



Porter Township | Cass County, Michigan

MASTER PLAN

Adopted by the Planning Commission: June 5, 2014
Adopted by the Township Board: June 10, 2014



**PORTER TOWNSHIP
CASS COUNTY MICHIGAN
(Resolution No. 2014) - 01**

At a regular meeting of the Porter Township Planning Commission held on June 5, 2014, at the Porter Township Hall, the following Resolution was offered for adoption by Planning Commission Member Russwurm and was seconded by Planning Commission Member Grotovsky :

**A RESOLUTION RECOMMENDING APPROVAL OF THE NEW
PORTER TOWNSHIP MASTER PLAN TO THE PORTER TOWNSHIP BOARD
AND CONSTITUTING PLANNING COMMISSION APPROVAL OF SUCH
MASTER PLAN**

WHEREAS, the Michigan Planning Enabling Act, MCL 125.3801 *et seq.* ("MPEA") authorizes the Planning Commission to prepare a Master Plan for the use, development and preservation of all lands in the Township; and

WHEREAS, the Planning Commission prepared a new Master Plan and submitted such plan to the Township Board for review and comment; and

WHEREAS, on March 11, 2014 the Porter Township Board received and reviewed the proposed Master Plan prepared by the Planning Commission and authorized distribution of the Master Plan to the Notice Group entities identified in the MPEA; and

WHEREAS, notice was provided to the Notice Group entities as provided in the MPEA; and

WHEREAS, the Planning Commission held a public hearing on June 5, 2014 to consider public comment on the proposed new Master Plan, and to further review and comment on the proposed Master Plan; and

WHEREAS, after the public hearing was held, the Planning Commission voted to approve the new Master Plan on June 5, 2014, and recommended approval of the proposed Master Plan to the Township Board; and

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

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT HEREBY RESOLVED AS FOLLOWS:

1. ***Adoption of 2014 Master Plan.*** The Porter Township Planning Commission hereby approves and adopts the proposed Master Plan, including all of the chapters, figures, descriptive matters, maps and tables contained therein.

2. ***Distribution to the Township Board.*** Pursuant to MCL 125.3843, the Township Board has asserted by resolution its right to approve or reject the proposed Master Plan and therefore, the approval granted herein is not the final step for adoption of the plan as provided in MCL 125.3843. In addition, the Planning Commission hereby approves distribution of the proposed new Master Plan to the Township Board. The Planning Commission respectfully recommends to the Township Board that the Township Board give final approval to the proposed new Master Plan.

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 the Township Board and at the public hearing, as well as the assistance of a professional planning group. The Planning Commission

also finds that the new Master Plan will accurately reflect and implement the Township's goals and strategies for the use, preservation, and development of lands within Porter Township.

4. ***Effective Date; Repeal.*** The new Master Plan shall become effective on the date it is approved by the Township Board.

YEAS: Wylie, Robbins, Russwurm, Williams, Northrup, Grotovsky,
Nagy

NAYS: None

ABSENT/ABSTAIN: None

RESOLUTION DECLARED ADOPTED.

CERTIFICATION

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

Dated: June 5, 2014

Respectfully submitted,

By Christine Northrup
Christine Northrup, Secretary of the Porter
Township Planning Commission

**PORTER TOWNSHIP
CASS COUNTY MICHIGAN
(Resolution No. _____)**

At a regular meeting of the Porter Township Board held on June 10, 2014, at the Porter Township Hall, the following Resolution was offered for adoption by Trustee Harvey and was seconded by Trustee Northrup:

**A RESOLUTION ADOPTING THE PROPOSED PORTER TOWNSHIP
MASTER PLAN**

WHEREAS, the Michigan Planning Enabling Act, MCL 125.3801 *et seq.* ("MPEA") authorizes the Planning Commission to prepare a Master Plan for the use, development and preservation of all lands in the Township; and

WHEREAS, the Planning Commission prepared a new Master Plan and submitted such plan to the Township Board for review and comment; and

WHEREAS, on March 11, 2014, the Porter Township Board received and reviewed the proposed Master Plan prepared by the Planning Commission and authorized distribution of the Master Plan to the Notice Group entities identified in the MPEA; and

WHEREAS, notice was provided to the Notice Group entities as provided in the MPEA; and

WHEREAS, the Planning Commission held a public hearing on June 5, 2014 to consider public comment on the proposed new Master Plan, and to further review and comment on the proposed Master Plan; and

WHEREAS, after the public hearing was held, the Planning Commission voted to approve the new Master Plan on June 5, 2014, and recommended approval of the proposed Master Plan to the Township Board; and

WHEREAS, the Township Board finds that the proposed Master Plan is desirable, proper, and reasonable and furthers the use, preservation, and development goals and strategies of the Township;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT HEREBY RESOLVED AS FOLLOWS:

1. ***Adoption of 2014 Master Plan.*** The Porter Township Board hereby approves and adopts the proposed Master Plan, including all of the chapters, figures, descriptive matters, maps and tables contained therein.

