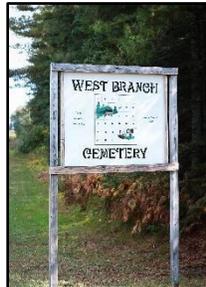


WEST BRANCH TOWNSHIP MASTER PLAN | 2024



“THE PERFECT TOWNSHIP”

ADOPTED ON: APRIL 16, 2024

This Master Plan was prepared by the West Branch Township Planning Commission with technical assistance from, *Northwoods Planning & Zoning Services, LLC*

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

TOWNSHIP BOARD

Jack Heidtman – Supervisor
Michelle Cristal – Clerk
Katherine Shaw – Treasurer
Tim Overmyer – Trustee
Kris Shaw – Trustee

PLANNING COMMISSION

Deena Barnhart - Chairperson
Nellie Turton – Secretary
Kris Shaw – Twp. Board Rep.
Ray Johnson
Wayne Theurer

Michael Beltz – Zoning Administrator



West Branch Township Hall

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Master Plan Document

The [West Branch Township](#) Master Plan details the vision for the community's future in the areas of future land use, economic and social trends, sustainability and resilience planning, as well as community facilities and services, recreational opportunities, and transportation planning. This vision is reflected through the establishment of the community's updated goals and objectives.

The [Michigan Planning Enabling Act, P.A. 33 of 2008](#) (as amended), provides for all local governments (township, village, city & county) to conduct land use planning. It does not amend the zoning of property and it does not have the force of law. It is merely a set of policies, strategies and goals to enhance and improve the community over a projected period of time. The Master Plan update process also created a framework for public participation and community involvement which promoted regional cooperation, which continues to enhance the rural, high quality-of-life found in West Branch Township.

The Michigan [Zoning Enabling Act 110 of 2006](#) (as amended) provides for all local government (township, village, city & county) to conduct zoning in the state. The act requires that the zoning ordinance be based on a Master Plan. Quality zoning practice promotes general health, safety and welfare, and it is the legal mechanism used to adjust the classification and regulation of land use.

The Master Plan is the community's vision, while zoning provisions provide a pathway to that vision. With an active Master Plan in place, zoning decisions should be consistent with the plan, current zoning ordinance and map.

Community planning is a continual process. As trends emerge and evolve within the community, relevant data should be researched and goals and objectives should be reevaluated. This plan represents an update from the previous version (2013-2018). This update version, utilized data research, 2020 US Census results, along with resident and stakeholder input. Issues and opportunities were explored and discussed, and goals and objectives were adjusted to meet the current and future needs of the community.

1.2 The Master Plan Update Process

The sections presented in this document represent the conclusion of months of discussion and study by the West Branch Township Planning Commission, with professional consulting services provided by Northwoods Planning & Zoning Services, LLC.

A Public Forum was held at the West Branch Township Hall on May 22, 2023, where members of the community gathered to offer their input on the future of the community. After a brief presentation of related materials, a general discussion was held and those conversations are documented in Appendix A of this Master Plan update.

The final draft plan was distributed and posted on the West Branch Township website in February of 2023 and made available at the West Branch Township Hall.

Residents also had the opportunity to provide comments at the Planning Commission's public hearing held on April 16, 2024, to again seek comment on the draft plan. Following the public hearing, this Plan was adopted by the West Branch Township Planning Commission on April 16, 2024. Finally, a Resolution of Concurrence was adopted by the West Branch Township Board of Trustees.

1.3 Major Themes Explored in the Plan

The following are subjects have been contemplated and discussed by the West Branch Township Planning Commission as part of this Master Plan update. These topics provided the foundation for the updated community Goals & Objectives and Future Land Use Plan found later in the document.

- Introduction/Background
- Social Characteristics
- Economic Characteristics
- Natural Resources
- Community Services & Facilities
- Transportation
- Public Participation
- Future Land Use & Zoning Planning
- Goals & Objectives
- Plan Implementation & Strategies

1.4 Planning Area

The planning area considered for this Master Plan update encompasses West Branch Township, Marquette County, Michigan. At only 36 square miles, it is the smallest (land area-wise) of the Townships located in Marquette County.

West Branch Township consists of survey Township 46 North, Range 24 West. The northern boundary of the Township is approximately seven miles southeast of the city limits of the City of Marquette with the major transportation connector being US Highway 41 South. The unincorporated community of Little Lake is three miles south of the southern boundary of the Township, and the unincorporated community of Gwinn is about five miles west of Little Lake on M-35. The small, unincorporated community of Skandia lies on the shared boundary with Skandia Township, and the community Sawyer, overlaps the southwestern corner of the Township.

1.5 Community History

West Branch Township was established in March of 1895, the last of five Township to split from the parent Township of Chocolay. Forsyth, Turin, Sands, and Skandia Townships had previously split from Chocolay Township. The Township was named for the West Branch of the Chocolay River. Most of the surveying in the Township was reportedly conducted by Lorenzo D. Harvey, a prominent resident of the community of Harvey.

Like many communities in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, the Township's early economy was founded on logging and farming. Settlement of the area began shortly after the Civil War with the arrival of Gustaf Hjalmer Bahrman. By the early 1870s the West Branch area consisted of a group

of small, scattered farms and homesteads. Many of the residents were of Swedish and German descent. Farms in the area produced a variety of crops including potatoes, cabbage, and rutabagas. Orchards and dairy production were also common. During the winter months, many farmers worked in forestry. Most of the early farms in West Branch Township and nearby areas have long been abandoned. Some farmers who were knowledgeable about soils, or were lucky enough to settle in areas of good soil, have sustained operations throughout the years. Several fifth-generation farms continue to be productive in the area. However, agriculture is no longer a major occupation within the Township, as most residents travel outside the Township for work.

In addition to farming, the forest industry played an important part in the area's early economy. Various logging camps and sawmills were scattered throughout the area. Softwood was used for lumber, and hardwood was used by charcoal kilns in Harvey and Marquette. Logs were cut and hauled by horse-drawn sled in the winter, while lumber was cut and moved in the summer months. In addition to lumber, shingles and lath were common sawmill products.

Cement blocks were also manufactured in the Township for a period of time. A small silver mine was once located on Silver Lead Creek near the present site of Sawyer. The area's first post office was established around 1894, and the first general store opened in 1902. A year later, both Yalmer and Skandia became stations on the Marquette and Southeastern Railroad line. This provided a relatively easy means of shipping farm produce and forest products to Marquette and other areas, since early roads were often muddy. This railroad has since been abandoned.

In 1933, the post office was moved to Skandia, and still serves residents of the West Branch Township and surrounding areas. At one time or another at least four schoolhouses were located in the Township and some are still used as private residences. Three of the schools were constructed around 1918, for a total cost of \$20,000. Cement for the schools were produced at a site on the Chocoy River. A Lutheran Church was located for a time along U.S. Highway 41 and at least three stores were located in the area. All three stores had gasoline pumps; one was situated on County Road 545, and the others were in the community of Skandia. One of these stores was later converted into a restaurant.

While there are still some commercial ventures in the community of Skandia and along Highway 41, most are located outside of the Township. In 1936, the old log, Township Hall which was located on a high spot on the Southeast corner of Townhall Road and County Road 545 was replaced by the existing building on the southwest corner of the same intersection. The new Township Hall was built by Workers Progress Administration workers and utilized logs cut near the building on a portable sawmill.

1.6 Community Character

The character of the Township is unique, given its rich agricultural heritage. Known as "*The Perfect Township*," West Branch Township is thirty-six (36) square miles and forms a perfect square with no geographic interruptions. As the community continues to write its history, it will deal with both issues and opportunities when assimilating new residential, commercial, recreational, and service-based land uses into the historically agricultural community. It is important to its citizens that the Township aims to protect its rural character and to ensure that new development and investment is consistent and compatible with the community's rich history.

1.7 How to Use the Master Plan

The plan is intended to be used on a daily basis as land use-based decisions are contemplated concerning development, redevelopment, capital improvements, economic incentives, and other matters affecting the Township's growth. Implementation of the Master Plan will be driven by the availability of resources (staff and/or funding) sufficient to guarantee success. This section summarizes the ways in which the Master Plan will be used.

Work Programs & Budgets

Township departments and administrators should review their annual work programs and budgets cognizant of the policies and recommendations presented in the Plan. Numerous objectives and strategies can be implemented in this way. As the Township budget is prepared and reviewed each year, the Plan should be referenced to ensure capital and operational investments are consistent with the Plan and its growth priorities, so that important aspects of the plan are not overlooked.

Development Approvals

Legislative and administrative approvals relative to development should be strongly predicated on the policies of the Plan. Land use and density recommendations, in particular, should be followed when considering zoning decisions. A degree of flexibility will be necessary to ensure that decisions are made based on current circumstances, which may dictate flexibility in applying the Plan's policies.

Capital Improvement Plan

The Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) for the Township should be strongly linked to the Plan policies when it is updated for 2024 and beyond. The CIP presents the Township's capital investments for up to a six-year planning period. Each improvement should reference a specific goal, objective or strategy, as recommended in the Plan.

Economic Incentives

Any proposed economic incentives for developers should only be awarded when the proposed project is consistent with the Plan—especially relative to land-use, density, and infrastructure. This is recommended in the Economic Development Goals & Objectives.

Annual Report

The Planning Commission should consider issuing a report each January that summarizes the status of each goal, objective and strategy relative to implementation. It will also note the status of the major assumptions that underlay the plan, such as population level changes. The report should be presented by the Planning Commission and be made available to the public.

Interpreting the Plan

The Plan is the set of official township policies to manage development and growth, and the implementing strategies that together establish a common vision of the Township for the future. Changing circumstances could influence the interpretation of a policy, but that should only occur where the broader goals and objectives of the Plan are consistently followed.

Amending the Plan

If the Planning Commission supports a development proposal that would distinctly deviate from the Plan's policies, a formal amendment of the respective plan policy would be required. Such an amendment should cite in the ordinance the facts supporting such change. The Planning Commission will provide a recommendation regarding each amendment, prior to action.

Updating the Plan

The plan covers the planning period 2024-2028. Townships are required to review the Plan every five years. In 2027, a review is recommended to begin started, with recommendations being presented to the Planning Commission for any adjustments to the plan by mid-2027. It will be conducted by the Planning Commission who will review and consider the recommended changes.

2.0 SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS

2.1 Introduction

Social characteristics are an essential component of the Master Plan when forecasting the future needs of the community. They provide the foundation upon which a major portion of this plan is based. While an evaluation of a community's current characteristics provides insight into immediate needs and deficiencies, population trends provide a foundation for determining future land use requirements, public facility needs, and essential service delivery.

This section of the plan examines several elements which are central to understanding a community's overall population and household characteristics. These items include population trends, age distribution, race and ethnicity, household relationships, household size, marital status, household type and ownership status.

2.2 Population Trends

The population of West Branch Township has, and still does, center on the economics of its abundant natural resources. Population projections are useful for the Planning Commission and Township Board for forecasting future residential demands for public services, recreational needs and other capital improvements. These projections also rely heavily on the future economic trends of the township and the region as a whole.

West Branch Township's population is widely dispersed throughout the community and features two more densely populated around Sawyer and Skandia. At the time of the [2020 Decennial Census](#), West Branch Township's was 1,702, which is an increase from the 1,623 residents surveyed during the 2010 Census.

2.3 Age Distribution

The median age of West Branch Township residents follows that of Marquette County and the State of Michigan at 38 years old. The Township differs from some of the surrounding communities however in its relatively lower percentage of the so-called "baby boomers." Only 25% of the Township population is listed as 60 years of age or older. A trend toward smaller families, with many people choosing to delay childbearing, or not to have children, also contributes toward this trend. Age distribution, sex and race and ethnicity within West Branch Township is further detailed in the graphics below from the 2020 US Census:

Age

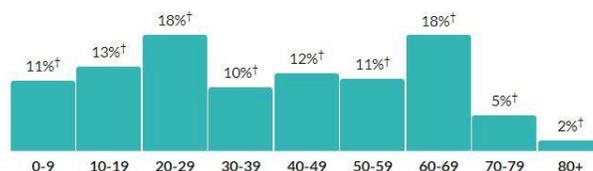
38

Median age

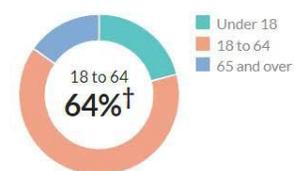
a little less than the figure in Marquette County: 39.2

a little less than the figure in Michigan: 39.8

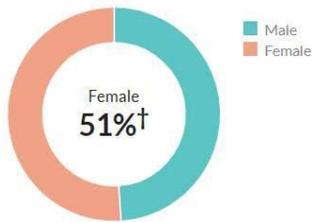
Population by age range



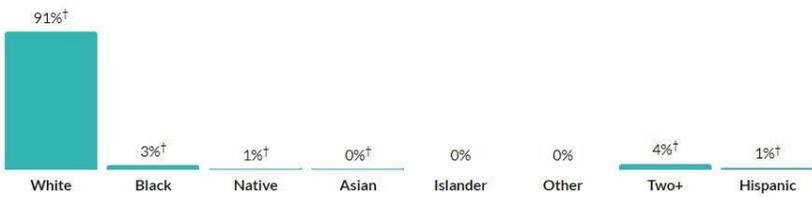
Population by age category



Sex



Race & Ethnicity



2.4 Household Characteristics

As of 2020, West Branch Township had 603 households, with 2.5 persons per household. 65% of the household were occupied by married couples. Marital status in West Branch Township was listed as 49% married. By sex, 8% of males and 4% of females were divorced.

Households

603

Number of households

Marquette County: 26,709

Michigan: 3,976,729

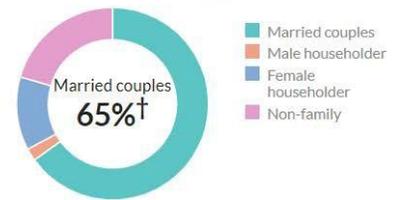
2.5

Persons per household

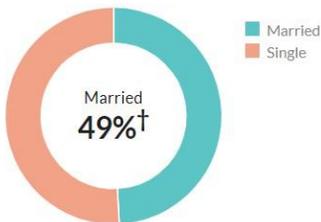
about 10 percent higher than the figure in Marquette County: 2.4

about the same as the figure in Michigan: 2.5

Population by household type

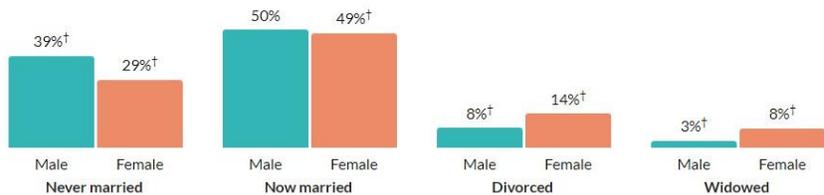


Marital status



* Universe: Population 15 years and over

Marital status, by sex



† Margin of error is at least 10 percent of the total value.

