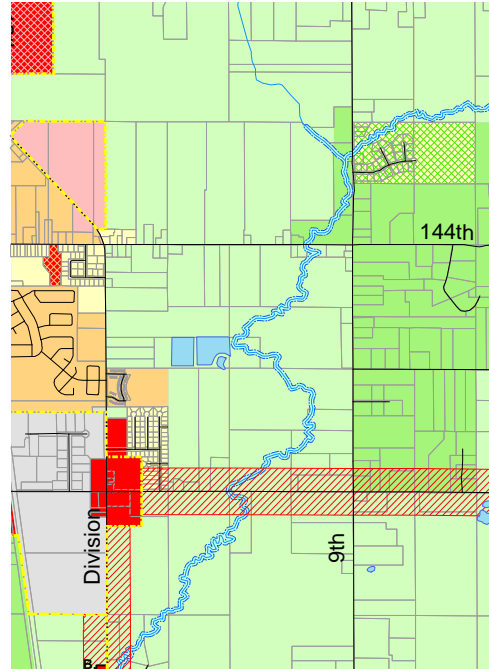


# Natural Features & Recreation

## GOAL 3

Green Lake will be characterized by attractive, environmentally harmonious development designed to minimize water quality impacts and preserve natural amenities associated with the unique feature. Keyholing (funneling) to Green Lake will be minimized, and recreational areas near the lake will be enhanced to serve all ages and

- A. Review existing zoning provisions and, as appropriate, implement strengthened utility policies that require developments to extend sanitary sewer and water services.
- B. Review existing zoning provisions and, as appropriate, implement strengthened anti-keyholing policies and regulations.
- C. Adopt lakefront zoning overlay district regulations designed to lessen the impacts of fertilizer runoff and sedimentation, and development impacts on Green Lake wetlands, woodlands, and watershed features.



## GOAL 4

The Rabbit River watershed will be preserved and protected for its habitat significance and biological function. Recreational opportunities associated with wildlife and aquatic habitat within the watershed will be expanded.

- A. Establish collaborative partnerships with agencies such as the MDNR and the local land conservancies to preserve natural systems.
- B. Adopt policies that encourage the use of conservation easements (duplicate of Goal 2B).

# Farmland

## GOAL 1

Significant areas of Leighton Township will support economically viable agricultural enterprises, which include traditional family farms, corporate agribusiness, and hobby and niche agricultural activities that can take advantage of emerging open space/cluster development patterns.

- A. Continually evaluate farmland preservation options in the context of a shifting agricultural economy.
- B. Work with agricultural interests and neighboring communities to monitor farmland preservation techniques.
- C. Adopt permissive agricultural business enterprise (e.g., agri-tourism, roadside retailing) provisions that will allow farm owners to augment farm income.
- D. Adjust zoning provisions to give priority to agricultural support businesses when establishing commercial zoning provisions along high-traffic rural corridors.



# Economic Development

## GOAL 1

The economic health of Leighton Township will be secured through regional job creation and local industrial growth. Such development will be integrated into the area's natural features, aesthetically attractive, and supported by water, sewer and transportation infrastructure. The Township will support the adaptive reuse of underutilized properties for economic development purposes.

- A.** Evaluate and strengthen utility policies as appropriate to require developments to extend sanitary sewer and water services.
- B.** Define existing and potential industrial and commercial corridors.
- C.** Develop and implement incentives for the redevelopment of existing industrial sites.



## GOAL 2

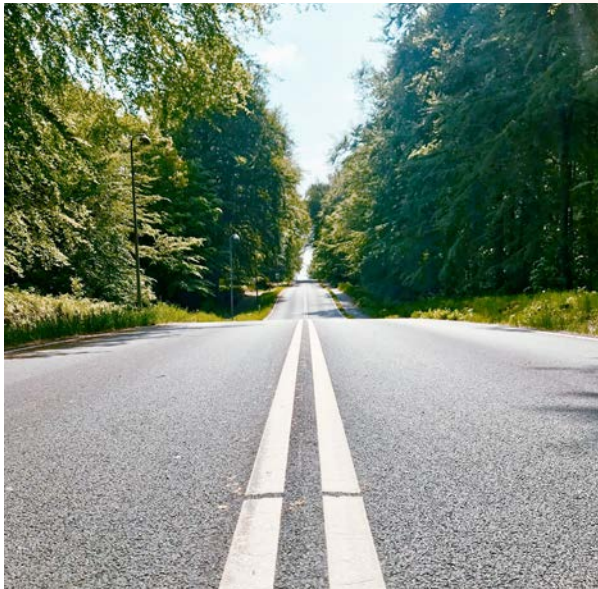
Neighborhood Town Centers will be established near existing population clusters at Moline and south of Green Lake to provide services to residents. The Neighborhood Town Centers will be pedestrian-oriented and hamlet-like in character.

- A.** Revise the zoning ordinance to accommodate and regulate Town Centers.
- B.** Re-examine road paving and sidewalk policies and revise as necessary to allow for viable and accessible Town Centers.
- C.** Complete Town Center design plans to inform property owners and developers of the Township's intent.
- D.** Develop and implement design standards pertaining to architecture, building material, building color, signage, banners, site utilization and development, and landscaping.
- E.** Cooperate with Dorr Township regarding the development of Moline.

# Traffic & Transportation

## GOAL 1

A safe, comfortable, well maintained, and efficient system of roadways will serve the citizens of the Township, providing effective linkages between and among existing and future neighborhoods, shopping, and employment areas.



- A. Expand the role of the Planning Commission in reviewing and recommending transportation proposals.
- B. Develop and implement a Transportation Plan to facilitate connectivity of new public and private roads.
- C. Develop and implement a continuing education program to inform local officials, private enterprises, and residents of the benefits of coordinated transportation improvements.
- D. Construct and improve roadway linkages between Sections 10 and 11 to serve existing and known new development.
- E. Construct bypasses for safer travel near the Library at 12th Street and Division Avenue and at other locations as appropriate
- F. Cooperate with Dorr Township and the Allegan County Road Commission regarding funding for improvements to Division Avenue.



# Traffic & Transportation

## GOAL 2

The timing and extent of gravel road improvements will be coordinated with planned and desired economic development and will be appropriately funded by private and public resources as applicable.



- A. Identify growth areas and strategically prioritize roadways requiring improvements.
- B. Improve roadways in acknowledgment of the recommendations of the Transportation Plan and in recognition of prioritization conclusions.
- C. Explore and implement private funding techniques to balance the public cost for new infrastructure resulting from new development.
- D. Utilize sound access management techniques to promote efficient traffic flow along high-development and high-traffic corridors.
- E. Adopt and implement improved access management standards to preserve the flow of traffic and the safety of motorists.
- F. Collaborate with Dorr Township and Allegan County to develop and implement amenable access management standards and physical improvements to Division Avenue.

# Utilities & Community Services

## GOAL 1

Long-term planning should anticipate that the community around Green Lake will ultimately be served with a central water supply and distribution system supported by private investment.

- A. Complete an evaluation of future water system needs.
- B. Undertake an assessment of potential well field sites to identify, preserve and protect wellhead areas in advance of actual need.

## GOAL 2

The public cemetery located on Kalamazoo Avenue will be expanded to adequately serve the area.

- A. Determine the future need of the cemetery and identify neighboring property that would be advantageous for acquisition.
- B. Develop and implement a capital improvement plan to fund the improvement of the cemetery.

## GOAL 3

Utility services will be extended strategically in support of growth and development that is consistent with local land use goals and objectives. Development patterns that encourage the Township's natural features and farmland preservation intentions will be strengthened by utility extension policies.

- A. Identify future utility needs and future improvement locations in keeping with Township land use goals. Utilize the completed infrastructure needs study.
- B. Adopt and implement zoning provisions that regulate densities based on available utilities.



- C. If necessary, strengthen utility policies that require developments to extend sanitary sewer and water services. As growth occurs, require utilities to be concurrently extended commensurate with the anticipated demand and impact of any proposed development.
- D. Evaluate, and adjust when necessary, policies to prevent the proliferation of private utility systems.



# Housing Development & Population



## GOAL 1

Leighton Township will have high-quality and inclusionary neighborhoods, which serve all residents, including young families and seniors, with attractive, affordable homes located in safe and quiet neighborhoods that promote human interaction.

- A. Revise elements of the zoning ordinance, including definitions and dimensional requirements, to make housing standards more clear.
- B. Evaluate minimum square footage and lot size requirements and revise the zoning ordinance as necessary to permit a broader range of housing forms.
- C. Utilize mapped Planned Unit Development districts to enable more creative residential communities.
- D. Refine the R3 zoning district language to permit attractive medium density residential communities to better serve young families, young professionals, and senior citizens.
- E. Develop and implement a sidewalk ordinance and other standards that require non-motorized connections in the Township's denser zoning districts.

# Planning, Governance & Regional Cooperation

## GOAL 1

Through inter-jurisdictional cooperation and funding, Leighton Township will be serviced by high quality health and safety services.

- A. Develop policy to encourage the establishment of health facilities within the Township to serve the needs of the community.
- B. Collaborate with neighboring communities and establish a regional fire and emergency response commission.



## GOAL 2

Through inter-jurisdictional cooperation and funding, Leighton Township will be serviced by high quality health and safety services.

- A. Explore and undertake methods to improve communication among neighboring municipalities.
- B. Identify potential and desirable joint-planning activities, such as transportation and utilities improvement, and identify legislative and political barriers to achieving partnership.
- C. Work together with neighboring communities on identified joint-planning activities, such as corridor plans, watershed plans and regional recreational facilities.

# Chapter 9: Future Land Use Plan

The Leighton Township Comprehensive Plan establishes general patterns of land use to guide growth and development for the next twenty to thirty years. This Plan constitutes a viable and integrated approach to accommodate the impacts of growth suggested by the existing growth patterns and developmental trends. The over-arching intent is to foster efficient patterns of development that preserve the community's important natural features and rural character while accommodating, and even encouraging, particular types of growth in certain desirable areas.

At an open house conducted for the revision of this Comprehensive Plan, the residents of Leighton Township overwhelmingly indicated a desire to preserve the rural character and farmland in the Township. Natural features such as farmland, water features, wildlife, and scenic views were all considered valuable. Survey respondents also aligned with these desires, indicating that their most important priorities are the protection of ground water, protection of private property rights, and

preservation of rural character. Expansion of industrial and office development were considered least important; however, limited development may be appropriate in specific areas. The priorities indicated by residents at the open house and in the survey helps guide future planning efforts. To honor these values, a land use framework has been developed that seeks to preserve open space, protect lake and water quality, provide for economic opportunity and services in appropriate locations, preserve the rural aesthetic, and provide recreation areas.

As part of the land use framework, this chapter describes several land use designations that are intended to guide new development in logical patterns while offering fair, and in some cases, value-enhancing opportunities for development. These designations are also illustrated on Map 10. Note that the future land use designations on Map 10 are general. Where two or more designations conjoin, either land use class may be appropriate.

# Character Areas

It is helpful to understand the existing characteristics of the Township. Generally, the Township may be nominally portrayed in six areas, grouped on the basis of similarities with regards to land use and development patterns. These areas are depicted on Map 9. The following discussion depicts existing attributes and challenges associated with these areas.

**AREA A.** Lands around the Moline community are characterized by a variety of uses, including industrial, commercial, single-family and multiple-family residential, manufactured housing, and public uses, including a park and a library. Moline shares a border with Dorr Township and is an unincorporated village. The community is characterized by an aging housing stock with shallow setbacks and an engaging village environment.

Moline has an opportunity to accommodate more intense uses to compliment the existing village atmosphere and to define and enhance its character. The physical layout of the community, its location, market demand, and the development sector, all coupled with visionary and proactive development policies established by the Township, could re-establish this community as a regional service area. In addition, the Moline area has potential to accommodate affordable housing while increasing quality of life for residents through nearby service uses and parkland.

**AREA B.** Lands comprising most of the northern half of the Township have been the first to transform from agricultural uses due to zoning and proximity to expressways and employment, and this is expected to continue. Some of the larger agricultural parcels in this area are towards the west, and include a poultry concentrated animal feeding operation just outside of Moline. The larger parcels in the direction of US-131, if developed, will impact this quadrant of the Township in terms of traffic, road quality, overall character, and service needs.

A major challenge in this north central region of the Township is the lack of a street connection between areas north and south of 145th Avenue east of Green Lake/ Round Lake with the rest of the Green Lake/ Round Lake community. This disconnect has resulted from the closure of the narrow stretch of 145th at the north end of Round Lake. New residents attracted by the smaller scale private street developments, as well as major developments such as Green Lake Ridge, will create dramatically increased traffic volumes east of Green Lake within a

few years. These increases will exacerbate the accessibility problem and the majority of traffic will be inclined to flow to the northeast and may ultimately manifest a physical and socio-economic rift within the community. It does not appear to be financially or politically feasible to extend Round Lake Drive to 145th or open 145th to through traffic. Both of these alternatives would require condemnation of valuable lake front properties and would force increased traffic on roadways that are clearly incapable of being upgraded to arterial, or even collector, status. The alternative appears to be improvements along 4th Street and 144th Avenue to accommodate a smoother more efficient flow of traffic. While this route will be circuitous, it is likely to remain the only viable approach to maintaining and improving connectivity between the areas.

An important factor in this portion of the Township is Green Lake, and how the remaining unimproved property in the vicinity of Green Lake will eventually be developed. Much of the undeveloped property adjacent to the lake is to the north. The total acreage of unimproved property within 1,000 feet of Green Lake totals approximately 180 acres. This represents an approximate 54% reduction in unimproved lands near Green Lake between 2005 and 2019. Based on present zoning stipulations and assuming all lands are buildable, these lands could accommodate approximately 90 dwelling units in the Rural Estate district, 313 dwelling units in the Low Density Residential district without water/sewer utilities, or 652 dwelling units in the Low Density Residential district on lots serving water/sewer utilities.

This added population has implications for community services. More people equate to a greater need in school facilities, and water and sewer infrastructure. Also, segregated land uses and relatively low-density growth patterns in new subdivisions near the lake preclude the feasibility of walking and require use of an automobile. Increasing traffic counts will require new roads. Other additional services, such as emergency and fire responders, will be needed to meet the needs of residents.

As a marketing technique, developers may offer lot buyers access to Green Lake even though all lots do not have direct lake frontage. Keyholing, or funnel development, is a development pattern where a waterfront lot is designated as common open space for a larger development away from the waterfront. This can be done through easements and common ownership of access points. A conflict exists: present waterfront property owners often want to minimize public access, while others, including new residents to the area, would enjoy lake access. Without anti-keyholing provisions the proliferation of semi-public beaches and boat launches scattered around the north end of the lake may be likely, reducing lake quality and safety. Therefore, the Township has adopted regulations related to keyhole parcels in order to reduce keyholing, protect water quality, and increase the lake's recreational quality.



**AREA C.** Area C is comprised of lands generally bounded by 2nd Street, Patterson Road, 143rd Avenue, and 140th Avenue, of which several large agricultural enterprises and areas are located, including a dairy concentrated animal feeding operation. Located in the eastern central portion of Leighton Township, this area also includes some large lot single-family home sites that dot the landscape, but the pressures of traditional subdivision development have thus far evaded the area.

A challenge for this agricultural area will be to minimize conflict between residents and farming operations and other intense farming uses. Active farmland around the large animal feeding operation and similar uses will serve as a buffer from residences near more rapidly developing Green Lake and other areas. Should developments happen near these concentrated operations, newcomer/farmer conflict will be inevitable.

This area also includes a possible road extension of 142nd Avenue to Patterson Road. While this extension may not be imminent, such an improvement will have implications for this area and for the intersection of Patterson Road and 142nd Avenue. If this extension materializes, this area may require a focused planning effort as the land use implications are realized, such as pressures for local service and convenience businesses, or more intensive residential development due to increased accessibility.



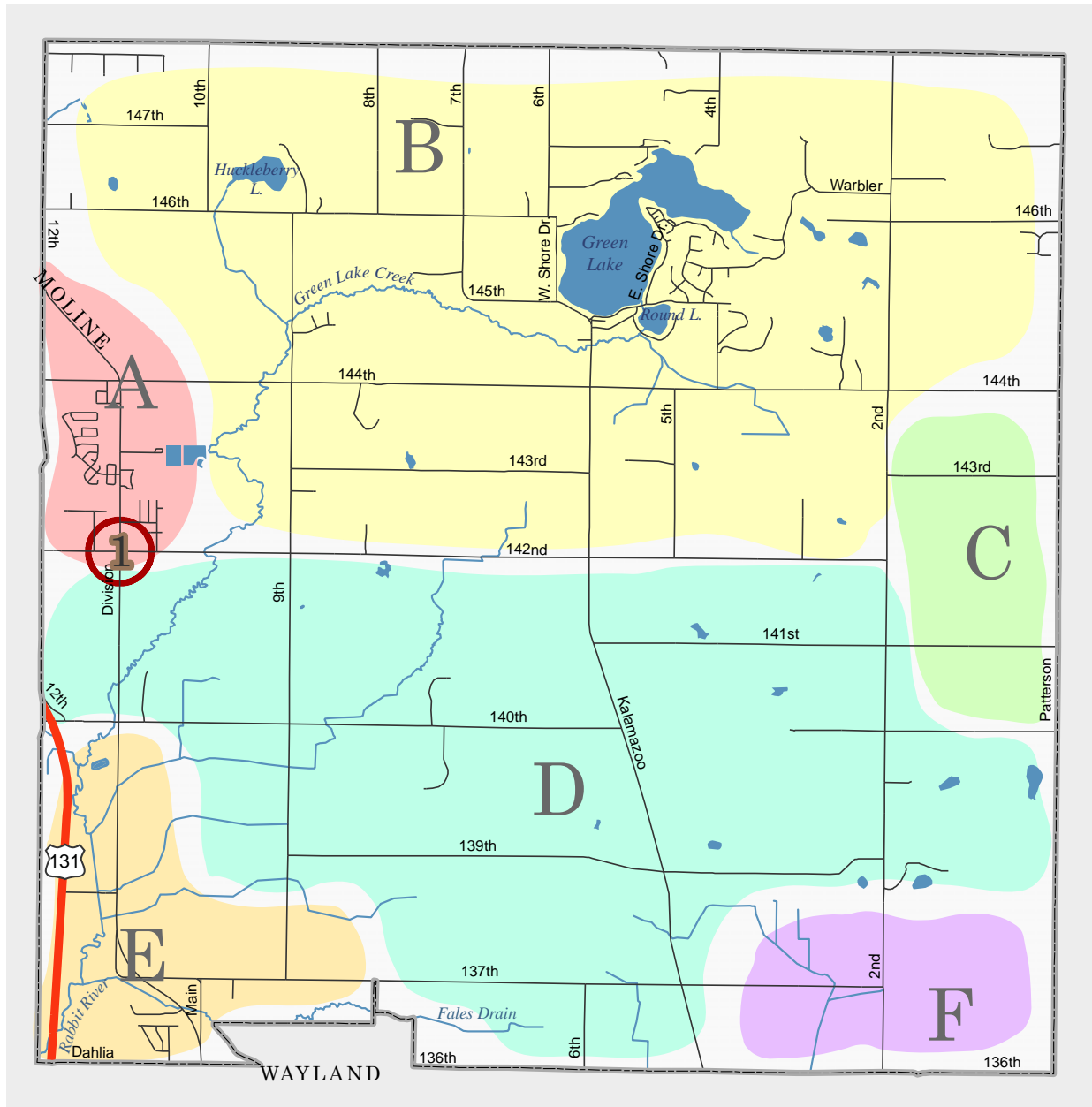
**AREA D.** Land south of 142nd Avenue consists largely of farmsteads and large lot single-family homes. Scattered mature forests and wetlands are more common in this portion of the Township. With a few exceptions, this area will likely be the last to transform from agricultural uses due to its southern location away from Grand Rapids, and lack of utilities. Traditional lot splits are not as prevalent south of 142nd Avenue and agriculture is the dominant land use. Although this area is generally associated with rural and agricultural land uses, there are two exceptions that are further described in Areas E and F.

**AREA E.** Although land south of 142nd Avenue is generally rural land with large parcels, Area E is an exception in this southeast corner of the Township. This area, which includes Sections 35 and 36, is comprised of a series of large gravel mines. It is anticipated that this area will be developed for either low density residential or agricultural uses when operations are complete. One of the operations involves the creation of a man-made lake that is likely to be converted to real estate lake development having numerous lakefront home sites.

**COMMERCIAL NODES.** A challenge to the Township will be to contain commercial development in well-planned nodes, rather than sprawling strip development, as prompted by residential development and traffic volumes through the Township. A challenge is to develop commercial properties in a manner amenable to local residents and to avoid the dangerous driving conditions associated with commercial strips (e.g. 28th Street, Alpine Avenue, etc).

**AREA F.** In addition to Area E, another exception to the rural land use pattern south of 142nd Avenue is depicted in Area F. This area in the southwest corner of the Township includes most of Sections 30, 31, and 32, and is a unique area of the Township that presents an opportunity for cooperative planning with Dorr Township and the City of Wayland. There are no utilities in this area, which will limit further development at current urban densities north of Wayland.

