

WHITE RIVER TOWNSHIP
MASTER PLAN



April 2005

LSL

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INTRODUCTION

This document defines a plan for land use and development. It will help Township officials make informed decisions about how the community grows and changes over time.

This plan was adopted to:

- ◆ Define a vision of the township's future.
- ◆ Provide guidelines for the preservation and enhancement of the community's character.
- ◆ Establish goals and policies relating to land use and development.
- ◆ Help with the process of reviewing land development project proposals.
- ◆ Encourage the preservation and protection of natural and environmental resources.
- ◆ Prescribe positive action that can be taken to assure that future development is consistent with the goals and policies expressed in this plan.
- ◆ Identify areas of the township suitable for different types of land use and development.
- ◆ Encourage the establishment and implementation of land use and development policies that promote and protect the health, safety and general welfare of the township's residents.
- ◆ Provide a legal foundation for the White River Township Zoning Ordinance.
- ◆ Provide a basic plan consistent with the requirements of the Township Planning Act, PA 168 of 1959, as amended.

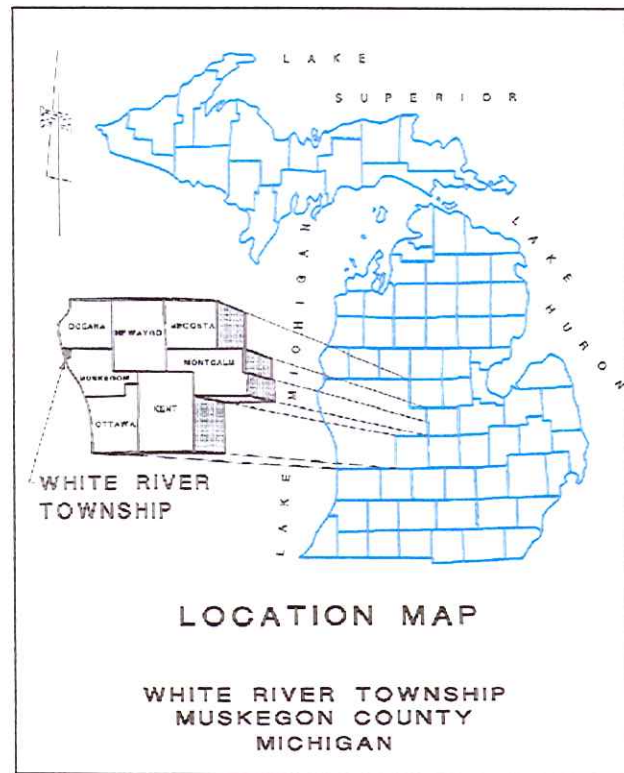
This plan was prepared by the White River Township Planning Commission with the assistance of LSL Planning, Inc.

COMMUNITY PROFILE

LOCATION

White River Township is located in Muskegon County on the east shore of Lake Michigan (See Location Map). The township is bounded by Lake Michigan on the west, White Lake and the White Lake Channel on the south, Montague Township on the east and Claybanks Township, Oceana County, on the north.

The township is 10 minutes driving time from the cities of Montague and Whitehall. The cities of Muskegon and Grand Rapids are approximately 30 and 55 miles distant respectively. U.S. 31, the region's north-south expressway, is accessible by the Fruitvale Road interchange located to the east in Montague Township.



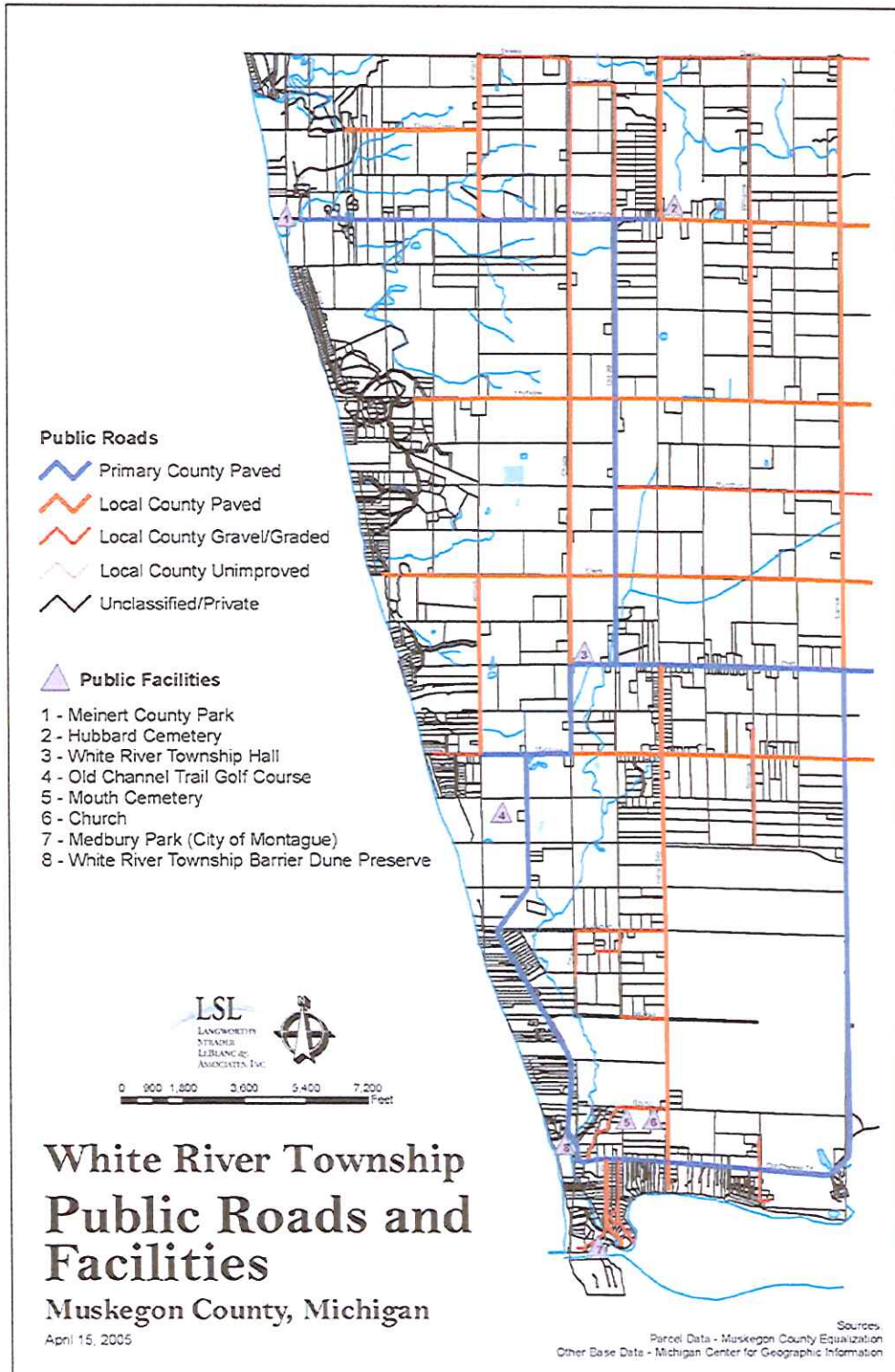
CLIMATE & TOPOGRAPHY

The township's climate is heavily influenced by its proximity to Lake Michigan that results in a moderation of extremes in temperature in both summer and winter months. The hottest month of the year is July, with an average temperature of 79 degrees Fahrenheit. The coldest is January, with an average temperature of 20 degrees Fahrenheit. The region has a growing season of 145 days, with approximately 31 inches of rainfall annually. Annual snowfall averages in excess of 93 inches.

The most prominent topographic attribute of the township are the sand dune areas located along and landward of the Lake Michigan shoreline. These unique features rise to an elevation of more than 150 feet above the lake level. Topography landward of these dune areas is gently rolling to flat. Other topographic features include Flower Creek, Little Flower Creek, and the Pierson Drain. Sadony Bayou, at the foot of the Pierson Drain, is a remnant of a former natural outlet from White Lake to Lake Michigan. During the 1870s, the outlet was modified with the introduction of the present White Lake Channel.