2. ***Distribution to Notice Group.*** Pursuant to MCL 125.3843, the Township Board approves distribution of the new Master Plan to the Notice Group.

3. ***Findings of Fact.*** The Township Board 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 the Township Board and at the public hearing, as well as the assistance of a professional planning group. The Township Board also finds that the new Master Plan will accurately reflect and implement the Township's goals and strategies for the use, preservation, and development of lands within Porter Township.

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

YEAS: 5 HARVEY, RUSSELL, CRONINGER,
NORTHROP, WYLIE

NAYS: 0

ABSENT/ABSTAIN: 0

RESOLUTION DECLARED ADOPTED.

CERTIFICATION

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

Respectfully submitted,

Dated: 6. 10, 2014

By Marty Russell
Marty Russell,
Porter Township Clerk

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Chapter 1. Introduction

Introduction

A Master Plan is one of the most important policy documents adopted by a community. It represents a statement about what a community is, what its residents value and what those residents hope the community will become. At its fundamental level, a Master Plan enables a community to establish a direction for physical development, capital investment and growth. Once adopted, the Porter Township Master Plan will serve as a guide, or blueprint, for the physical conservation of certain areas and the development of other areas.

The Michigan Planning Enabling Act (Act 33 of 2008, as amended) specifically gives Porter Township the authority to prepare and adopt a plan. The Act also requires that the Master Plan be reviewed and updated as necessary every five years. The original Plan was adopted in 2000 after a two-year planning process that consisted of a significant amount of public input and hard work by Township officials and volunteers.

The Plan was reviewed in 2002 by the newly-formed Porter Township Planning Commission. The intent of the 2002 Plan was to guide growth and development through the year 2012, and it recommended that the Plan be reviewed and updated again at that time.

The Township expressed a desire to maintain some of the growth and development goals and strategies that were present in the 2002 Plan, so this Plan updates and analyzes many of the trends occurring in the Township and their implications as they relate to land use planning.

Even though previous work has enabled this 2014 Master Plan to focus on key issues and challenges, long-range planning should be carried out in general terms and recognize the potential for change and provide the ability to be flexible if conditions in the Township deviate from the anticipated course. This will result in a Master Plan that will be useful well into the future, instead of becoming obsolete if or when demographic, economic or social trends stray from those identified in this document.

The Planning Process

The planning process involved four inter-related phases:

A Community Profile - Understanding Current Challenges

During this initial phase, a variety of empirical data was reviewed pertaining to demographics, economics, land use, transportation and other topics. The purpose of this effort was to develop a comprehensive impression of the patterns of change in the Township and the challenges that the community will likely face in the future.

Goal Setting - Outlining a Preferred Future

In this phase, information gathered from the public, as well as local elected and appointed officials, were formed into several broad goal statements which form the foundation of the Master Plan. Each goal is supported by several objectives that are to be seen as steps needed to accomplish each goal.

The Master Plan - Developing the Blueprint

The third phase involved drawing together the input from the previous two phases and preparing a Future Land Use Plan. The future land use designations and map were developed in a series of meetings of the Planning Commission. To support the desired development patterns envisioned in the Future Land Use Map, the Map is supported by text describing how specific areas of the Township should develop within the next thirty years or so.