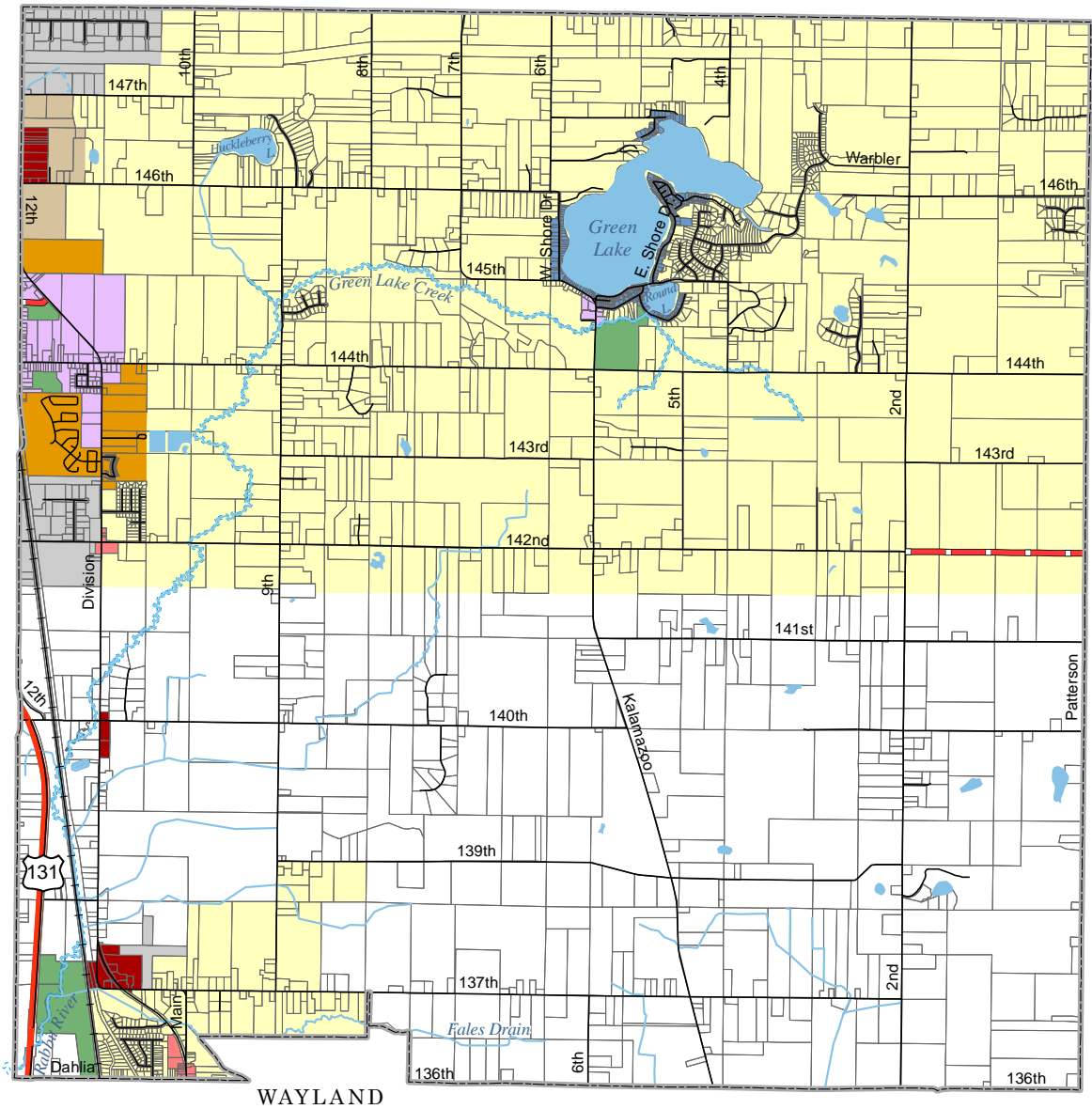
This Area includes the potential for several complementary land uses. Warranting discussion is the notion of a community park serving both the City of Wayland and the Township off the west end of Dahlia Street and adjacent to the Rabbit River in Section 31. This would include development and connections to a pedestrian trail following the old interurban rail line. Discussions on desirable land uses around the airport should also proceed. Finally, the development of land west of US-131 in Sections 30 and 31 of Leighton, and adjacent land in Dorr, should occur as a result of cooperative planning between the two Townships.



## LEGEND

- ✖ Area A
- ✖ Area B
- ✖ Area C
- ✖ Area D
- ✖ Area E
- ✖ Area F
- ✖ Commercial Nodes

MAP 9. CHARACTER AREAS



**LEGEND**

- Possible Road Improvements
- Riparian Area Protection Zone
- Agricultural
- Single-Family & Rural Residential
- Multiple-Family Residential
- Lake Residential
- Mixed-Use/Town Center
- Neighborhood Commercial
- General Commercial
- Light Industrial/Office
- Industrial
- Park/Recreation

MAP 10. FUTURE LAND USE



## Agricultural

The primary intent of the Agricultural future land use designation is to promote land uses and parcel sizes that are conducive to the enterprise of agriculture. Agricultural activities may include cropland, pastures, orchards, farm markets, related businesses, forestry and forestlands, animal operations, and mining in specific locations where it can be supported by appropriate infrastructure. The minimum lot size is 2 acres and this designation supports the Township goal of rural preservation. Public sewer is not available, anticipated, or encouraged. Higher densities and development that requires support by public sewer and water or private collection systems are also discouraged.

| Future land use designation | Primary compatible zoning district | Potentially compatible zoning district | Remarks   |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------------|--|---|
| Agricultural                | AG                                 | R-1                                    | High intensity development should not be permitted. Low density residential uses may be appropriate where farming activities are limited or lands are unsuitable for agriculture. |



When development does occur, the prevalent development pattern within this area will be through land divisions. Open space and conservation clustering techniques should be encouraged. Such clustering of homes should not increase the overall density of development in the district, but should preserve larger tracts of open space in order to preserve the rural character of these lands, minimize curb cuts along section lines and arterial roads, utilize community resources wisely, and preserve natural features.

Emblematic of the Agricultural areas are single-family detached homes and farmstead clusters (single-family homes with a series of accessory structures, such as barns, silos, stables, and utility buildings). Rural viewsheds are expected to be preserved along road rights-of-way, including trees lining roadways and any unique natural features.

Important factors to consider when designating parcels of land as Agriculture include an examination of local and county data identifying productive agricultural land uses, the relative size and contiguity

of agricultural properties, and farmland identified as having prime, unique, or local importance according to the Natural Resource Conservation Service designations. Parcels with these factors should be considered as valuable agriculture resources and should be preserved.

Preservation of these lands can be supported through the Township's participation in a County Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) program. The Allegan County Farm Preservation Board is responsible for encouraging Agricultural Security Areas and acquiring Agricultural Conservation Easements on properties whose owners are interested in preserving higher value agricultural lands. Through the PDR program, a property becomes permanently protected from development by relinquishing its developmental rights in return for compensation. The landowner is allowed to continue usual farming activities and may sell the property; however, the easement protects the landscape from development that would reduce the land's rural character.

# Single-Family & Rural Residential

| Future land use designation       | Primary compatible zoning district | Potentially compatible zoning district | Remarks   |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|--|---|
| Single-Family & Rural Residential | AG, R-1                            | R-2                                    | High intensity development should not be permitted. Residential development should be considered in coordination with available infrastructure. |

The Future Land Use Map designates the majority of the north one-half of the Township within the "Single-Family and Rural Residential" land use category. This planning district encompasses approximately 9,500 acres and includes the majority of the Township's current single-family residential development. While it is the aim of the Comprehensive Plan to direct the majority of new single-family residential growth within this general planning area, it is not anticipated that the planning area will see full development within the 20 to 25 year planning horizon. Assuming an average density of 2 units per acre, the planning area

could ultimately accommodate close to 20,000 residents. Considering the average household size of owner-occupied units (2.98 people) as reported by the 2016 American Community Survey, this density could also accommodate approximately 56,000 people. Given that the Township's total population is expected to increase by approximately 3,000 people by the year 2030 and assuming 3 persons per household, the actual amount of land consumed by new residential development within that time period is more likely to be in the range of 750 to 1000 acres, or roughly 10 percent of the total area.



With its generally sparse current pattern of development, underdeveloped road system, and the lack of utilities, several parts of the planning area (especially in the south central and east central areas), are not yet viewed as being as ripe for conversion to dense residential use as other areas located further to the north and west. For that reason, a policy of managed, incremental expansions of the residential zoning districts is intended to prevail rather than a policy that would allow significant leapfrog changes or the wholesale re-zoning of the planning area. It is therefore anticipated that current zoning classifications within this future land use designation will remain largely in place until market conditions, emerging development patterns, and infrastructure improvements clearly warrant changes on an incremental basis.

The Township's Single-Family & Rural Residential designation incorporates two single-family zoning districts: R-1 Rural Estate District and R-2 Low Density Residential District. R-2 is the denser of the two districts. The minimum lot size in the R-1 District is 2 acres. Without utilities the minimum lot size in the R-2 District is 15,000 square feet and the maximum developed density is approximately 2 dwelling units per acre. When water and sewer are available, 12,000 square-foot lots (approximately 3 dwelling units per developed acre) are permitted in the R-2 District. Developed R-1 and R-2 areas are now characterized by single-family homes in traditional subdivisions as well as newer cluster subdivisions that include set aside open spaces and a variety of lots sizes. Within the R-1 areas, agricultural uses are also permitted and may continue as a principle land use activity. This is an important planning consideration and significant physical and cultural trait of R-1 areas.

When a change within the Single-Family and Rural Residential future land use planning area is contemplated, whether at the request of a land owner or at the Township's initiative, several factors will be weighed in determining the appropriateness of an R designation over an existing Agricultural designation or the R-1 over the R-2 District. The following factors are among those that will be considered and weighed. The factors are not prioritized nor should they be considered exclusive to all other considerations.

- The demand for housing and the existing supply of available, undeveloped R-1 and R-2 areas nearby and elsewhere in the Township.
- The presence of utilities and or the likelihood and timing of utility extensions capable of serving the particular area when it does develop.
- The soils of the area and their ability to accommodate residential development densities without public sewer.
- The availability and quality of ground water and its sufficiency to support residential water demands.
- The consistency of allowable densities and lot sizes with neighboring developed residential areas and neighborhoods.
- The presence and proximity of farming operations and the direct impacts that a conversion to residences would have on such operations.
- The adequacy of the road system that would be called on to directly support the additional traffic demands, any plans for road improvements, and the timing of such improvements.

Clustering and open space techniques are encouraged in this classification as a way to preserve open space and natural features as development occurs. Open space practices should preserve tree-lined roadways, thus maintaining a rural viewshed similar to that of the Agricultural designation. Open space and trailways will be encouraged within new developments and with a focus toward interconnection with future adjacent or nearby developments. It is envisioned that over time the interconnectivity of private open space and trails will evolve into a functional web of connected trails and open space having significant environmental and recreational value.

The Allegan and Barry County Road Commissions are proposing to extend 142nd Avenue so that 142nd Avenue will be a direct route between US-131 and M-37. Should this improvement occur, traffic will increase considerably on 142nd Avenue. Nonetheless, the Township does not envision or promote intense residential or commercial development east of Kalamazoo Avenue. The desired development pattern is to allow the establishment of small distinct commercial nodes at major street intersections, as development occurs from west to east, as opposed to lengthy stretches of residential or commercial strips. A confined node of commercial uses may be contemplated in the future subject to utility availability.



## Lake Residential

The Lake Residential district includes parcels adjacent to Green Lake and Round Lake. This future land use category is intended to prevent and control overcrowding near the shoreline of these lakes in an effort to protect water quality, preserve lake resources, and ensure safe recreational use. Single-family residential dwellings are the primary land use and this designation encourages the preservation and modernization of the existing housing stock in these locations. Infill and redevelopment are intended to occur with a similar pattern and density of existing properties. The expansion of this designation is discouraged at this time, as it is intended to maintain the patterns of existing development around Green Lake and Round Lake.

| Future land use designation | Primary compatible zoning district | Potentially compatible zoning district | Remarks  |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------------|--|--|
| Lake Residential            | LR                                 | -                                      | Patterns of existing development should be maintained. |



# Multiple-Family Residential

| Future land use designation | Primary compatible zoning district | Potentially compatible zoning district | Remarks  |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------------|--|--|
| Multiple-Family Residential | R-3                                | C-1                                    | Appropriate development should occur in coordination with available infrastructure and public services. Limited commercial uses may be appropriate when sensitive to residential properties. |

Multiple-Family Residential development will consist primarily of apartment homes, senior living facilities, and attached condominiums. More manufactured housing communities are not desired or anticipated. The minimum lot area for the R-3 district is 12,000 square feet for single-family dwellings. Multiple-family dwellings have a minimum lot area of 50,000 square feet, plus 4,500 square feet for each dwelling unit over three. Any lot that is not served by public sewer and/or public water must have a minimum area four times greater than the minimum area required by the Allegan County Health Department, in addition to the minimum lot area requirements.

Multiple-Family Residential uses are intended to provide affordable and high-quality housing for young families, the elderly, and young professionals, and to act as a transition from lower density residential uses to more intense uses. Such uses will be in close proximity to, and will provide pedestrian connections to, commercial services. This Plan envisions a confined mix of uses east of Division Avenue to blend with the Moline Town Center area. This area east of Division Avenue will consist primarily of residential land uses but may serve as a transition between the Town Center and single-family uses to the east and south. Limited small-scale

neighborhood commercial uses, similar in form with those of the Town Centers, may be contemplated in this area. This Plan intends not to foster a large area of single use multiple-family developments east of Division Avenue.

Play areas for children and other parkland to provide recreational opportunities should be incorporated in new development. Developments will include pedestrian walkways and street layouts should be designed to connect with future developments as they occur. Trail facilities will be incorporated into new developments and be positioned to join with trails in future developments.







## Mixed Use/Town Center

It is anticipated that the town center areas will provide most of the daily service needs of the nearby residents, and that service uses will actually be knitted in with residential uses. Concentration of residents generates a need for services. These service areas will generate less automobile traffic than the automobile-oriented strip commercial form. A key and necessary element will be convenient and safe pedestrian access. Residential uses in the town centers will be similar to that described in the Multiple-Family Residential area. Primary examples of uses include coffee shops, beauty shops, community banks, village-like town homes, and village-like apartment homes. Individual stores will generally not be greater than 5,000 square feet. Public utilities will serve these uses, which are described in more detail on the follow pages, according to location.

| Future land use designation | Primary compatible zoning district | Potentially compatible zoning district | Remarks  |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------------|--|--|
| Mixed Use/Town Center       | C-1                                | R-3                                    | Uses should be sensitive to surrounding residential properties available public infrastructure, services, and utilities. |

## MOLINE TOWN CENTER

Small-scale retail and service uses (local pharmacies, fresh fruit markets, small restaurants) and office service uses (family doctors and dentists) will be near adjacent residential areas. The proliferation of long, sprawling strip commercial facilities will be discouraged, and since these commercial uses serve the adjacent neighborhoods and should be considered a part of the community, the building types and designs should reflect the architectural character of the adjacent neighborhoods, both present and anticipated.

Residential development that occurs within the Moline mixed use area should not be isolated from service uses with excessive setbacks. Rather, service uses will be designed to mitigate the impacts of typical strip malls with parking to the side or the rear. A compact neighborhood with compatible land uses is expected.

Adjacent to and north of the Leighton Township Library, a new street is proposed to connect Division Avenue to 12th Street southeast of the current intersection. Along with this new section of street, a cul-de-sac will be constructed at 12th Street to prevent through traffic and to preclude motorists from driving the road segment, which is likely to become increasingly dangerous as traffic volumes increase. This street improvement is an important element of the Moline Town Center for several reasons. The improvement would eliminate anticipated safety concerns of the current Division Avenue and 12th Street intersection. Secondly, the realignment will likely improve the value of the adjacent existing homes by lessening traffic noise and other negative aspects attributed to high traffic volumes. Thirdly, the realignment will facilitate the town center concept by providing improved interior street access to the library and other currently vacant but developable land.



## GREEN LAKE TOWN CENTER

To meet the needs of residents, a small-scale, walkable, and village-like mixed use town center is contemplated generally southwest of Green Lake. The Green Lake Town Center would serve several purposes. It would offer a residential alternative for senior citizens and young families. It would also anchor the Green Lake area and provide convenient services and other low volume destinations to serve the growing population and visitors. Finally, it would provide an attractive entry and will help to define a sense of place for the Green Lake community.

The concept of the Green Lake Town Center consists of single and two-story buildings including small-scale neighborhood commercial uses, single-family detached and attached dwellings, and modest-density owner-occupied multiple-family uses to accommodate senior citizens in the area, all formed into a compact and walkable community. Two-story buildings could be encouraged and could incorporate retail and service uses such as a local pharmacy, fresh produce farm market, a community bank, a day care, and small restaurants on the first story of buildings, with owner-occupied residential dwellings above. Drive-through restaurants will not be encouraged. Of course, proposed commercial uses must be compatible with existing, established residences, so it is likely that the Town Center will emerge slowly as properties change hands over time.

Given the proximity of the Town Center to the lake, an overlook space may be appropriate as a long-term feature of the area. An additional boat launch in this area is not now viewed as a desirable component due to additional needs for parking and trailer storage and concerns over the lake's carrying capacity for additional watercraft.

Green Lake Town Center would have walking and bicycling connections to existing and planned residential areas nearby, thus facilitating a pedestrian friendly motif for the town center and a healthier, more pleasant lifestyle for residents of adjacent neighborhoods. Should the area develop piece-by-piece, developments will be designed and coordinated so that pedestrian connection among them is possible. In addition, due to floodplain issues, a nature trail is encouraged along Green Lake Creek to buffer development from the water feature and to provide an amenity to area residents.

The development of less than desirable commercial strip uses with parking lots dominating the front yard area will be discouraged. Front and side yard setbacks will be shallow and parking will be in the rear of commercial buildings. Buildings will be oriented toward 145th, Kalamazoo, and an internal street network provided by a developer and approved by the Township; strip development with multiple access points off the proposed by-pass will be discouraged because it would diminish the market for Town Center businesses.



The existing non-residential and non-institutional uses in the vicinity are good examples of the types of local business that will continue to be encouraged. For example, a church is located on 145th west of the existing commercial enterprises. The church generally fits in with the town center concept and includes a ball field. A restaurant, small-scale gas station and convenience store also exist, primarily serving local needs. These types of businesses are consistent with the vision of the town center to be formed along a new internal street network. Natural building materials such as brick, stone, and wood should be used. Signage and exterior lighting will be low-impact and at a pedestrian scale.

### Green Lake Town Center Conceptual Sub-Area Plan

- |   |                                   |   |  |
|---|-----------------------------------|---|--|
| 1 sub-area focal point and linear green | 3 townhomes with attached garages | 5 single-family homes along the creek             | 7 low density single-family homes                      |
| 2 neighborhood focused retail           | 4 multifamily homes on the green  | 6 new park and connection to church and woodlands | 8 relocated storage facilities with vegetative buffers |



## Neighborhood Commercial

| Future land use designation | Primary compatible zoning district | Potentially compatible zoning district | Remarks   |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------------|--|---|
| Neighborhood Commercial     | C-1                                | O/I                                    | Uses should occur in nodes of development, be sensitive to surrounding residential properties, and consider available public infrastructure, services, and utilities. |

Neighborhood Commercial uses are small-scale, automobile-oriented service land uses intended to serve the local population, and possibly even passers-by. Commercial facilities will generally be larger than the buildings in the Mixed Use/Town Center area, and may include restaurants, offices, and small grocery and retail stores. Facilities greater than 10,000 square feet are not desired. Landscaping should be used to screen parking areas and to create a pleasing aesthetic. Uses should not compete with regional facilities located in adjacent communities. It is anticipated that Neighborhood Commercial areas will be presently zoned for commercial use and will be served with utilities.





# General Commercial

| Future land use designation | Primary compatible zoning district | Potentially compatible zoning district | Remarks   |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------------|--|---|
| General Commercial          | C-2                                | O/I, I-1                               | Uses should be sensitive to surrounding residential properties and consider available public infrastructure, services, and utilities. |

This planned use will serve the needs of motorists traveling along Division Avenue. Developments are not expected to be of a regional scale, though stores will generally be larger than Neighborhood Commercial uses and should provide for efficient ingress and egress. Commercial uses such as restaurants, grocery stores, retail developments, and even wholesaling, warehousing, and minor repair shops are anticipated, though facilities greater than 15,000 square feet are not desired.

Access points in the General Commercial designation will be coordinated with neighboring uses to minimize traffic conflicts and increase safety for motorists and driveways will be located as far from street intersections as possible. Landscaping and trees will be planted in the parking areas and around the perimeter of the site to help visually buffer the use from neighboring uses. Utilities will serve these uses.