ROADWAYS & TRANSPORTATION

The Public Roads & Facilities Map illustrates the township's roadway system. All roads, except those that are privately owned, are maintained by the Muskegon County Road Commission. These roads are two lanes and are paved with gravel, asphalt or seal-coat. Traffic volumes are generally low, partially due to the township's location on the north side of White Lake, as well as its isolation from other densely developed communities.



Traffic counts for roads in the township are unavailable, though field observations indicate that traffic volumes appear to be well within their capacity.

EXISTING LAND USE

White River Township has a land area of approximately 15.8 square miles (10,112 acres). The township is considered a rural community, exhibiting significant amounts of acreage in open space, agriculture, and low density residential development. Smaller enclaves of active commercial and industrial areas also exist, but are very minor when compared to overall land use patterns and acreage. Existing land uses may be generally described as follows:

Agriculture

Agriculture dominates the landscape, particularly in the northern two-thirds of the township, occupying slightly over 4,000 acres. A high percentage of these lands are located on designated prime farmland soils. Except for the presence of low density non-farm dwellings, there is no substantial non-farm development in this portion of the township. Small pockets of agriculture are also present in the southern one-third of the township.

Residential

Residential development, including farm, non-farm and seasonal dwellings, occupy approximately 600 acres. The majority of the homes are located along section line roadways throughout the township on parcels generally larger than one acre. There is no substantial higher density development anywhere in the community except for residential areas located near Lake Michigan and White Lake.

Non-farm year-round dwellings represent approximately 66 percent of the community's housing stock. Seasonally occupied homes and cottages, located primarily along the Lake Michigan and White Lake shorelines, comprise approximately 31 percent of the township's housing stock. Seasonal homes along or near the shoreline tend to represent the most densely developed portions of the township. Unlike farming and open space areas, homes along the shorelines are often on parcels of less than 1 acre.

Overall, the township's housing density is approximately one dwelling unit per 13 acres of land.

Commercial

The township does not have a significant amount of commercial development, occupying approximately four acres of land. Uses include the Old Channel Inn Restaurant, the Indian Point Trading Post & Bait Shop, the White Sands Resort on White Lake, and the Pigeon Hill Resort. Other commercial uses include a variety of minor business activities located in various areas of the township which are operated as home occupations.

The plan does not provide for significant new commercial development. Residents rely on businesses located in the nearby cities of Montague and Whitehall to fulfill basic retail, service, and office needs.

Industrial

The Dupont and Lime Specialties facilities occupy approximately 1,165 acres of land in the Township's industrial zoning districts. As with commercial development, the Township relies on the nearby cities of Montague and Whitehall for the accommodation of industrial development. It is recognized that these neighboring cities offer close access to U.S.-31 and provide high quality industrial park space fully served by municipal water and sanitary sewers.

Public/Semi-Public/Recreational

Public and semi-public uses occupy approximately 128 acres of land including:

1. Township Hall – Constructed in 1998, the Township hall and offices, located on Post, are used for Township meetings, select public events, records storage, and as a polling place.
2. Cemeteries – The Township owns the Mouth and Hubbard Cemeteries. The Mouth Cemetery is listed on the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) register as a site of historical and archaeological significance. This cemetery is an important part of the township's history. Hubbard Cemetery is included on the State Archaeologist Register as a site of archaeological significance.
3. Other Township Property – The Township owns an unimproved barrier dune preserve located in Section 34 on Lake Michigan, south of the Old Channel Inn. Township officials have indicated a desire to develop the property for some form of lower intensity public use. In addition, the Township also maintains an abandoned 20 acre landfill located off of Fruitvale Road, which is now an established woodlot. White River Township also maintains two tennis courts located on Indian Bay Road, which are named in honor of Township Treasurer Henry Ranthun.
4. County Facilities – Meinerd County Park is located on Lake Michigan at the foot of Meinerd Road. Meinerd Park is 54 acres in size, and has 2,000 feet of sandy beach. Additionally, the park provides picnic areas with grills and tables, playground, concession stand, paved parking, modern restrooms, drinking fountain, boardwalk and stairway to a bridge over Little Flower Creek, and an observation deck overlooking Lake Michigan.
5. City of Montague Facilities – Medbury Park, owned and operated by the City of Montague, is located on Lake Michigan at the White Lake channel. The park includes restrooms, a parking lot, several picnic tables, and paved boardwalk located along the White Lake Channel connecting the parking area to a public beach on Lake Michigan.

Vacant/Open/Undeveloped

This category totals 4,800 acres of land and includes wooded areas, sand dunes, abandoned farmland, undeveloped open areas, and vacant tracts of land next to Lake Michigan. An undetermined number of acres of land in this category may be generally unsuited for all but the least intrusive types of development due to location in MDEQ designated critical dune areas, floodplains, areas of steep slopes, and/or poor build able soils.

Water Bodies and Streams

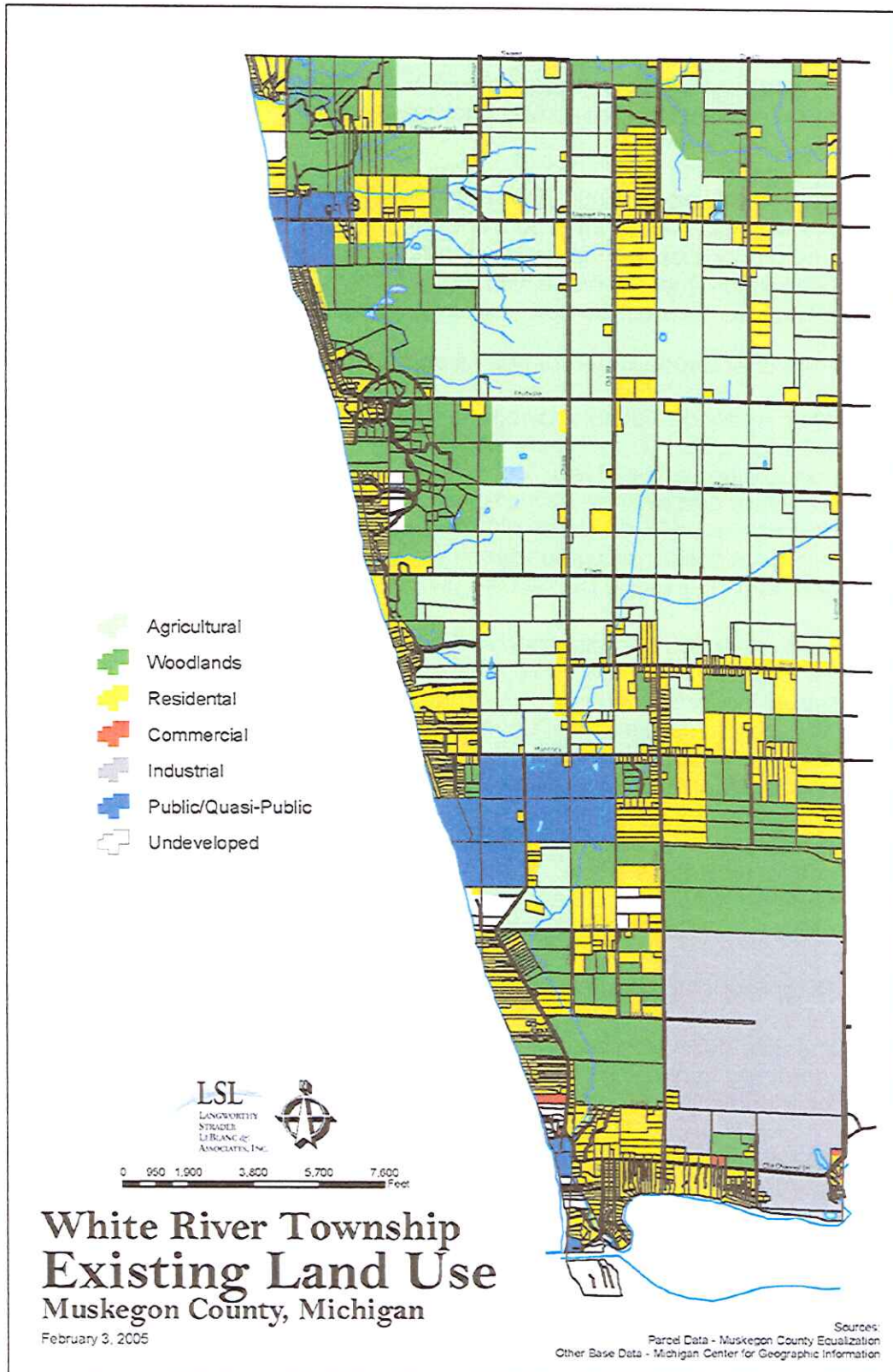
In addition to Lake Michigan and White Lake, the township includes several small streams and water bodies. These include Big Flower Creek, Little Flower Creek, Pierson Drain, Sadony Bayou, as well as numerous, small unnamed ponds. Except for Lake Michigan and White Lake, the surface water acreage is minimal.