Of the 817 total housing units, 74% were listed as occupied with 53% of housing units being owner-occupied.

Units & Occupancy

817

Number of housing units

Marquette County: 33,626

Michigan: 4,566,504

Occupied vs. Vacant



Ownership of occupied units



West Branch Township has 6.6% of its population identified as having veteran status and is consistent with the State of Michigan rate of 6.8%. Of the 80 total veterans 33 are listed as Vietnam-era.

Veteran status

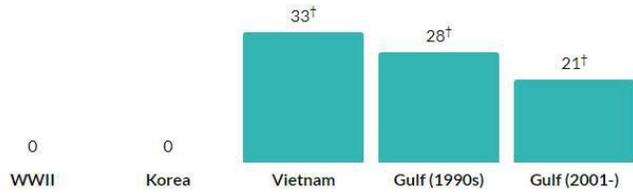
6.6%

Population with veteran status

about two-thirds of the rate in Marquette County: 9.5%

about the same as the rate in Michigan: 6.6%

Veterans by wartime service



* Civilian veterans who served during wartime only

Show data / Embed

80 Total veterans

68 Male

12 Female

† Margin of error is at least 10 percent of the total value.



West Branch Township Cemetery – Veterans Memorial

3.0 ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS

3.1 Introduction

Numerous factors contribute to the economic development of a community, many of which extend far beyond the community's boundaries into the region as whole. Understanding the history of economic development in the community is imperative to knowing the culture of its population. Current economic aspects such as income, workforce industry type, and educational attainment will also be detailed below. Finally, broad economic development goals and implementation tools designed to assist West Branch Township in achieving those goals, will be discussed in this chapter.

3.2 Historical Economic Factors

Like the rest of the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, West Branch Township's economic history is closely related to its natural resources. Agriculture, forestry, and earth product industries were the mainstays of the local economy throughout the Township's early history.

Today, the Township serves as both an agricultural area and a bedroom residential community for the nearby city of Marquette. The Township itself contains no commercial center, although some commercial enterprises are located on the east side of US Highway 41 in neighboring Skandia Township. Businesses in the Township are those which involve home-based employment, including farms and a variety of service businesses. Establishments include the Sawyer Village Shoppette (grocery store), Kids-R-Us Child Development Center, Inc., and the 906 Community Church.

Countywide, the Marquette-Negaunee-Ishpeming urban corridor is the primary trade and employment center, and statistics on a county level reflect development trends in this area more than the rural areas of the county. Many residents in the outlying areas of the county, including West Branch Township, are employed in the urban corridor and purchase goods and services there, while choosing to live in a more rural setting.

Although agriculture and forestry industries still exist to some extent, a more sustainable future is possible by capitalizing on some of the very natural resources that the community was founded on. This would include realizing those resources in a different way – through outdoor recreational opportunities, tourism, and historical interpretation.

West Branch Township may also diversify their economic base and create employment opportunities that encourage additional investment and reinvestment into the community. By tapping into light industrial development with a focus on light manufacturing, assembly, and distribution, these industries would also help to ensure sufficient revenues are generated to support the community.

3.3 Current Economic Factors

Income levels and educational levels are important factors when considering future economic development planning. Shown below are average per capita income, median household income, poverty level and educational attainment displayed graphically, according to the 2020 Census and [American Community 5-Year Survey](#) results.

The average per capita income was listed as \$25,993, or about 90% of Marquette County and about 75% of the amount of the state average. Median household income was \$56,161 which was slightly less than Marquette County as a whole and roughly 90% of the amount in Michigan.

Income

\$25,933

Per capita income

about 90 percent of the amount in Marquette County: \$29,939

about three-quarters of the amount in Michigan: \$34,768

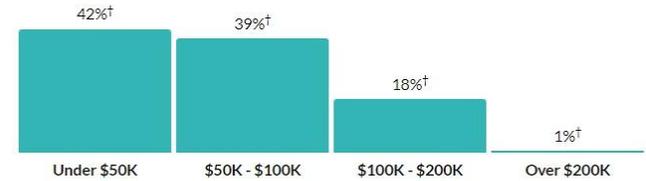
\$56,161

Median household income

a little less than the amount in Marquette County: \$57,981

about 90 percent of the amount in Michigan: \$63,202

Household income



† Margin of error is at least 10 percent of the total value.

About 19.4% of the population was below the poverty line, including 41% of children under the age of 18 and 3% over the age of 65. In comparison, the 19.4% figure in West Branch Township is about 1.3 times that of the rate in Marquette County and approximately 1.5 times the rate in the State of Michigan.

Poverty

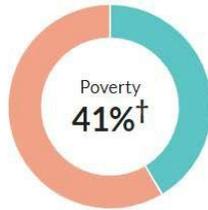
19.4%

Persons below poverty line

about 1.3 times the rate in Marquette County: 15.2%

about 1.5 times the rate in Michigan: 13.3%

Children (Under 18)



Seniors (65 and over)



† Margin of error is at least 10 percent of the total value.

As detailed below, West Branch Township features a relatively high-level of educational attainment when compared with the rest of Marquette County and the State of Michigan. Further, 39% reported some college-level education. 19% have obtained a Bachelor’s degree and approximately 10% hold a post-graduate degree.

Educational attainment

97.1%

High school grad or higher

about the same as the rate in Marquette County: 95.3%

a little higher than the rate in Michigan: 91.6%

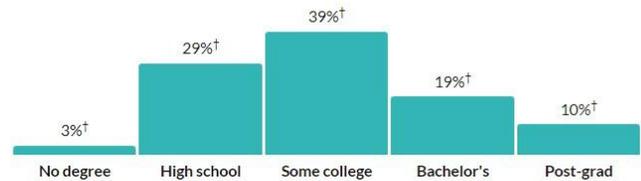
28.4%

Bachelor's degree or higher

about 80 percent of the rate in Marquette County: 34.1%

about 90 percent of the rate in Michigan: 30.6%

Population by highest level of education



† Margin of error is at least 10 percent of the total value.

3.4 Economic Development Strategies

West Branch Township’s natural resources and proximity to the City of Marquette will continue to be assets for future economic development strategies. West Branch Township should work to

retain and encourage expansion of existing businesses and industries. Where and when feasible, attract new economic developments such as light manufacturing and service-based industries to help provide various levels of desired employment opportunities in the community. Other, future economic development possibilities such as recreation tourism and/or cultural and historic interpretation-based tourism, off-road vehicle (ORV) trails, sport fishing, camping, hiking, hunting, and mountain biking, could also be developed with sound fiscal and long-range planning efforts.

3.5 Future Development Considerations

In order to understand the growth needs of West Branch Township, we need to understand the physical requirements of that growth. Aside from the economic conditions which exist, there are four primary principles which determine the type and pattern of growth that occur: available utility services, available road systems and conditions, the preservation and conservation of existing environmental features, zoning regulations and land use planning.

Utility Infrastructure

The primary utilities needed for developments are electric, gas, water service and sanitary sewer. Electric service is provided by utility companies and the demand for this service, along with the ability to afford their installation, drives potential expansion.

Transportation Network

If the Township expects an increase in development, the demands of this development will also depend on the extent and condition of the local road network. The proximity to Marquette may benefit the overall character of the community and be a draw to those that are looking for the rural setting; however, it does not provide ideal accessibility and traffic-based visibility that developers often seek to locate primary businesses. West Branch Township will continue to work with the road commission to address future transportation needs as they arise.

Environmental Considerations

Environmentally susceptible areas will influence the location for potential development in previously undeveloped areas, especially where floodplains, wetlands, and coastal areas exist. Policies continue to be implemented regarding the impact of growth on the environment, and developments have become more sustainable as a result. The goal of the Township is to work with all levels of government, as well as private property owners, to encourage sustainable development and minimize adverse impacts of development on the environment.

Existing Zoning & Land Use Planning

Policies regarding land use are typically expressed within a general land use plan that is policed by the zoning ordinance. As growth occurs, the plan must be reviewed to make sure that the new growth is consistent with what has been planned and anticipated. As new businesses reveal themselves and evolve, it may be necessary to revisit and amend the plan to accommodate the new ideas. Since the general land use plan is designed to be flexible, future business leaders can work with community officials to make changes, as needed.

Local land use regulation (zoning) is a valuable and accepted legal principle. Land use is controlled through the separation and/or merging of certain land use types into zoning districts. The rules governing these districts are contained in a zoning ordinance, created by the community, which contains provisions regulating the type, size, and intensity of the development permissible. Zoning is designed to provide for the orderly development of land. From time to time, zoning regulations should also be reviewed to ensure that consideration is given to new or evolving businesses that may be looking to locate in West Branch Township.

4.0 NATURAL RESOURCES

4.1 Introduction

Natural resources help to define the character of the community, support natural systems that provide for wildlife and a healthy environment, and provide opportunities for recreation. These features can have a profound effect on a community's development by directly or indirectly constraining or supporting growth. The interests of property owners and development needs must be balanced with environmental conservation and preservation.

The outstanding natural features in the planning area are of high value to the community. These include the Chocoy River and its tributary system, inland lakes, extensive woodlots and tree resources, natural habitats, rolling topography, and species habitats. The Natural Resources section of the Master Plan will discuss resource management, topography, geology, water features, and watersheds.

4.2 Resource Management

West Branch Township aims to conserve natural systems and resources by integrating them within development and recreation opportunities, in order to provide a more sustainable community. Natural systems will be conserved wherever feasible and the impact of development on natural resources will be minimized by limiting or eliminating development within these areas. The most outstanding habitats should be preserved as public or private open space and will not be developed. Public access to natural resources should be expanded where and when feasible, provided it does not adversely impact these areas. This could also include the integration of natural areas into public parkland and private open space areas for residents to enjoy.

The overarching goal is to effectively manage the community's natural resources and to minimize impacts from development and preserve the most outstanding resources. This may be accomplished through a number of management tools include zoning overlay districts, well-designed sites, and best management practices.

Potential Protective Strategies:

Natural Resources Inventory

The Township may consider preparing a database inventory of natural resources from existing informational data sets. The database would be a valuable tool that would provide property owners with detailed information to assess development proposals and identify priority areas for parkland acquisition and open space preservation. Such a database would include a map showing soil classifications, slope, vegetation, species habitat, riparian corridors, water features, and other resources.

Environmental Analysis Map

An analysis of environmental conditions affecting a specific development site may be prepared on a more consistent basis. The zoning ordinance may be amended to require a formal Environmental Analysis Map and text with any proposed commercial site plan or subdivision plat, which identifies all sensitive resource areas and mitigates any adverse changes to those resources due to the proposed

development, along with mitigation measures to offset those changes. This submittal requirement could also be linked to open space requirements, waterfront setbacks, and land clearing provisions within the zoning ordinance.

Design Standards

Another tool for protecting natural resources is to encourage best-management design standards. In particular, clustering of development and “open space” subdivisions are favorable development tools. Compact or clustered development may include the clustering of smaller lots or the clustering of buildings, and in each case a balance is provided with additional, common-area, open space. The Planning Commission and/or Township Board could draft guidelines that provide for these best-management practices that would be included in the zoning ordinance.

4.3 Topography and Geology

Both bedrock and surface geology have an impact on the potential for additional development. Bedrock geology is the solid rock layer usually found below soils and surface geology. Its formation occurred during the earliest periods of the earth’s formation. Surface geology material usually occurs between the soil at the earth’s surface and the bedrock formations are found below the surface. It is not as fine textured as the soil but is a granular material that differs from bedrock.

Bedrock Geology

The importance of bedrock to a community’s development is its ability to supply groundwater. The quality and quantity of groundwater are influenced by the types of bedrock the water is retrieved from, and the layers through which the water passes before reaching the water well.

The majority of the bedrock found in the Township that underlies the glacial soils is composed of Munising Sandstone and Palmer Gneiss, Republic Granite and Compeau Creek Gneiss. A small area in the southeast corner of the Township is underlain by Trempealeau formations (dolomitic sandstone). All of the bedrock underlying the Township dates back to the Precambrian era, generally believed to be over 600 million years ago. Munising Sandstone underlies the north half and much of the southeast quarter of the Township. This formation is a major aquifer in Marquette County, providing adequate, but not large quantities of water for domestic wells.

The granitic and gneissic rocks found in the southwestern part of the Township consist of primarily metamorphic rocks. These rocks are from Achaean or Precambrian period, making them among the oldest rocks in the area. The Munising Sandstone and Trempealeau Formations found in the southeast corner of the Township generally provide groundwater with good chemical quality, although the water is moderately hard to hard.

Surface Geology

The surface geology of the Township is a result of glaciation. The different deposits of surface geology are categorized by names that relate to the particular process of formation and variance in material content. The surface geology of the Township consists of end moraines, glacial outwash, lacustrine deposits, and glacial till.

End (terminal) moraines are deposits of materials left by the melting of the glaciers as they receded. On the surface, these deposits frequently appear as large hills. These deposits include sand, gravel, and large boulders which are usually poorly sorted and can reach a depth of over 300 ft. End moraines are important sources of groundwater in Marquette County.

Glacial outwash consists of stratified sand and gravel materials which were deposited in and by moving streams of water flowing from the glaciers. Wells drilled into glacial outwash generally provide water that is satisfactory for domestic use.

Lacustrine deposits consist of stratified layers of fine sand and silt with some clay which was deposited in glacial lakes. Wells drilled in lake deposits also generally yield water with quality suitable for most uses.

Glacial till consists of deposits of glacially derived materials is usually clay, silt, or sand, but pebbles and huge boulders may be present. Till lithology is commonly related to local bedrock, and in most places the greater part of the material comprising till was derived from nearby bedrock and not from rocks hundreds of miles away.

Mineral Resources

Although other areas of Marquette County contain economically important mineral resources such as iron ore, no concentrations of marketable minerals are known to exist within the Township. There is potential for mineral resources such as sand and gravel; however, specific testing would be required to determine the location, extent, and quality of these materials. Extractions of these resources are dependent on local demand.

Soils

Soil occurs at the earth's surface, and generally have a finer texture than the bedrock or surface geology described in the previous section. Glaciers were the primary soil-forming force in the Great Lakes region. Soil is comprised of material derived from bedrock by the action of glaciers, waves, flowing water, freeze-thaw cycles and wind. It also contains organic material derived from plants and animals, micro-organisms, chemical precipitates, air and water.

Soils are grouped into associations based on common characteristics, such as drainage, slope and texture. The soils in these associations respond similarly to the various uses which they may be subjected to. The United States Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources conservation service (NRCS) has completed a soil survey for Marquette County. The soil survey contains descriptions of the suitability of the various mapping units for various land uses. Any proposed land use type should consider the suitability of the soils and erosion limitations for the type of development planned.