## Light Industrial/Office

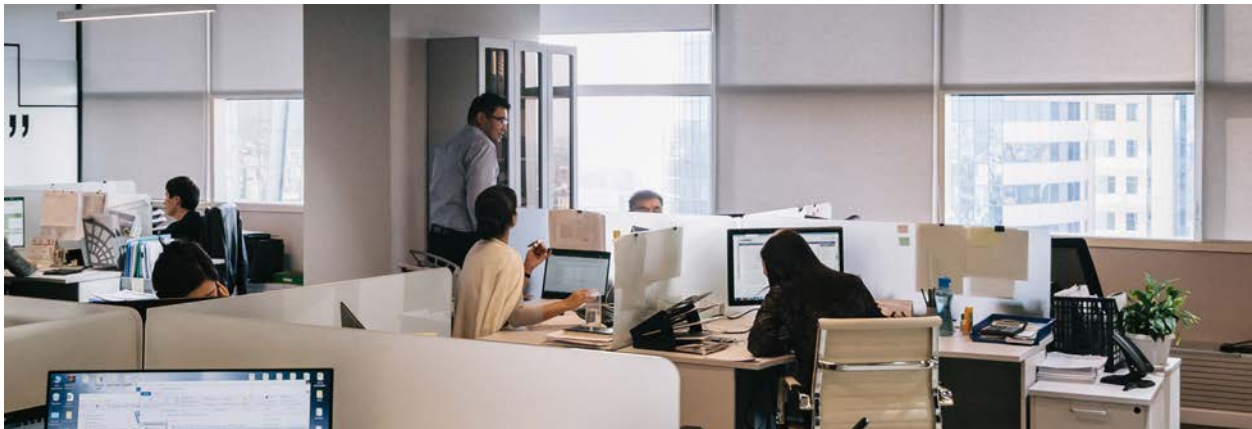
| Future land use designation | Primary compatible zoning district | Potentially compatible zoning district | Remarks   |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------------|--|---|
| Light Industrial/Office     | O/I                                | C-2                                    | Uses should be sensitive to surrounding residential properties and consider available public infrastructure, services, and utilities. |

This designation is intended to accommodate more compatible industrial uses, such as warehousing, automobile repair, storage, office facilities, and similar establishments. Light Industrial/Office areas are positioned for easy access to US-131 and for proximity to utilities. It is anticipated that light industrial and office growth will occur in planned developments, and building design and site improvement is to be analogous to high-quality office developments.

When considering expansion of light industrial and office uses, special attention should be given to the preservation of natural features, signage, landscaping, lighting, access control, and building design. Pedestrian walkways to residential areas in Moline are desired, where practical, to provide for alternative modes of transportation to and from work.

Preservation of natural features is especially important when such features buffer industry from neighboring uses and mitigate industrial effects.

Industrial buildings are expected to be attractive, with sides and front facades of the buildings designed with high quality building materials such as stone, brick, and other natural materials. Well-maintained and landscaped yards are expected in yards adjacent to the street and where a rear or side yard abuts a residential zoning district. Loading areas should be located in the rear of buildings. Outdoor storage should be minimized and where it is permitted, buffering techniques should be implemented. Landscaping should be used to augment the natural impression found in Leighton Township.





## Industrial

Similar to Light Industrial/Office, this designation is intended for somewhat heavier industrial and office uses and may include uses described in the aforementioned classification and light manufacturing and processing.

Industrial areas are positioned for proximity to US-131 and utilities will serve these uses. Growth will occur in planned industrial developments and building design and site improvement will have the appearance of an office park. When considering an expansion of industrial uses, site design criteria will be similar to that described in Light Industrial/Office and includes signage, landscaping, environmental implications, lighting, access

control, drainage, site improvement, and building design. Preservation of natural features, landscaping, and other screening mechanisms are expected to buffer these uses from neighboring land uses.

Emissions into the environment should not be perceptible at any lot line. Loading areas should be positioned in the rear of buildings. Sides and front facades of the facilities should be attractive and designed with standard durable building materials such as stone and brick. Safety for workers and the public should also be strongly considered, with site design conducive to emergency services personnel, vehicular traffic, and truck traffic.

| Future land use designation | Primary compatible zoning district | Potentially compatible zoning district | Remarks   |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------------|--|---|
| Industrial                  | I-1                                | O/I, C-2                               | Uses should be sensitive to surrounding residential properties and consider available public infrastructure, services, and utilities. |

## Park/Recreation

This designation includes a school,

| <b>Future land use designation</b> | <b>Primary compatible zoning district</b> | <b>Potentially compatible zoning district</b> | <b>Remarks</b>   |
|------------------------------------|---|---|--|
| Park/Recreation                    | AG, R-1                                   | R-2, R-3                                      | Opportunities for recreation should contribute to the preservation of open space and the Township's natural setting. |

government facilities, parks, and anticipated parkland; all are intended for use by the public. Development on land designated as Park/Recreation will be limited to uses that are non-profit and municipal in nature and include playfields, ball fields, sports facilities, forest preserves, and play equipment. Lighting and nighttime noise should be managed to preclude undesirable effects on nearby uses.

An area in Section 10 north of 144th Avenue has been suggested as potential parkland. The Township Hall is presently located in the vicinity and acquisition of nearby property would be a logical extension of municipally owned land. A recreational facility would serve the growing population in the Green Lake area.

Lands in Section 31 near and adjacent to the Rabbit River have also been suggested as potential parkland. The development of a recreational facility in this area will require cooperation with Allegan County and the City of Wayland. These properties have been acknowledged as Park/Recreation for the following reasons:

- The land is generally unsuitable for farmland or development due to wet soils and low ground.
- This land is a logical place for a park since a pedestrian trail following the old interurban rail line is proposed. The park could serve as a regional resting point, destination, or a trailhead.
- The Rabbit River runs through the land and a park would protect homes from flooding and would protect the river from encroaching development.

Additionally, land adjacent to Kalamazoo Ave. and 144th is suggested for potential parkland. This land borders Green Lake Creek and would provide a natural buffer and mitigate flooding near the creek and Round Lake. This area contains a large patch of forest that would help preserve important natural features in this area. As development has occurred around Green Lake, the preservation of a contiguous patch of forest would help improve water quality in the lakes and stream, while also providing a walkable community gathering place.



## Riparian Area Protection Zone

The Riparian Area Protection Zone boundaries are intended to protect critical watercourses in the Township and are part of a regional effort to protect the river and surface water quality in general. These natural waterways are significant in many ways, including their vital role in carrying storm water runoff, as a recreational resource, and for their intrinsic natural ecological and biological value. The long-term goal of focusing land use policies within the Township's watershed is to improve surface water quality. Two of the objectives that must be met to achieve that goal include reducing non-point source pollution, and the preservation and enhancement of natural vegetation adjacent to watercourses.

The mapped overlay is meant to designate the land closest to the watercourses as the area that is best used as a buffer between disruptive development or harmful development practices and the watercourse. If implemented, this simple approach can be highly effective in achieving the stated water quality objectives. Within the buffer, extensive removal of natural ground cover and trees adjacent to watercourses is discouraged. Structures and development and intensive agricultural activities, such as animal grazing and cultivation, will be encouraged to be setback a minimum of 50 feet from any waterway. Implementation measures may range from educational efforts that encourage farmers to employ best management practices near the watercourses to new zoning regulations that establish minimum building setbacks and other "no disturb" controls on land developers.



## Phased Zoning

This Plan recommends that the rezoning of land to higher intensity zoning districts be done in a phased or incremental manner. For example, while the Plan may identify locations in the Township that are appropriate for additional single-family & rural residential development in agricultural areas, this Plan does not recommend immediate rezoning of this land. Rather, rezoning to more intensive zoning districts should occur incrementally over time to ensure the Township is capable of:

1. Meeting the increased public service demands;
2. Managing township-wide growth and development;
3. Adequately reviewing rezoning requests as they apply to the specific subject property;
4. Ensuring that a rezoning is in response to a demonstrated need; and
5. Minimizing unnecessary hardships upon the landowner as a result of property assessments and/or resulting nonconforming uses and structures.



# Complete Streets



This Comprehensive Plan supports a complete streets policy. A complete streets policy encourages a design approach that enables safe travel for multiple forms of transportation, including vehicles, pedestrians, bicycles, and public transportation. Through this approach, thoroughfares are planned, designed, and constructed to allow access to all legal users safely and efficiently, without any one user taking priority over another. The goal is to provide safe access for all types of users and modes of transportation within a right-of-way.

In Leighton Township, primary modes of transportation include motorists, pedestrians, and truck drivers. The Township's primary objective will be to work jointly with surrounding communities to promote healthy lifestyles for people of all abilities through the continued development of a nonmotorized network. However, more could be done, such as sidewalks on both sides of a roadway or street (where appropriate), pedestrian signals and signage, bike lanes, and other features. Complete streets can result in increased safety for non-motorized users, improved public health, a cleaner environment, mobility equity, and enhanced quality of life through increased modal choices and more inviting streets.

In addition, another key motivation to enact complete streets policies is that Michigan law encourages MDOT to give additional consideration to enhancement and other grant applicants with such policies. The Michigan Planning Enabling Act has also been amended to stipulate that transportation improvements be respectful of the surrounding context, further ensuring that more equitable and attractive streets become a reality.

Although much of Leighton Township is a rural community, these elements are feasible in many developed areas of the Township. Some features may be accomplished through simple road restriping and the addition of signage. Other projects may be more involved and may only be practicable when coordinated with major roadway reconstruction. Because most of the Township's roadways are under the jurisdiction of Allegan County, much of the Township's work in implementing a complete streets policy will involve working with neighboring communities, the Road Commission, MDOT, and other pertinent agencies.

# Chapter 10: Action Plan

The following strategies are established to implement the goals and objectives and land use recommendations of this Plan. It is recognized that many strategies will be long-term in nature and that many entities in addition to Leighton Township will need to cooperate in order to fully implement this Plan.

Primary responsibility for implementing the Plan rests with the Leighton Township Board, the Planning Commission, and the Township staff. The Planning Commission is also responsible for prioritizing the strategies set forth in this Action Plan. In order for the Future Land Use Plan to serve as an effective guide for continued preservation/growth in Leighton, it must be implemented. This is done through a number of methods. These include ordinances, programs, and administrative procedures which are described in this chapter. Some of the implementation strategies require significant public and private investment. Some are modest enough to be implemented immediately. Others will take time. All are important, as they contribute individual elements that will help build the overall vision expressed by the planning participants.



# Natural Features, Parks, and Trails

## 5-YEAR PARKS AND RECREATION PLAN.

As the Township's population continues to increase, it is likely that demands for additional recreational opportunities will also increase. During the open house and survey conducted in preparation for this Plan, respondents indicated a strong desire for the preservation of open space and the presence of additional recreation facilities and trails. In order to encourage recreational opportunities in the Township, the development of a 5-Year Parks and Recreation Plan is advised. This Plan will provide specific goals, objectives, and actions applicable to the Township's natural resources, creation of parks and trails, and open space preservation. The plan should also identify future areas for playfields and other amenities, define and endorse a trail network and staging areas, and include a capital plan for funding and implementation.

This Comprehensive Plan also recommends that the natural resource inventory, which is an optional component to the 5-Year Parks and Recreation Plan, be completed in order to serve as a basis for identifying important significant natural features and valuable open spaces in the community. This would provide a key component in identifying likely trends or conditions that may threaten important natural features. Significant natural features and valuable open spaces should also be documented to help identify preservation priorities that may arise for private conservation and possible land acquisition.

The development of a 5-Year Parks and Recreation Plan will also make the Township eligible for funding assistance from the Michigan DNR Trust Fund, Land and Water Conservation Fund, and Passport Grants program. These grants are awarded each year and can help offset the costs of developing park and recreational facilities in the Township.

**MAPPED INVENTORY.** Based upon the natural resource inventory created for the 5-Year Parks and Recreation Plan, the Township should develop a series of mapped exhibits to serve as a guide for future land use decisions or to encourage private protection of natural features. The 5-Year Parks and Recreation Plan and the Michigan Natural Features Inventory will serve as a solid foundation with field confirmation work to be conducted on a sequential basis as the inventory develops. The Township may also partner with various environmental agencies and volunteers to assist in research, funding, and feature delineation. In some areas it may be appropriate to develop zoning overlay provisions or other preservation mechanisms.

Additional inventory can also occur as private property owners submit site plans for review and consideration. Independent or professionally prepared natural feature cataloging can be made a required component of site plan submittals and the information derived can be considered for incorporation into this inventory.



**RESPONSIBILITIES.** This activity should primarily be the responsibility of the Planning Commission with support from Township staff, planning consultants, and possibly environmental consultants. The Planning Commission should advise the Township Board in the formation of a Parks and Recreation Board.

**RELATED GOALS AND OBJECTIVES.** This strategy supports the following goals and objectives:

| Goals | Objectives |
|-------|------------|
| A1    | a, b, c    |
| A2    | a, b       |
| A4    | b          |



# Revise the Zoning Ordinance and Map

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The Township Zoning Ordinance is the primary regulatory mechanism for carrying out the goals and objectives of this Plan. To bring the ordinance into conformance with this update of the Comprehensive Plan, the ordinance and zoning map should be evaluated and revised, as appropriate. This may include the revision of current regulations and provisions or the creation of new regulations and provisions in order to accomplish the vision set forth by this Comprehensive Plan.

The following paragraphs describe many of the changes that will be needed in the zoning ordinance and map.

1. Review commercial and industrial district standards to ensure that they reflect the goals and Future Land Use designations in the Comprehensive Plan, including the two Town Centers.
2. Develop and implement a form-based code to guide future development in Town Centers to be visually distinct areas that promote the rural character of the Township and provide community-oriented space for residents.
3. Develop regulations for residential districts geared toward the creation of pedestrian friendly transportation networks, including sidewalks and trails. Develop regulations for trail facilities to be integrated with natural features and new developments.
4. Develop improved access management standards to protect the flow of traffic and the safety of motorists for Division Avenue and 142nd Avenue. This activity should include Dorr Township with respect to Division Avenue.
5. Improve the current parking and landscaping standards to provide a more specific and thorough guide regarding the amount, placement, and type of landscaping and impervious surfaces within new developments.
6. As needed, modify elements of the zoning ordinance, including definitions, site plan requirements, minimum square footage, and dimensional requirements, to clarify housing standards and permit a broader range of housing types within the Township.
7. Update signage regulations and definitions to be content neutral.
8. Evaluate regulations pertaining to the removal and processing of topsoil, sand, gravel, or other such minerals for their effectiveness at protecting natural resources and the surrounding area from negative impacts associated with high-intensity land uses, while permitting appropriate development in certain areas.
9. Revise zoning regulations to permit a broader range of agricultural enterprises and ensure compliance with generally accepted agricultural management practices (GAAMPs), and adjust zoning provisions in commercial areas to encourage agricultural support businesses (such as farm market stands).





**RESPONSIBILITIES.** These activities should primarily be the responsibility of the Planning Commission, with the Township Board having final approving authority over any changes made to the Ordinance. This task will also likely involve support from Township staff and planning consultants.

**RELATED GOALS AND OBJECTIVES.** This strategy supports the following goals and objectives:

| Goals | Objectives |
|-------|------------|
| A1    | a, b, c    |
| A2    | b, c       |
| A3    | b, c       |
| A4    | b          |
| B1    | c,d        |
| C1    | c          |
| C2    | a,c,d      |
| D3    | a          |
| F1    | a, b, c, d |

## Green Lake Sub Area Plan

The land in the general vicinity of Green Lake is subject to residential and light commercial interests due to the presence of desirable water features. As the Township's population continues to experience growth, this area is likely to receive continued developmental pressures. In order to guide growth in this area, it is recommended that the Planning Commission undertake a sub-area planning activity to ensure growth occurs in coordination with existing utilities and available infrastructure.

The goal of this sub-area plan would be to address the unique blend of land uses in this area in order to provide opportunities for growth in appropriate areas while protecting sensitive natural features. This activity should involve property owners in the vicinity of Green Lake to garner consensus with regards to the Green Lake Town Center area. Area residents should generally accept the overall concept plan prior to the Township convening with developers to refine the concept.

The development of this sub-area plan may include specific recommendations pertaining to building form during development and re-development, streetscaping, access management, pedestrian accessibility and safety, zoning standards, and other topics.

**RESPONSIBILITIES.** This activity should primarily be the responsibility of the Planning Commission with support from Township staff, planning consultants, and possibly environmental consultants.

**RELATED GOALS AND OBJECTIVES.** This strategy supports the following goals and objectives:

| Goals | Objectives |
|-------|------------|
| C2    | a, b, c    |
| E2    | a          |

# Public Lands and Infrastructure Policies

Policies that direct the location of public water and sanitary sewer services are an important growth control mechanism. By encouraging new development located in proximity to existing or proposed sewer and water lines, the Township will be in the strongest position to guide and direct growth in accord with the Plan. For this technique to be effective, the Township must continually review and as appropriate, modify existing mechanisms to manage the placement of utilities and infrastructure in the community. Additionally, this Comprehensive Plan encourages an expanded cemetery.

**WASTEWATER.** An element of this implementation strategy will be to review and strengthen standards that require developers to extend sanitary sewer and water with developments. This will accomplish the purpose of providing services for future residents and may reduce the excessive proliferation of septic systems. As growth occurs, the Township may require utilities to be concomitantly extended and improved proportionate with the estimated demand and impact of proposed development. Such standards may better manage resources and encourage efficient development patterns.

**WATER.** The private water system will be incrementally expanded in the Moline area. This strategy also anticipates comprehensive long-term planning around Green Lake, which may ultimately be served with public

water, should current growth trends continue. It is anticipated that such facilities will be, in part, supported by private investment, if large-scale development ensues. Tasks will include an evaluation of future water needs, implementation of current infrastructure needs studies, and an assessment of potential well field sites near the lake to identify and acquire wellhead areas prior to their development.

**TRANSPORTATION.** Transportation policies may need to be modified to accommodate certain goals of this Plan. For example, in order for the two Town Center areas to be realized as envisioned, road width requirements for those areas may need to be reduced to provide for a more walkable, neighborhood-scale environment.

To further other objectives of this Plan, the Township should work with the Road Commission to develop a Transportation Plan. Such a plan would include research and analysis and serve as a guide to the modification of existing road policies. Such revisions would facilitate connectivity of roads in subdivisions for accessibility and walkability. The plan would analyze the impact of private roads, and expand the role of the Planning Commission in recommending transportation improvements. Further, the Transportation Plan would identify anticipated future growth areas and would prioritize road improvements as well as identify emerging connectivity needs.

Several projects are anticipated over the life of this Comprehensive Plan, including a bypass to accommodate safer, more efficient traffic flow near the Leighton Township Library at 12th Street and Division Avenue. The Township must work with Dorr Township and the Allegan County Road Commission on some of these matters, including the improvement of Division Avenue. In addition, the Township should revise access management standards for development along Division Avenue, and may develop zoning overlay provisions to regulate access along the proposed bypasses.

**CEMETERY.** It is anticipated that the Township-owned cemetery on Kalamazoo Avenue will be enlarged to accommodate future growth. A first step is for the Township to evaluate demand for burial space to properly determine future need. The Township should also identify adjacent property for acquisition, as well as develop a capital improvement plan to finance the expansion.

**RESPONSIBILITIES.** The Township Board, being the legislative body for the community, must undertake this strategy.

**RELATED GOALS AND OBJECTIVES.** This strategy supports the following goals and objectives:

| Goals | Objectives    |
|-------|---------------|
| A3    | a             |
| C1    | a             |
| C2    | a             |
| D1    | a, b, c, d, e |
| D2    | a, b          |
| D3    | b             |
| E1    | a, b          |
| E2    | a, b, c, d    |
| E3    | a, b          |
| F1    | d             |

# Water Quality Protection Strategy

The abundant water features in Leighton Township provide aesthetic value, recreational opportunities, and benefits to wildlife. The sustainable use of these features is an important factor for the preservation of the Township's natural resources and rural character. During the open house and community survey conducted in support of this Plan, respondents strongly prioritized the protection of surface water quality and groundwater resources. The majority of respondents also indicated support for increased controls on development in order to protect water quality in lakes, rivers, and streams.

Ground and surface waters are impacted by a number of sources, many of which residents can control. As a rural community, sources of interest include the use of septic systems, pesticides, and fertilizer applications. Therefore, public education is an essential aspect of protecting water quality. Educational information may be created to describe topics such as the importance of septic tank maintenance, agricultural best management practices for protecting groundwater, and appropriate fertilizer application in residential areas.

The provision of safe drinking water is largely connected to the quality of groundwater in the Township. As a rural community, most residents receive their drinking water from groundwater wells. Therefore, this Plan recommends the development of a wellhead protection program to support the protection of water quality for current and future residents of Leighton Township.

The Michigan Wellhead Protection Program (WHPP) is a voluntary program that can help communities protect their drinking water by identifying important groundwater recharge areas and eliminating contamination in those areas. These areas become known as Wellhead Protection Areas (WHPA), which are areas that directly contribute to the water in community wells. This program also provides an excellent assessment on existing groundwater availability and vulnerability of wells to contamination. By participating in the WHPP, the community receives a higher level of groundwater protection that contributes to public and environmental health, has a management area approved by the state of Michigan, and is qualified for financial assistance for the development of management practices (planning and zoning) and appropriate closure of abandoned wells in the WHPA.

**RESPONSIBILITIES.** This strategy should primarily be the responsibility of the Planning Commission with support from Township staff, planning consultants, and environmental consultants. This will also involve the creation of a WHPP team, which may include participants from the local municipality, fire department, health department, and citizens.

**RELATED GOALS AND OBJECTIVES.** This strategy supports the following goals and objectives:

| Goals | Objectives |
|-------|------------|
| E1    | b          |
| E2    | c          |



## Community Education, Outreach, and Communication

Communities exist in dynamic environments, where unique land use challenges arise, social and economic concerns shift, and choices of its members continually shape its natural and built environments. In order to achieve a shared vision of the community's future, continued education and communication between local leaders and community members is essential.

In order to lead effectively, Township officials must continue to pursue education. This may include attending training workshops and conferences, reading publications related to current land use and zoning topics, and maintaining good communication with officials across jurisdictional boundaries. This promotes coordinated planning efforts among different townships and leads to well-informed decision making.

In order to participate in the Township's vision, the community must also pursue education. The benefits of implementing the goals and objectives of this Plan should be communicated by Township officials and resources made available so that the community can stay updated on current planning trends. Public meetings, including those hosted by the Planning Commission and Township Board, should be instructive for the public.