ADJACENT LAND USE & ZONING DISTRICT RELATIONSHIPS

Land uses in Claybanks Township, along the township's northern boundary mirror land uses in White River Township. Uses include residential development along the Lake Michigan shoreline, farming operations and undeveloped land. Land within approximately 1/4 mile of the Lake Michigan shoreline is zoned for residential use. The balance of land is zoned for agricultural use.

Land uses in Montague Township to the west also mirror those found in White River Township. Montague Township's zoning districts, including those established for heavy industrial uses, are generally consistent with zoning districts in White River Township. The only conflict is where White River's I-2 District adjoins a portion of Montague Township's R-1 Residential District south of Hancock Road.

White River Township is regulated by a local zoning ordinance adopted pursuant to the provisions of the Michigan Township Zoning Act (MI Public Act 184 of 1943, as amended). The ordinance includes a special Critical Dune Overlay District for the protection of Lake Michigan's shoreline and associated dunes.



NATURAL & ENVIRONMENTAL FEATURES

The natural environment plays an important role in planning future land uses. It also plays a significant role in the process of reviewing and approving land development project proposals.

Natural features that make a community attractive for development can be easily destroyed by insensitive site planning and land development practices. In addition to contributing to the character of the township, natural features influence the suitability of land for development. These features, if inappropriately altered or destroyed through development can be transformed from valuable, functional assets into liabilities.

Natural features offer a wide variety of natural and cultural advantages to the community.

- ◆ When wetlands, natural drainage courses, and floodplains are filled to provide more "buildable" land, natural stormwater retention and water filtration capabilities are destroyed. The amount of sediment-laden runoff from rainstorms and snowmelt is increased, overloading streams and other natural drainage courses, adversely affecting downstream property owners. Runoff storage, filtration, and groundwater recharge capabilities provided by wetlands and natural drainage courses are destroyed.
- ◆ Poorly designed or maintained stormwater management systems can discharge excessive amounts of stormwater into natural drainage courses and streams. Stream bottoms and banks are damaged by increased volume and velocity after rainstorms. Sediment deposited on stream bottoms destroys habitat. Off-site streams and drainage courses must be "improved" (widened, straightened, paved, etc.) to accommodate increased runoff.
- ◆ Leveling land to accommodate a greater density of development destroys natural drainage systems. Soil erosion and sedimentation control methods become expensive for developers, and create liability problems if control measures are not properly installed and maintained.
- ◆ Filling floodplains decreases their natural capacity to hold floodwaters.
- ◆ Intensive development in areas of prime farmland soils threatens the integrity of remaining farming activities. The loss of farming activities has an effect on the local and regional economy, and changes the character of the community.
- ◆ Opportunities for recreation, such as hiking, hunting, cross-country skiing, biking, bird watching, etc., are lost as open space gives way to development.
- ◆ Opportunities for providing education oriented natural areas are eliminated as sand dune and wooded areas are developed for residential use. Access to shorelines is gradually restricted.



Clearcutting of wooded areas destroys their stormwater storage and filtration capabilities. Wildlife habitat is lost unless reforestation occurs.

The locations of significant natural and environmental features found in White River Township are shown on the Natural Features Map and described below.

Streams & Floodplains

Flower Creek passes through the northern portion of White River Township in and empties into Lake Michigan south of the Flower Creek subdivision in Section 4. Little Flower Creek and its tributaries run through Sections 3, 4 and 10.

Floodplains are found on either side of Flower and Little Flower Creeks, as well along either side of Pierson Drain through the entire township. Floodplains are generally unsuited to all but the least intrusive types of development. Stream crossings and construction within floodplains are regulated by the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ), and may also be affected by local flood insurance regulations.

Sadony Bayou is a remnant of the natural outlet from White Lake to Lake Michigan. The present White Lake channel was improved late in the late 1990s. Sadony Bayou is bounded by wetland areas and floodplains.

Wetlands

The largest wetland area is located in Sections 3 and 4, east of the Lake Michigan shore. Other significant wetland areas are found at the upstream end of Sadony Bayou, as well as in low lying wooded areas in and adjacent to the sand dune areas along Lake Michigan. Wetlands are generally unsuited to development due to their soil structure and high water tables. Construction in or filling of wetlands is regulated by the MDEQ along any water body, including lakes, rivers and streams.

Sand Dunes

Lake Michigan's sand dunes are a significant natural resource that supports unique and fragile ecosystems. The township's dunes are particularly susceptible to erosion by wind and water if inappropriately used or developed.

Through the Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act (NREPA), PA 451 of 1994, policy was enacted to protect the environment and natural resources of the state. There are two specific parts of Michigan's NREPA that provide regulations for White River's Coastal Areas, Part 323, Shorelands Protection and Management, which regulates high risk erosion areas and Part 353, Sand Dune Protection and Management, which regulates critical dunes. Certain construction activities and land uses in critical dune areas are under MDEQ jurisdiction.

High Risk Erosion Areas

The MDEQ has designated portions of the Lake Michigan shoreline as high risk erosion areas. These areas are particularly susceptible to the forces of erosion caused by wind and water. Certain types of construction activities and land uses in these areas must comply with MDEQ regulations applicable to setbacks from erosion hazard lines.

Soils

Soil types play a significant role in planning future land uses, affecting the suitability of land for various types of development.

The location and intensity of future development is highly dependent on the capability of soils to accommodate septic systems because there is no municipal sewer or water systems. *[A small enclave of homes in the township near the City of Montague are served by the city's municipal water system. However, there are no plans at this time to expand that service to other township locations.]*

Soil characteristics that influence the suitability of land for development include permeability, wetness, bearing capacity, shrink-swell potential, and slope. In all but the most extreme cases, limitations posed by poor soil characteristics can be overcome by careful site planning, management and design. Those characteristics presenting the most severe limitations to intensive development include the following:

- ◆ Soils with High Water Table, Wetness and Poor Permeability – Soils having these characteristics are generally unsuited for septic system installations, road construction, and building site development. Septic systems cannot function properly without modification in engineering, design and layout. Soils tend to be of insufficient strength to support building foundations, and shrinking and swelling of soils during freeze/thaw cycles can damage building foundations unless soils are modified with appropriate fill material.
- ◆ Rapid Permeability & Poor Filtration Capability – Soils having these characteristics are generally well suited to building site development, but may inadequately filter septic system effluent prior to reaching the underlying water table. Intensive development on these soils may pose a threat to unprotected groundwater supplies.

The Generalized Soils Map illustrates the general location of soil associations found in White River Township. Table 1 provides a general overview of the suitability of and limitations posed by the soil types occurring within each association. The information presented on the map and table is intended to help with the process of determining areas of the community best suited to various types and densities of development. This information is not site specific. It is general in nature and not intended to eliminate the need for on-site investigation of soils when development proposals are made. Detailed information about soils can be found in the (Muskegon County) Natural Resource Conservation Service Soil Survey.