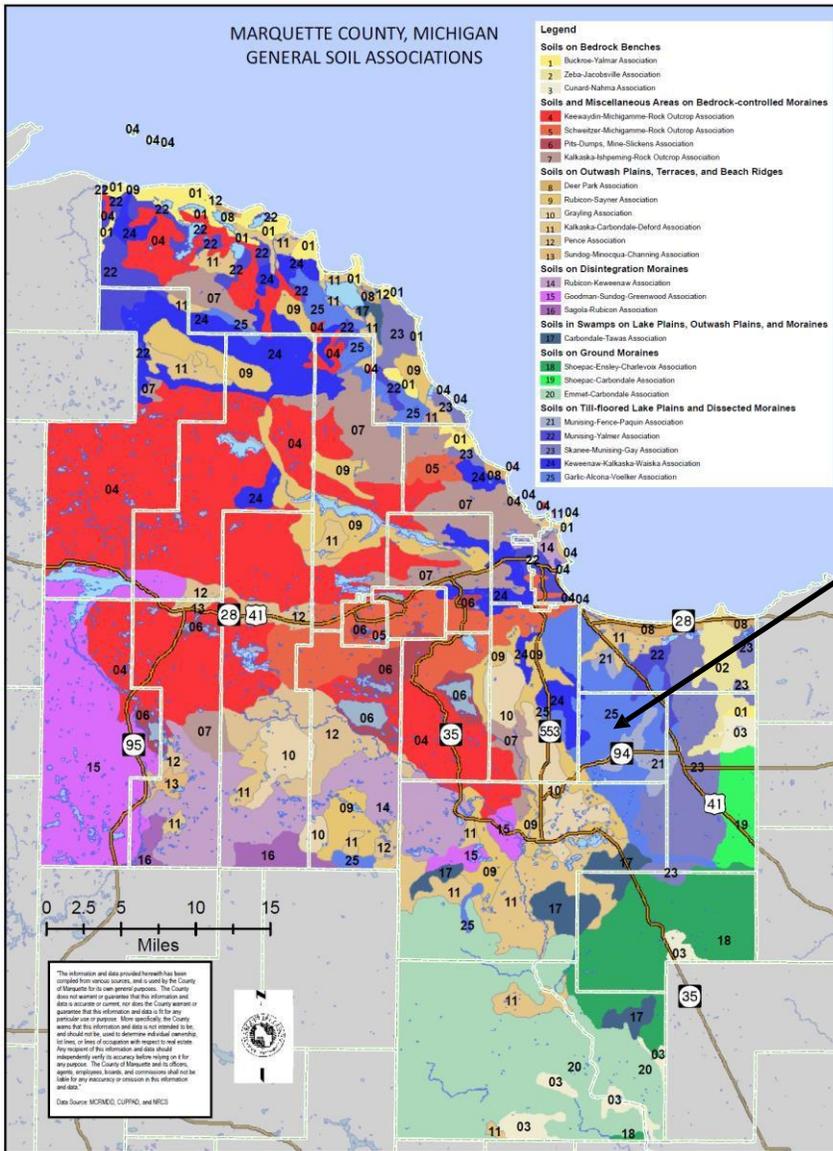
4.4 Development Limitation Considerations

Slope

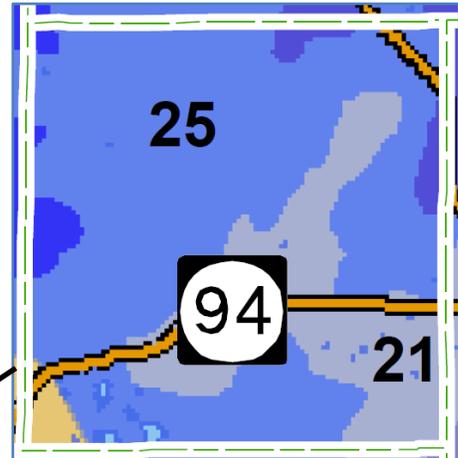
Most construction can accommodate significant slopes (slopes above 15%) through stringent construction designs. This is typically not an issue given the relatively flat topography found in West Branch Township. However, along ravines, slopes that equal or exceed 15% should be avoided for construction sites and should be set aside in public or private open space. Appropriate slopes for roads are 8% to 12%, but 5% is preferred, especially for fire apparatus.

Drainage

Poorly drained soils may be suitable for farming, provided artificial drainage is installed for wet weather months. However, poorly draining soils do not make for great building sites and often require on-site detention or retention. Wherever possible, poorly drained soils should be avoided as building sites.



**West Branch Township
General Soil Associations:**



- 21 Munising-Fence-Paquin Association
- 22 Munising-Yalmer Association
- 23 Skanee-Munising-Gay Association
- 24 Keweenaw-Kalkaska-Waiska Association
- 25 Garlic-Alcona-Voelker Association

Water Features & Watersheds

Water features play an important role in the Township. The major water features in the Township include the Chocolay River and its tributaries as well as a few lakes in the southwestern corner of the Township, as well as wetlands. The majority of West Branch Township is located within the Chocolay River Watershed, which flows into Lake Superior (with the exception of a small area in the southwest corner of the Township that drains to the Escanaba River watershed, flowing to Lake Michigan).

Water Features in the Township include: Big Trout Lake, Engman, and Sporley Lakes, along with two small unnamed lakes. Big Trout Lake, Engman and Sporley Lakes have become popular for year-round and seasonal waterfront residential development.

Chocolay River Watershed

The Chocolay River Watershed is a 160-square mile (102,400 acre) drainage system located in Michigan’s Upper Peninsula, in Marquette County, southwest of the city of Marquette. It encompasses

the entirety of West Branch Township, the majority of Chocolay Township, and parts of Sands, Skandia, and Forsyth Townships. The watershed drains into Lake Superior in Harvey. Population within the watershed has been estimated at roughly 10,000 inhabitants, with all of the residents acquiring their water supply from groundwater wells, excluding a small portion of Skandia Township.

Wetlands

Pockets of wetlands are found throughout West Branch Township, with significant areas associated with the Chocolay river drainage area. Wetlands include swamps, marshes, bogs, and similar areas often found between open water and higher elevated areas. Wetlands are valuable natural resources that provide important benefits such as surface and groundwater quality and storm water treatment. Because of the nature of their soils and vegetation, wetlands have the capacity to absorb and retain large volumes of excess runoff during rainy periods, slowly releasing water into streams and rivers during dry seasons so that a consistent water flow is maintained.

Wetlands also play an important role in cleansing water polluted by industrial wastes, sewage, and runoff from agricultural lands. Various chemicals, pesticides and heavy metals are bound or broken down in the wet soils. Because of the saturated, anaerobic soil conditions in wetlands, rare and unique plants and wildlife can also be found.

When wetlands are drained and filled, their capacity to retain storm water runoff is greatly lowered; causing increased flooding during rainy periods and reduced stream flow in the dry seasons. Development of wetlands in contact with groundwater can result in direct contamination of the groundwater and any water supply wells dependent upon it. Moreover, wetland destruction eliminates the populations of plants and wildlife dependent upon the unusual conditions occurring there.

Wetland regulation in Michigan is provided for by the Wetland Protection Act, part 303 of the Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act, PA 451 of 1994, which is administered by the Department of Environmental Quality.

Wetlands shown on the map below reflect data from the Michigan Department of Natural Resources. The wetlands data map is based on interpretation of high-altitude aerial photographs and should only be utilized as an “indicator map”. In other words, if a development is proposed in an area where wetlands have been identified on the map, an on-site investigation is typically warranted. The on-site investigation is necessary to first confirm and delineate the boundary of a wetland, and second, to determine if the wetland is regulated. The most accurate delineation of wetlands is derived from an on-site field inspection of a parcel.

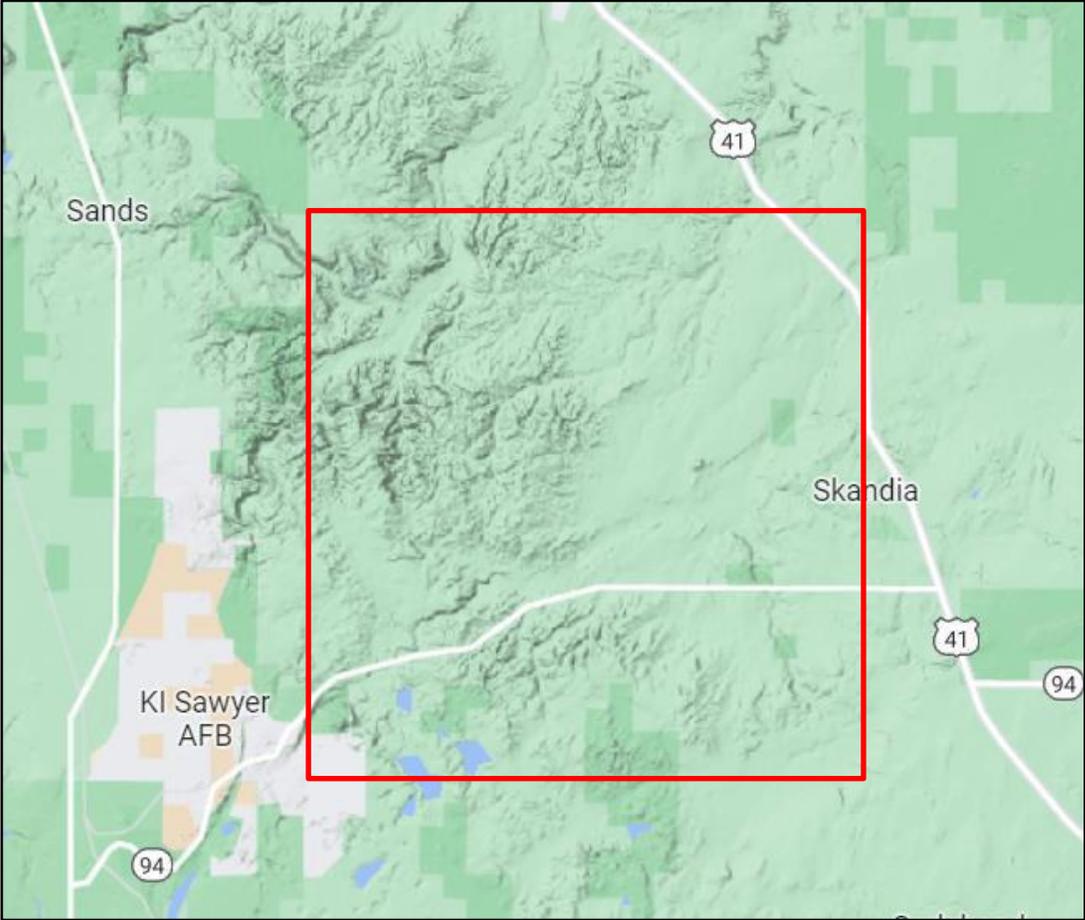
Groundwater

Michigan has long been known as the Great Lakes State and enjoys an abundance of surface water. However, including all of the available surface water, groundwater makes up 97% of the world’s freshwater supply.

Almost 50% of the State’s population and most of West Branch Township utilizes ground (well) water as the sole source of drinking water. Despite the obvious dependence on this resource, very little public understanding exists regarding the nature and importance of groundwater. Like many other natural resources, ground water is more vulnerable in some areas than others, depending largely on quantity and quality. It should be noted that some residents of West Branch Township are served by a civic water utility, by way of the Skandia/West Brand Township Water Authority.

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Three primary factors determine ground water vulnerability: soils, depth to the aquifer and general aquifer condition and type. Sandy soils offer considerably less protection than heavier clay soils. Confined aquifers are safer than unconfined ones. Once these things are understood, more effective protection measures for ground water are possible. Special considerations to the types and densities of permitted land uses should apply in areas that offer little natural protection to ground water. This should also apply where the protection level is unknown. Local officials must consider ground water resources when considering the future planning and development of the community.



West Branch Township Topographic Map

5.0 COMMUNITY SERVICES & FACILITIES

5.1 Introduction

An essential function of any municipality is the provision of services and facilities that will meet a variety of community needs. Services and facilities provided by local governments are vital elements in the community’s quality of life and well-being. Services may include police and fire protection, municipal water and wastewater systems, disposal of solid waste, and recreation programs. Community facilities may include libraries, parks and recreational facilities, cemeteries, schools, and the infrastructure related to municipal water and wastewater treatment systems. This section will examine the services and facilities available to residents of West Branch Township and will discuss potential issues and opportunities associated with them.

5.2 Police, Fire, & Emergency Medical Services

Although West Branch Township does not provide its own police department, the community is served by law enforcement by way of the Marquette County Sheriff’s Department and the Michigan State Police. Historically, neither of these agencies has had any responsibility for law enforcement on the former K.I. Sawyer Airforce Base; however, since the base closure, police protection on the former air base is provided by the Marquette County Sheriff’s Department, the Michigan State Police, and the Forsyth Township Police Department. Communities that maintain their own police forces, such as Forsyth Township, enjoy a higher ratio of officers to population due to additional officers patrolling the community.

Fire protection for West Branch Township residents is provided by a joint fire department with neighboring Skandia Township. The West Branch-Skandia Fire Department is staffed by 21 fire fighters, 4 first responders and 5 EMTs, who operate two pumper trucks and one tanker. The Fire Hall was established in 1963 and is centrally located in community of Skandia. Mutual aid agreements exist with the Chocolay, Sands, Forsyth, Rock River, Mathias, and Tri-Twp Fire Departments, as well as with the National Forest Service.

Further, the West Branch-Skandia Fire Department is second to be called out to the Marquette Sawyer Regional Airport after Forsyth EMS and Fire.

Finally, the Michigan Department of Natural Resources provides fire protection countywide for grass, brush and forest fires under mutual aid agreements with local units.



At the time of this report, the ISO Commercial Risk Services, Inc. was currently being calculated and will be updated when available. The ISO rating represents a relative scale of fire protection, with

lower numbers indicating a greater level of protection, and compares with the highest possible rating of 10, or no fire protection. The areas receiving a rating of 8 are those within five miles of the fire hall, and with a fire hydrant within 1,000 feet, while other areas within five miles are given a classification of 9. This means that only Skandia area has the lower ISO rating, which translates into somewhat lower insurance costs for property owners. West Branch Township's rating is typical of rural Townships; usually the only areas, which have a lower fire protection area, are cities or villages where population is generally concentrated and municipal water systems are in place throughout the community.

As is the case with fire protection, the West Branch Township partners with Skandia Township to provide emergency medical services. West Branch and Skandia Townships are in the primary service area of UP Health Systems of Marquette, and the hospital's advance life support unit provides transportation. Further, and at the time of this report, the Skandia-West Branch Township Joint Operations was in the process of securing property for a new emergency services facility to serve the community.



The Skandia-West Branch First Responders maintain a rescue truck used to transport personnel and equipment to the scene of a medical emergency. Mutual aid agreements for emergency medical services exist with Chocolay, Sands, Tri-Township, and Forsyth Townships; and with UP Health Systems of Marquette for transport. Since closing of the K.I. Sawyer AFB, the two townships have assumed responsibility for emergency services within the Township. The Skandia-West Branch First Responders are also the 2nd call out to Sawyer International Airport after Forsyth Township EMS and Fire. This has resulted in an increase in the Township's area of primary responsibility.