Continued education and involvement of the public may occur through the establishment of committees, to which some of the responsibilities are given for achieving the vision of this Plan. These committees could include a combination of elected or appointed officials, key community stakeholders, and interested citizens. These committees should be encouraged by Township officials and focus on topics that are of great importance to the community. This may include a Farmland Preservation Committee or a Wellhead Protection Committee.

Additionally, the Township should seek ways to provide residents with news, information, and educational material regarding their Township government and applicable land use topics. Communication between Township officials and the public could be encouraged through media efforts, such as informational social media posts and enhancements to the Township website. Further, educational material could be made available at the Township Hall regarding land use and planning topics. Other possibilities include the creation of a Township newsletter, encouraging Neighborhood Watch programs, or the creation of special meetings specifically for the purpose of discussing the Township's planning efforts with the public.

**RESPONSIBILITIES.** The Township Board, Planning Commission, and staff will be responsible for pursuing continued educational opportunities, developing appropriate committees, and creating and/or updating informational materials.

**RELATED GOALS AND OBJECTIVES.** This strategy supports the following goals and objectives:

| Goals | Objectives |
|-------|------------|
| A2    | a          |
| A4    | d          |
| B1    | a, b, e    |
| C2    | b          |
| D1    | c          |
| G2    | a, b, c    |



## Cooperate with Neighboring Municipalities

Inter-jurisdictional cooperation on certain land use issues pays dividends to all involved. In an effort to manage growth properly, the Township seeks to establish consistent goals and regulations so that the immediate area develops in a compatibly efficient manner. Consequently, the Township seeks to minimize incompatible land uses across municipal boundaries. The implementation of any programs or policies resulting from this strategy will necessitate endorsement and support from all jurisdictions involved. This activity will be on-going and may include partnering with neighboring municipalities on corridor plans, watershed plans, regional health facilities, regional recreational facilities, and transportation and utility improvements. A first step is for the Township to identify legislative and political obstacles to accomplishing partnership on any given issue.

**RABBIT RIVER WATERSHED.** Several communities in the area that are interested in preserving the Rabbit River's significant features, including creeks, streams, wildlife, and wetlands, were engaged in materializing the Upper Rabbit River Watershed Land Use Action Plan. This Action Plan, published in 2013, includes increased recreational opportunities as one of its important goals in the watershed. This includes activities such as unobtrusive trails alongside waterways and scenic overlook areas.

Additionally, the reduction of nonpoint source pollution is an important goal listed in the Action Plan. This promotes the protection of water quality through watershed focused land-use planning and supports tools that will minimize high levels of runoff. Leighton Township should remain active in pursuing the goals of this Watershed Land Use Action Plan and seek ways to incorporate stormwater best management practices and encourage recreation within the watershed.

**AGRICULTURE.** In an effort to continually monitor agricultural trends and to support economically sustainable enterprises, the Township should collaborate with agricultural interests and neighboring communities to examine farmland preservation techniques. Of course, any preservation would be voluntary to preserve the rights of property owners, and may involve the purchase or transfer of development rights, as these mechanisms become feasible and authorized in the Township.

**MOLINE.** The Township should engage in discussions with Dorr Township concerning the development and future of the Moline community. Moline is a gateway into Leighton and a nucleus of the two Townships. Thus, it is an important consideration for regional planning. It is anticipated that Moline will continue to develop as a population and employment center, and the Town Center should develop in conjunction with similar policies and patterns in neighboring Dorr Township. Also, Leighton Township should work with Dorr on the future development and zoning of the properties west of US-131 and east of the Dorr-Leighton boundary.

**EMERGENCY SERVICES.** It may be appropriate at some point in the future for the Township to collaborate with neighboring communities to establish a regional fire and emergency response organization. It is often more efficient for municipalities to partner on this issue as they grow in population, rather than each having individual service agencies. This strategy will include improved communication among adjoining governments and research to identify opportunities to collaborate.



**RESPONSIBILITIES.** The Planning Commission and Township Administration will be responsible for the effort of communicating with other boards and commissions serving adjacent and nearby municipalities.

**RELATED GOALS AND OBJECTIVES.** This strategy supports the following goals and objectives:

| Goals | Objectives |
|-------|------------|
| A4    | d          |
| B1    | a, b       |
| C2    | d          |
| D1    | a, b, c, e |
| D3    | b          |
| G1    | a, b       |
| G2    | a, b, c    |

# Appendix A

## Open House Summary Report



# **Leighton Master Plan**

## OPEN HOUSE SUMMARY REPORT

Leighton Township  
Master Plan Update  
March 2019

williams&works

## Introduction

On February 26, 2019, Leighton Township held a public open house for the purpose of gathering public opinions regarding land use, development, and Township priorities in support of its efforts to update the Township's Master Plan. The public engagement activities at the open house resulted in quantifiable data and qualitative information from Township residents and workers to help set policy related to land use planning over the next several years. This report presents the findings of the public open house. It includes a summary of its findings in terms of the input received, an analysis of the significance of the conclusions, and a discussion of the methods used to solicit feedback.

## Public Open House

The public open house was held on Tuesday, February 26, 2019 at the Leighton Township Hall 6 pm to 8 pm. The open house featured a number of interactive stations designed to solicit input from residents through engaging and fun activities. The general purpose of each activity was to prompt the public with an issue or concern facing the Township, and the public was tasked with providing feedback on what is most important to them and what ideas they have to address these issues or concerns. Attendees were given the opportunity to engage in any of the activities as they pleased and further discuss specific items of personal importance with Township officials.

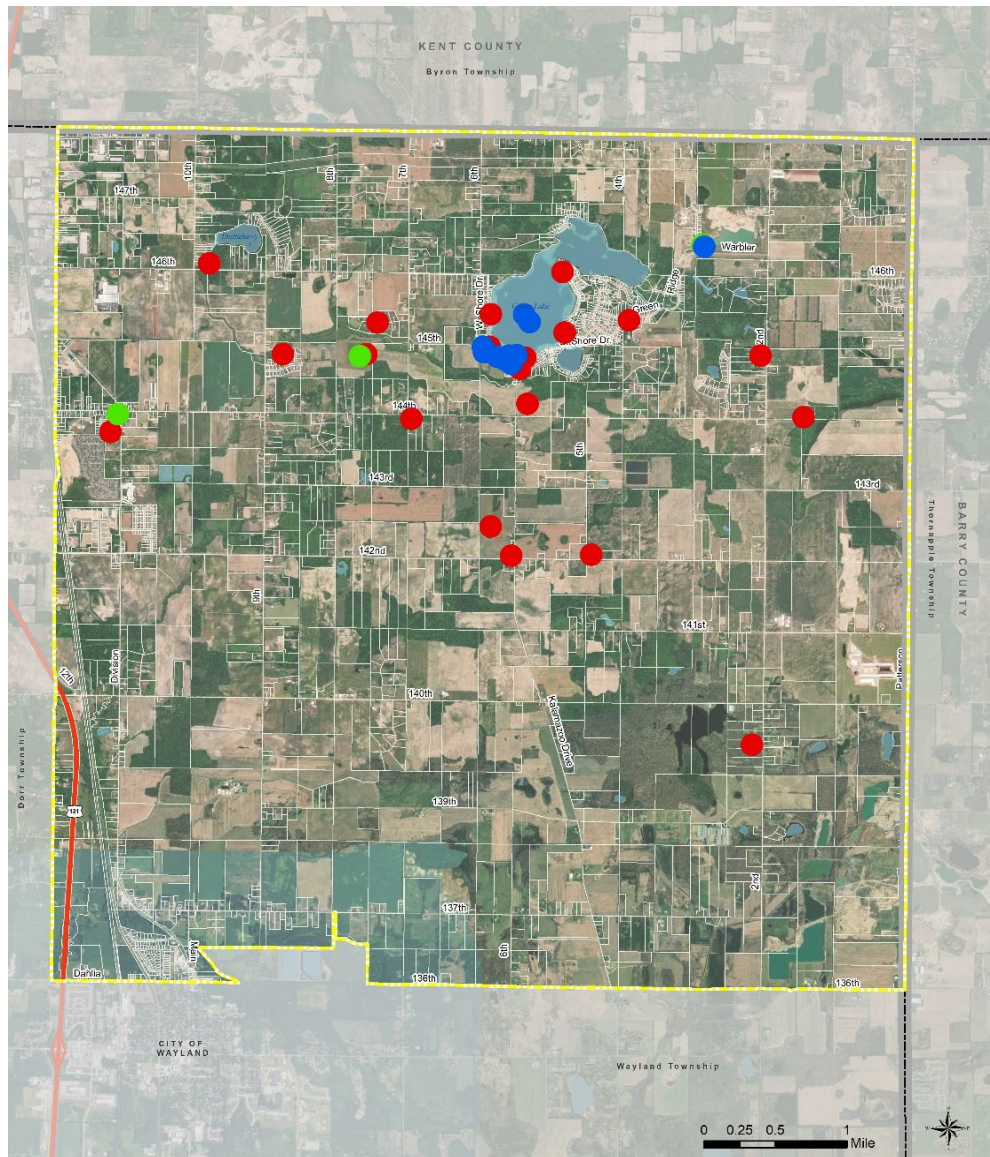
The open house received between 30 to 40 attendees. The event was publicized through online methods such as emails and social media announcements. These announcements were sent to a variety of Township neighborhood groups, churches, and local establishments.

Results from each of the activities are presented on the following pages, along with conclusions and next steps.

## Live \ Work \ Go (Station 1)

Attendees were asked to place a dot on a map indicating the locations in which they live, work, and frequently visit. The purpose of this station was to gain a sense of which areas of the Township are most frequently represented and to identify key service areas within the Township.

● = live      ● = work      ● = frequently visit



The most represented portion of the Township was north of 142<sup>nd</sup> Street. The greatest concentration of participants resided in the Green Lake area. Considering this is the most-densely populated portion of the Township, a greater level of input from this area was expected. Common destinations were concentrated in the Green Lake area as well. The lake provides many recreational opportunities including boating, fishing, and swimming. Green Lake One Stop, a local

store located near the lakeshore, appears to be a popular destination in the area by providing goods and services to lakeside residents and visitors. Those who indicated their location of employment indicated locations in the northwestern quadrant of the Township, nearest to the Moline area. However, it appears that most residents are not employed in the Township. This trend coincides with the 2017 American Community Survey's report that the mean travel time to work for residents was 23.7 minutes, indicating that residents travel considerable distances for employment.

### Your Priorities (Station 2)

Attendees were told to imagine they were in charge of directing the Township's spending. They were given a total budget of 10 pennies and instructed to place them into labeled jars according to how they would spend the Township's funds based on what was most important to them.

**Table 1. Priorities of Leighton Township Attendees**

| Category                                  | Pennies |
|---|---------|
| Preserving rural character and farmland   | 116     |
| Expanding commercial development          | 19      |
| Protecting surface water quality          | 34      |
| Protecting groundwater resources          | 27      |
| Adding more non-motorized pathways        | 21      |
| Acquiring or improving Township parks     | 19      |
| Creating more affordable housing options  | 5       |
| Expanding public water or sewer utilities | 17      |
| Property maintenance and enforcement      | 6       |
| Expanding industrial development          | 6       |

Preserving rural character and farmland was by far the most important priority of attendees, with this category comprising 43% of the total priorities. Protecting groundwater and surface water quality were also important to attendees, representing 12.6% and 10% of the total priorities, respectively. The character of Leighton Township is greatly shaped by farmland and water features, and these defining elements are shown to be of great importance to attendees.

### Land Use & Development (Station 3)

To glean insights into land use and development issues, attendees were asked to place flag notes on a map of the Township to identify positive aspects, negative aspects, and key opportunities within the Township. The graphs below identify the frequency of participant comments and the map depicts the location of each comment.

Figure 1. Positive Aspects of Leighton Township

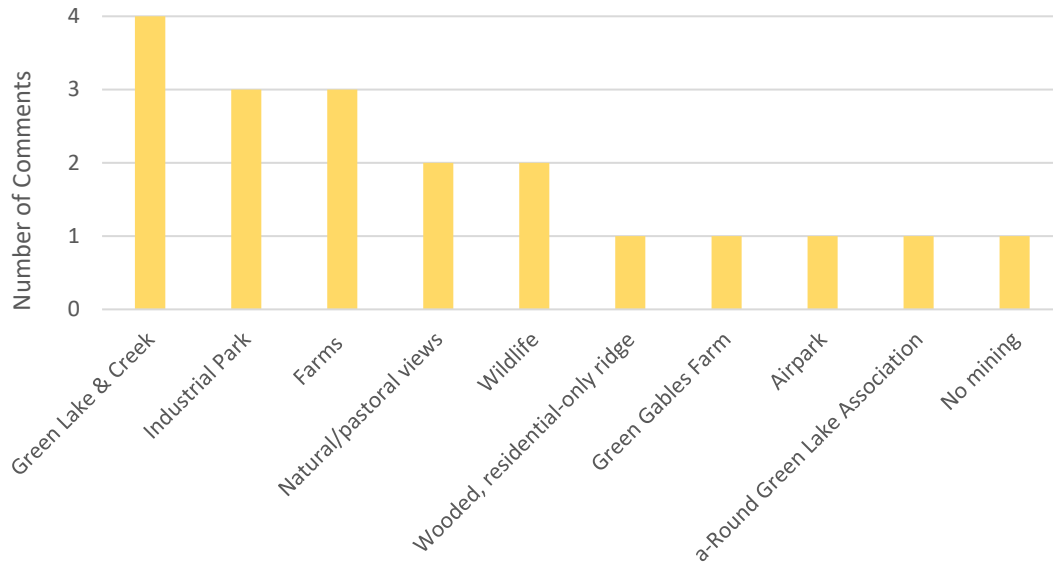


Figure 2. Negative Aspects of Leighton Township

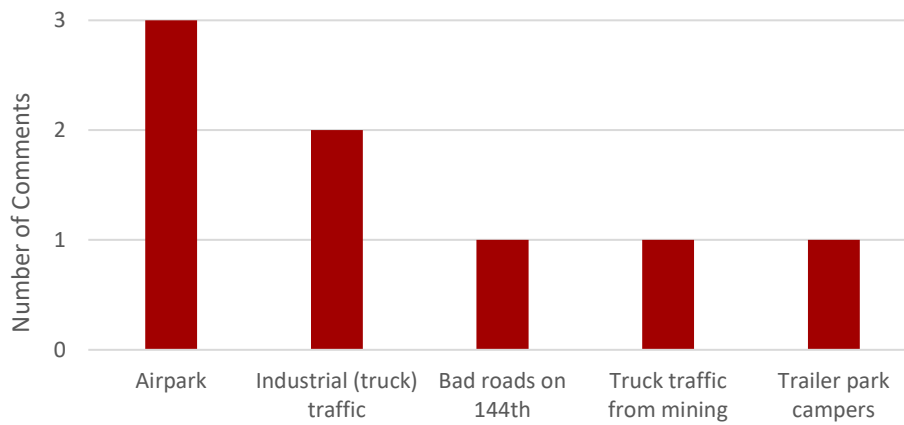
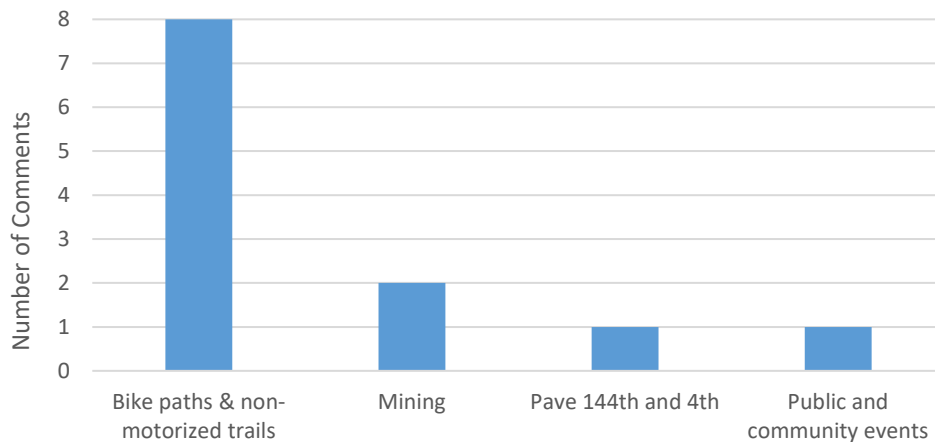
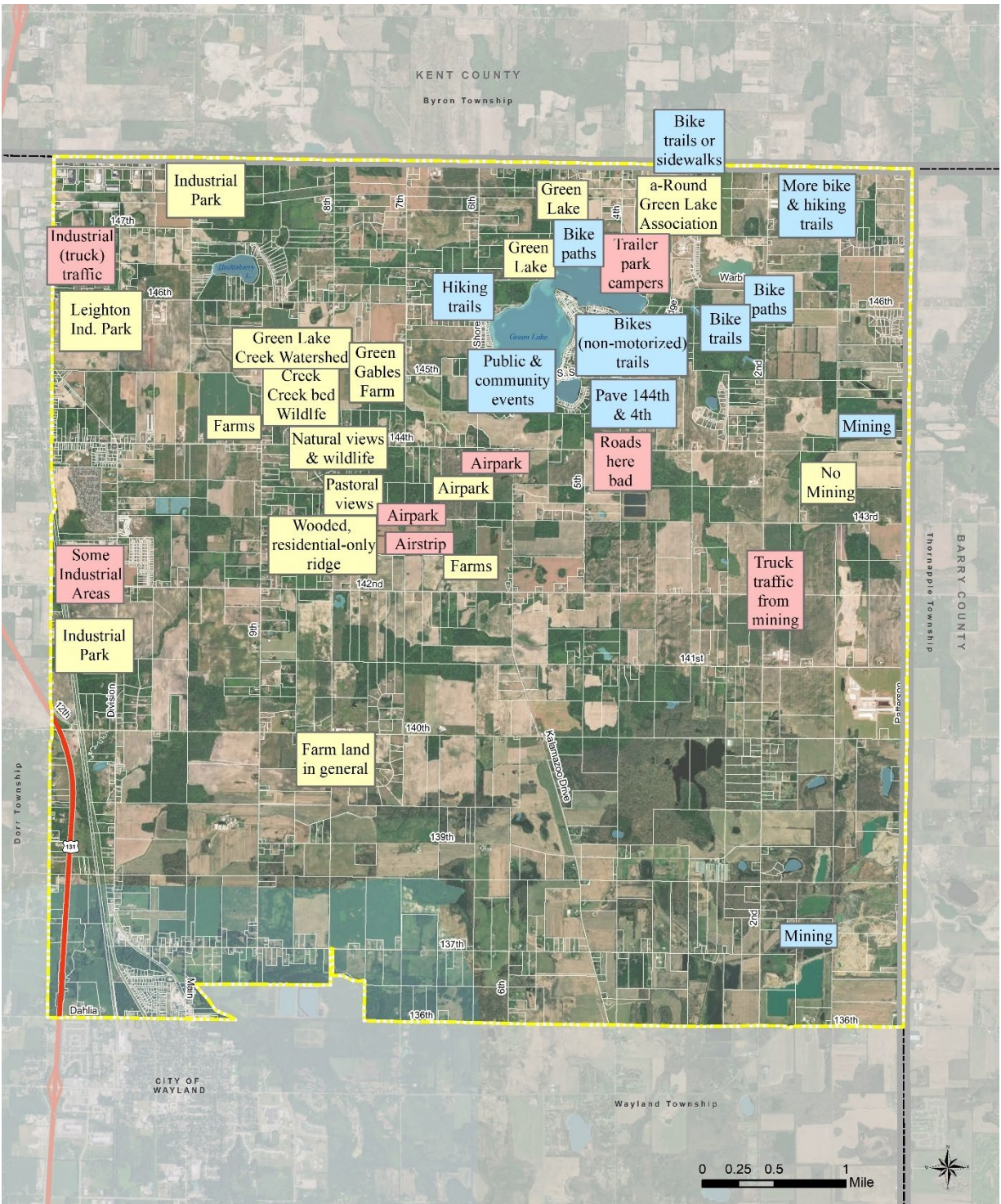


Figure 3. Key Opportunities in Leighton Township







Green Lake and Green Lake Creek were the most common positive element identified on the map. Natural features appear to be important to participants, as several comments identified positive elements being water features, wildlife, natural views, and farmland. These positive

natural areas were most commonly located southwest of Green Lake. The industrial park was also identified as a positive element, as it provides industry to the area.

The most negative aspect of the Township as identified by attendees was the airpark south of Green Lake. Attendees also noted traffic from the industrial park and mining to be a nuisance. Overall, negative features were related to aspects of transportation.

The majority of comments regarding opportunities were related to bike and hiking pathways. Non-motorized transportation opportunities were highly desired by participants. Locations for these types of pathways were identified near Green Lake. Additionally, mining appears to be a controversial topic, as attendees identified it within all categories as being positive, negative, and an opportunity.

#### Green Lake (Station 4)

Attendees were asked to indicate their level of agreement with three statements related to Green Lake. The attendees marked their level of agreement on scale that ranged from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”. These scales and the attendee’s responses are represented below.

1. Leighton Township should increase public access to Green Lake.



2. I support increased controls on development around the lake to protect the water quality of Green Lake.



3. I would be willing to pay slightly higher taxes or fees in order to protect the water quality of Green Lake.



The majority of attendees (76.9%) indicated that the Township should not increase public access to Green Lake. Considering that several attendees lived in the Green Lake area, increasing traffic in this area appears to be undesirable. Most attendees also indicated that they would support modest control on development in order to protect water quality on Green Lake. However, fewer attendees would be willing to pay in order to protect the water quality.