TABLE 1: Generalized Building Site and Septic System Limitations			
Soil Association & Description	Soil Types	Septic System Limitations	Building Site Limitations
Rubicon-Croswell-Deer Park - Nearly level to steep, well drained and moderately well drained, sandy soils on outwash plains, beach ridges and dunes.	Rubicon	Slight – Mod	Slight – Mod
	Croswell	Severe	Moderate
	Deer Park	Slight – Mod	Slight – Mod
Nester-Ubly-Sims - Gently sloping to hilly, well drained, moderately well drained and poorly drained loamy soils on lake plains and uplands.	Nester	Severe	Slight – Mod
	Ubly		
	Sims		Severe
Belding-Allendale Rubicon (Montcalm Association) - Nearly level and gently sloping, poorly drained and well drained, loamy and sandy soils on lake plains.	Belding	Severe	Slight – Mod
	Allendale		
Montcalm-Nester- Belding-Kawkawlin - Gently sloping to rolling, somewhat poorly drained and well drained, sandy loamy soils on lake plains, outwash plains and glaciated uplands.	Montcalm	Slight – Mod	Slight – Mod
	Nester	Severe	
	Belding		
	Kawkawlin		Severe

Key to Table

Slight – soil features and properties are generally favorable for the indicated use. Limitations are easily overcome.

Moderate (Mod) – soil features and properties are not favorable for the indicated use. Special planning, design or maintenance is needed to overcome or minimize the limitation(s).

Severe – soil features and properties are so unfavorable or so difficult to overcome that special design, significant increases in construction costs, and/or possible increased maintenance are required.

Source: Natural Resource Conservation Service

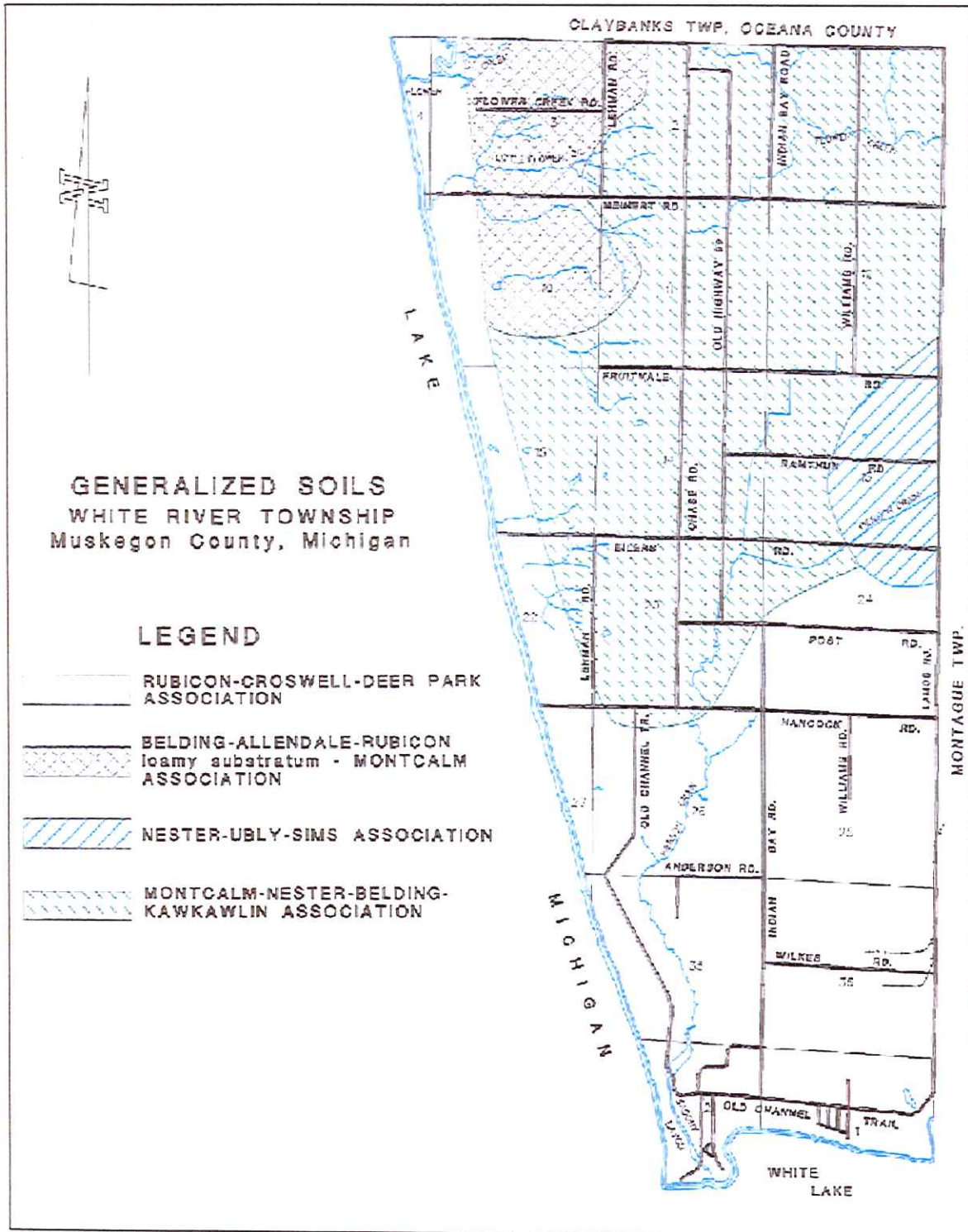
Prime Farmland

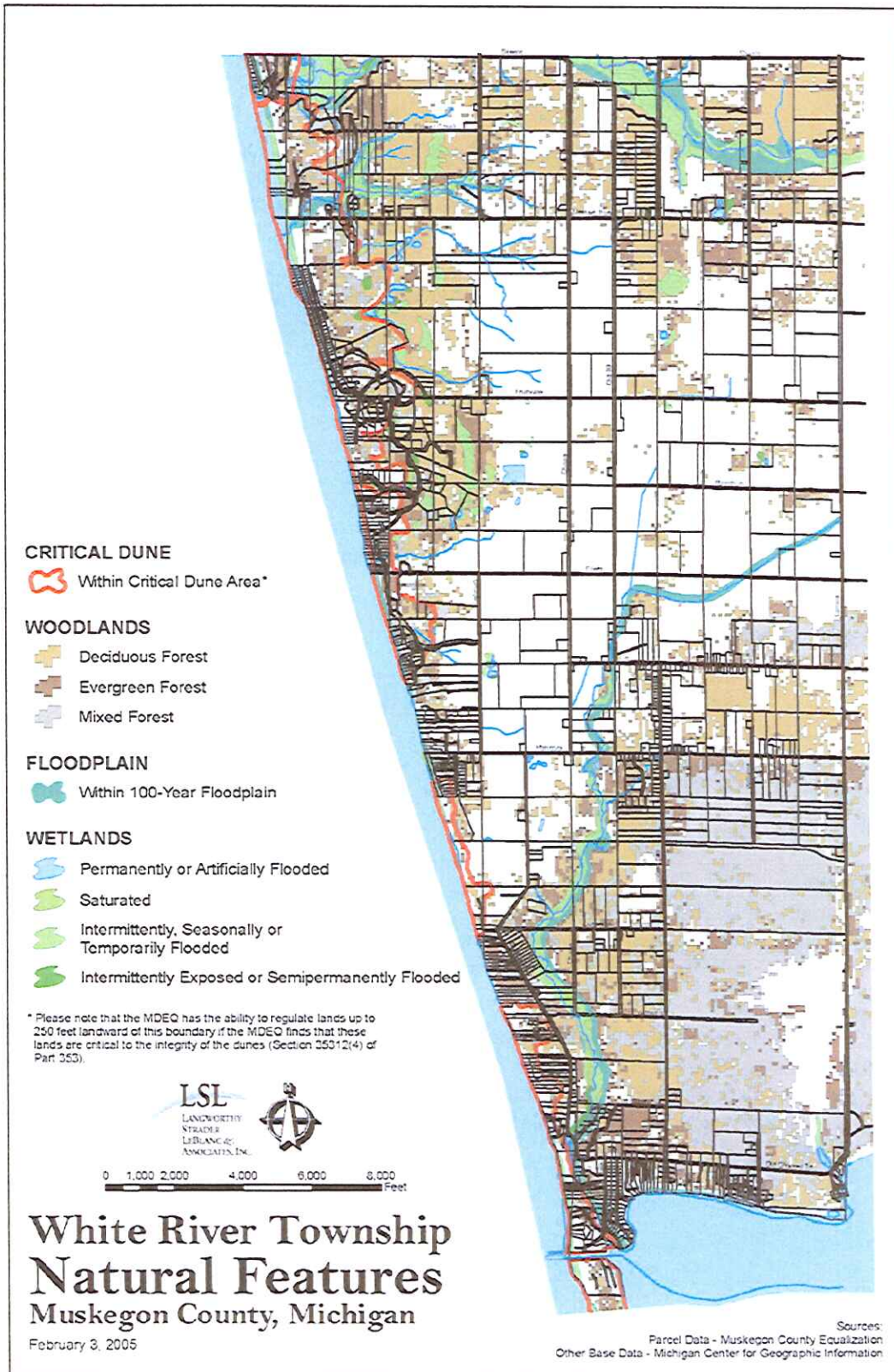
Prime farmland soils possess characteristics that are ideally suited to economically produce sustained high yields of crops when treated and managed according to acceptable farming methods. The bulk of the township’s active agricultural land is located in these areas.