Emergency calls for fires, emergencies, medical emergencies, crimes, and other emergencies are accomplished by dialing the numbers 9-1-1. Emergency calls are received by the central dispatch location at the State Police Post in Negaunee, and the callers are displayed. The appropriate responding unit is then dispatched. Local fire, police, and emergency medical service units are all dispatched through central dispatch.

5.3 Water, Sanitary Sewer/Septic, Solid Waste

Water

Only two areas within West Branch Township are served by municipal water systems; a small area in the unincorporated community of Skandia, and the portion of the Sawyer community located within the Township. Residents of the remaining portions of the Township utilize private wells as a source of water. The Skandia-West Branch Water Authority System includes a groundwater system that serves approximately 60 households in Skandia and West Branch Townships.

Sawyer operates a water system, which served all buildings on the former airbase, including residential, commercial, and military uses. The Sawyer water system has been maintained and is reportedly in good condition. Water for the system is supplied from wells located in Forsyth and West Branch Townships. Due to the concerns about dropping lake levels in areas near the former base, the

wells in the Township were the primary supply for the system source. The combined capacity of the four wells is about three million gallons per day.

Sanitary Sewer/Septic

Sanitary Sewer service is provided in the portions of the Township that includes Sawyer. Areas outside of the former airbase rely on on-site systems, primarily septic tanks and drain fields. A small area near the Skandia-West Branch Fire Hall was formerly served by a community septic system, but this system was replaced in 1995 by private systems. There have been no reports of widespread septic failure and due to the low-density of development and soil types, which provide adequate drainage in developed areas. On-site systems appear to be adequate for the near future. A wastewater treatment system serves all areas of the former airbase, with the exception of the gatehouse, visitor center, and ski hill at the main gate in Forsyth Township. The system includes 37 miles of sewer main, 15 lift stations (six of which have septic systems installed to provide backup service), a treatment plant and an aeration lagoon for pretreatment of industrial wastes. A wastewater treatment plant, which provides tertiary treatment using the rotating biological disk system, is located in Forsyth Township.

Solid Waste

Residents of West Branch Township have two options regarding solid waste disposal. One private hauler offers pickup services to households in the Township; the Township pays the tipping fees associated with this service. Residents may also bring their refuse directly to the transfer station in Skandia, which is operated jointly by Skandia and West Branch Townships. Each household in the Township using the transfer station, whether on his or her own or through the private hauler, must purchase an annual punch card. Waste from the Township, along with the other Marquette County units of government, is disposed at the Marquette County Solid Waste Landfill located in Sands Township.

5.4 Municipal Buildings

West Branch Township Hall

The West Branch Township Hall is located at the intersection of Townhall Road and CR 545, on a 40-acre site. The original building was built in 1930, and is one-story wood frame structure with a full basement. An addition to the hall was constructed in the mid-1980s, and included offices, two barrier-free restrooms and a ramp providing handicapped accessibility to the older portion of the building. The original building houses a kitchen, meeting rooms, and two restrooms.



Library

The Township is in the service area of the Peter White Public Library in the City of Marquette. Township residents pay a millage of their property tax to support the Peter White Public Library. Neighboring Forsyth Township also operates a library in the community of Gwinn, which is also available to citizens of West Branch Township.

Cemetery

One cemetery is located in West Branch Township, and is owned and operated by the Township. Additional acreage has been purchased on an as-needed basis to accommodate needs. The cemetery is located on the south side of M-94 West, near the intersection with CR 545.



Government Offices

Most state, county and Federal agencies, which serve the local area, maintain offices in the city of Marquette or elsewhere in the county. A United States Post Office is located in Skandia.

5.5 Electrical, Natural Gas, Telephone, Cable, & Internet Services

Electrical

Two electrical utilities provide service to residents of the Township. Upper Peninsula Power Company (UPPCO) serves the southwestern portion of the Township, within Sawyer, while the Marquette Board of Light and Power (MBLP) serves the eastern half of the Township. The only area served by three-phase power, which is important to many industrial uses, is located along US Highway 41 south of Marquette to approximately the Bergdahl's location in Skandia Township.

A single substation and a network of over 130 miles of above-ground and underground lines provide electrical service at Sawyer. UPPCO has acquired the electrical system on base.

Natural Gas

Michigan Gas Company provides natural gas to Sawyer, including the residential areas located in the Township. The remainder of the Township has access to propane and outdoor wood boilers for heating purposes.

Telephone, Cable and Internet

Telephone services are provided by TDS, throughout the development portions of the Township. Cable television is available only along US Highway 41, Townline Road, Kreiger Drive in the Skandia area, and on the developed portions of Sawyer. Cable and internet services are provided by Spectrum.

5.6 Public Education

School-aged children of the Township residents attend school in the Gwinn Area Community School District, which includes two elementary schools and a middle/high school. One elementary school, K.I. Sawyer Elementary is located in Sawyer. This school primarily serves the children in grades K-6 from a portion of Sands, Forsyth, West Branch and Skandia Townships. The Gwinn High School was remodeled to include middle school students, as well. It serves all the Townships in the district, and is located in Gwinn.

5.7 Continuing Education

Local residents looking for higher educational opportunities may attend Northern Michigan University (NMU) located about 15 miles from the Township in the City of Marquette. NMU offers Baccalaureate and Masters' Degree Programs, some PhD programs, as well as technical training in a variety of fields. Other institutions of higher learning in the Upper Peninsula include Bay de Noc Community College in Escanaba; Gogebic Community College in Ironwood; Michigan Technological University in Houghton; and Lake Superior State University in Sault Ste. Marie.

5.8 Healthcare

Sawyer Medical provides residents of the Township medical services. This medical facility houses medical doctors, an optometrist, and a dental group. Two hospitals and a wide variety of medical professionals are located within a few miles of the Township. UP Health Systems of Marquette is located in the City of Marquette, while Bell Memorial Hospital is located in the City of Ishpeming. Physicians in the area provide a broad spectrum of healthcare services, including cardiology, dermatology, urology, obstetrics/gynecology, pediatrics, neurology, and family practice. There are five long-term care facilities located within an hour drive of the Township; Norlite in Marquette, Marquette County Medical Care Facility in Ishpeming; Mather in Ishpeming; and Eastwood in Negaunee. Dentists, optometrists and ophthalmologists, and other specialties round out the range of choices for local residents, and home healthcare and hospice services are available from offices located in Marquette.

5.9 Arts & Culture

Several facilities are located within the region that provides cultural arts activities, including Kaufman Auditorium at the Graveraet Elementary School in Marquette, Forest Roberts Theater at NMU; Shiras Planetarium in Marquette Senior High School; the Superior Arts Council in Gwinn; and the Bonifas Arts Center in Escanaba.

5.10 Parks & Recreation

This next section provides an inventory of existing parks, recreational facilities, and natural resource assets located in the West Branch Township planning area. Both the public and private sectors

provide recreational opportunities within the Township. Local residents also have access to a wide range of facilities and programs in neighboring communities. The Township has eleven recreation facilities including those that are privately owned. These sites provide a wide spectrum of recreational opportunities that Township residents can enjoy year-round. In 2023, an inventory of existing public recreation areas and facilities within the Township were updated with the assistance of Township officials. This inventory included the following currently available facilities:

West Branch Recreation Area

This 40-acre community recreation site is located next to the Township Hall at the corner of CR 545 and CR TD (Town Hall Road). The West branch of the Chocoday River runs through the parcel of land. A pavilion was erected on this site in 2000. The site also features a play structure.



Maple Lane Cross-Country and Hiking Trail

This privately-owned recreation trail system is located on a 69-acre parcel of land along Kreiger Drive (just West of US Highway 41), near the eastern limit of the Township. The site is used during the summer months for hiking and archery shooting and during the winter months for cross-country skiing. The facility offers ski rental and sales, an archery range and shooting course, and archery equipment sales and service.

West Branch Sportsmen's Club

A privately-owned sportsmen club located on a seven-acre parcel of land along Engman Lake Road off of M-94 West in the south-central portion of the Township. Facilities at the site include the clubhouse, rifle range, and trap & pistol shooting area.

Engman Lake Access Site

A Michigan DNR owned and operated access site located on a 4.6-acre parcel of land in the southwestern portion of the Township, along Engman Lake Access Road. Facilities at the site include a hard surface launch ramp, public restrooms, and associated parking.

Sporley Lake Access Site

A Michigan DNR owned and operated access site located on a one-acre parcel of land in the southwestern portion of the Township, off CR TAC. Facilities at the site include hard surface launch ramp, public restrooms, and associated parking.

Big Trout Lake Access Site

A Michigan DNR owned and operated access site located on a 5.2-acre parcel of land in the southwestern portion of the Township, off Sporley Lake Road. Facilities at the site include hard surface launch ramp, public restrooms, and associated parking.

Public and CFR Forest Lands

Approximately 600 acres of state-owned land, which is part of the Escanaba River State Forest, is located within the Township. This acreage is located in the southwest corner of the Township. It is open to the public for outdoor recreation activities like hunting, fishing, and hiking. In addition, over 4,300 acres of Commercial Forest Reserve (CFR) lands are located in the Township. These privately-owned parcels of land that are open to the public for hunting and fishing.

West Branch Nature Area

The nature area includes 80 acres along M-94 West. A branch of the Chocolay River runs through this parcel. This is currently an undeveloped wooded area.

In addition to the sites listed above, residents of the Township have access to a wide variety of recreational facilities in neighboring communities.

West Branch Cemetery

One cemetery is located in the Township, and is owned and operated by the Township. The cemetery is located on the south side of M-94 West, near the intersection with County Road 545.

5.11 Future Considerations

Based on community input, the following recreational facilities have been expressed by residents as having propriety when considering future recreation planning:

Picnic Area/Playground/Horseshoe Court/Basketball court/Volleyball Court

The development of this area, near the Township Hall, currently has two handicap accessible picnic tables and a pavilion. This provides Township residents a place for picnics, reunions, and other social gatherings. The Township would also like to develop a playground, horseshoe court, basketball court, and sand volleyball court near this picnic area. Residents living in the local vicinity and on occasion by residents and non-residents using the facilities for special events and gatherings would likely use these facilities on a day-to-day basis.

Fishing Platform/Bridges

The scenic West branch of the Chocolay River runs through the center of the 40-acre parcel that makes up the Township recreation area. The Township would like residents and visitors to have access to the river for fishing and viewing. The Township is planning to construct a handicap accessible fishing platform along the river in the eastern portion of the property and bridges across the river in central and northern portions of the property. These facilities would be tied into the site's walking/nature trail system.

Soccer Field

Due to the growth of soccer, there has been an increased demand for soccer fields. To solve some of the demand issues, the Township is planning to construct a soccer field in the northwestern portion of the Township recreational area property. The Township intends to work with local youth soccer organizations in the design of the new soccer field.

Camping Area

With all the beautiful natural features offered at the Township recreation area, residents would like the Township Board to consider the design and construct a camping area in the southeastern portion of the site. This camping area would be primitive in nature and allow only non-motorized access.

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To this end, West Branch Township has entered into a contract to have their 5-year Recreation Plan updated. Once updated and registered with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR), the community will be eligible to apply for various MDNR recreational development grant opportunities that may be utilized to offset the cost of planning and developing additional recreation opportunities at the township's 40-acre site, adjacent to the Township Hall.



Conceptual rendering of proposed recreational improvements at the West Branch Township Hall property.

Additional Considerations

Regional recreational trends also show that people are also interested in bird watching, mountain biking, cross-country skiing, disc golf, and pickleball. These activities, and their potential place in the community, should be discussed during the Township's next 5-year Recreation Plan update.

6.0 TRANSPORTATION

6.1 Introduction

Transportation infrastructure serves to tie a community together and link it to the rest of the outside world. Transportation systems include roads, bridges, aviation, rail, public transit, and non-motorized systems. Together, these networks create economic opportunity and provide access to markets, goods, and services. The quality of these assets reflects and impacts community health and vitality.

Circulation, utility, and communication infrastructure serve to tie a community together and link it to the rest of the outside world. Local streets and pedestrian networks should provide safe, reliable access to work, shopping, recreation, and residences. Regional transportation and communication networks create economic opportunity and provide access to markets, goods, and services not found in the community.

6.2 Road Network

Road Network

Michigan Public Act 51 (Act 51) indicates that all counties and all incorporated cities and villages must establish and maintain road systems under their jurisdiction, distinct from state jurisdiction. This act classified the road system in counties into the following five categories (the legal systems of roads): state trunkline, county primary, county local, city/village major, and city/village local. These classifications provide a tool for enacting guidelines and standards on the use of public roads, and enable proper distribution of state and federal funds for road improvements. The following are general descriptions of these classifications.

State Trunkline

The state trunkline system within the county road network is made up of state and Federal highways, which connect communities within the county to other areas within the state and locations outside the state. These roadways provide the highest level of traffic mobility for the traveling public. *In West Branch Township, US Highway 41 and M-94 are the only state trunklines.* US-41 is an important north/south highway corridor in the central Upper Peninsula. It runs from Copper Harbor in the Keweenaw Peninsula, through the cities of Marquette and Escanaba, then to the City of Menominee and beyond, and connects the Upper Peninsula to the Milwaukee and Chicago urban centers, and as far south as Florida.