## General Comments (Station 5)

Attendees were asked to place a flag note containing their written comments regarding any land use or planning topic. This activity allowed participants the freedom to inform the Planning Commission about other ideas or issues concerning land use and development in the Township. The transcribed comments are below and have been grouped according to topic.

### Recreation & Events

- Please more hiking trails. Start with a hiking trail.
- More walking biking trails
- Need bike/run trails
- Sidewalks and bike paths (non-motor)
- Trails and sidewalks
- More community events
- Partner with a-Round Green Lake Association on community events

### Facilities and Services

- Internet access
- Internet access!
- Internet access
- Online access to planning meeting minutes

### Transportation

- Improve roads
- Spend more \$ on roads
- Ensure airstrip remains daytime grass strip 4 hours as approved

### Development

- No gravel pits
- Enable green energy development
- No more growth to Hunter's Glen
- When new plan is drafted please highlight or flag any changes from current plan

### Natural Features

- Maintain and improve water
- Nature preserve
- Worried about drinking water with so much PFAS being found in other areas
- Preserving natural creek and wildlife is very important to me

Attendees consider non-motorized pathways an important aspect of land use and development. This appears to be the most desired form of recreation in the community. Attendees also desire more community events and value the a-Round Green Lake Association as a partner in the community. Trails and events often gather the community together, bolstering community identity and character.

Another theme identified in attendee comments was the lack of internet service. Most attendees indicated that they lived in the northern half of the Township near Green Lake, so it appears that internet coverage is not sufficient within this area.

## Conclusions

Based on the above results, the Township Planning Commission should consider the following as it updates the goals, objectives, and action items contained in the Master Plan:

### Recommendations

- Preserving rural character and farmland, protecting surface water, and protecting groundwater were identified as being top priorities among the public during the open house. Additionally, several natural features were listed as being positive aspects of the Township. The Planning Commission may wish to review and address water quality concerns in the Master Plan to help inform the public of water quality protection strategies. Preserving natural features is of great importance to Township residents and should be considered throughout the Master Plan update.
- Bike paths and hiking trails comprised the overwhelming majority of key opportunities identified for the Township and were also mentioned several times as general comments. The Planning Commission may consider promoting policy related to non-motorized pathways as a valuable community feature through the Master Plan.
- The public has identified a desire to have greater internet access.
- The public holds several perspectives on mining in the Township. Truck traffic and gravel pits were viewed negatively and having an area with no mining was considered positive. However, opportunities for mining were also identified. The Planning Commission may consider recommending review of current mining regulations in order to ensure appropriate protection and welfare for Township residents.
- Green Lake was identified as an important defining feature of the Township and its protection was highly valued by the public. The majority of attendees did not want increased access to Green Lake. Many attendees would support increased controls, while fewer would be willing to pay for protection. The Planning Commission should consider this when assessing land use development strategies for Green Lake.

## Next Steps

The Leighton Township Planning Commission should review and discuss the open house results contained in this report at their next meeting and future meetings, if necessary. We have also prepared an online community survey to gather additional community input over the next month. Once that is complete, the Township should use the results of the open house and survey to inform edits to the Goals and Objectives, Future Land Use, and Implementation Strategies sections of the Master Plan.

As always, feel free to contact us if there are any questions.

# Appendix B

## Survey Summary Report



# **Leighton Township**

## PUBLIC SURVEY SUMMARY REPORT

Leighton Township  
Master Plan Update  
August 2019

williams&works

## Introduction

In June and July of 2019, the Leighton Township Planning Commission issued opinion surveys for the purpose of gathering public opinions regarding land use and planning in the Township. This community input is useful for guiding policy decisions that will be considered while updating the Township's Master Plan. The survey resulted in a large amount of quantifiable data from the Township property owners, business owners, and residents that will help set policy relative to growth and development in the community. This report presents the findings of the survey, including a summary of its findings in terms of the input and quantified data received, an analysis of the significance of the conclusions, and the survey methodology.

## Methodology and General Information

The survey questions were developed by the Planning Commission with assistance from Williams & Works. The survey was organized into three sections: background questions and two land use sections. The survey was conducted through the online survey tool SurveyMonkey. The survey was publicized through a notice sent out to all property owners in the Township that was included with the summer tax bills. A total of 158 responses were received by the July 31, 2019, deadline.

Due to the sample size, sample population, and other limitations generally associated with online surveys, the results should not be interpreted with a purely scientific mindset; however, the survey resulted in objective, quantifiable information from a large number of people compared to typical participation in other forms of public input (community open houses, visioning meetings, charrettes, etc.). Therefore, the survey results provide valuable perspectives of the community's opinions regarding land use and planning. This survey is one of the several tools that will help the Township Planning Commission set land use planning policy, prioritize projects, and make decisions over the several years.

The format of the survey enabled respondents to provide confidential replies using a "check-the-box" format to expedite the completion of the online form and to maximize the rate of response. This format also facilitates consistent scoring on which analysis can be performed. Some respondents completed the survey but left various items blank; however, all surveys had at least some responses that could be scored. A total of three survey pages were created in order to organize questions by category.

### Data Entry and Measurement

Through the online survey tool, SurveyMonkey, respondents received a standardized set of questions from which they could choose responses. Some questions also allowed space for individual comments. This method restricted acceptable entries to those required by the form, providing a standardized method by which analysis could be conducted and trends observed.

Two scoring scales were used to report the data received: Nominal and ordinal. A nominal scale merely counts responses by particular classification (e.g., resident or non-resident). This scale is useful to separate responses into working groups or to evaluate the overall sample to determine whether it represents the larger population. Items 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 15, and 16 were scored on a nominal scale.

An ordinal scale is more useful in gaining insight into respondent beliefs because it includes the characteristic of rank order. That is, one item is greater or lesser than another item, or it has more or less of a particular quality, based on a commonly understood standard. An ordinal scale enables some greater judgment about the relative strength or weakness of particular responses (e.g., “greater than,” “more important than,” etc.). It does not, however, include a quantifiable or consistent interval between the various points in the scale. Items 5, 8, 12, 13, 14, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, and 26 were scored on an ordinal scale.

Lastly, question 27 featured an open-ended write-in response for participants to write in their general thoughts pertaining to parks and recreation facilities.

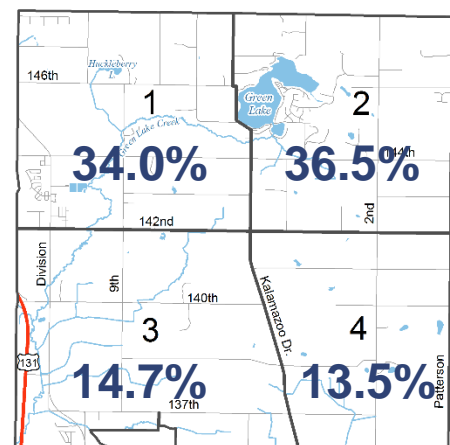
For the purposes of reporting the results of the survey, the ordinal scales used were converted to interval scales. This merely means that a numeric value was assigned to each response with an interval of “1” between each point on the scale. For example, in Question 14, “Very Concerned” responses were assigned the number 3, “Somewhat Concerned” responses were assigned the number 2, and so forth. This was done to enable the measurement of central tendency of all responses, which is accomplished by determining the arithmetic mean (or average) response for the item. However, it must be recognized that the assignment of value to the intervals of the scale does not automatically result in a true interval scale because each respondent will have his/her own interpretation of the interval. Nevertheless, in aggregate, this procedure does enable comparison of the items from one to the next.

## Analysis

Results were compiled to determine trends in opinions of survey respondents. Cross-tabulation analyses were performed in order to try and understand if various sub-groups of survey respondents responded differently to questions which may not be readily apparent when analyzing total survey responses. Cross-tabulations were performed for the following: area of residence in the Township (Q1), full-time residents vs. seasonal residents (Q2), duration of residency in the Township (Q5), and age (Q8).

## Background Questions

1. The first question focused on the geographic representation of survey respondents based on four quadrants in the Township. The plurality of respondents indicated that they live in the northeast quadrant (36.5%), followed closely by the northwest quadrant (34.0%). Together, the northern half of the township contained the majority (70.5%) of respondents. This is unsurprising, as the northern portion of the township is closest to Grand Rapids and has likely experienced increased population growth as a result of the expanding suburbs of the city. Additionally, the northern portion contains Green Lake, around which there is substantial residential development. This increased residential density in the northern half of the



Township also correlates to the Zoning Map, in which many parcels are zoned in the Rural Estate or Low Density Residential districts. The northeast southwest (14.7%) and southeast (13.5%) quadrants of the Township tend to feature larger parcels that are primarily agricultural land and fewer residences are located in these areas.

A cross-tabulation analysis was performed in order to identify any major differences between respondents in different geographic representations. The most dominant housing types or respondents in the northwest quadrant was single-family homes on 5 or more acres and single-family homes on less than 5 acres. This was also the only quadrant to have any respondents that lived in a multi-family home. The primary connection of respondents to the township was as a resident; however, this quadrant was identified as the most diverse, as it also had the highest number of business owners, commercial property owners, and landlords compared to the other quadrants. Further, the largest age group representing this quadrant was the 65 years or over age group.

Respondents from the northeast quadrant had the highest number of seasonal residents, likely due to the presence of Green Lake in the quadrant. Respondents from this quadrant primarily live in single-family homes on less than 5 acres, indicating that this quadrant has received greater development. This quadrant also had the highest number of respondents between the ages of 35 and 44 years, representing a younger demographic than other quadrants.

The southwest and southeast quadrants did not have any seasonal residents. Both quadrants also had the highest percentages of their population living in a single-family home on 5 or more acres, indicating that the southern half of the Township is generally less developed with larger parcels. Both of these quadrants also had the highest retention rate of respondents, the plurality of the southwest (47.8%) and the majority of the southeast (57.1%) having respondents who have lived in the Township more than 25 years. These groups also both had the highest percentages of respondents from the 55 to 64-year age groups.

When comparing important reasons for living in Leighton Township, the southwest and southeast quadrants had a greater percentage of respondents who desired the farming and agricultural community and the rural lifestyle than those in the northern quadrants. Comparatively, the northeast quadrant considered the Caledonia Community School District an important factor. Green Lake was also most important to the northern quadrants.

When comparing concerns of respondents, the southeast quadrant was less concerned traffic congestion than other quadrants. Further, both the southwest and southeast quadrants were substantially less concerned about traffic speeds than those in the northern quadrants. The quadrant with the greatest level of concern regarding the lack of bike trails and paved shoulders was the northeast. Additionally, the northern quadrants were more concerned about the quality of surface water than the southern quadrants.

The northern quadrants were more concerned overall regarding zoning enforcement and property maintenance. The southeast quadrant had the lowest level of concern overall.

However, the southeast quadrant was most concerned about the conversion of farms to residential lots and had the highest percentage of respondents who thought preserving farmland was an important priority.

2. The overwhelming majority (96.1%) of residents indicated that they are full-time residents in the Township. Only six (4.0%) respondents indicated that they were seasonal residents and 14 individuals skipped this question.

A higher percentage of seasonal residents owned a lakefront single-family home compared to full-time residents. Additionally, seasonal residents had a greater percentage of those who had lived in the Township more than 25 years and were primarily 65 years or older. Green Lake was the primary reason seasonal residents had chosen to live in the Township.

Compared to full-time residents, seasonal residents were less concerned about traffic congestion and more concerned about traffic speeds. They were also less concerned about zoning enforcement and property maintenance.

Full-time residents were more concerned about farmland preservation, improving traffic flow, and preserving the rural character of the Township. Additionally, protecting groundwater and improving parks and recreation facilities were considered more important to full-time residents than seasonal residents.

3. According to the survey, 44.5% of respondents indicated they live in a single-family home on less than five acres. 41.9% of survey participants indicated living in a single-family home on more than five acres. Additionally, 12.3% of respondents reported living in lakefront single-family homes. Therefore, the vast majority of respondents reside in single-family housing (98.7%). This is a slightly higher percentage than indicated in the 2017 American Community Survey Estimates, which reported that approximately 86.4% of Township residents reside in a single detached housing unit. The higher proportion of single-family homeowners in the community survey is reflective of the chosen advertising methods for the survey, which utilized the summer tax bills of property owners. Multi-family homes were the second most common type of housing and the only other type of residence reported by respondents (1.3%).

**Table 2. Type of Residence**

| Answer Choices                         | Responses |            |
|--|-----------|------------|
| Detached Single Family Home (5+ acres) | 41.9%     | 65         |
| Detached Single Family Home (<5 acres) | 44.5%     | 69         |
| Lakefront Single Family Home           | 12.3%     | 19         |
| Multi-family Home                      | 1.3%      | 2          |
| Duplex                                 | 0.0%      | 0          |
| Manufactured Home                      | 0.0%      | 0          |
| <b>Answered</b>                        |           | <b>155</b> |
| <b>Skipped</b>                         |           | <b>11</b>  |

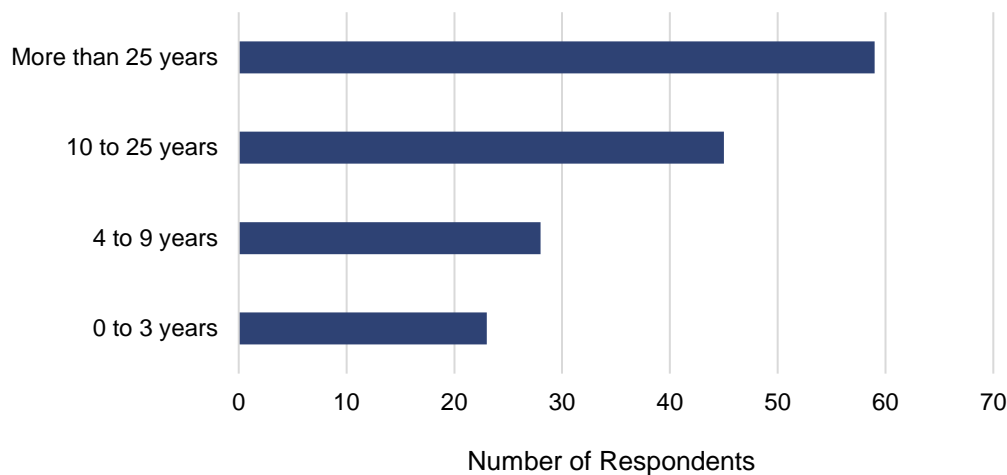
4. All respondents indicated that they owned their homes. Comparatively, the 2017 American Community Survey Estimates indicated an owner-to-renter ratio of



approximately 9:1. This is a high ratio of owner to renter-occupied units, indicating a lack of rental units in the Township. The abundance of owner-occupied units is likely due to the predominance of agricultural land with large parcels and lakefront property in the Township.

- Overall, respondents indicated that the Township has a strong rate of retention among its population. The plurality of respondents indicated that they have lived in the Township for more than 25 years (38.0%), while many also indicated that they have lived in the Township for 10 to 25 years (29.0%). Those living in the Township for 0 to 3 years was comprised of the smallest group of respondents (14.8%).

**Figure 1. Duration of Residency**



A cross-tabulation analysis was performed to identify any distinct patterns based on the duration of residency in the Township. Respondents living in the Township more than 25 years primarily live in a single-family home on more than 5 acres (61.0%), while all other age groups primarily live in single-family homes on less than 5 acres. The plurality of respondents who have lived in the Township 0 to 3 years are most represented by the 35 to 44-year age group, while those who have lived in the Township more than 25 years are best represented by respondents 65 years or over (39.0%).

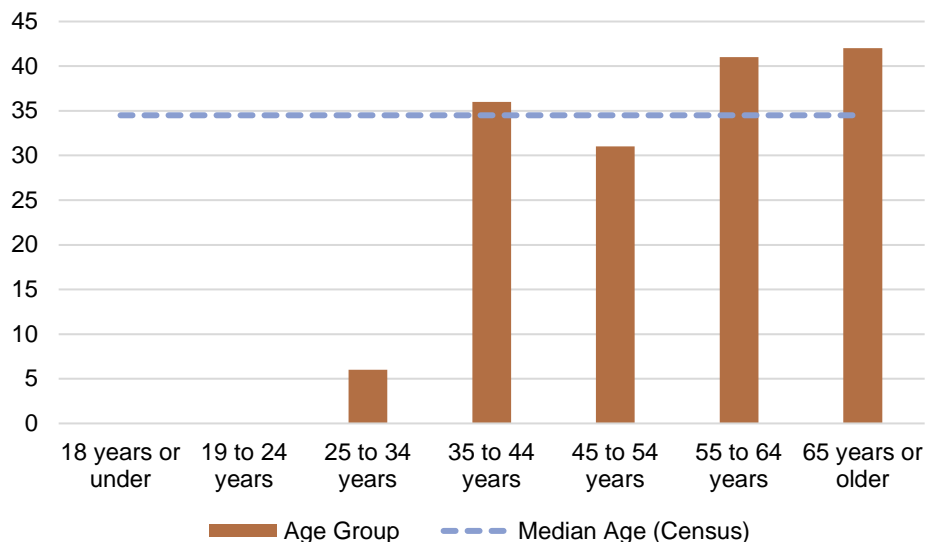
Respondents who have lived in the Township more than 25 years had the highest percentage of respondents who selected the farming and agricultural community as an important reason for living in the Township (42.4%). Those who have lived in the Township for 0 to 3 years had the greatest percentage of respondents who chose the Township because of its access to Grand rapids (52.2%). In general, Green Lake was a more important reason for living in the Township to respondents who have lived in Leighton Township 0 to 3 years and 4 to 9 years, while those who have lived in the Township 10 to 25 years (13.3%) or greater than 25 years (30.5%) had a higher percentage of respondents who grew up in the Township.

Respondents who have lived in the Township 0 to 3 years are most concerned about the lack of sidewalks, bike trails/paved shoulders, and quality of surface water. The majority of this group also considered preservation of open space as being very important

(60.0%) and had the greatest level of agreement that the Township should acquire more land for parks, natural areas, and non-motorized trails. Those who have lived in the Township 10 to 25 years or more than 25 years are most concerned about loss of open space/natural areas to development than other groups. These groups also identified protection of private property rights as very important.

6. The majority of respondents (88.2%) do not intend to move out of the Township in the next five years. A total of 18 respondents (11.8%) indicated the expectation of moving and 14 respondents skipped this question. Overall, this corresponds to the high retention rate of respondents in Question 5, as the majority of respondents have lived in the Township over 10 years.
7. This question asked respondents to identify their primary connections to the Township, permitting more than one answer per person. The majority of respondents to the survey indicated that they were residents (87.9%). The remainder were comprised of business owners (5.2%), commercial property owners (2.3%), landlords (2.3%) and those who work in the Township (2.3%). These results are consistent with the rural character of the Township, as there are many large agricultural parcels and limited commercial development.
8. The age of respondents was generally skewed toward the older end of the age spectrum, which is common among surveys. Similar percentages of respondents were from ages 65 and over (26.9%) and 55 to 64 years (26.3%). Several respondents were also between 35 to 44 years (23.1%). For comparison, the 2017 Community Survey reported the Township's median age was 34.5 years.

**Figure 2. Age of Respondents**



A cross-tabulation analysis was performed to identify any distinct patterns based on the age of residents. Overall, the youngest groups of respondents lived in the northern portion of the Township, with the greatest percentage of those 25 to 34 years living in the northwest quadrant and the greatest percentage of those 25 to 44 years living in the

northeast quadrant. In general, younger age groups (25 to 34 and 35 to 44) lived predominately in single-family homes on less than 5 acres, while older age groups (55 to 65 and 65+) live primarily in single-family homes on 5 acres or more. The 55 to 64-year age group had the highest percentage of respondents who expected to move out of the Township in the next 5 years (25.0%).

The primary workplace of all groups except 65 years or older was the Grand Rapids area. However, the 25 to 34-year age group had the highest percentage of individuals who worked in the Grand Rapids area overall (83.3%). The importance of Grand Rapids for the 25 to 34 age group is also reflected in reasons for living in the Township, as all respondents in this age group chose access to Grand Rapids as an important reason for living in Leighton Township.

In general, the 25 to 34-year age group was the least concerned about traffic congestion, while other age groups indicated higher levels of concern regarding this topic. The lack of public water and sewer was a greater concern to the 25 to 34-year age group compared to other age groups; however, this group also did not think expanding public utilities was important. The 65 and over age group had the greatest percentage of respondents who were not concerned about a lack of trails and paved shoulders (62.2%), while those 35 to 44 years were very concerned about this aspect of the Township (42.4%).

The 25 to 34-year and 35 to 44-year age groups had the highest percentages of respondents who desired single-family housing on 5 acres or more, at 83.3% and 69.7%, respectively. Single-family homes on 1 to 5 acres were most desired by those 55 to 64 years (68.9%) and 65 years or over (54.1%). Satisfaction with housing choices was highest for the 25 to 34-year age group to live in the Township than any other group.

Farmland preservation and preserving the Township's rural character was important to all age groups. The 25 to 34-year age group also had the highest percentage of those who thought increasing housing for young families was important (50.0%). This group also had the highest level of agreement that preserving the rural feel of the Township could be accomplished through clustered development that preserves open space, with 66.7% selecting either "Strongly Agree" or "Agree."