Slope

Slopes of less than 12 percent generally present slight limitations to development. However, caution should be exercised when siting non-motorized and motorized vehicular routes, particularly those necessary for emergency access purposes. Slopes between 12 and 18 percent present moderate limitations that may be overcome by careful site planning. Slopes in excess of 18 percent render a site generally unsuited to development without a certified architect and engineering design specifications.

For the most part, slopes exceeding 12 percent are located in the area of dunes along the Lake Michigan shoreline and along the banks of local creeks and drains.





Housing & Population Characteristics

POPULATION

The U.S. Census (2000) reports a township population of 1,338 persons, an increase of 88 persons, or 7.0 percent since the 1990 Census. Between 1970 and 2000, the township's population increased from 1,016 to 1,338 persons, representing a 30-year growth rate of 31.7 percent.

Unit	1970	1980	1990	2000	Population Change 1970 to 2000	% Change 1970 to 2000
White River Twp.	1,016	1,215	1,250	1,338	322	32.0%
Montague Twp.	1,147	1,359	1,429	1,637	490	43.0%
Fruitland Twp.	3,200	4,168	4,391	5,235	2,035	64.0%
City of Montague	2,396	2,332	2,276	2,407	11	0.5%
City of Whitehall	3,017	2,856	3,027	2,884	-133	-4.0%

Source: U. S. Census

Population Projections

Unit	2000	2010	2020	2030	% Change 1970 to 2000
White River Twp.	1,338	1,431	1,526	1,628	22%
Montague Twp.	1,637	1,777	1,896	2,022	24%
Fruitland Twp.	5,235	5,592	5,964	6,361	22%
City of Montague	2,407	2,485	2,650	2,827	17%
City of Whitehall	2,884	2,971	3,169	3,380	17%

Sources: U.S. Census and West Michigan Shoreline Regional Development Commission

Seasonal Population

The township's resident population figures or projections fail to present an accurate picture of the township in that they do not take into account seasonal population increases. Based on the occupancy of seasonal dwellings, combined with daily visitors to Lake Michigan and White Lake, it is estimated the population increases by 500 to 1,000 during peak, warm weather weekends.

Population by Age Category

- ◆ The median age of township residents is 43.9 years.
- ◆ Compared to the county, the township's population has a lower percentage of very young residents and a higher percentage of elderly residents .
- ◆ The percentage of township residents in the 25-34 age groups is significantly less than the county. This group comprises the "early family forming" population, with the highest number of young children.
- ◆ The 35 to 54 age group comprises 27.7 percent of the population. This age group includes later family forming years and/or mature family years.
- ◆ Over 31 percent of the population is 55 years or older.

Age	Muskegon County		White River Township	
	#	%	#	%
Under 5	11,675	6.9%	65	4.9%
5 – 9	13,307	7.8%	77	5.8%
10 – 14	13,783	8.1%	109	8.1%
15 – 19	12,679	7.4%	101	7.5%
20 – 24	10,247	6.0%	38	2.8%
25 – 34	22,173	13.0%	118	8.8%
35 – 44	27,163	16.0%	188	14.0%
45 – 54	22,999	13.5%	227	17.0%
55 – 64	14,287	8.4%	176	13.2%
65 +	21,887	12.9%	239	17.9%
Total	170,200	100.0%	1,338	100.0%

Sources: U.S. Census, 2000

INCOME AND EMPLOYMENT

The 2000 Census reported the township's median household income at \$48,077, slightly higher than the county median of \$38,008. The 2000 per capita income was 21,797. Adjusted for inflation, the township's 2003 median household income is estimated at roughly \$54,000. Muskegon County as a whole is estimated at \$42,800.

Due to a lack of commercial and industrial development, White River Township does not possess a significant base of employment opportunities. Instead, residents rely on the urban centers of Montague, Whitehall, and Muskegon for most employment opportunities. The Township does not anticipate appreciable change/growth in its business base.

HOUSING AND HOUSEHOLDS

Housing

The 2000 Census reported 779 housing units in White River Township. This reflects an additional 87 units since the last count, completed for the 1998 Township Recreation Plan. Most of the housing stock consists of site-built single family dwellings. It is estimated that roughly two-thirds of the new homes are occupied on a full-time basis with the remaining one-third for seasonal use. There are a few manufactured homes, attached dwellings (primarily two-family), and a limited number of multiple family residences.

Type of Dwelling	Number of Units	Percent of Total
Site-Built Single-Family	668	97%
Manufactured Home Single-Family	15	2%
Two and Multiple-Family	9	1%
Total Housing Units	779	100%

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, 2000

A total of 512 homes (66 percent of the total housing stock) are occupied year-round. Another 267 (34 percent) are classified as vacant. Of the vacant homes, the Census estimates that 243 homes are occupied for seasonal or recreational purposes. Each year, an undetermined number of seasonal homes become occupied as year-round residences.

Household Number and Size

As of 2000, the township had 512 households; of these, 394 (77 percent of total households) were classified as family households. The average number of persons per household was 2.57. This relatively small household size, coupled with a high median age, indicates that White River Township has created an attractive environment for retirees and 'empty nesters'.

PUBLIC ATTITUDE / OPINION SURVEY

INTRODUCTION

The following is a summary of the results of a Public Attitude/Opinion Survey, prepared and distributed by the White River Township Planning Commission. Nine hundred surveys were mailed, 547 completed surveys were returned, for a return rate of approximately sixty-one percent (61%). The return rate is considered excellent by survey standards.

For purposes of analysis, each survey question was quantified according to residency type. Residency categories include:

- ◆ Approximately 11 percent of the completed surveys were from residents/households living in the township five years or less.
- ◆ Approximately 72 percent of the completed surveys were from residents/households living in the township for more than five years.
- ◆ Approximately 17 percent of the completed surveys were from non-residents.

In addition to the demographic questions, participants were given the opportunity to respond to open ended questions dealing with special population needs and recreational programming. Participants were also invited to comment freely on any township matter of interest. The open ended questions dealt with the following:

1. "Please identify the existence of special or unique population needs, including needs associated with special population groups such as senior residents, those physically challenged, etc."
2. "Please identify needed and/or desired recreation opportunities and programs."