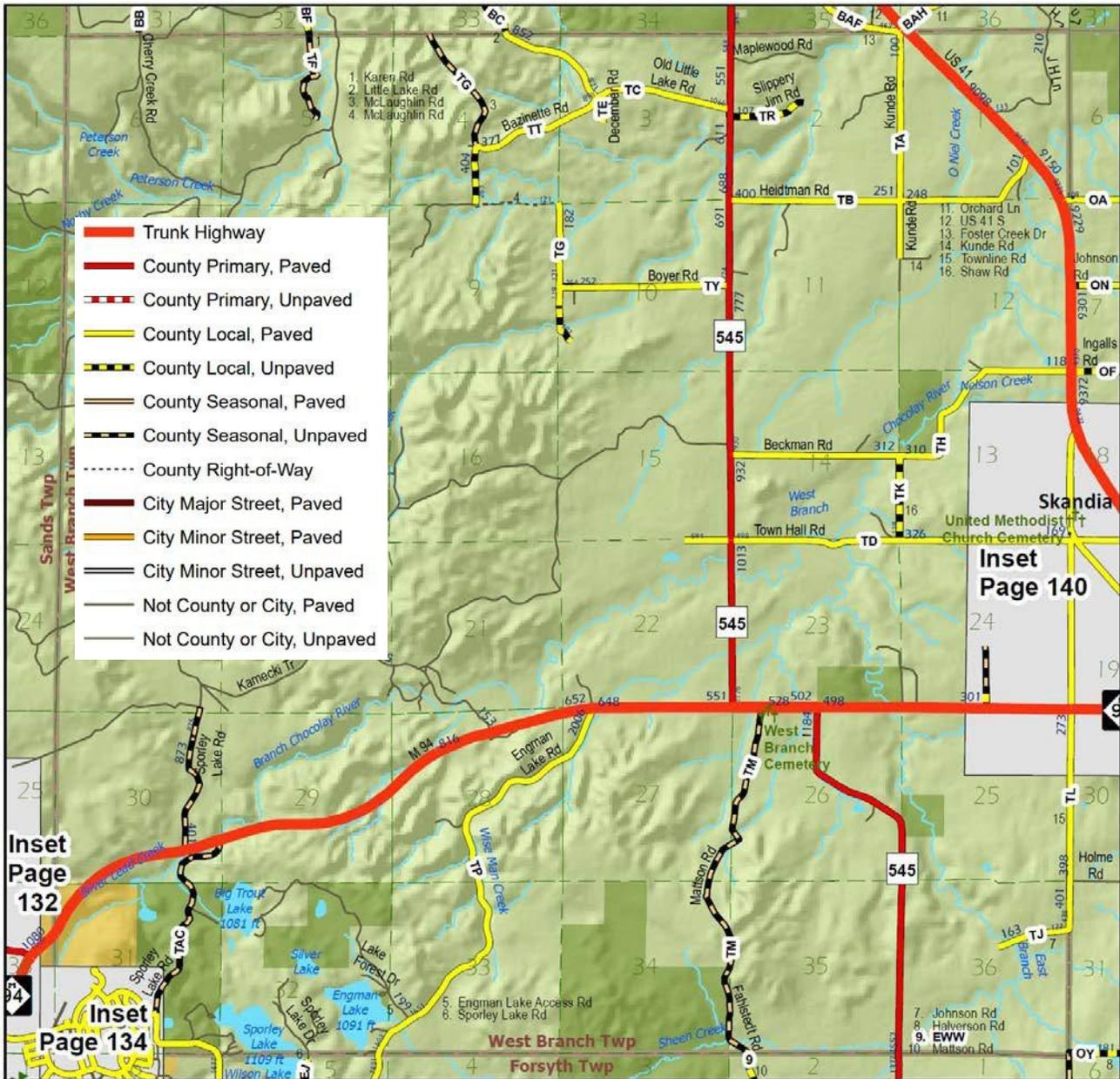
County Primary and Local Roads

The county road system is separated into primary and local roads. As a result, all functions related to the county road network, such as financing and road commission activities, are based on the primary/local road classification. The major difference between this classification scheme and functional road classification, which is explained later in this Plan, is that the latter breaks down the county's road system into more categories. All roads in the functional road classification that are arterials (principal and minor) and collectors (major and minor) are considered primary roads in a county road system. The main reason for separating a county road system in this way is to provide a more useful tool for planning purpose.

The primary road system consists of roads in a county of greatest general importance. These roads facilitate the movement of traffic from smaller to larger population centers within a county in areas

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served by state trunklines. The primary system also serves as an important supportive road network for the trunkline system. *The primary county road in the Township is County Road 545 (CR 545).* Local road systems usually contain the most miles of road in a county road system, and have the lowest levels of traffic. These roads are typically referred to as Township roads or local roads.



West Branch Township Road Atlas - Marquette County Resource Management/Development Department.

National Functional Classification of Roads

The National Functional Classification is a planning tool developed by the Federal Highway Administration, which is used by Federal, state, and local transportation agencies. It classifies streets and roads according to their function along a continuum that indicates the greatest mobility/greatest access to property. Roads, which provide the greatest mobility, are classified as principal arterials. Minor arterials, major collectors, and minor collectors follow.

Roads classified as local, provide the greatest access to property. The placement of streets into these categories is determined by their relationships to traffic patterns, land-use, land access needs, and traffic volumes.

Rural Principal Arterial

The main function of a principal arterial road is to quickly, safely, and efficiently move traffic over medium to long distances, often between regions as well as between major economic centers. *In the Township, US Highway 41 and M-94 are classified as rural principal arterial.*

Rural Minor Arterial

Minor arterials are roads that move traffic over medium distances within a community or region in a moderate to quick manner. They distribute traffic between collector roads and principal arterials. *There are no minor arterials in the Township.*

Rural Collector Roads

Collector roads provide access between residential neighborhoods and commercial/industrial areas. They should provide a more general “area to area” service rather than specific “point to point” function. Collectors usually serve medium trip lengths between neighborhoods on moderate to low traffic routes at moderate speeds. They distribute traffic between local and arterial roads, usually between home and the following: work places of worship, school, or those places where business and commerce are conducted. *M-94 is the Township’s only major collector road, while CR 545 is designated as a minor collector.*

Rural Local Roads

The predominant function of roads classified as local is to provide direct access to adjacent land uses. Local roads serve as the end for most trips within a community. All streets, which are not classified as arterial or collector, are classified as local roads. Local roads should be designed to move traffic from an individual lot to collector streets, which in turn serve areas of business, commerce, and employment. Local roads should not be designed or located in such a manner that they would be utilized by through traffic.

6.3 Road Maintenance

Although not a direct responsibility of West Branch Township, it is important to be aware of how the [Marquette County Road Commission](#) assesses and conducts road maintenance within their jurisdiction. The Marquette County Road Commission utilizes the [Pavement Surface Evaluation and Rating \(PASER\)](#) inventory and asset management system for assessing the condition of National Functional System major streets. Many Township roads may have been evaluated along with the County process. PASER is a visual survey method developed to evaluate road conditions. Ten separate ratings are used to

evaluate the surface distress of the pavement based on pavement material and types of deterioration present. The ratings are then grouped into three categories based on the type of work required, including Routine Maintenance, Capital Preventive Maintenance, and Structural Improvement. See the below table for PASER ratings and recommended maintenance.

Asphalt Streets

PASER Rating	Condition	Treatment
9 & 10	Excellent	No maintenance required
8	Very Good	Little or no maintenance
7	Good	Crack sealing and minor patching
5 & 6	Fair - Good	Preservative treatments (non-structural)
3 & 4	Poor - Fair	Structural improvement (overlay)
1 & 2	Failed	Reconstruction

Concrete Streets

PASER Rating	Condition	Treatment
9 & 10	Excellent	No maintenance required
7 & 8	Very Good	Routine maintenance
5 & 6	Fair - Good	Surface repairs, sealing, partial-depth patching
3 & 4	Poor - Fair	Extensive slab or joint rehabilitation
1 & 2	Failed	Reconstruction

Routine Maintenance includes regularly scheduled preventative treatments such as street sweeping, drainage clearing, gravel shoulder grading, and sealing of tight cracks. PASER ratings 8-10 are usually newly constructed or recently improved roads requiring little or no maintenance.

Capital Preventive Maintenance consists of planned treatments applied to existing roadways to retard further deterioration, maintain, or improve function, and correct distress. PASER ratings 5-7 are roads that have good structural support with surface deterioration, such as cracks over one-quarter (1/4) inch in width.

Roads rated as needing Structural Improvement include those in need of repair to improve the structural integrity of the pavement. PASER ratings 1-4 are roads that may need major rehabilitation or reconstruction. Typical problems include rutting greater than one-half (1/2) inch deep, cracking in the wheel path, severe block cracking, alligator cracking, and cracks with severe erosion.



The Planning Commission recommends that the West Branch Township Board continues to work with the Marquette County Road Commission to ensure that roads are consistently rated and maintained within the community in order to best serve its residents and visitors.

6.4 Public Transportation

Public transportation service is provided to the Township by the [Marquette County Transit Authority](#) (commonly known as Marq-Tran), which is funded through a County-wide millage and Federal and State subsidy. Marq-Tran provides fixed routes and door-to-door service from the hours of 6:00 A.M. to about 6:30 P.M. Stops along the fixed routes that serve West Branch Township. Additional information on routes and service schedules can be found [HERE](#). To accommodate more users, Marq-Tran has also added bike and ski racks to the front of all fixed-route buses.

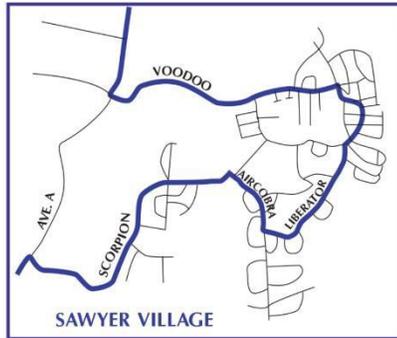
MARQUETTE ♦ SAWYER ♦ GWINN



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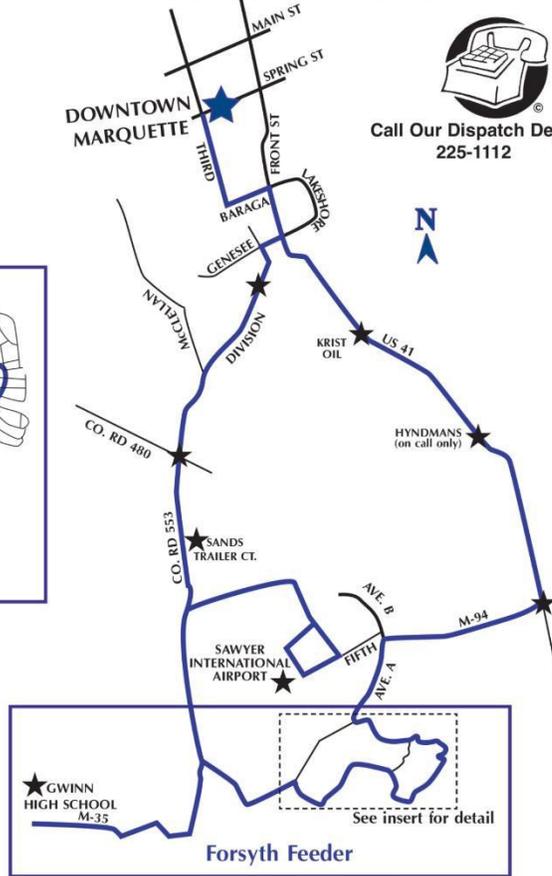


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PRIDE PRINTING 1/17



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6.5 Air Transportation

Air Transportation is conveniently located within close proximity to West Branch Township by way of [Marquette Sawyer Regional Airport](#) located north of Gwinn on a portion of the former K.I. Sawyer Air Force Base. The Sawyer International Airport facility sits on 2,100 acres and includes a passenger terminal and a single paved 12,370 by 150-foot runway. This large runway was originally designed and built for the Air Force’s B-52 bombers. Both commercial and private air carriers serve Marquette Sawyer regional airport. A list of the commercial airline carriers is listed below.

American Airlines proudly operated by Envoy serves Marquette with non-stop service to Chicago O’Hare on a 50-seat regional jet aircraft.

Delta Air Lines proudly operated by Endeavor Air serves Marquette with daily non-stop service to Detroit Metro on a Canadair Regional Jet 900 Aircraft (76-seat capacity).

7.0 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

7.1 Introduction

The success of any planning process is dependent upon resident and stakeholder involvement. This Master update will be more successful if the local residents and stakeholders help to establish, and support the plan's goals and objectives. The Planning Commission and Township Board should always make attempts to involve the local residents through the availability of information, regardless of whether a plan update is being discussed or not. This information can be made available for the public through the West Branch Township website, social media outlets, email correspondence, public meetings, local publications, and area news media. By allowing open access to important community development information, the Township will allow the public to acquire the necessary background to help communicate their desires for the present and future of the community.

7.2 Public Input

To that end, West Branch Township officials solicited community involvement to maximize the effectiveness of the Master Plan update by hosting a public forum/open house at the West Branch Township Hall on Monday, May 22, 2023 at 7PM. Although lightly attended by the public, a robust discussion was held related to the future of the community by those who attended the session. Details from the discussion were used to formulate the goals and objectives of this plan found in the next section. As stated in an earlier section of this plan, the sections presented in this document represent the conclusion of months of discussion and study by the West Branch Township Planning Commission, along with technical assistance provided by Northwoods Planning & Zoning Services, LLC.

Below is a summary of ideas and comments provided by attendees of the public forum/open house in May of 2023:

- One woman suggested a community garden be considered by local officials. She indicated that many residents live in the woods and animals such as deer and rabbits eat many of the garden crops grown during the short growing season. She also commented on the limited sunlight if living in the woods. A community garden could be fenced in to protect plants which would be located in an open (full-sun) location.
- Another resident, who identified himself as a real estate developer suggested considering smaller minimum lot sizes in some of the zoning districts that featured large minimum lot sizes. The rationale was to create more developable lots. He indicated that more folks would move to the community if this were to be implemented.
- A brief discussion also ensued regarding the portion of the Sawyer (former KI Sawyer AFB) that lies within the southwest portion of West Branch Township. It was stated that the area needs to be zoned to an appropriate district to encompass the various land uses found within that specific area.
- Additional comments and discussion centered on the desire to maintain the rural character of the township and sense of community.

WEST BRANCH TOWNSHIP | MASTER PLAN 2024

The final draft plan was posted on the West Branch Township website in February of 2023, and a hard-copy was made available at the West Branch Township Hall. Residents also had the opportunity to provide additional comments at the Planning Commission's public hearing on April 16, 2024.

Following the public hearing, the Master Plan update was adopted by the West Branch Township Planning Commission on April 16, 2024. Finally, a Resolution of Concurrence was adopted by the West Branch Township Board of Trustees.



Chocolay River, West Branch Township (upmls.com)

8.0 FUTURE LAND USE & ZONING PLAN

8.1 Introduction

A future land use plan is representative of the preferred future and how the community would like to develop over time. Future Land Use planning sets the desired locations of land uses including: residential, commercial, industrial, public facilities, open space, agricultural, forest, recreational areas and any potential changes to traffic circulation throughout the Township.

Local governments are endowed with the ultimate authority for controlling land use through zoning laws and building and sanitation codes. These various regulations establish parameters within which development can occur. Zoning regulations must be based on a plan developed with public input. It is important that future land use decisions be realistic in light of the ability of local governments to provide essential public services in a fiscally-responsible manner.

The ways in which people utilize land define the economic, social, and physical aspects of the community. Land use patterns and interrelationships must fit with an overall vision of the community. If not, goals and objectives will conflict. This section of the Plan addresses existing and future land use, and development of standards and regulations. There are four (4) main types of land uses found in West Branch Township. These categories will be discussed in terms of their composition, importance, compatibility, needs and impacts and location placement for future growth management purposes.

8.2 Land Use Categories

Agricultural

Agricultural land use is a very desirable type. Many people are looking for the perfect agricultural property. There are many ways to utilize agricultural land. Some uses will vary according to the zoning ordinance as well as county rules and regulations. Usually, when referring to agriculture, it means the production of crops. That is true for agricultural land use. Some popular crops to produce are wheat, corn, vegetables, hay, etc. Another use for agricultural land is raising livestock. Most agricultural land is described as ranches, farms, or pastures.