Respondents 25 to 34 years and 35 to 44 years were most supportive of a dedicated millage to acquire or improve parks, natural areas, and non-motorized trail facilities. 66.6% of those 25 to 35 years and 60.6% of those 35 to 44 years selected either "Strongly Agree" or "Agree" to this question. Those 35 to 44 years also had the strongest overall agreement to support increased controls on development to protect water quality.

9. The plurality of respondents indicated that they worked in the Grand Rapids area (35.1%). This was followed by those who are retired (25.3%), work at home, (8.4%), and work at other places not listed in the survey (8.4%). This question allowed respondents to specify their workplace should it not be listed in the survey. Those who commented other work locations included Dorr township, Middleville, Hastings, Chicago, and Hudsonville. Several also travel throughout Michigan and the nation. It is not surprising that the majority of respondents work in Grand Rapids, considering the Township's

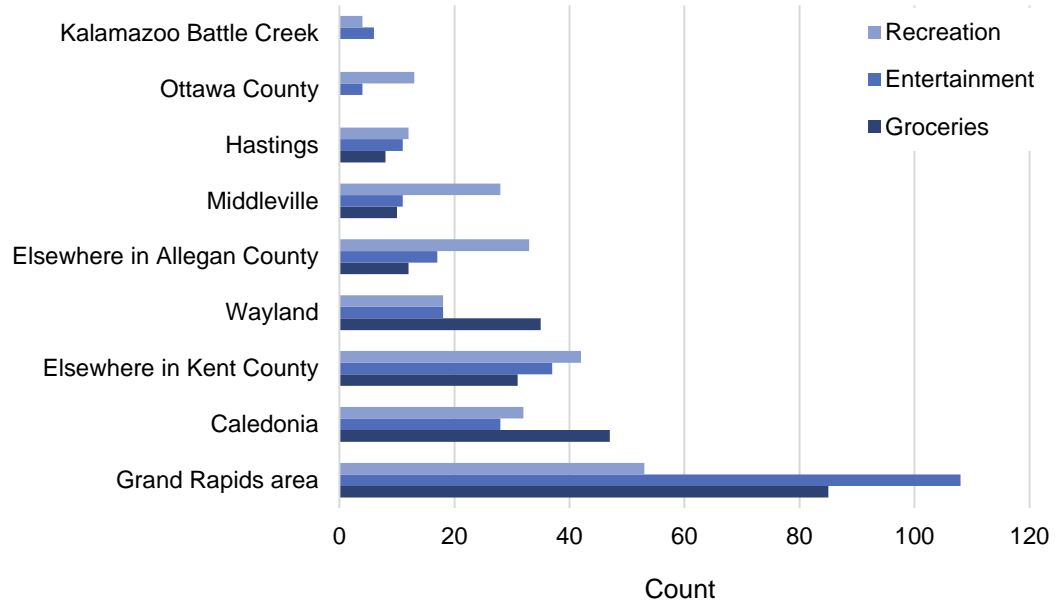
proximity to this large urban center and the majority of respondents residing in the northern half of the Township.

**Table 4. Primary Workplace of Respondents**

| Answer Choices                      | Responses       |            |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------|------------|
| Grand Rapids area                   | 35.1%           | 54         |
| Retired                             | 25.3%           | 39         |
| Home                                | 8.4%            | 13         |
| Other                               | 8.4%            | 13         |
| Elsewhere in Kent County            | 5.2%            | 8          |
| Leighton Township (but not at home) | 3.9%            | 6          |
| Stay-at-home parent                 | 3.9%            | 6          |
| Elsewhere in Allegan County         | 3.3%            | 5          |
| Caledonia                           | 2.6%            | 4          |
| Wayland                             | 1.3%            | 2          |
| Unemployed                          | 0.7%            | 1          |
| Kalamazoo/Battle Creek              | 0.0%            | 0          |
| Student                             | 0.0%            | 0          |
|                                     | <b>Answered</b> | <b>154</b> |
|                                     | <b>Skipped</b>  | <b>12</b>  |

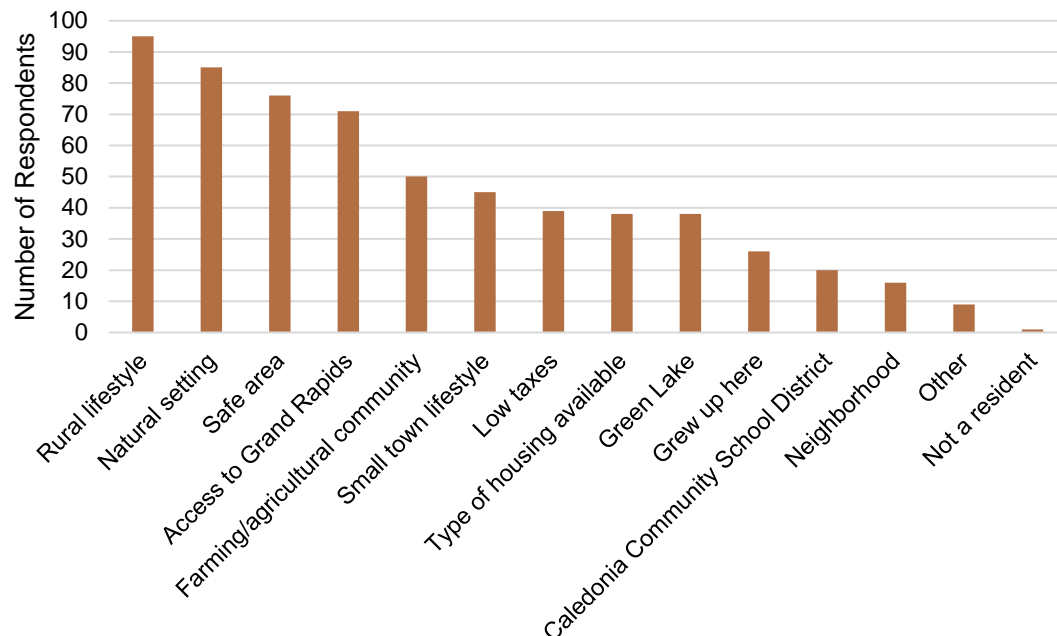
10. When asked where respondents travel for groceries, entertainment, and recreation, the Grand Rapids area received the highest total number of responses (133), followed by Caledonia (67), and elsewhere in Kent County (64). During the 2010 Census, the city of Grand Rapids had a population of 188,040. Therefore, it is expected that this urban center and surrounding suburban areas would provide a significant number of goods and services to residents in Leighton Township. The Grand Rapids area was also the most popular location for groceries (85), entertainment (108), and recreation (53). Outside of the Grand Rapids area, Caledonia was the second most popular location for groceries (47) and elsewhere in Kent County was the second most popular for entertainment (31) and recreation (42).

**Figure 3. Popular Locations for Goods and Services**



11. The final background question asked respondents to indicate the most important reason(s) they have chosen to live in Leighton Township. The top two choices were 'Rural lifestyle' (15.6%) and 'Natural setting' (14.0%). Additionally, respondents also indicated a safe area (12.5%) and access to Grand Rapids (11.7%) as important factors for living in the Township. Many respondents who selected 'Other' indicated a connection to land and family in the area.

**Figure 4. Important Reasons for Living in Leighton Township**



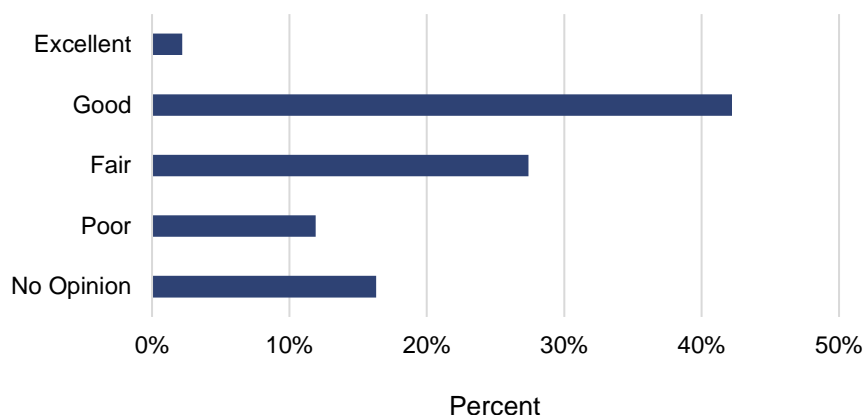


## Land Use & Development Questions, Part 1

This section of the survey focused on residential opinions related to growth, development, and land use in Leighton Township. Questions within this section were intended to provide insight on community priorities and attitudes related to several land use and planning topics in the Township.

12. The majority of respondents (61.0%) felt that the Township was growing “about right.” Several respondents (25.0%) felt that the Township was growing too quickly and some had no opinion (11.0%). Very few thought that the Township’s growth was too slow (2.9%).
13. Respondents were asked to rate the Township’s efforts to guide and direct development and growth. The plurality of respondents (42.2%) thought that the Township’s efforts were “Good.” Many respondents also indicated that efforts to guide and direct development was “Fair” (27.4%). A somewhat similar percentage of respondents had “No opinion” (16.3%) or rated the Township’s efforts as “Poor” (11.9%), while 2.2% thought the Township’s efforts were “Excellent.”

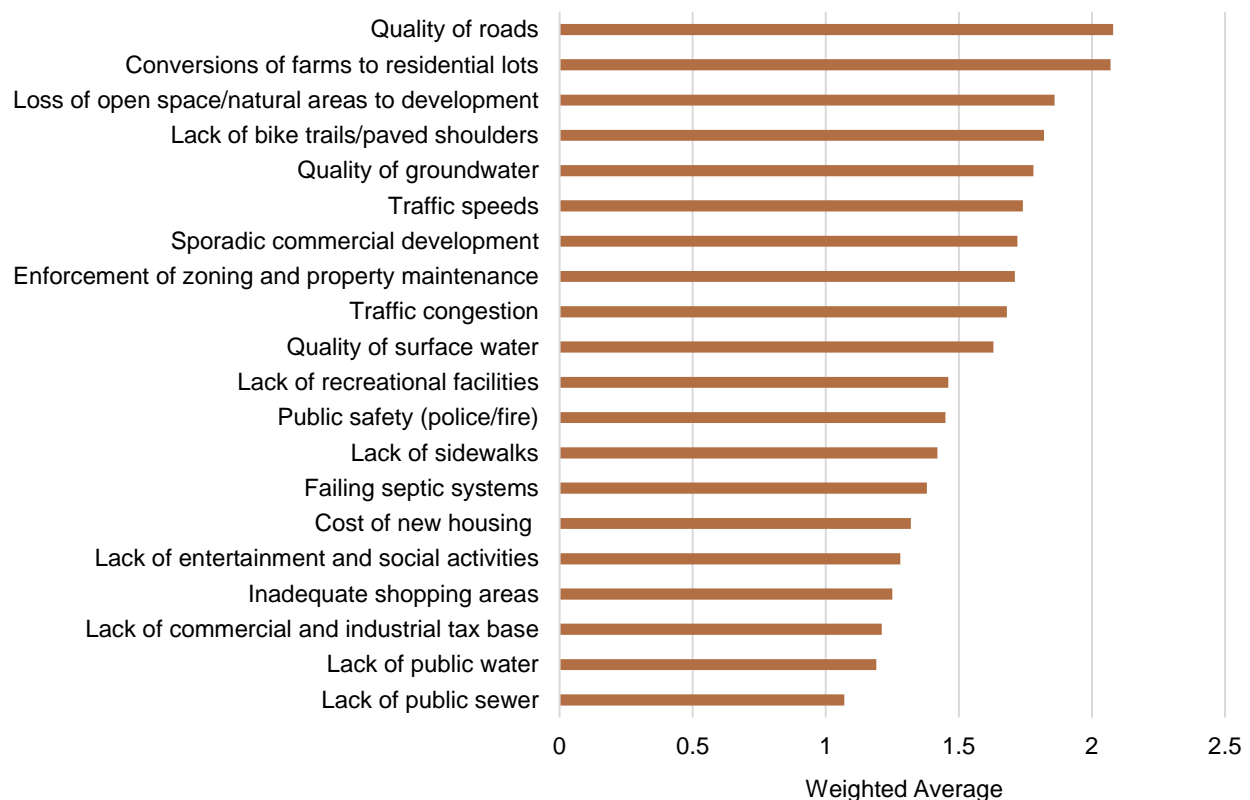
**Figure 4. Rating of the Township’s Efforts to Guide and Direct Growth and Development**



14. Question 14 asked respondents to rate their level of concern regarding a list of issues facing the Township. Answer choices available for this question were “Very Concerned,” “Somewhat Concerned,” “Not Concerned,” and “No Opinion.” For purposes of providing a quantifiable value to compare and rank issues, a weighted average was applied. A score of 3 was given to “Very Concerned,” a score of 2 was given to “Somewhat Concerned,” a score of 1 was given to “Not Concerned,” and a score of 0 was given to “No Opinion.” Quality of roads and conversions of farms to residential lots were the top two concerns of respondents. Loss of open space/natural areas to development and lack of bike trails/paved shoulders were also considered important. Overall, the conversion of farms received the highest individual count for “Very Concerned” (48) and quality of roads received the highest individual count for “Somewhat Concerned” (71). Lack of public water and sewer were the lowest concerns among respondents.

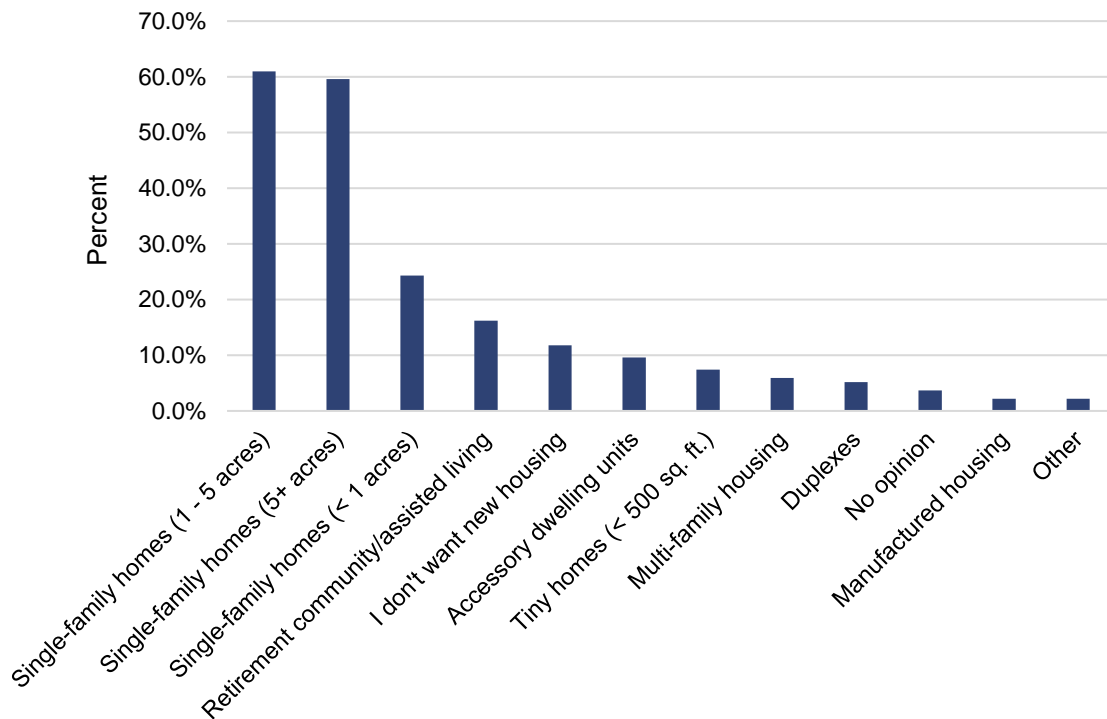
Several respondents also left comments related to their concerns. Many of these comments were related to the roads, including traffic issues, need for pavement, and speeding. Specifically, 144<sup>th</sup> Street and 2<sup>nd</sup> Street were identified as needing to be paved due to the amount of traffic it accommodates. Bike trails were also desired as an alternate mode of transportation. Additionally, more enforcement is desired for noise, speeding, animal control, and residential density.

**Figure 5. Level of Concern Regarding Township Issues**



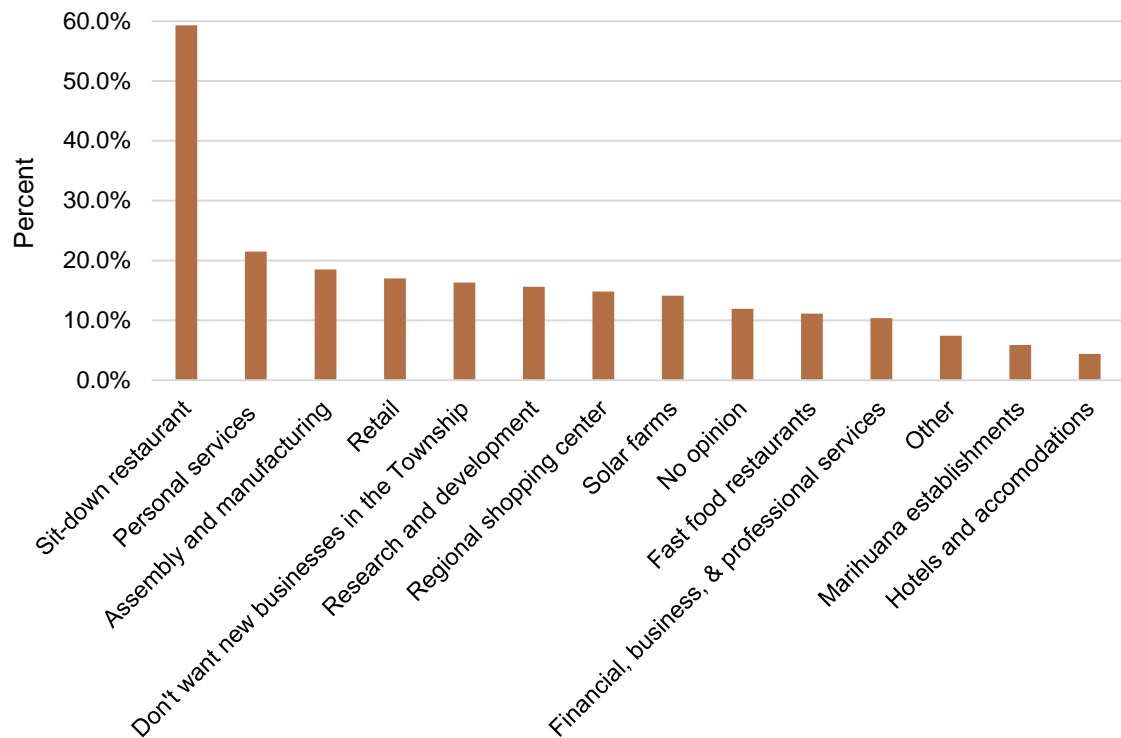
15. Question 15 asked what types of housing respondents would like to see in the Township. Respondents were encouraged to select all that applied. The clear top selections were single-family housing on 1 to 5 acres (59.6%) and single-family housing on 5 or more acres (61.0%). Single-family homes on less than 1 acre were also desired (24.3%), as well as retirement community and assisted living accommodations (16.2%). The overwhelming desire for single-family housing aligns with the community's value of open space, natural areas, and agriculture. Generally, there was little support for manufactured housing (2.2%), duplexes (5.2%), and multi-family homes (5.9%). A few respondents provided additional comments, which are included at the end of this report.

**Figure 6. Desired Housing Types in Leighton Township**



16. Similar to the previous question, Question 16 also gathered respondent preferences for types of development in the Township. This question asked respondents what types of businesses they would like to see in the Township, encouraging them to select all which applied. These types of commercial development can provide local employment and a diverse tax base. The majority of respondents indicated they would like to see a sit-down restaurant (59.3%), which was the clear top choice for businesses in the Township. Following a sit-down restaurant, respondents also desire personal services (such as barber or beauty shops, health and fitness centers, dry cleaning services, etc.) (21.5%), assembly and manufacturing (18.5%), and retail (17.0%). Several respondents did not desire new businesses in the Township (16.3%). The least desired types of businesses were hotels and accommodations (4.4%) and marihuana establishments (5.9%). Ten respondents included other comments, which included several comments against marihuana establishments. Several comments also commented that additional businesses are not necessary. One respondent wanted the Township to be a local leader in green energy.