Finalization and Adoption - From Planning to Action

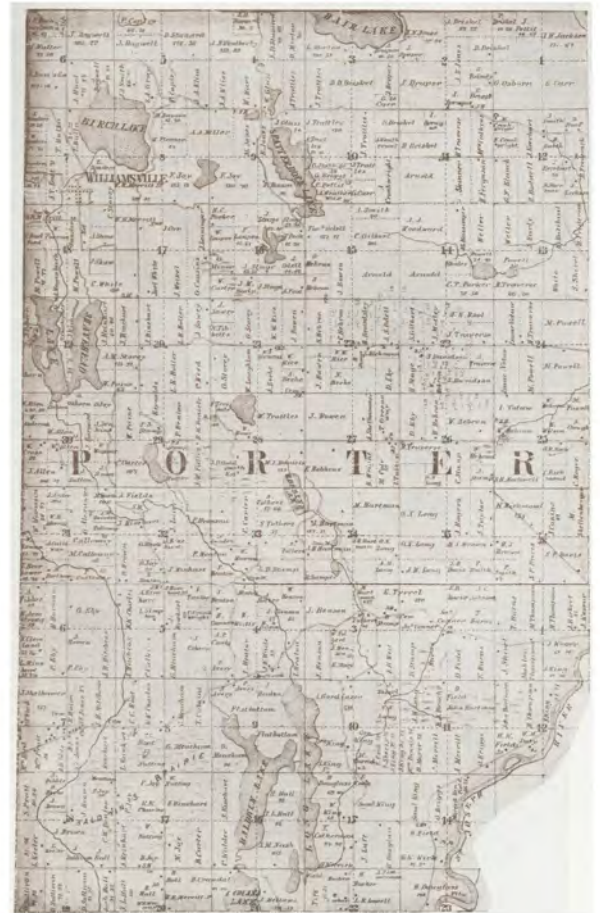
The final phase of the process involved the development of specific implementation strategies to carry out the Plan. At the conclusion of the fourth phase, a public hearing was held on the Plan. After making any final adjustments after the hearing, the Planning Commission and Township Board officially adopted the plan.

A Brief History of Porter Township

Cass County was inhabited by settlers in the 1820s, and organized in 1829 with a population of about 900 residents. Unlike many parts of the United States, Cass County was settled in a west-to-east migration pattern as settlers moved from Niles eastward into Cass County. Most early settlers were from New England, although many also came from the south.

Porter Township is named after John B. Porter, who was the Governor of the Territory at the time of its organization. Due to its large size, it has been referred to as north and south Porter for many years. Porter Township's first settler was John Baldwin, who established a farm in South Porter in 1828. Other early settlers in Porter Township included William Tibbetts and Daniel Shellhammer (1829) and John White, who was likely the first settler in North Porter in 1831. The first elected supervisor of Porter Township was Othin Beardsley, in 1833.

These early settlers established patterns of land use and agricultural activities that still continue to this day.



This 1860 map of Porter Township shows land ownership, and the pattern of development can still be seen today.

Chapter 2. Demographics

The demographic makeup of a community and the demographic change experienced in a community over time are among the most important indices to measure growth and its likely impact on land use. Therefore, an understanding of past and present population characteristics is a key component of a realistic and meaningful Master Plan. This chapter presents the existing demographic conditions in Porter Township and will become part of the foundation for drawing conclusions about the future land use needs in the Township over the life of the Master Plan.

Historical Population Change

In order to make any assumptions about the future of the Township, it is important to examine the population change of the past. While Porter Township has remained a rural and agricultural community, it has also emerged as both a recreational community with a number of seasonal homes, and a bedroom community with many residents commuting to nearby employment opportunities in Niles, Elkhart and South Bend.

Since 1980, the population of Porter Township has remained fairly steady, while a number of communities surrounding it have grown. Table 2.1 below

Table 2.1. Population Change in Porter Township and Surrounding Communities, 1980-2010

	1980	1990	2000	2010	Percent Change 2000-2010	Percent Change 1980-2010
Porter Township	3,857	3,857	3,794	3,798	+0.11%	-1.53%
Newberg Township	1,382	1,627	1,703	1,632	-4.17%	+18.09
Penn Township	2,044	1,877	1,902	1,774	-6.73%	-13.21
Calvin Township	1,643	1,813	2,041	2,037	-0.20%	+23.98
Mason Township	2,132	2,450	2,514	2,945	+17.14%	+38.13
Mottville Township	1,490	1,501	1,499	1,436	-4.20%	-3.62
Constantine Township	3,647	4,152	4,181	4,217	+0.86%	+15.63
Fabius Township	3,153	3,187	3,285	3,248	-1.13%	+3.01

illustrates the change in population from 1980 to 2010 in Porter Township and its neighboring Townships.