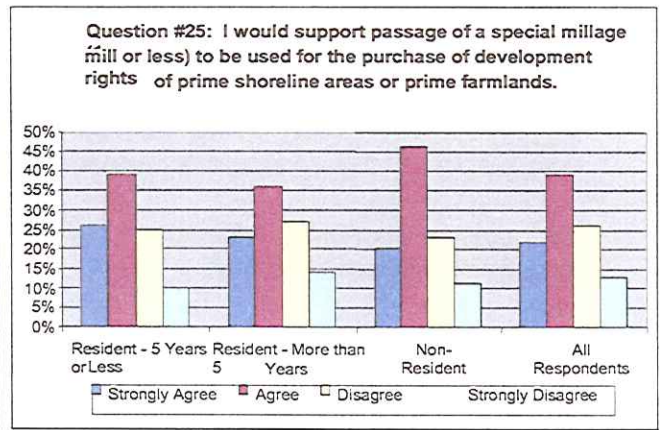
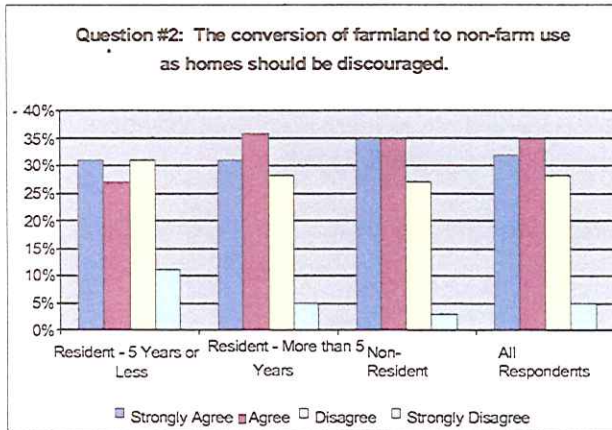
A copy of the survey instrument illustrating the specific responses to all questions, response rates and comments appear in Appendix A. The combined responses are also provided.

MAJOR SURVEY FINDINGS

Attitudes Towards Growth and Development

A common issue in growing, rural communities is how residents are coping with new development. Accordingly, several of the survey responses inquired into respondents' feelings about this important issue. A majority (67 percent) felt that conversion of farmlands to non-farm uses should be discouraged (Q #2); 61 percent would support a millage (1 mill or less) to be used for the purchase of development rights of prime shoreline areas or prime farmlands (Q #25). However, a similar percentage (69 percent) felt that farmers should be able to sell their land for non-farm uses (Q #21). This inconsistency could indicate a strong desire to preserve prime shoreland areas since Question #25 included those areas as well as farmland, or it may simply indicate a desire to allow farmers to sell their land. A slight majority (52 percent) also indicated that preserving areas of open space and woodlands is more important than trying to preserve active farmlands (Q #10).

A large majority (85 percent) view the Zoning Ordinance as an effective growth management tool (Q #29).

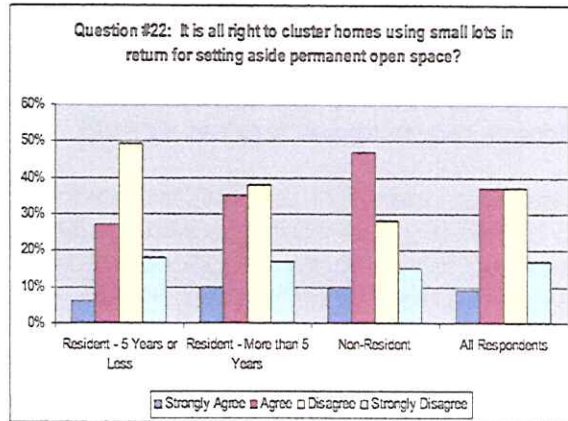
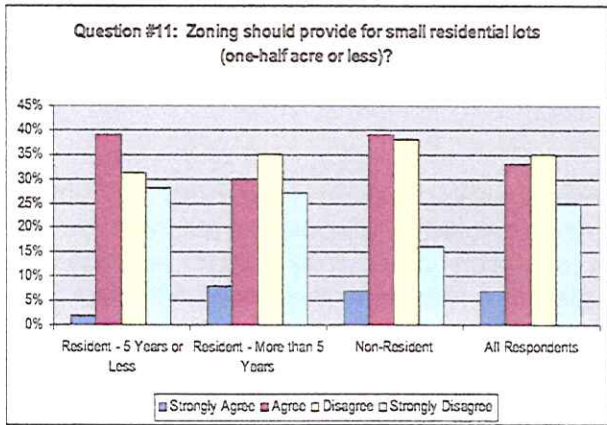


Residential Densities and Development

Generally, responses regarding residential development favored preservation of a low density, rural character for the Township.

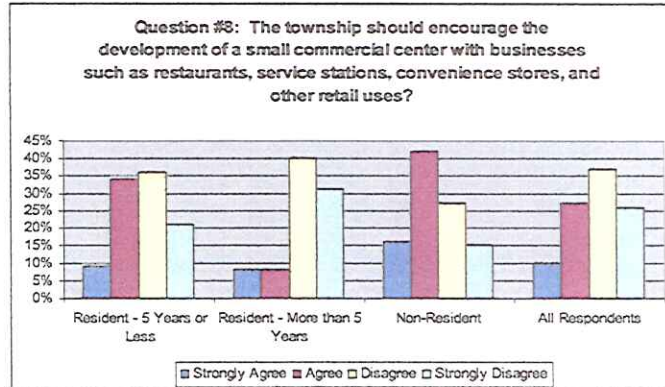
- ◆ Nearly two-thirds (60 percent) of respondents do not desire lots of one-half acre or less to be provided for through zoning. (Q #11)
- ◆ An overwhelming majority (81 percent) agreed that apartments are not needed in the township (Q #14).
- ◆ A majority of respondents (72 percent) do not want large single-family homes along the Lake Michigan shoreline to be permitted to be converted to multiple living units (such as condominiums or apartments) (Q #17).
- ◆ In contrast, 86 percent felt that homeowners should be permitted to expand their homes to include an attached apartment for use by an aging parent or other family member (Q #1).
- ◆ A slightly majority (54 percent) voiced the opinion that clustering homes using small lots in return for setting aside permanent open space is not acceptable. However, 57 percent of the non-residents surveyed felt that clustering is an appropriate tool provided open space is retained (Q #22).

Although the majority of respondents did not feel that apartments or manufactured homes were needed or should be allowed, this should probably not be taken as a lack of concern about the need for affordable housing, but rather concern about the level and type of development and how it might affect the overall character of the township.



Commercial and Industrial Development

Several questions were posed to determine the overall feeling toward allowing additional commercial and/or industrial development. Although responses to these questions were mixed, a slight majority (56 percent) indicated that light industrial development such as small machine shops or fabrication shops should be permitted (Q #4), while almost two-thirds (63 percent) indicated that the Township should not encourage the development of a small commercial center. This is in contrast to the 58 percent of non-residents that thought a small commercial center should be encouraged (Q #8).



A majority of residents (65 percent) felt that homeowners should be able to operate a business from his/her garage or accessory building, provided the level of traffic, noise, hours of operation, and other impacts are held to a minimum (Q #18).

The respondents felt strongly (68 percent) that the development of facilities to encourage tourism (such as golf courses, restaurants, and similar resort facilities) should not occur (Q #16).

Utilities and Roads

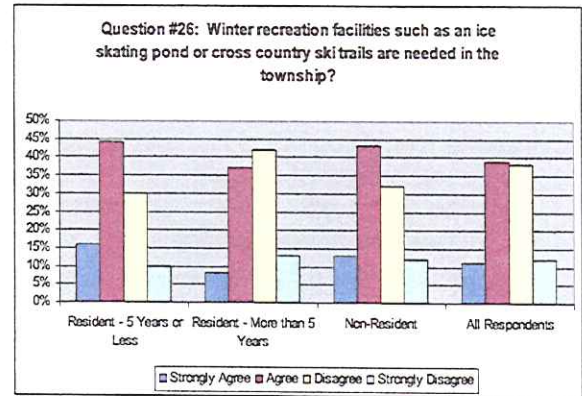
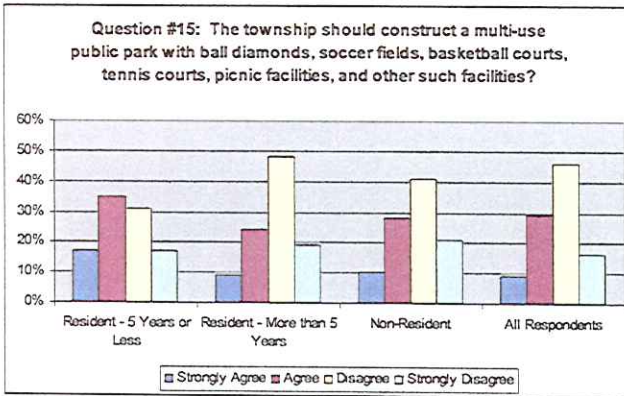
There is strong support to connect to the City of Montague municipal water and sanitary sewer systems (70 percent for water and 74 percent for sewer) should such services be needed in the future (as opposed to building Township water and sewer systems) (Q #6 and Q #7).