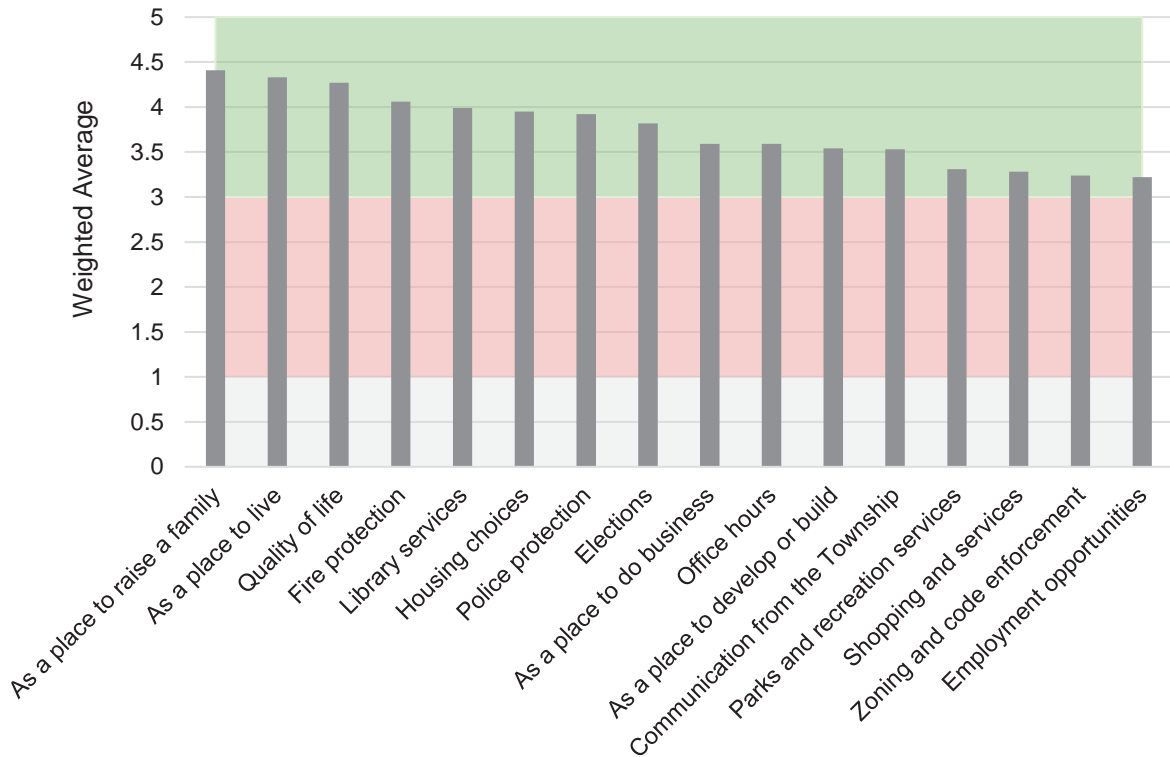
**Figure 7. Desired Business Types in Leighton Township**



17. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of satisfaction with various aspects of the Township in Question 17. Answer choices available for this question were “Very Satisfied,” “Satisfied,” “Neutral,” “Dissatisfied,” and “Very Dissatisfied.” For purposes of providing a quantifiable value to compare and rank respondents’ satisfaction of the listed issues, a weighted average was applied. A score of 5 was given to “Very Satisfied,” a score of 4 was given to “Satisfied,” a score of 3 was given to “Neutral,” a score of 2 was given to “Dissatisfied,” and a score of 1 was given to “Very Dissatisfied.” Interestingly, all answer choices had a score greater than 3, indicating that survey respondents were generally satisfied with all answer choices. Overall, respondents were most satisfied with the Township as a place to raise a family (4.41), as a place to live (4.33), its quality of life (4.27), and fire protection (4.06), as all of these aspects received a score greater than 4. Employment opportunities (3.22) and zoning and code enforcement (3.24) received the lowest satisfaction levels; however, these scores were still relatively high overall.

A variety of comments were received in this section, including the desire for internet, better enforcement, senior citizen activities, and investment in parks and hiking trails.

**Figure 8. Satisfaction with Various Aspects of the Township**

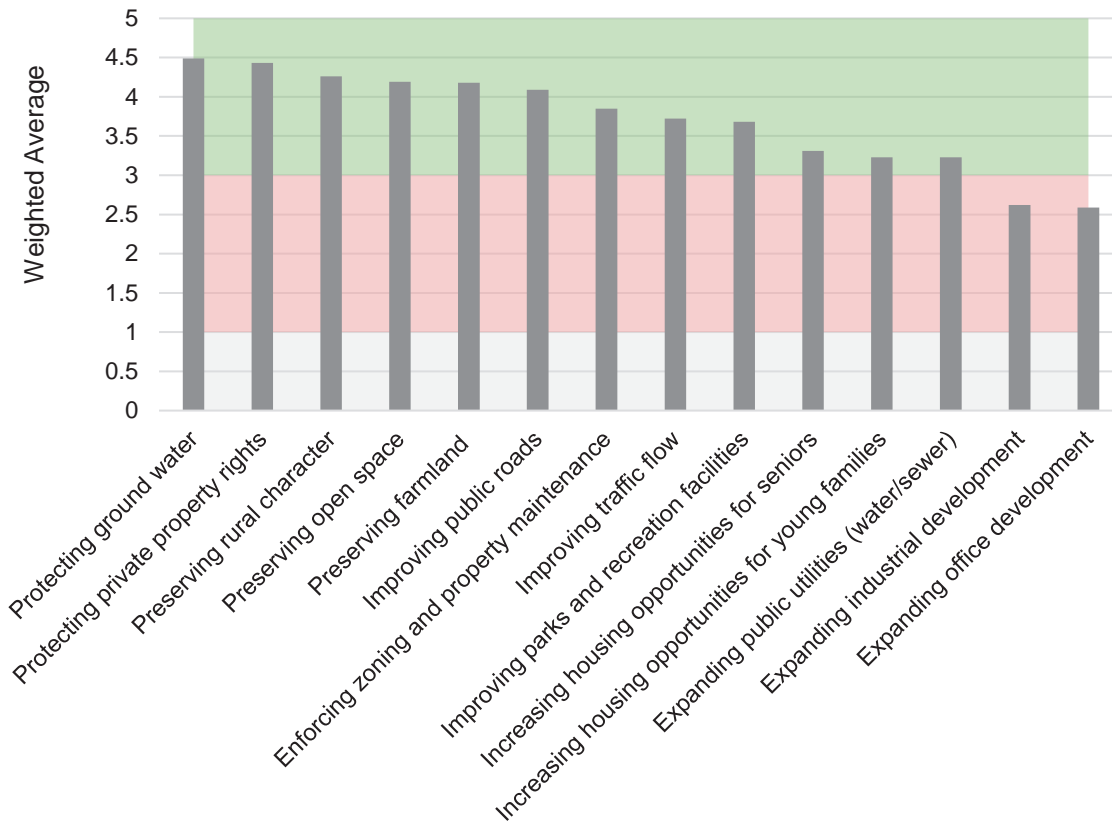


18. Question 18 asked respondents to consider the importance of various potential Township priorities. Answer choices available for this question were “Very Important,” “Important,” “Neutral,” “Not Important,” and “Not At All Important.” For purposes of providing a quantifiable value to compare and rank the relative importance of the listed issues, a weighted average was applied. A score of 5 was given to “Very Important,” a score of 4 was given to “Important,” a score of 3 was given to “Neutral,” a score of 2 was given to “Not Important,” and a score of 1 was given to “Not At All Important.” The most important priorities were protecting ground water (4.49), protecting private property rights (4.43), and preserving rural character (4.26). The least important priorities of respondents were expanding industrial development (2.62) and expanding office development (2.59).

Nine respondents commented on this question, primarily addressing transportation. One respondent commented that the roads are fine, while two desired roads to be paved due to their poor condition and the amount of truck traffic on them. Other modes of transportation, such as walking or biking were also mentioned through comments desiring sidewalks and biking trails. Additionally, parks, access to natural features, and improved internet access was also desired.



**Figure 9. Importance of Township Priorities**

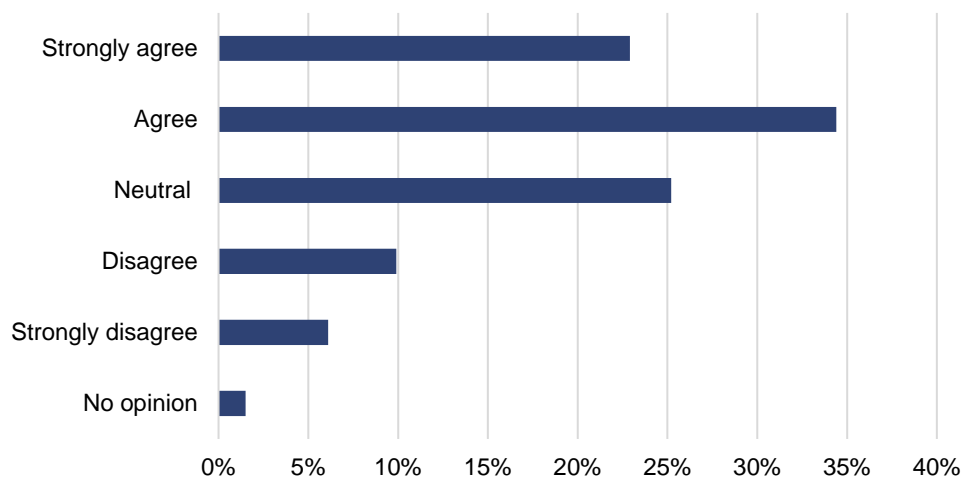


## Land Use & Development Questions, Part 2

This section of land use and development questions aimed to gather opinions related to specific, vital issues that are facing the Township. This allows respondents to rate their level of agreement with several statements in order to gather opinions. Answer choices for each statement were “Strongly Agree,” “Agree,” “Neutral,” “Disagree,” and “Strongly Disagree.” For purposes of providing a quantifiable value to compare and rank the relative importance of the listed issues, a weighted average was applied. A score of 5 was given to “Strongly Agree,” a score of 4 was given to “Agree,” a score of 3 was given to “Neutral,” a score of 2 was given to “Disagree,” and a score of 1 was given to “Strongly Disagree.”

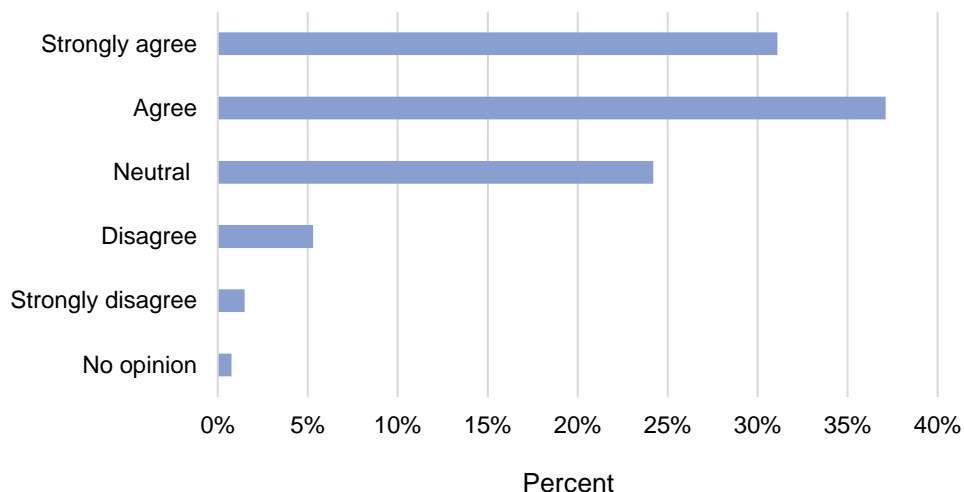
19. This question asked whether the Township should provide more land for parks, natural areas, and non-motorized trails. The plurality of respondents (34.4%) agreed with this statement. A similar number of respondents either strongly agreed (22.9%) or were neutral (25.2%) regarding this statement and few strongly disagreed (6.1%).

**Figure 10. The Township Should Provide More Land for Parks, Natural Areas, and Non-motorized Trails**



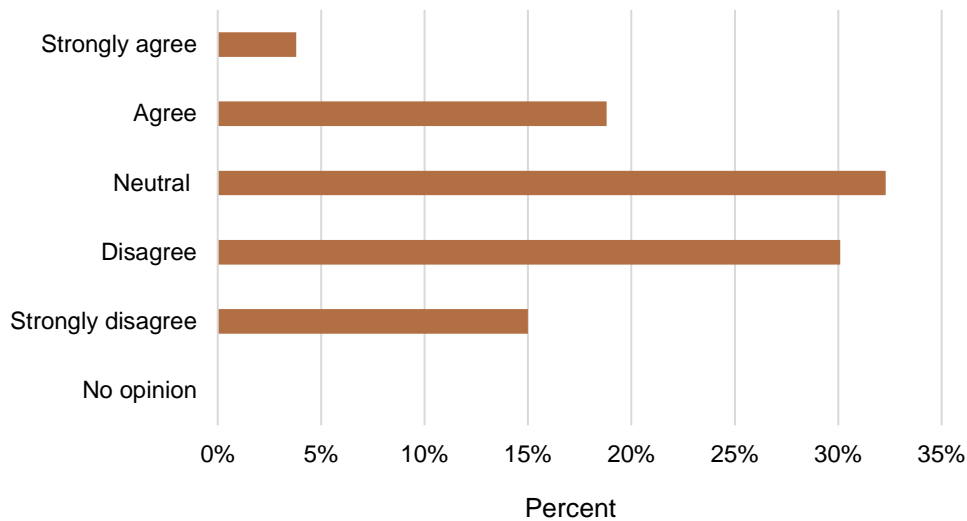
20. Question 20 gathered opinions on whether the respondents would support increased controls on development to protect water quality in lakes, rivers, and streams. The plurality of respondents (37.1%) indicated that they would agree with this statement. Many respondents also strongly agreed with the statement (31.1%).

**Figure 11. I Would Support Increased Controls on Development to Protect Water Quality in Lakes, Rivers, and Streams**



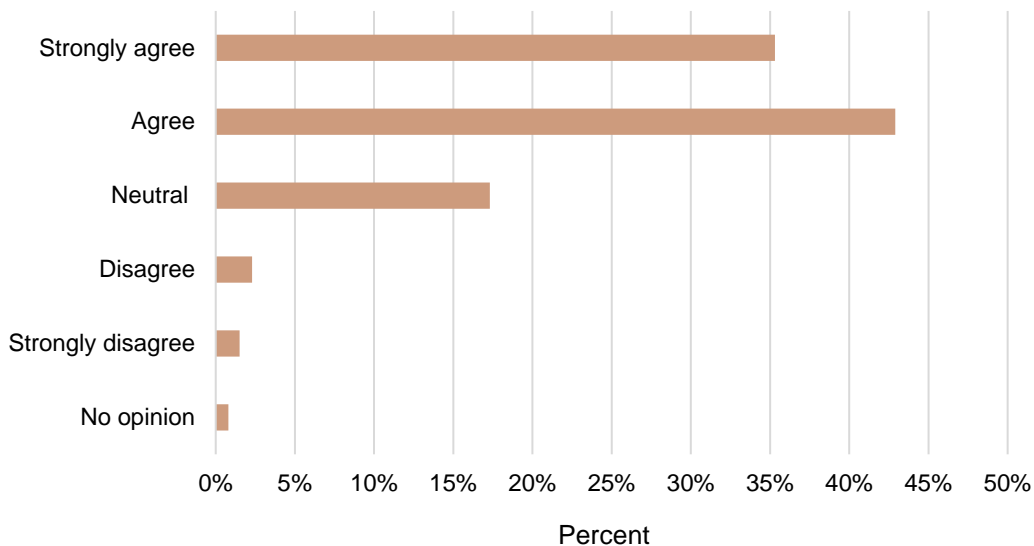
21. This question obtained respondent opinions regarding whether the Township should attract more commercial businesses. The majority of respondents were either neutral (32.3%) or disagreed (30.1%) with this statement. Several also strongly disagreed (15.0%) or agreed (18.8%). Therefore, this question elicited a broad variety of responses from respondents; however, more respondents disagreed with the statement overall.

**Figure 12. Leighton Township Needs to Attract More Commercial Businesses to the Township.**



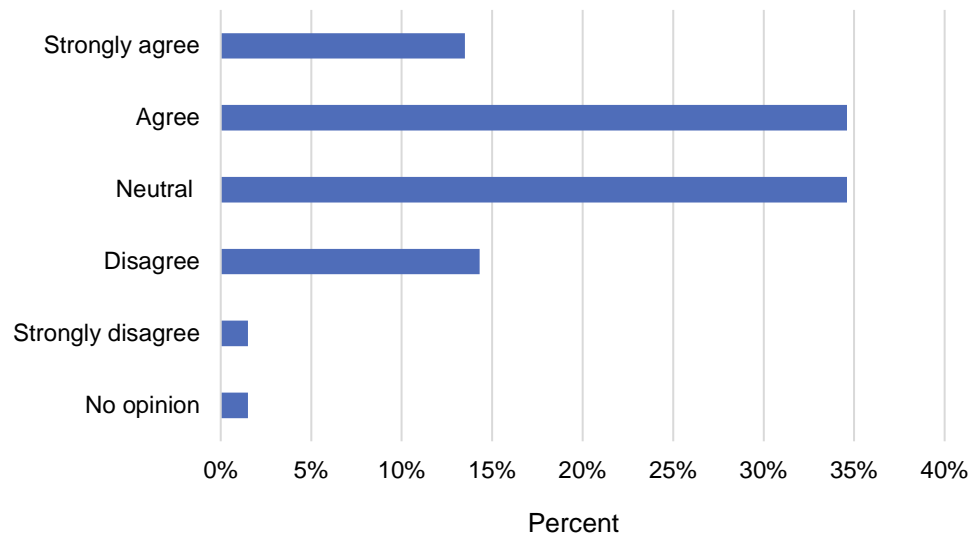
22. The next question evaluated respondent opinions on whether farmland should be preserved in the Township. The plurality of respondents (42.9%) agreed with this statement and many others strongly agreed (35.3%). Few respondents disagreed with this statement (1.5%).

**Figure 13. Farmland in the Township Should be Preserved**



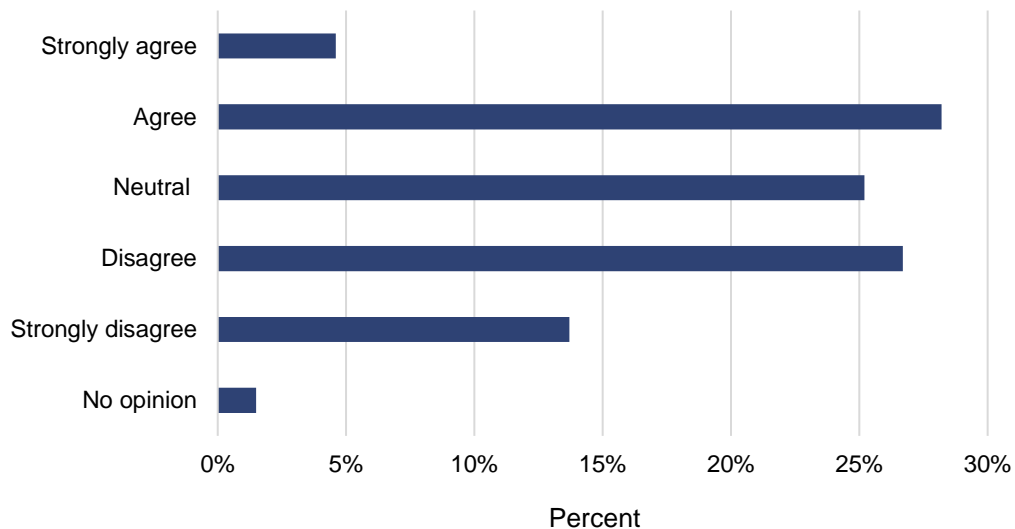
23. Question 23 evaluated respondent opinions on directing new housing primarily to areas with existing water and sewer services. The same number of respondents either agreed or were neutral regarding this statement (34.6%). Similar numbers of respondents either strongly agreed (13.5%) or disagreed (14.3%) that housing should be directed to areas with existing water and sewer services. Therefore, there was a broad range of opinions regarding this issue; however, more respondents agreed with this statement overall.

**Figure 14. New Housing Should be Directed Primarily to Areas with Existing Water and Sewer Services**



24. This question considered respondent opinions on whether housing developments should be developed with smaller lots and preserved open space in order to protect the rural feel of the Township. Relatively even numbers of responses were obtained from those who agreed (28.2%), were neutral (25.2%), and disagreed (13.7%).

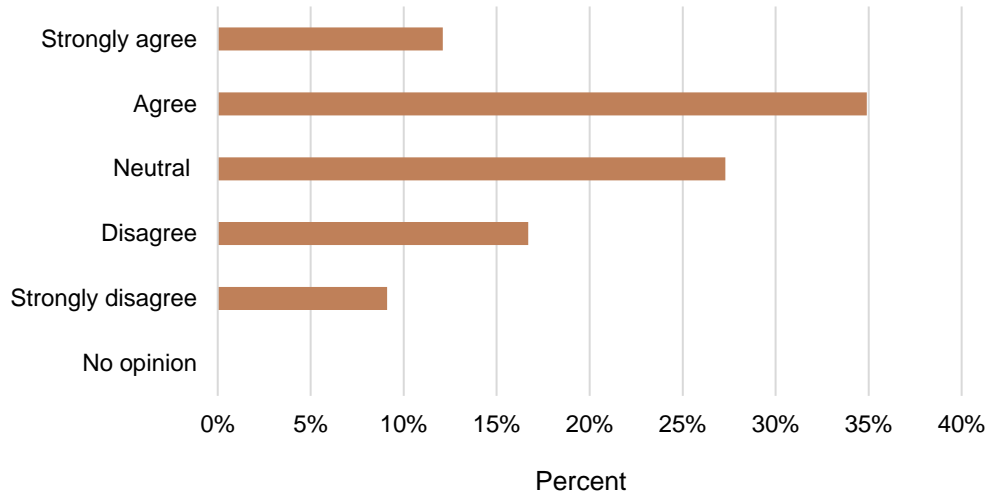
**Figure 15. Housing Developments with Smaller Lots Clustered Closely Together and Preserved Open Space Offer a Good Way to Protect the Rural Feel of the Township**



25. Question 25 considered whether respondents would support a dedicated road millage in order to improve the quality of roads in the Township. The plurality of respondents

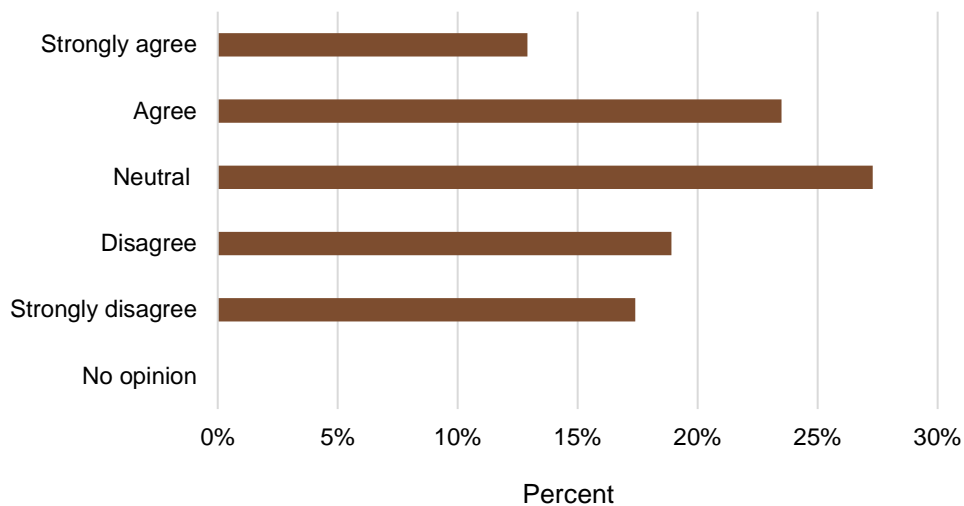
(34.9%) agreed that they would support this statement. Several respondents (27.3%) were also neutral regarding their support.