Mason Township, which borders the southern part of Porter Township to the west, experienced the greatest rate of growth both in the last 30 years and between the two most recent Census counts in 2000 and 2010. Porter Township’s other neighbor to the west, Calvin Township, also experienced a significant amount of growth from 1980 to 2010, but most of that growth occurred between 1980 and 2000. To the east of Porter Township lies Constantine Township and Mottville Township, both of which are in St. Joseph County. Mottville Township’s population has declined somewhat since 1980, which Constantine Township has grown by about 15%.

In Porter Township, the population has remained remarkably steady since 1980. The Township gained just four residents from 2000 to 2010, and between 1980 and 2010 it experienced a slight decline of 1.53%, which equates to a loss of just 59 residents over 30 years.

Population Projections

In order to adequately plan for land uses in the future, it is necessary to estimate the future population of Porter Township. While it is impossible to determine exactly what the number might be, the following methods can give us a rational means of estimating the Township’s future population.

Method 1. Constant Proportion Method. This method assumes that Porter Township will continue to represent the same percentage of Cass County’s population over the next thirty years. In 2010, Porter Township comprised 7.26% of Cass County’s total population of 52,293. Using the population projections published by The Right Place in 2007, we can project Porter Township’s population as 7.26% of Cass County’s projected population in 2020 and 2030.

Table 2.2. Porter Township Population Projection: 2010-2030 Using the Constant Proportion Method

	2010	2020	2030
Cass County	52,293	52,891	54,691
Porter Township	3,798	3,839	3,970

Method 2. Growth Rate Method. The Growth Rate (or geometric) Method projects future population growth or decline based on the rate of change in the Township in the past. Using the growth rate method, the following assumes that growth in the future will occur at the same average rate as has occurred annually since 1980. As indicated previously, the Township’s population declined somewhat between 1980 and 2010, resulting in an overall compounded annual rate of change of -0.051%.

Table 2.3. Porter Township Population Projection: 2010-2030 Using the Growth Rate (Geometric) Method

	2010	2020	2030
Porter Township	3,798	3,778	3,759

Method 3. The Arithmetic Method. The Arithmetic Method is similar to the growth rate method in that population projections are based on growth that occurred in preceding decades. This method, however, bases population change on the overall average change in the number of persons per year, rather than on growth rates. The following projections are based on the average net decrease of 2 persons per year between 1970 and 2000, in Porter Township, based on U.S. Census figures.

Table 2.4. Porter Township Population Projection: 2010-2030 Using the Arithmetic Method

	2010	2020	2030
Porter Township	3,798	3,778	3,758

Method 4. The Building Permit Method. This may be the most reliable projection technique because it depicts present growth trends based on the actual number of residential building permits issued by the Township. Porter Township has issued 18 new residential building permits on average per year from 2003 through 2011. The Township’s average household size is 2.37 persons according to the 2010 Census. Extrapolating these figures into the future may project likely population growth, if current trends remain the same. This population projection technique holds that Porter Township will grow by about 43 persons per year.

**Table 2.5. Porter Township Population Projection: 2010-2030
Using the Building Permit Method**

	2010	2020	2030
Porter Township	3,798	4,228	4,658

Population Projection Summary. By averaging the four population projection summaries discussed above, a general idea of population change over the next twenty to thirty years can be determined. Based on the projection techniques described, Porter Township will have a population of about 3,906 in 2020 and 4,036 in 2030. Using the Township's average household size of 2.37 persons, this equates to about 100 new homes in the Township by 2030.

	2010	2020	2030
Constant Proportion Method	3,798	3,839	3,970
Arithmetic Method	3,798	3,778	3,758
Growth Rate Method	3,798	3,778	3,759
Building Permit Method	3,798	4,228	4,658
Average	3,798	3,906	4,036

These projections are not meant to be exact; rather they are intended to provide a general idea of the growth that can be expected over the life of this plan.

There are several factors that could cause growth to exceed or fall short of these projections. For example, if a significant amount of commercial and industrial growth occurs along M-217, it could attract residents to the Township and the population could grow significantly. However, if that development does not occur, and the local and national economies continue to struggle as they have in the later part of the 2000s and early 2010s, then Porter Township could experience limited growth, or potentially a decline, in population.

Demographics

Age Characteristics. The expected change in population can give a community a sense of the development that is likely to occur over the next twenty to thirty years, but there are changes that occur within an existing population that can also have a profound effect on the characteristics of a community. For example, a community with a large number of young families may need to consider planning for schools, parks and other land uses that families need. On the other hand, if a

community has a large number of seniors and adults approaching 65, then it may be appropriate to examine policies that are more senior-friendly. Figure 2.1 is a population pyramid of Porter Township residents, based on 2010 Census figures.