While economic factors related to agriculture, such as labor force percentages and incomes have declined over the years, farming continues to play a role in the Township's economy. Recognition of the advantages and benefits of farming and agriculture is well-known. There is also awareness that these areas often include environmentally sensitive receptors such as sinkholes, floodplain and wetlands. Similarly, there is a growing movement to permanently preserve the best agricultural soils and salvage the institution of the locally owned family farms. The Township changed their zoning of agricultural lands to residential much to the dismay of area farmers. There is a desire by the farming community to maintain its role in the area's economy and culture. Future land use planning should account for agricultural and woodland conservation, while maintaining a balance with the existing farm community, natural environment, and surrounding residential land uses.

Residential

Residential land is meant for building homes. There are many different types of homes. Zoning laws determine which type of home may be built on a property. Issues to consider when considering residential land use: What types of houses are in the area? Does the area have amenities nearby,

such as grocery stores, parks, and schools? Is the property accessible by public roads? Will it be difficult to site sanitary utilities?

Since the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, Marquette County as a whole, has experienced an uptick in interest from remote workers, climate migrants, and the like. As such, identifying adequate locations for new home sites remains challenging. Although space is ample throughout West Branch Township, not all of these locations are desirable to prospective residents. Further, other areas may not be adequate to handle the additional traffic, stormwater runoff, and sewage disposal.

Without the aid of appropriate growth management techniques, the Township is open to rampant development with resulting pressure placed on its current infrastructure. For instance, if more miles of road are needed to address growth, more miles of roads must be maintained and the existing infrastructure would suffer.

Development not properly located may be errantly situated in geologic or topographic settings susceptible to drainage problems. The resulting effects may not only prove to include maintenance problems for the Township and County, but will also be inconvenient and costly for homeowners. For these reasons, it is imperative for the Township to consider proper zoning district locations for residential land use.

Commercial

Commercial land uses involve services and commerce. Commercial land use opportunities are an exciting and important land use to any community. Most commercial land is used for things like businesses, warehouses, shops, restaurants, office buildings, and grocery stores.

To avoid problems associated with sudden large-scale development, portions of the Township could be zoned Retail Commercial and Professional Office to provide select business growth in the Township. While this type of development is not currently synonymous with West Branch Township, addition increases in services such as broadband internet could provide a catalyst to this type of development. This is especially important to the southwest portion of West Branch township that lies within the area of Sawyer. This area should be studied and zoned in a way that is more conducive to the land uses that are actually on the ground there.

Recreational

Recreational land can be defined as any piece of property with land used for purposes of recreation. This specific use can be anything from hunting, fishing, ATV-ing, camping, or any combination of the like. The main difference between this type of property and any other rural property can be profit, as many other rural properties like this are purchased for reasons such as farming, ranching, or timber harvesting.

Transportation

Linking transportation and land use refers to the process of guiding development and expansion of communities with the goal of better coordination of land use and transportation that accommodates pedestrian and bike safety, mobility, enhances public transportation service, improves road network connectivity, and includes a multi-modal approach to transportation. Typically, this is accomplished through supporting land-use development patterns to create a variety of transportation options.

Under increasing pressure from population expansion, development of large tracks of open lands into residential subdivisions or strip-style commercial shops is occurring in communities throughout the United States. At the same time that roads are being widened and new roads are being constructed,

the facets of transportation such as bike trails, sidewalks, and other facilities that link activities and users are lagging. The objective of linking transportation and land use is to define and manage this growth of communities in a fashion that balances land use and transportation needs. To achieve this objective, there are a number of important resources that need to be available to planners. The following discusses four priority areas where federal research is needed to support the linkage between transportation and land use.

8.3 Climate Resiliency & Future Land Use Planning

Climate resiliency is defined as the capacity for a socio-ecological system to absorb stresses and maintain function in the face of external stresses presented by extreme weather. Well-planned communities can adapt, reorganize and change in the face of these events and make sure the community is prepared for such unexpected event. Climate resiliency planning focuses on all aspects of community, ensuring the economy, the environment, and social/living conditions are vibrant and upheld through adversity. As these resiliency planning concepts and solutions continue to develop, West Branch Township may desire to utilize them where and when feasible, within the realm of future land use planning.

Air Quality

In order to reduce the impacts of air pollutants it is necessary to maintain a high percentage of township land as farm and forest, and forest resource zoning districts. These categories assist in the absorption of local air pollutants.

Emergency Response & Extreme Events

Extreme weather events and wildfires coupled with insufficient infrastructure, challenging transportation networks, isolated residents, and other challenges can lead to increased health dangers in the community, such as injury, respiratory illnesses, cold-related illness, and mental health consequences. Remote areas in the outer reaches of West Branch Township are vulnerable to the impacts of reduced emergency response times. As such, it is necessary to limit residential land uses that promote high-intensity development in these areas.

Water-Related Concerns

Sudden spring snow melt and heavy rain events, can lead to intensified flooding, road closures, mold, and contaminated water. Maintaining low-density residential land uses in susceptible areas mitigates residential vulnerability.

8.4 Relationship Between Zoning & Future Land Use

The Zoning Map is a graphic representation of how land in the Township shall be used. The future land use map on the other hand, is a general description of where and what intent the zoning should have in the future. The above land use classifications comprise the Future Land Use Plan for West Branch Township. This Future Land Use Plan will serve as a guide for making decisions on the rezoning of land, moving forward. The following represents the various zoning district classifications in West Branch Township.

Rural Residential (RR-1)

Single-family dwellings; Family and group day care homes; Publicly owned parks; and accessory structures normally associated with single-family dwellings and mobile homes, such as a garage or shed for tools.

Rural Residential (RR-2)

Single-family dwellings; Two-family dwellings; Family and group day care homes; Churches; Schools; Publicly owned parks; and accessory structures normally associated with single family dwellings and mobile homes, such as garage.

Rural Residential (RR-5)

Single-family dwellings; Mobile homes; Churches; Schools; Cemeteries; Public and private recreational facilities including parks and playgrounds; Light agricultural activities; Traditional agricultural activities on tracts of 20 acres or more; and accessory structures normally associated with single-family dwellings and mobile homes, such as a garage or shed for tools.

Rural Residential (RR-10)

Single-family dwelling units; Family and group day care homes; Recreational structures; Churches; Schools; Growing and harvesting of timber; Light agricultural activities; Traditional agricultural activities on 20 or more acres; Public and private recreational facilities including parks, winter sports, facilities, trails, and playgrounds; Stables; Veterinarian offices and animal clinics; winter sports, day camps, campgrounds and golf courses and similar facilities; and accessory structures normally associated with single-family dwellings and mobile homes, such as a garage or shed for tool.

Resource Production (RP-20)

The growing and harvesting of timber; Parks, winter facilities and trails; Recreational structures; Stables; Light agricultural activities; Traditional agricultural activities; and accessory structures normally associated with single-family dwelling and mobile homes, such as a garage or shed for tools.

Lakeshore & Residential (LS&R)

Single-family dwellings; Mobile homes; Recreational structures; and accessory structures normally associated with single-family dwellings and mobile homes, such as a garage or shed for tools.

Recreational Structure (RS)

Recreational structures and accessory structures normally associated with single-family dwellings and mobile homes, such as a garage or shed for tools.

Agricultural Production (AP)

Light agricultural activities; Traditional agricultural activities; Timber production, Single-family dwellings; and accessory structures normally associated with single-family dwellings and mobile homes, such as a garage or shed for tools.

Public Area (PA)

Municipal public health facilities; Municipal buildings; Municipal recreation areas, parks, trails, pats and/or other similar facilities; Community school district facilities, Federal, State or County managed land; and Cemeteries.

Town Development (TD)

Single-family dwellings; Two-family dwellings; Cemeteries; Township halls; Community centers; Fire halls; Elevated water storage tanks; Post offices; Offices; General retail sales to the customer, production may occur on the premises provided all goods on the premises must be sold on the premises; Restaurants, grills, cafes; Personal services; and Family and day care homes.

Industrial (I)

Industrial manufacturing and operations for the servicing, compounding, fabrication, assembling or

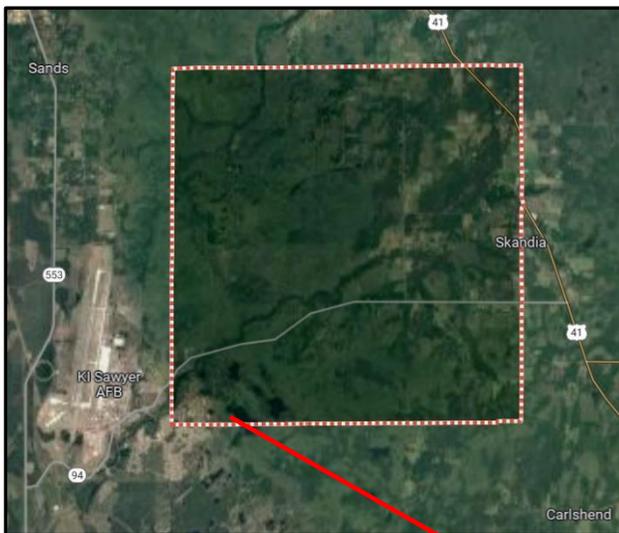
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treatment of articles or merchandise which do not emanate noise, smoke, odors, dust, dirt, noxious gases, glare, heat, vibration or psychological ill effects which would create a nuisance to owners or occupants of surrounding premises; Contractor yards and shops; Warehousing; Auto body and paint shops; Lumber yards; Sawmills; and Research laboratories.

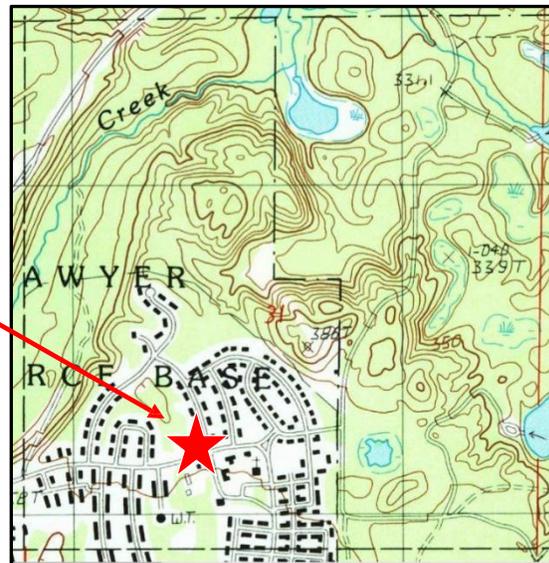
8.5 Proposed Amendments to Future Land Use Plan & Zoning Map

The Planning Commission and Zoning Administrator recognize the need to investigate desired future land use and zoning provisions for that portion of the former KI Sawyer AFB, which was conveyed to West Branch Township as part of the United States Government's divesting of the property. In 1993 the Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission announced K.I. Sawyer was on the closure list, and in September 1995, K.I. Sawyer AFB officially closed.

This small portion of the township lies in the southwest corner of Section 31 and features an area within West Branch Township that is unlike any other in the community. There are a variety of residential and commercial land uses found in this area. Further, the zoning of this portion of the community does not account for the varying land use types and density that is actually on the ground. The Planning Commission and Zoning Administrator recognize the need to address the zoning of this property in the near future, so that it is planned and recognized for what it is.



West Branch Township Boundary



West Branch Township – Section 31, Mixed-Use Area.

9.0 GOALS & OBJECTIVES

9.1 Introduction

This chapter of the West Branch Township Master Plan update outlines a course for action for achieving the community's goals. These goals and objectives are the "To Do List" for township officials and relay to prospective new stakeholders and residents what is expected, desired, and supported by West Branch Township.

Goals reflect the needs, values, and desires of the community, and they cover a wide range of topics. They answer the question, "What do we want the future of our community to look like?" They also represent a desired future condition, or an end to which efforts are directed.

Objectives are statements of a position, or course of action, which provide a means of obtaining a stated goal. Objectives are also more specific and measurable tasks that may be long-term, mid-term, or short-term, but need to occur in order to accomplish the below goals.

9.2 Primary Goals & Objectives

The Township has drafted the following goals and objectives to guide future land use decisions for this Master Plan update in 2023.

Goal 1: Natural Resources & Rural Character

West Branch Township will encourage development that seeks to preserve, protect and perpetuate the Township's natural resources. The township will take proactive measures to protect and preserve its rural character.

Objectives:

1. Protect natural resources that are considered sensitive such as wetlands, scenic by updating and enforcing zoning ordinances that protect these areas.
2. Continuously review the zoning ordinance to ensure that there are provisions addressing sensitive environmental areas that cross parcel boundaries such as bluffs, erosion zones, wetlands, swamps, and marshes.
3. Introduce appropriate regulations and guidelines for development in sensitive environmental areas.
4. Identify land uses which are most appropriate for the Township especially those based on renewable resources, such as agriculture, forestry, and recreation.
5. Encourage businesses that have demonstrated responsibility toward the environment.
6. Provide encouragement to residents for keeping their property in character with the natural resources. The Township values tidiness and the absence of clutter that can be a detractor to an otherwise pleasant area, fitting in nicely with the natural environment and maintaining/enhancing property values.
7. Study the possible need for additional signage at entrances to the Township and to areas of interest to enhance recreation and/or tourism.

8. Establish guidelines to keep as much Township land as possible accessible to all residents and visitors.
9. Consider adding zoning provisions requiring dark-sky friendly light fixtures to be used by future commercial development, in order to help protect the rural character of the community.

Goal 2: Transportation

The Township will continue to work with Marquette County Road Commission to enhance the travel patterns and accessibility of all users throughout the community.

Objectives:

1. Continue to work with the Marquette County Road Commission to decide the best course of action for the local road system.
2. Consider future land uses when making decisions involving long term maintenance of roads.
3. Provide additional support for motorized and non-motorized access and trail connectivity in the area, where and when feasible.
4. Study and consider transportation resources for special groups such as senior citizens with the goal of providing transportation mobility to all residents regardless of age or ability.
5. Determine how to provide an equitable means road maintenance to all residents regardless of surface type.

Goal 3: Recreation

Recreational opportunities for residents and visitors will be enhanced by improving the variety and number of recreational resources without negatively impacting the existing natural environment.

Objectives:

1. Improve access to natural features where applicable. For example, improve access to Township-owned properties for the best public use.
2. Continue support of existing year-round, family oriented recreational activities.
3. Consider creation of new community recreational activities that can be sponsored by the Township.
4. Update the Township Recreation Plan to direct recreational initiatives and allow access to State and Federal grant funds.
5. Support recreational activities and resources that contribute to the economic development of the Township by creating attractions for visitors.

Goal 4: Housing

The Township will encourage a land use pattern that will preserve its rural character and provide adequate housing opportunities.