The majority (69 percent) felt that public roads are in good condition (Q #12), and that patrols of the township by the County Sheriff's Department are adequate (65 percent) (Q #13). Private roads were supported by 59 percent of respondents (Q #19).

Recreational Opportunities

Outdoor recreational facilities (such as public parks and playgrounds) were important to a majority of respondents, as 61 percent indicated that the Township should get involved in the development of these facilities (Q #29).

Most respondents (71 percent) felt that the Township should construct a bike path connecting to the existing Hart-Montague Bike Trail (Q #5). About two-thirds (65 percent) felt that the Township should acquire additional lands along Lake Michigan or White Lake for park use, (Q #9) and a slight majority of respondents would support a millage to purchase and develop existing and future park lands (Q #24). However, a majority (62 percent) did not support Township construction of a multi-use public park, although a slight majority (52 percent) of newer residents (5 years or less) agreed that such facilities should be developed (Q #15). And although the respondents dead-locked on the question of whether winter recreation facilities are needed, the findings indicate that newer residents (60 percent) and non-residents (56 percent) do support such facilities while longer term residents (55 percent) do not (Q #26).



A large percentage (71 percent) did not support the development of a public campground for tent camping and recreational vehicles (Q #23). This is consistent with the apparent desire (see discussion on Question #16 above) to limit tourist-oriented facilities in the township.

GOALS & OBJECTIVES

Participants in the planning process have defined goals the Township should strive to accomplish or attain. The goals are based on the Planning Commission's perceptions of issues and opportunities that bear on the community's future, the results of the public attitude/opinion survey, an understanding of current conditions, likely population growth, and land development trends.

The Township needs to take positive action to assure that goals are attained over the next three to five years. The establishment of realistic and meaningful goals and objectives is essential to an effective Master Plan.

- ◆ A GOAL is a destination, a final purpose which a community seeks to attain. A goal should be a general statement.
- ◆ An OBJECTIVE is a means to accomplish the goal. It may be very specific or detail a future action that should be undertaken.

IMAGE AND COMMUNITY CHARACTER

Goal:

Maintain patterns of development that accommodate, enhance, and preserve the township's pastoral setting, rural amenities, open spaces, and scenic beauty.

Objectives:

1. Instead of promoting the growth of local commercial and industrial operations, continue to rely on the urban cities of Montague and Whitehall for commercial and industrial facilities and services.
2. Maintain zone districts and district regulations that recognize and foster the township's natural and rural character.
3. Encourage the continued maintenance of the township's agricultural base and the preservation of the township's natural features including dunes, shorelines and water bodies, natural topography, and other physical features.
4. Encourage property owners and developers to maintain the natural landscape (topography, vegetation, views, etc.) when proposing and designing new developments.
5. Limit/restrict the construction of structures and the alteration of the landscape such that natural views and vistas are destroyed or significantly altered.
6. Limit the on-site placement of artificial lights that have the potential to significantly disrupt/alter the nighttime skyline.

FARMLAND PRESERVATION

Goal:

Preserve the township's farmland base.

Objectives:

1. Maintain a strong agricultural component as part of the Township's zoning ordinance. Restrict/limit the use of prime farmlands for non-farm purposes.
2. Work with members of the farming community to identify measures/programs needed to preserve the local farmland base.
3. Orient intensive livestock operations to locations distant from areas likely to experience higher levels of residential development.
4. Maintain the integrity of prime farmlands by avoiding the piecemeal (spot) rezoning of these lands for non-farm use.

RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT

Goal:

Promote high quality residential development.

Objectives:

1. Prepare and adopt subdivision and condominium regulations.
2. Provide opportunity for residential density bonuses for residential projects exhibiting exemplary integration and preservation of natural features as part of the overall site design and development.

FUTURE LAND USE PLAN

This chapter presents a plan for land use and development in the township. This plan is intended to serve three purposes:

- ◆ Depict how and where new development should occur over the course of the next five to ten years.
- ◆ Establish the descriptions of the land use categories illustrated on the Future Land Use Map.
- ◆ Provide general guidelines for land use and development in each category.

This plan is the product of an analysis of the community's current condition, the results of the community attitude survey, an understanding of the issues and opportunities likely to impact the future of the community, and the goals for land use and development described in the previous chapter.

AGRICULTURAL LAND USE AREA

Farming and agricultural practices are recognized as being vital to the economic health and character of the Township. It is the Township's intent, therefore, to encourage farming and other agricultural activities, and to develop and implement guidelines that encourage the continuation of these activities.

The agricultural area encompasses prime and significant active farmland, most of which has been farmed over the past century. This area also contains significant amounts of wooded and scenic open land that is not ideally suited to farming operations. Low density residential development may be permitted in areas not well suited to farming operations.

The primary objectives of the Agricultural area are as follows:

- ◆ To permit and encourage the continued vitality of generalized and specialized farming activities.
- ◆ To encourage the establishment of reasonable policies and guidelines that forestall the fragmentation and conversion of prime and other farmland to non-agricultural land uses.
- ◆ To allow for the establishment of compatible, non-agricultural land uses on lands deemed to be marginally suited or unsuited to agricultural pursuits.

LAKESHORE & SAND DUNE AREA

The shoreline and sand dune areas adjacent to Lake Michigan and White Lake are vital to resident and visitor perceptions of the township's character. Sand dunes are attractive, ecologically sensitive and irreplaceable natural resources. In the past, sensitive sand dune ecosystems have suffered irrevocable alteration or destruction caused by intensive

development. Intensive shoreline development concentrates a variety of impacts at the water's edge, and detracts from the physical beauty of the community.

Accordingly, it is the township's intent to encourage the preservation of the lakeshore and sand dune areas by providing and implementing guidelines for land use and development. Development in these areas should be limited to low-density, low-intensity, residential and recreational uses.

This area also includes Muskegon County's Meinert Park, the City of Montague's Medbury Park, and the Township's Barrier Dune Preserve. The presence of significant amounts of vacant land, particularly along the Lake Michigan lakeshore south of the Lloyd's Landing property, presents opportunities for the Township to purchase land for ecosystem preservation purposes, or for the development of passive park space.

Because of existing residential development, White Lake is poorly suited to anything other than low density, single-family residential development. Non-riparian, "keyhole" land development projects should be prohibited in this area. Dockage for boats should be limited to those that are accessory and customary to single family residential development.

The primary objectives of the Lakeshore & Sand Dune area are as follows:

- ◆ Recognize that the sand dune area and the lakeshore ecosystems are irreplaceable natural resources that make a vital contribution to the image and character of the community;
- ◆ To encourage the preservation of fragile and valuable ecosystems found along the Lake Michigan shoreline;
- ◆ To provide areas for planned, low-density and single-family residential development in a manner that provides for sustaining the area's image and character;
- ◆ To encourage public and private riparian land owners to work together to create a balance of interests in the use and preservation of lakeshore and sand dune areas;
- ◆ To encourage the purchase of land by the Township for preservation, as well as for the development of passive public park and recreation facilities.
- ◆ To encourage private property owners to establish conservation easements that will preserve sensitive sand dune and lakeshore ecosystems.

RESIDENTIAL AREA

This Area has been established to provide for residential development on land poorly suited to agriculture uses. This category includes existing smaller lot residential and subdivision development, and significant amounts of undeveloped land that is wooded or open.