**Figure 16. I would support a dedicated road millage in Leighton Township in order to improve the quality of roads.**



26. This question considered whether respondents would support a dedicated millage to acquire or improve parks, natural areas, and non-motorized trail facilities in the Township. The plurality of respondents (27.3%) were neutral regarding this statement. Several also agreed that they would support a dedicated millage for this purpose (23.5%). A similar percentage of respondents either disagreed (18.9%) or strongly disagreed (17.4%) that they would support this statement.

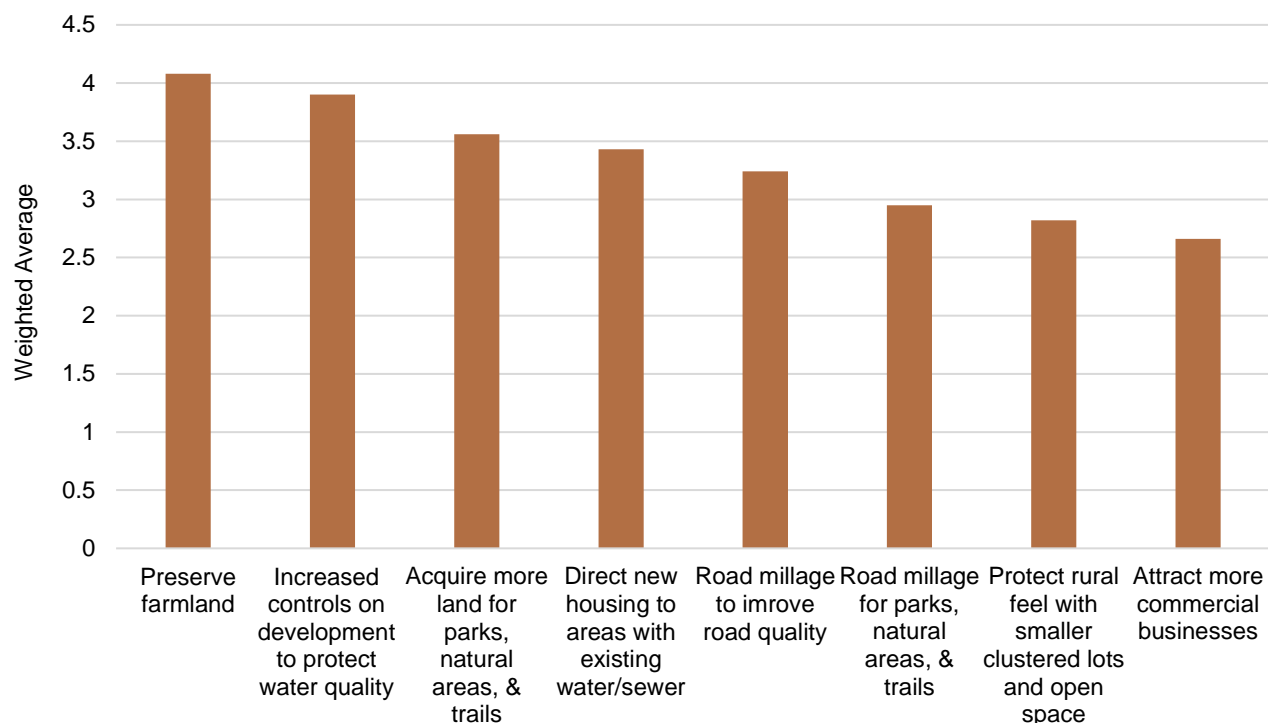
**Figure 17. I would support a dedicated millage in Leighton Township in order to acquire or improve parks, natural areas, and non-motorized trail facilities**





In order to compare respondent levels of agreement between all statements, the weighted averages of each are compared below. Overall, preserving farmland in the Township had the highest level of agreement among respondents. The statement allowing recreational marihuana facilities received the highest level of disagreement.

**Figure 18. Comparison of Respondent Agreement on Various Statements**



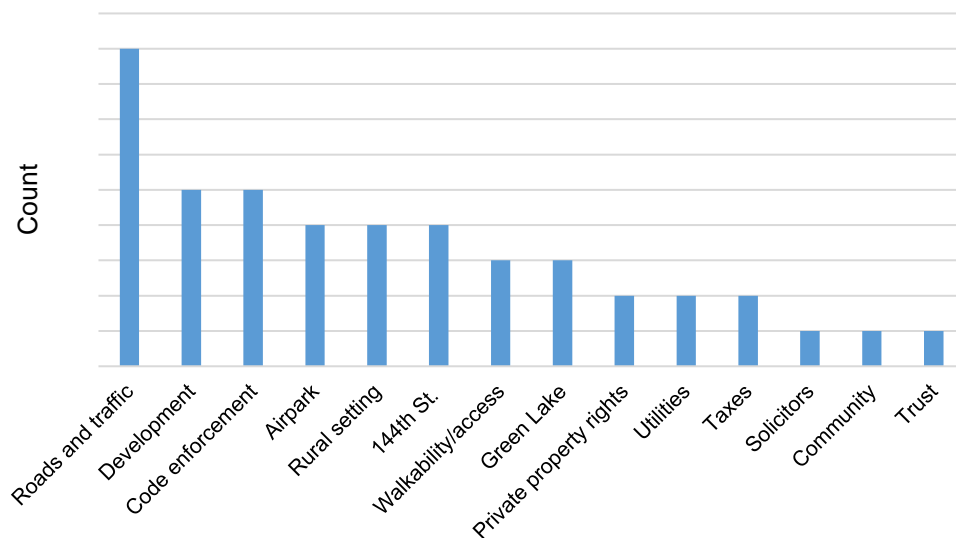
27. The final question of the survey allowed respondents to provide additional thoughts related to planning and zoning in Leighton Township that were not covered in the survey. A total of 28 respondents used this section to provide comments. These comments were coded in order to identify emerging themes among respondents. These coded values are depicted in Figure 19. Overall, roads and traffic were the primary concern among respondents. Several respondents were concerned about high traffic on gravel roads, specifically noting that pavement should be a priority on 144<sup>th</sup> Street, followed by 2<sup>nd</sup> Street. Traffic was also a concern related to the rural setting of the Township, as it detracts from the natural setting that originally attracted residents. Some respondents also believe that the current taxes or millage should be allocated towards the goal of road improvement.

Almost all respondents who mentioned development in their comments did not want to attract additional businesses. Most emphasized the importance of the Township's rural character and the desire for this character to remain. Due to the Township's proximity to larger urban areas, respondents did not view additional development as desirable or necessary. The only development that was desired by one respondent was to create a downtown near Green Lake with retail, a park, and township offices. However, the

overall trend in comments was to minimize growth to retain the natural setting of the Township.

Several respondents were also concerned about code enforcement in the Township. A variety of concerns were identified in the comments, such as wrecked cars, condemned houses, fireworks, shooting, and permitted uses. However, the consensus was that people are not obeying the zoning and that enforcement is desired. However, this should be addressed with care in light of the community's strong desire to protect private property rights as identified in Question 18 of this survey.

**Figure 19. Major Themes in Comments About Planning and Zoning**



## Conclusions

Based on the above results, the Township Planning Commission should consider the following as it updates the goals, objectives, and action items contained in the Master Plan:

- Rural lifestyle, natural setting, and safe area were identified as important reasons for living in Leighton Township. These aspects were identified as important throughout the survey and appear to be of great importance and value to the Township residents. The Master Plan should continue to support and encourage these aspects that are valued by residents.
- Overall, the plurality (42.2%) of respondents thought the Township's efforts to guide and direct growth and development were good. Several comments included the desire to limit development and preserve the existing rural character of the Township. Overall, respondents do not desire substantial development. Since the Township is in close proximity to the Grand Rapids area, respondents are satisfied with nearby goods and services and appear to enjoy the Township's rural setting as a change of pace from the city. This character should be protected during the Master Plan update.

- Respondents were most concerned about the quality of roads in the Township. Several comments were concerned about traffic and the quality of roads, especially related to gravel roads. Many comments included the desire for 144<sup>th</sup> Street and 2<sup>nd</sup> Street to be paved due to the high traffic levels they accommodate. While road maintenance is primarily a County consideration, some discussion regarding road improvements should be considered for the updated plan.
- Another top concern for respondents was the conversion of farms to residential lots. This often results in the loss of open space to more dense developments and diminishing the agricultural community that exists in the Township. Overall, respondents were relatively divided regarding a development pattern that protects the rural feel with smaller clustered lots and preserved open space, with slightly more respondents disagreeing with this pattern overall. Instead, respondents tended to desire less development in general. Therefore, the balance between providing development to meet the needs of residents and preserving the natural setting desired by residents should be discussed in the Master Plan.
- Although the public deeply values the agricultural community and rural character of the Township, additional recreation opportunities are desired to better enjoy the natural features. Respondents generally agreed or strongly agreed that the Township should provide more land for parks, natural areas, and non-motorized trails. Additionally, the northeast quadrant was the most concerned about the lack of bike trails and paved shoulders. Therefore, opportunities for recreation may be considered in the Master Plan update.
- Protecting private property rights was considered one of the most important priorities for the Township. However, zoning and code enforcement was also identified as a problem by respondents. Several comments mentioned the necessity of enforcement to clean up properties and permit uses in appropriate areas. Additionally, zoning and code enforcement received a low satisfaction level. Therefore, the Planning Commission may consider including recommendations in the Master Plan to review current property maintenance ordinances and potentially adopt new ordinances if deemed to be insufficient. The balance between protecting private property rights and enforcing zoning should be thoroughly considered during this process. Additionally, the Township can consider taking a more proactive approach to dealing with zoning complaints, violations, and similar issues.
- Most residents feel the Township's growth is at an acceptable pace and the Township's efforts to guide and direct that growth are generally good.
- Protecting ground water was identified as the most important Township priority. Many respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that they would support increased controls on development to protect water quality in lakes, rivers, and streams.

- The Township has a strong retention rate of its residents, as the plurality of survey respondents have lived in the Township over 25 years. This indicates that the Township provides good quality of life for its residents. However, as this population ages, the Planning Commission may consider planning for the needs of future residents as well.
- The Grand Rapids area was the most popular location for recreation, entertainment, and groceries. Respondents indicated overall satisfaction with the provision of goods and services due to the Township's proximity to Grand Rapids. This limited the desire for additional commercial businesses in the Township.
- The most desired housing types in the Township are detached single family homes on 1 to 5-acre lots or 5+ acre lots. The majority of respondents live in these types of homes and the desired growth is for similar housing. In general, younger residents tend to reside on smaller lots than those who are older. The Township Planning Commission should consider the impact larger and smaller lots would have when assessing and making changes to the Township's future land use map.

## Next Steps

The Leighton Township Planning Commission should review and discuss the survey results contained in this report at their next meeting and future meetings, if necessary. The results of this survey will inform edits to the Goals and Objectives, Future Land Use, and Implementation Strategies sections of the Master Plan.

## **Appendix 1. Responses to Open-Ended Questions**



**9. Where do you primarily work?**

- Dorr township
- Middleville, Barry County
- All of Michigan
- Hastings
- Chicago
- Disabled
- Middleville
- Dorr township
- Nation wide
- Hudsonville & Charlotte
- Kentwood
- Home based and travel, mostly in Michigan
- Kentwood

**11. From the following list, please select the most important reason(s) you have chosen to live in Leighton Township (check all that apply):**

- Like the acreage
- grand kids were there
- Inherited land
- Family lives here
- Thornapple Kellogg School District
- Affordable land
- Re located for spouses work
- Land stewardship on family farm property.
- Small Lake

**14. Please rate your level of concern regarding the following issues:**

- Noise ordinance, lack of police responding to issues, need lower speed limits in residential areas. Animal control issues that need addressed, number of people living in single family residence areas.
- Disappointed in changing from needing 10 acres to build a house down to 2. We didn't build out here to live in a city type environment & now we have 8 houses on both side of us.
- M-37 during rush hrs would embarrass any thinking person.
- A paved bike path would be swell.
- Internet sucks! Need better service.
- We would love to see 2nd street paved- there are a lot of houses coming in on this road and it gets frustrating to have to wait for the township to grade it. However, our taxes SKYROCKETED last year! I could NOT believe the jump! Wondering if that money is going to pave 144th and 2nd st.
- Pave the Roads!!! Increase the Millage!!! 144th and 2nd first.
- Many vehicles travel well over the 25mph speed limit on 144th between Division and westward.
- Fireworks and shooting are out of control. No enforcement.
- Need even MORE ways to let ppl know traffic sign for Kalamazoo street at 142nd Ave. maybe put rumble strips in pavement also I still see ppl NOT stop at over pass for 142nd and US 131.
- Township Board does whatever they like.
- I would like to attend community events and activities. I also really dislike the large number of gravel trucks that traverse 142nd daily.
- Very concerned about Leighton Township's failure to follow the Master Plan and decisions made by the Planning Commission.
- Cars speeding, no bike trails.
- Lack of Senior Citizen Opportunities.

**15. What types of housing would you like to see in the Township? (check all that apply):**

- Sable homes are poor quality in my opinion.
- Airparks with housing.
- None.

**16. What types of businesses would you like to see in the Township? (check all that apply)**

- Marihuana? What is that?
- Please no solar, wind or pot.
- I came out to Leighton Township because of the rural setting. If I want to go shopping or to other businesses there are plenty of them within Middleville, Caledonia, Wayland, Kentwood, etc... We don't need more businesses.
- Definitely not marijuana facilities. (x3)
- Not right in middle of residential area.
- Not sure what Marihuana is.
- I would love to see Leighton Township be a local leader in green energy.
- Not necessary.

**17. How satisfied are you with the following aspects of the Township?**

- Our Library is the best! Great job!
- I actually received this survey from someone else who lives in the township. I must not be on a mailing list...
- Internet access is poor. Charter should expand their coverage area as a condition of Twp approval.
- I think the new business at Moline Elem has not been "good" neighbors. When they first moved in they did NOT properly dispose of mold they burned the moldy

items. Very disappointed in how this was not handled with neighbors calling and complaining.

- I would like investment in parks and hiking trails. We have tons of woodlands and not a single park or hiking trail that I know of. I'd also like community events at the parks and public buildings.
- Township officials should conduct the business of the township in the best interest of the entire township and not just to benefit those with the most money and influence.
- What does elections have to do with this?
- Elections?? Go to more sites parking is an issue enforcement of zoning is weak.
- Senior Citizen Activities

**18. In terms of potential Township priorities, how important are the following?**

- Our roads are fine.
- Improve internet access. Use grant funds available, coordinate with Charter.
- For the love of all that is holy, pave the roads. Raise the millage from 1-4 mills.
- I am so pleased with how well our little community is run. The only thing we lack is sidewalks or walking biking trails.
- Why ask these questions?? Township board does not care what we think anyway. Replace the Township Board.
- Parks, recreation, community events, and access to public natural land including Green Lake and hiking trails.
- Please pay attention to areas other than Green Lake.
- Pave the roads!!!! Too many dirt roads in poor shape with gravel trucks running on them.

**28. Please use the box below to give us any additional thoughts about planning and zoning in Leighton Township not covered in this survey.**

- The entire process of approving the air park has left me very distrustful of the process, those in leadership roles - specifically the Supervisor - and the ability of

the Board to discern and enforce conflict of interest situations. That trust is sacred and it has been violated by the lack of transparency surrounding the decision making process and the Supervisor's role and influence on those decisions. The recommendation to the Board to deny the request for the air park should have been upheld. Much needs to be done to rebuild my trust.

- We don't have need any more industry in the township. There are a lot of semis on Division and 142nd already. It would be nice to have a fee for solicitors. They all come to Leighton township because the surrounding townships requires them to pay in order to solicit.
- With 144 closed and heavy construction in Grn Ridg Estates egress is limited and on occasion impassable. Open barricade. Water main broke 2 consecutive years. Water/Sewer cost increased dramatically. Pros- power doesn't got out as often! Thank you.
- RE: farmland preservation - not a supporter if it limits the rights of landowners to do as they please with their own property.
- Again, I don't think we need more businesses. We live where we live because of the rural setting. If we want businesses, there are plenty in Caledonia, Middleville, Wayland, etc... While parks and trails would be nice, I don't find them necessary. I feel we should use our high taxes to focus on the roads- paving 144th is a great start and I'd love to see 2nd street next. I think paving 2nd street between 141st and 136th would get a lot more residents to live out that way.
- I strongly dislike the dust control applications as they are quite damaging to vehicles.
- The township is in good shape in most areas. Focus has to be on high traffic gravel roads. 144th and 2nd need to be priorities.
- More airplanes less horses.
- 144th Avenue needs to be paved as quickly as possible. This Township should have the monies to pave the roads and improve parks. The taxes are high enough and money should have been set aside for these fixes.
- The a portion of the Martin land should have been acquired to buy bypass 145th and create a Downtown Green lake with areas for retail development, a park, township offices near the center of the township.
- Consider 1-way traffic around Green Lake along South Shore Dr. & Round Lake Dr.
- Less government... not more.



- I believe the township is a good place to be with a great location to Thornapple Kellogg Schools and easy access to shopping in nearby communities. We don't need to have a shopping mall or bunch of commercial buildings when Grand Rapids, Middleville, Wayland and Caledonia and other areas are so close.
- Terribly dissatisfied when the airport went through. Why didn't they listen to the planning committee who turned it down. Small town politics.
- The Township needs to enforce codes more strongly. Wrecked cars sitting around, condemned houses that are falling down. ENFORCE THE CODES.
- Need to enforce fireworks and shooting in the area. Shooting and fireworks go off at all hours and times. Sounds like a war zone. Sometimes 2 and 3 am.
- Enforcing zoning. Supporting the commercially zoned areas. Like the RV park in the Ag zone and the Wedding venue in the Res zone.
- It would be fantastic if the public beach area on Green Lake could be expanded or improved upon. Parking is extremely limited, and there is no easy way to get in/out of the water with a small child in your arms. Paved sidewalks in a designated area would also be amazing!
- Planning Commission mostly are good smart people. Township Board highly influenced by a few with money. Replace them all. Get rid of the Airport!!!!
- Raise Road Mills to 4 or 5 Mills and Start Taring Roads.
- I live 1.5 miles from Green Lake but it feels completely inaccessible. I don't have a boat so the boat launch doesn't help me. It seems to be entirely private and my sense is the Green Lake community wants to keep it that way. It feels very exclusive from the outside looking in. There are no community events around the water and that's a shame. Gun Lake has a certain community vibe to it: Gun Lake Live, multiple public parks, Yankee Springs Rec Area, etc. Green Lake feels like a private party that I'm not invited to.
- Rather than paying to upgrade your parking lot every year, please devote funds to providing internet options to the residents.
- There are people not obeying zoning. Make sure they do.
- Zoning is not being obeyed how can you improve it.
- Roads are being paved that are dirt instead of fixing the roads that are already paved. Housing developments and apartment complexes are going in when school systems are already overcrowded. People move out here to live the country life but still have access to great schools. It's starting to be more

suburban than rural. Someone shouldn't have to drive to a trail to be able to go for a run without worrying about being hit by a car when they live in a rural community. What the township needs is more river access spots for kayaking and trails to go mountain biking and 4 wheeling. It could use a few restaurants and some good entertainment spots but honestly, I'd rather have to drive for those things so they don't affect the peaceful country lifestyle that I moved out here to have.

- You don't need to grow. Provide opportunities for current residents and keep the pace to a minimum. If you keep giving up a little bit of land or rural setting, or farm here and there then eventually my kids or my kids kids will see the township as a big city. And this would not be a place I would want to live.
- We moved to Leighton township in part because of current MP emphasis on maintaining rural aspect of the township. Bike paths and walking trails that connect to Wayland would be a great for residents and help showcase the township.



A decorative dotted line in a light orange color. It starts horizontally on the left, curves diagonally down and to the right, and then continues horizontally on the right side.

# A Comprehensive Plan

Leighton Township, Michigan