Objectives:

1. Encourage all housing in the Township to be maintained in a decent, safe, and sanitary condition. Ensure enforcement of the Township and County Building Codes and the Township Zoning Ordinance.
2. Encourage the rehabilitation and maintenance of existing housing stock to

3. provide safe living conditions and prevent deterioration and blight.
4. Encourage and provide guidance for the construction of conventionally-built and non-conventionally-built single-family homes and cottages.
5. Consider the growing interest in tiny homes and accessory dwelling units (ADUs) when updating the zoning ordinance.
6. Ensure that zoning districts feature appropriate minimum lot sizes when considering where and when future growth will occur.
7. Non-traditional approaches to neighborhood development will be encouraged, such as open space subdivision, and cluster housing with outstanding natural features.

Goal 5: Public Service, Government, and Infrastructure

Provide essential public facilities and services to support the needs of residents, businesses and visitors.

Objectives:

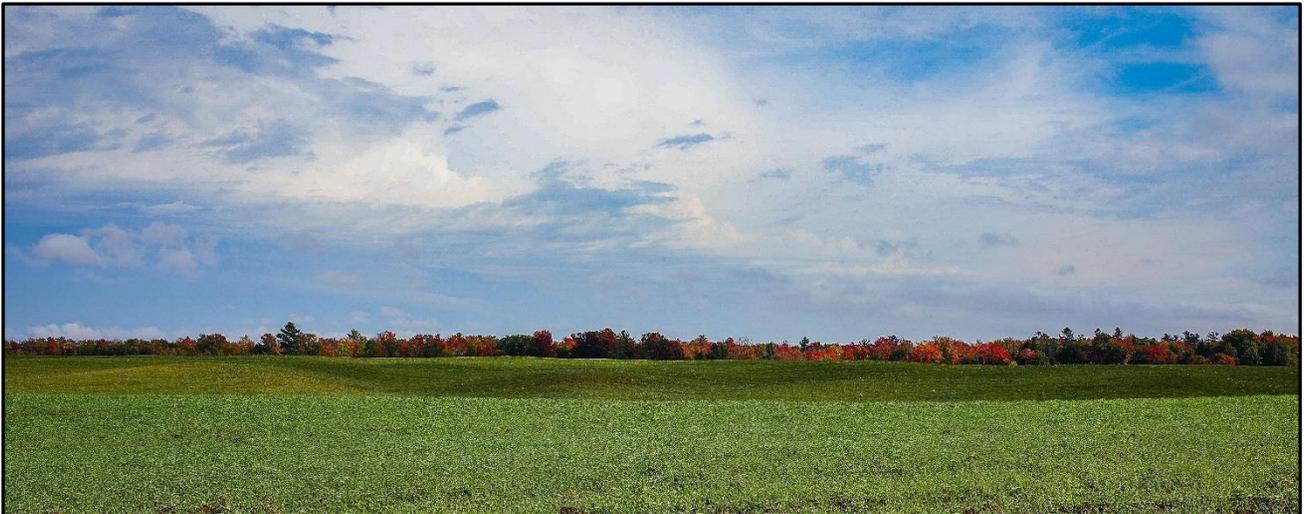
1. Address the special needs of the disabled and elderly when considering community development projects.
2. Actively seek the input of area agencies, volunteer groups, and other units of government on subjects of common interest.
3. Seek to expand opportunities to work with other area agencies, groups and units of government on joint projects of common interest.
4. Provide opportunities and encouragement for community volunteers to work together across generational lines to accomplish activities and events.
5. Seek ways to reach out and welcome new residents, landowners, and businesses into the community.
6. Support and encourage private civic groups which provide educational and social programs of importance to local residents.
7. Recognize the importance of information and communication; seek ways to expand and improve cellular and broadband services in the community.
8. Evaluate and update the Township website to increase accessibility of information that is needed by residents and others outside the community.
9. Continue to support the operation and enhancement of the Township EMS and Fire Department. Encourage new volunteers for the Fire Department and new Emergency Medical Technicians.
10. Continue cooperation with the Marquette County Sherriff's Department and Michigan State Police for law enforcement.
11. Educate residents about recycling and trash programs available in Marquette County.
12. Determine a plan to adequately maintain the Township buildings, such as the Town Hall. Plans could include getting grants for maintenance or allocating Township funds for future updates and improvements.
13. Seek grant opportunities that help expand broadband internet connctivity in the Township.
14. Evaluate the possibility of attracting research and development and/or light manufacturing into the Township.
15. Protect the tax base to ensure that essential health, safety and public services can be maintained. This is especially important when properties are sold to tax-exempt organizations.

Goal 6: Economic Development

The Township's economic base will be diversified and expanded to create employment opportunities, to encourage additional investment and reinvestment into the community, and to ensure sufficient revenues are available to support the Township's operations.

Objectives:

1. Diversify and expand the tax base to provide sufficient revenues to support Township services and facilities.
2. Emphasize research and development, light industrial, commercial and service-based development that will be sustainable for the long-term.
3. Consider expanding the range of economic incentives financial benefits that may incentivize opportunities for developers.
4. Coordinate with economic partners to expand development opportunities.
5. Consider changes in the economy such as the growing remote work force and new and innovative small business start-ups.
6. Consider the rezoning of that portion of property within West Branch Township that lies within the Village of Sawyer. This property should be zoned specifically to represent the existing and desired land uses in this diverse location.



Rolling hills in West Branch Township

10.0 PLAN IMPLEMENTATION & STRATAGIES

10.1 Introduction

The Township aims to carry out the goals and objectives of this Master Plan. The Township Board, Planning Commission and staff will continue to monitor the outcomes of the plan and will propose changes as they are needed and/or warranted.

This Master Plan is not a permanent document. It can be amended over time. Because communities are always facing new issues and opportunities, it may be necessary to revise and/or update the Master Plan more regularly than every five (5) years. In order for the Master Plan to be relevant to the community, it must remain current and relevant to issues and opportunities that may arise.

9.2 Plan Review

As required by the [Michigan Planning Enabling Act, P.A. 33 of 2008](#), the draft plan was distributed to neighboring communities, county and utilities on February 9, 2023, with instructions for review and comment. A list of the entities receiving the draft plan is located below.

10.3 Public Hearing & Adoption

The Public Hearing notice for adoption was distributed in the Mining Journal in February of 2024. The Township Planning Commission held a duly called Public Hearing on April 16, 2024. Following the Public Hearing, the Planning Commission adopted the plan on April 16, 2024. The West Branch Township Board of Trustees passed a Resolution of Concurrence

10.4 Distribution of the Plan

Following adoption, the Master Plan update was distributed to neighboring communities, county and utilities in the same manner as the draft plan. A list of those receiving the final plan is below:

- Marquette County
- Chocolay Township
- Skandia Township
- Sands Township
- Forsyth Township
- TDS Telecom
- Spectrum Communications
- Michigan Gas Company
- Upper Peninsula Power Company (UPPCO)
- Marquette Board of Light & Power (MBLP)
- Central Upper Peninsula Planning and Development (CUPPAD) Regional Commission

10.5 Master Plan Strategies

What are planning strategies?

Strategic planning is a process in which an organization's leaders (West Branch Township Board of Trustees and Planning Commissioners) define their vision for the future and identify the community's goals and objectives. The process includes establishing a strategy or strategies to reach those goals so that the Township can reach its stated vision. The following strategies represent a consensus of the work and research performed in the drafting of this Master Plan update for 2024.

Managed Growth

The primary focus of the Plan is well-managed growth. The Plan contains provisions focused on growth management. It is the intention of the Township to encourage growth, but to do so in a moderate, well-paced development that ensures revenues will be generated to meet the needs of the community. This may require expansion of the Township's tax base and infrastructure to ensure the provision of adequate services.

Growth will be managed through a variety of objectives and strategies: expanding the tax base (commercial uses along the US Highway 41 and M-94 West corridor); ensuring development contributes its fair share of the infrastructure costs; and expanding the housing stock to provide a full range of housing options.

Sustainability

To ensure that the Township will be successful in managing growth, it must also make certain that its future is sustainable. Sustainability is measured in many ways: sufficient tax revenues generated to meet local needs; community facilities that meet the needs of residents; a range of affordable housing opportunities; environmental resources that are conserved for future generations; and development located in appropriate areas, that is consistent with the rural character of the community.

The vision of this Master Plan is sustainable, provided the economic base grows in tandem with the growth of the community. The Township's future will be sustainable through expanding the tax base with a focus on broadening the housing stock to provide a full range of options; strengthening the community's management of the environment; establishing historic preservation where and when feasible, attracting and retaining new industries, and commercial developments where appropriate.

Maintaining Community Character

The character of the Township is unique, particularly given its rural heritage and natural features. While the Township is one of the Upper Peninsula's smallest Townships, its close proximity to the City of Marquette provides residents with access to a variety of urban amenities.

The Plan identifies appropriate areas within the Township for various types of development and recreational opportunities. It recommends the Township protects its character and ensures new development and reinvestments are consistent and compatible with the community's "rural" environment.

Expanding Community Services

Provisions within this Plan promote options for expanding growth and development in the Township. The Land Use Element identifies areas for growth and development along corridors, such as M-94 West and US Highway 41. In order to support this growth, the Township must ensure sufficient services will be available to meet local needs. For example, significant portions of the Township are not

currently served by municipal water systems. With the exception of municipal water systems located in a small area in the unincorporated community of Skandia, and a portion of the Village of Sawyer, most residents utilize private wells as a source of water.

A similar situation exists with respect to wastewater treatment. The portion of the Township lying within Sawyer is served by the former base wastewater treatment system. The remaining portions of the Township rely upon on-site septic systems.

The Township should explore the opportunity to expand the water, wastewater and electrical systems along the M-94 corridor, where and when feasible. This will provide the necessary infrastructure for development along the corridor in close proximity to Sawyer.

This is a concept for the future that will take time and money to implement, but it should be pursued as opportunities arise, especially as funds are made available from Federal, State, and local sources for these types of community enhancements. While this is a long-term vision, the Township will also continue to work with property owners, businesses, and investors to emphasize appropriate development.

Housing for All

A broad range of housing opportunities is critical to a successful and sustainable community. Examples include affordable and livable housing conditions, opportunities for home ownership, and adequate sites for development of new housing, in areas where there is adequate infrastructure to support development. Housing supports economic development by helping attract workers and business owners to the community, which can generate positive net revenue by increasing the tax base.

A wide range of policies are available to address broadening the housing stock, to promote affordable housing units that meet housing needs, to encourage preservation of privacy for residents, and to encourage reuse and maintenance of existing housing to prevent deterioration and blight.

Environmental Conservation

The Plan embraces a strong dedication to conserving the natural environment and features that are unique to the Township. The Chocolay River and its tributary system are outstanding natural assets that provide recreation, natural beauty, and add to the Township's character. Inland lakes, extensive woodlots, and tree resources, natural habitats, and rolling topography in portions of the Townships are also contributors to the community's character.

The Plan focuses on preserving the most outstanding resources, conserving other resources as development occurs, and mitigating the negative impacts of development on the entire resource system.

Land Use

Adopt guidelines to provide direction to potential commercial developers. The unique aspects of the Township should be protected and promoted when new construction is contemplated. This requires an approach that provides flexibility in new construction, but insures the outcome will be consistent with the character of the Township.

Encourage additional development along the M-94 West and Sporley Lake Road closest to Sawyer where and when feasible. The Township could acquire such properties to initiate further commercial and/or residential development in the area. Light industry/mixed-use development should be

considered the M-94 West corridor. The Sporley Lake Road area should be a focus for residential development given its proximity to the Village of Sawyer and existing utilities.

APPENDIX A

West Branch Township
Marquette County, Michigan

Planning Commission Resolution #041624-1

At a regular meeting of the West Branch Township Planning Commission held in person, on Tuesday, April 16, 2024, the following resolution was offered by Commission member Ray Johnson and supported by Commission member Nellie Turton.

A RESOLUTION ADOPTING THE UPDATED WEST BRANCH TOWNSHIP MASTER PLAN | 2024-2028

WHEREAS, the Michigan Planning Enabling Act (P.A. 33 of 2008), authorizes the Planning Commission to prepare and periodically update a Master Plan for the use, development and preservation of all lands in the Township; and

WHEREAS, the Planning Commission prepared an updated Master Plan and submitted said plan to the Township Board for review and comment; and

WHEREAS, the Township Board received and reviewed the proposed Master Plan update prepared by the Planning Commission and authorized the distribution of the updated Master plan to the Notice Group entities identified in the Michigan Planning Enabling Act (P.A. 33 of 2008); and

WHEREAS, notice was provided to the Notice Group as provided in the Michigan Planning Enabling Act (P.A. 33 of 2008); and

WHEREAS, the Planning Commission held a Public Hearing on April 16, 2024 to consider the public comment received on the proposed Master Plan update, and to further review and comment on the Master Plan; and

WHEREAS, the Planning Commission finds that the proposed Master Plan update is desirable, proper, and reasonable, and furthers the use, preservation, and development goals and objectives of the Township;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT HEREBY RESOLVED AS FOLLOWS:

1. The West Branch Township Planning Commission hereby adopts the proposed Master Plan Update, including all of the chapters, figures, descriptive matters, maps and tables contained therein.
2. Distribution to Notice Group. Pursuant to MCL 125.3843, the Planning Commission approves the distribution of the adopted Master Plan update to the Notice Group.
3. Findings of Fact. The Planning Commission has made the foregoing determination based on a review of existing land uses in the Township, a review of the existing Master Plan provisions and maps, and input received from Planning Commission members and the public, as well as with the assistance of the Township's professional consultant. The Planning Commission also finds that the amended Master Plan will accurately reflect and implement the Township's

goals and objectives for the use, preservation, and development of lands within West Branch Township.

4. Effective Date; Repeal. The amended Master Plan shall become effective on the adoption date of this resolution. The prior Master Plan is hereby repealed upon the updated Master Plan becoming effective.

Yeas: 3
Nays: 0
Absent/Abstain: 2 absent

RESOLUTION DECLARED ADOPTED.

CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that the above is a true copy of a resolution adopted by the West Branch Township Planning Commission at the time, date, and place specified above; pursuant to the required statutory procedures.

Date: April 16, 2024

By: Kris Shaw

Kris Shaw
Planning Commission Chairperson

WEST BRANCH TOWNSHIP

1016 County Rd 545 N

Skandia, MI, 49885

PH# (906-942-7400)

www.theperfecttownship.com

RECREATIONAL PUBLIC HEARING & PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING

TUESDAY APRIL 16TH 2024 – 6:30PM Start time.

1. Call Meeting to Order.
2. Roll Call.
3. Approval of the Agenda
4. Public Comment
5. New Business
 - A. Public Hearing #041624-1.** Public Hearing & Potential Adoption of the updated West Branch Township Master Plan, 2024-2028.
 - B. Public Hearing #041624-2.** Public Hearing & Potential Adoption of the West Branch Township Recreation Plan, 2024-2028.
6. Unfinished Business.
7. Correspondence.
8. Reports.
9. Announcements.
10. Public Comment.
11. Adjournment.