Areas east of Indian Bay Road within 1/4 to 1/2 mile north and south of Wilkes Road may be able to accommodate higher density duplex, multi-family and manufactured home park development when infrastructure becomes available or if privately owned, developed and operated sewage treatment systems are provided.

The primary objectives of the Residential Area include:

- ◆ To provide an area of the community ideally suited to low to medium-density one-family residential development.
- ◆ To allow for planned, large-lot single and two-family residential land development projects on land poorly suited to farming and other agricultural activities.
- ◆ When infrastructure becomes available, to provide limited areas that may be able to accommodate planned duplex, multi-family and manufactured home park development.

POTENTIAL COMMERCIAL AREAS

This category includes three small areas along county primary roads in which limited amounts of commercial development may logically occur. These areas are limited in size for a number of reasons:

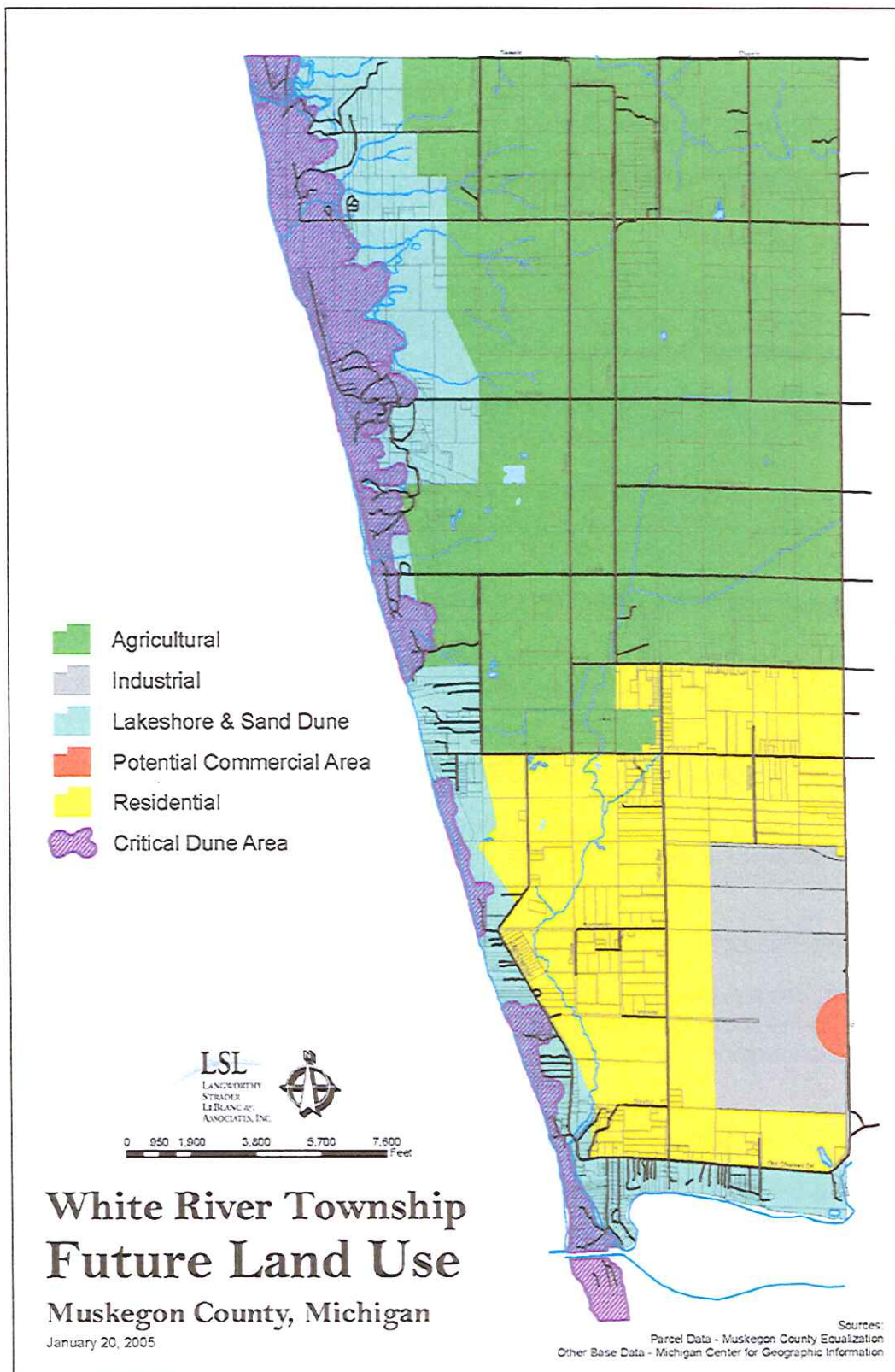
- ◆ The Township has no plans to provide public sewer and water utilities over the short or long term.
- ◆ Low traffic volumes, low population density and limited county primary roads limit the market for a variety of service and business types of development.
- ◆ The "market" present in the township has historically been too small to support viable business, commercial, or service enterprises. Accordingly, commercial development has been and will continue to be very limited.
- ◆ The Public Attitude/Opinion Survey indicated that many residents desire to see very limited commercial development.
- ◆ Commercial centers serving White River Township exist in the nearby cities of Montague and Whitehall.

The objective of potential Commercial Areas are as follows:

- ◆ White River Township officials wish to support the commercial and business development and redevelopment efforts in the Cities of Montague and Whitehall.
- ◆ The Planning Commission has indicated a desire to support small-scale "bed and breakfast" and similar businesses in a manner consistent with the image and character of the community.

INDUSTRIAL AREAS

This plan does not provide for the establishment of any industrial development outside of existing industrial zoning districts. This is due, in part, to a lack of utilities and other infrastructure, and the availability of vacant industrial park land in the City of Montague. Accordingly, the established future industrial development should occur only in existing industrial zoning districts.



IMPLEMENTATION RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter describes specific actions Township officials may take to help ensure that the goals expressed in the plan are attained.

ONGOING PLAN IMPLEMENTATION & EVALUATION

Township Officials should:

- Use this plan when reviewing land development proposals, during consideration of rezoning requests, and when deliberating applications for variances and interpretations of the zoning ordinance.
- Consider committing the time and resources necessary to ensure the accomplishment of the goals and action plans described in this plan.
- Review and evaluate the plan annually as a means of tracking the accomplishment of goals and effectiveness of action plans. As goals are accomplished, and action plans are implemented, the plan can be amended accordingly.

ACTION PLAN #1: REVIEW & UPDATE CURRENT ZONING ORDINANCE

The White River Township Zoning Ordinance can be the most effective tool used to ensure that future land uses and land development projects are consistent with the goals expressed in this plan.

ACTION PLAN #2: PREPARE & ADOPT SUBDIVISION REGULATIONS

The Township must adopt a subdivision control ordinance if it wishes to play a significant role in the process of reviewing and approving subdivisions platted under the provisions of the Michigan Land Division Act.

ACTION PLAN #3: PARKS AND RECREATION PLANNING

The Township should keep the existing Community Parks and Recreation plan up to date for submission to the Michigan Department of Natural Resources to assure eligibility for park and recreation funding assistance for future parkland acquisition and development projects.

ACTION PLAN #4: LONG AND SHORT-TERM CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS PROGRAMMING

The Township Board should consider the development of a Capital Improvements Program as a means of identifying and prioritizing short and long-range funding needs for community services and facilities, such as a new Township Hall, parks, road improvements, and other facilities requiring large capital expenditures.

ACTION PLAN #5: COORDINATION WITH WHITE LAKE AREA 2000+ STRATEGIC PLAN

Township officials should continue to play a role in the strategic planning process initiated by the 2000+ Strategic Plan Steering Committee & Task Force to ensure that the issues and concerns described in this plan are addressed in this area-wide planning effort.

Additionally, because Township officials have expressed interest in providing for very limited amounts of commercial development in the community, coordination of planning programs with surrounding communities, especially the City of Montague, is essential.