**RECREATION PLAN HEARING
APRIL 16, 2024 6:30PM**

Meeting called to order by Chairperson Kris Shaw at 6:30pm.

Present: Vice Chair Ray Johnson, Secretary Michelle Christal, Nellie Turton, Jen Christal, Brandon Chmiko, Lions Club Representative Catherine Shaw, there were several community members and township board members present.

Absent: Chris Sudinsky

Agenda: A motion to approve the agenda was made by Ray Johnson and supported by Brandon Chmiko.

Public Comment: Jason McCarthy spoke about the other Townships he has been involved with and the jobs he has done, explained on how things will be done to get grants. Stated he is a grant writer and the future and intent to get grants and in kind services.

Kris thanked Jason for his work and he spoke on concerns and thanked him for his input.

New Business:

Public Hearing #041624-1. Public Hearing & Potential Adoption of the updated West Branch Township Master Plan, 2024-2028.

Public Hearing #041624-2. Public Hearing & Potential Adoption of the West Branch Township Recreation Plan, 2024-2028.

Gloria Urban asked if there was an environmental study Jason said no. Also is concerned on camping site says no supervision, she is opposed.

Greg Hardy spoke on his concerns and are in his letter on file. Kris spoke we have to have a plan in place before we can apply for grants also spoke on the things residents have asked about. We will be asking for input and for volunteers from our community. Ray spoke we did try to get people to come to community meeting, and we have to have a 5 year plan.

Julie Sanford spoke on campground horrors always problems.

Natasha Lantz thanked the committee for their time and work on project.

Jack Heidtman spoke there are grants for recreation, free money.

No grants for roads, spoke on parking.

Brent Haykoop appreciates us and the work that has been done.

Allison Heykoop interested in park and concerned on the noise from ball games and trash on grounds. Would like to see bike and walking trails.

Ray spoke on people and what they would like to see in our community, and lets give more to our area. Also said we have resources give it to the kids and community.

Charles DeVooght spoke on all of the kids signed up for baseball over 150 expects 300 this year. Would like to see soccer fields there are none in area for teams to play.

Scott Caldwell stated campground scares him but is all for playground.

Some residents asked if we would remove campground, board is willing to remove from plan.

Mark Krans asked if there was a timeline for grants. Jason stated April next year.

Motion to approve Recreation Plan with removal of campgrounds made by Ray supported by Kris. M/C

Motion to recommend to West Branch Board made by Ray supported by Michelle. M/C

Unfished Business: None.

Correspondence: All written correspondence is included within the minutes.

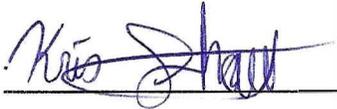
Adjournment: Motion to adjourn was made by Ray Johnson and supported by Brandon Chmiko.

Hearing adjourned.

Next meeting May 13th

CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that the above is a true representation of the public hearing by the West Branch Township Recreation Committee at the time, date, and place specified above.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Kris Shaw". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a horizontal line.

Kris Shaw
Board Chair

12 April, 2024

Greg Hardy
595 Town Hall Rd
Skandia, MI 49885

West Branch Township
ATTN: Recreation Plan Update
P.O. Box 56
Skandia, MI 49885

To Whom It May Concern:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment and offer input on the ***West Branch Township Recreation Plan | 2024-2028 (hereinafter "the Plan")***. I fully understand the importance of recreational opportunities in our community and appreciate the work the recreation committee has done to date. I offer the following comments and concerns for your consideration:

- (1) Page (1) of the Plan references 2020 US Census Bureau data. Relevant census data not listed includes:
 - The median age in the township is 40.6, meaning half of the township's population is younger than 40.6 and half is older.
 - The largest age group is 60-64 years old, comprising 139 members of the township's population.
 - The next largest age group is 20-24 years old, comprising 132 members of the population.
 - Age group 5-9 totals 86, 10-14 totals 90 and 15-19 totals 87, for a total of 263 or 15% of the township's total population.
 - In contrast, 18% of the township's population is greater than or equal to 65 years of age and 23,4% of the township's population is greater than or equal to 60.
 - Lastly 55.9% of the township's residents own homes in the township (home ownership rate).
- (2) It is reasonable to conclude that West Branch Township has a somewhat senior population, but a population age spread reasonably characteristic of Marquette County as a whole. It is also notable that nearly half (45.9%) of the residents are renting in the township. Given the census data as it stands, the question of how, given the Plan's primary focus stated on Page (1) of the Plan, recreational resources are to be allocated proportionally to the census data demographics. I would hope consideration is given to this concern.
- (3) Page (3) of the Plan addresses the accountability of the Township's Recreation Plan. It states, ***"The Township's Recreation Plan will be administered by the Township Board and reviewed annually to assure that its goals, objectives, and Action Program are focused on providing the highest and best recreational opportunities for the community. It is anticipated that this Recreation Plan will be reviewed and updated every five years, with the assistance of the Recreation Committee and Planning Commission."*** A mechanism for public input should be integral to this process in the future, just as it is now, and should be included in the assessment and review process in the future.
- (4) Consideration needs to be given to traffic flow and parking in the Plan. Parking is already a

problem with many events held at the township hall, with cars parked on both sides of Town Hall Road well past the township building. The road west of the Township Hall is narrow with nearly non-existent shoulders. This results in narrow passage suitable for one car at best. Use of Town Hall Road for parking is not a viable option (Reference **State of Michigan MCL 257.672 Stopping, parking or leaving vehicle upon paved or main traveled part of highway or upon paved or unpaved part of limited access highway; violation as civil infraction**). Additionally, Town Hall Road is a dead end without an area suitable for turning around at its end, this resulting in turn-around traffic at the dead end using residential driveways. This is disruptive to local residents. I would suggest that parking should be centralized at or near the Township Hall, effectively providing necessary additional parking for township activities as well as recreational activities in the future.

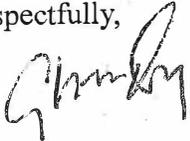
- (5) This also suggests that recreational ventures should be focused at or near the Township Hall.
- (6) Centralization of activities at or near the Township Hall would also be of benefit when considering future sanitary, concession and storage facilities necessary given the increased activities.
- (7) Consideration should be given to local residents when planning and implementing the Plan. This should include traffic, noise and infringements on private properties. If nothing more, consideration should be given to buffer distances from the area of an action program activity to an existing residential property. This is simply a courtesy to the township's taxpayers.
- (8) Are potential financial commitments in the future a concern? The Plan makes little mention of the process in this regard. What percent of township's budget is to be allocated to the Plan's implementation and future maintenance? Are there rough projections for the total cost of and subsequently the township's share of future projected action programs? As much as I enjoyed the "W" in the past, it would be a mistake to revisit the impact on the township's financial health resulting from that situation.
- (9) Given the inclusion of "***Begin land clearing for proposed improvements at the West Branch Township Hall/Park property, without the aid of grant funding.***" in the ***Action Program 2024*** section of the Plan, questions of both financial and practical consideration arise. What is the proposed use of the area to be cleared and at what cost to the township? What considerations were given to the area proposed to be cleared? It appears from the ***Action Program 2024*** section that a baseball field is under consideration. Given the proximity of Skandia Township's existing field this seems to be a duplication of a resource already available.
- (10) The notion of primitive camping necessitates well defined and spacious buffer zones from private properties. It also suggests a well defined monitoring process by the township for obvious reasons including fire control and sanitation. Nature trails would seem to be more in line with the overall objectives of the Plan.
- (11) Mechanisms for representative public input are also critical in this process. The public input meeting held on March 4, 2024 was unknown to me. I receive the agendas and approved minutes from the township and saw no mention of the meeting. I also saw no mention of it on the website. I understand that it's not necessarily a meeting of the public body per se, however it is a meeting of consequence. The point being, if a representative public opinion is sought, a reliable and accessible mechanism for informing the public should be available. Tools such as the online survey program **Survey Monkey (surveymonkey.com)** provide the capability of listening to what people want by collecting responses using web links, email, or by embedding surveys and forms on your website.
- (12) Are there plans for recreational use of the township's two other properties? The ***Future Considerations*** section on pages 7-8 of the Plan address only projects on the township's 40 acre

parcel. The **Action Plan** section of the Plan also only addresses activities on the township's 40 acre parcel.

(13) For your reference, in reviewing the West Branch Township Recreation Plan | 2024-2028, I noted the following errata in the Final Draft – March 12, 2024 copy.

- **Page (1): Link for Michigan Department of Natural Resources Guidelines for the Development of Community Park, Recreation, Open Space, and Greenway Plans results in “Page Not Found” error.**
- **Page (1): Link for Michigan's Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) results in “Page Not Found” error.**
- **Page (1): Link for the township's website is listed as www.theperfecttownship.org. This is incorrect. The correct URL is www.theperfecttownship.com. The website as of March 31, 2024 offers a link to the final draft document, however, the link is on the “Services” page, under “Township Hall”. For future reference, the Michigan Open Meetings Act 267 of 1976, section 15.265, paragraph (4) states in part, “The public notice on the website shall be included on either the homepage or on a separate web page dedicated to public notices for non-regularly scheduled public meetings and accessible via a prominent and conspicuous link on the website's homepage that clearly describes its purpose for public notification of those non-regularly scheduled public meetings.” I didn't see anything posted on the township's Facebook page.**

Respectfully,



Greg Hardy

**WEST BRANCH TOWNSHIP
PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING
PUBLIC HEARING**

APRIL 16TH 2024, 7:00PM

Meeting called to order by board member Kris Shaw at 7:30pm

Present: Kris Shaw, Secretary Nellie Turton, Ray Johnson

Absent: Chairperson Deena Barnhart, Wayne Theurer

Agenda: A motion to approve the agenda was made by Ray Johnson and supported by Nellie Turton. **M/C.**

Public comment: Jason McCarthy spoke about future for the Township and the Master Plan. Julie Sanford spoke up about the road conditions in the township and possible road mileage in the future.

New Business: A motion to adopt the Master Plan as presented was made by Ray Johnson and supported by Nellie Turton. **M/C**

Unfinished Business: Rezoning on Sawyer (Section 31)

Public comment: None

Adjournment at 7:48pm

CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that the above is a true representation of the public hearing by the West Branch Township Recreation Committee at the time, date, and place specified above.



Signed by acting chairperson, Kris Shaw

WEST BRANCH TOWNSHIP
REGULAR MEETING
APRIL 16th, 2024 7:50PM

Members present included Supervisor Jack Heidtman, Clerk Michelle Christal, Treasurer Catherine Shaw, Trustee Kris Shaw, and Trustee Tim Overmyer. Clerk Michelle Christal was absent. Also present were Zoning Administrator Mike Beltz, Karla Hardy, Greg Hardy, Melissa Krans, Mark Krans, and Natasha Lantz.

AGENDA: A motion to approve the Agenda was made by Kris Shaw and supported by Catherine Shaw. M/C

PUBLIC COMMENT: Natasha Lantz spoke on happenings at the library. Karla Hardy asked about the township's webpage. Melissa Krans spoke on a possible millage for roads. Mark Krans state he feels there should be a millage proposal for roads. Discussion was held about millage and road repair,

MINUTES: A motion to approve the Regular Meeting Minutes as presented was made by Catherine Shaw and supported by Kris Shaw. M/C

JOB BILLS PAYABLE: A motion to approve the payment of the JOB Bills for year end 2023-2024 totaling \$10,601.87 and the April 2024 bills totaling \$30,047.35 was made by Jack Heidtman and supported by Catherine Shaw. M/C

JOB BUDGET REPORT: A motion to approve the JOB Budget year end and April 2024 as presented was made by Jack Heidtman and supported by Catherine Shaw. M/C

FINANCIAL REPORT: A motion to approve the Financial Report as presented was made by Kris Shaw and supported by Michelle Christal. M/C

BUDGET REPORT: A motion to approve the Budget with the addition of moving \$38.18 from Public Works to Zoning and 55.40 from Public Works to Cemetery Lights and to approve the 2024-2025 budget was made by Kris Shaw and supported by Michelle Christal. M/C

BILLS PAYABLE: A motion to pay the total bills totaling \$20,405.14 was made by Jack Heidtman and supported by Catherine Shaw. M/C

ZONING ADMINISTRATOR: Zoning Administrator Mike Beltz reported on his activities for the month.

ASSESSOR REPORT: Everything is up to date.

PLANNING COMMISSION: A motion to adopt the Master Plan was made by Kris Shaw and supported by Jack Heidtman. M/C
The next Planning Commission Meeting is in September.

RECREATION TEAM: A motion to adopt the Recreation Plan with the removal of camp ground was made by Kris Shaw and supported by Michelle Christal. M/C

JOINT OPERATIONS: Minutes are on file.

SOA: Tim Overmyer spoke on the SOA meeting and things that are happening at Sawyer.

CORRESPONDENCE: SEMCO franchise agreement is still with Bonnie Hoff.

OLD BUSINESS:

A: BUILDING CODES: Tabled until next month

B: FLOOD PLAN: Nothing needs to be done.

C: SEMCO: A hearing needs to be held.

NEW BUSINESS: Nothing at this time.

EXTENDED PUBLIC COMMENT: Ray Johnson spoke on the agreement with the County and Building Codes.

BOARD COMMENT: None.

Meeting adjourned at 8:50 pm



Submitted by Michelle Christal, Clerk



Northwoods Planning & Zoning Services
325 Northwoods Rd
Marquette, Michigan 49855
906-399-1808
northwoodspz@gmail.com

February 7, 2024

Public Notice

West Branch Township, Marquette County, Michigan

Notice of 63-day Review Period for Master Plan Update

In accordance with the requirements of the *Michigan Planning Enabling Act (PA 33 of 2008, as amended)*, this letter serves as notice that the West Branch Township Planning Commission, along with technical assistance from *Northwoods Planning & Zoning Services, LLC*, has completed a draft update of their five-year community Master Plan. As such, the required sixty-three (63) day review period will commence on Friday, February 9, 2024.

Per PA 33, when a Township of Michigan has prepared a draft Master Plan update, it must notify by personal or first-class mail delivery of a hard copy, or by electronic mail any City, Village, and Township located within, or contiguous to the Township, and to the County Planning Commission. The same notice must also be sent to any railroad companies or public utility that registers for such a notice with the Township.

You may review the attached draft of Master Plan update, or visit <http://www.theperfecttownship.com> to view a copy. The Planning Commission would appreciate any comments or suggestions regarding the Master Plan update contents and how it may affect planning efforts for our neighboring communities, utility companies, etc.

You are invited to send a letter or an email stating your questions, position, or opinions to me at 325 Northwoods Rd, Marquette, MI 49855 or at the email address below. West Branch Township thanks you for your assistance and cooperation on this matter.

Sincerely,

Jason McCarthy
Northwoods Planning & Zoning Services, LLC
northwoodspz@gmail.com