As Figure 2.1 shows, while Porter Township has a number of young people, almost half of its residents are between the ages of 40 and 65, and another 17% are over the age of 65. Further, the median age in Porter Township increased from 41.5 in 2000 to 47.6 in 2010.

This means that over the life of this plan, there will be an increase of the number of seniors living in the Township, and senior-friendly development types and land uses should be strongly contemplated in planning activities. Research has found that many seniors prefer to “age in place” which means that they want to stay in their current homes or current communities. It is recommended that the Township plan for this increase in senior residents.

Social Characteristics. Residents of Porter Township generally live in traditional husband/wife households, and about a 18% of those are families with at least one child under the age of 18. About 28% of households contain at least one person over the age of 65, which is about the same as the County. Due to the general aging of the Township, the number of households with at least one resident over 65 years of age will increase over the life of this plan.

In terms of education, about 90% of

Figure 2.1 2010 Population Pyramid for Porter Township

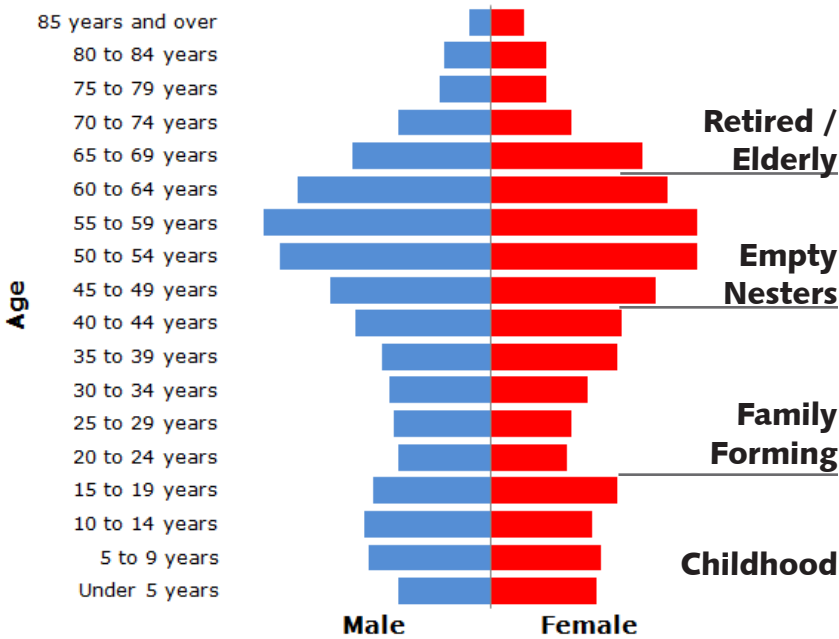
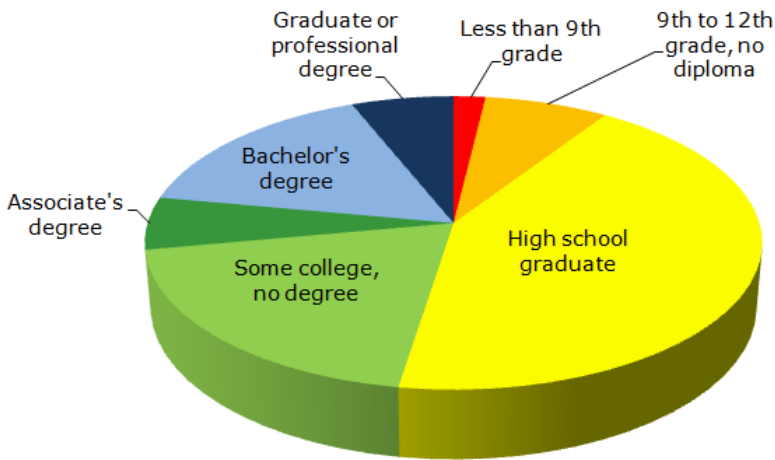


Figure 2.2 Highest Level of Educational Attainment in Porter Township



Township residents have achieved at least a high school diploma, while another 22% have at least a bachelor's degree. Figure 2.2 illustrates education attainment in the Township, according to the 2010 Census.

Race and Ethnicity. Porter Township is very homogeneous in terms of ethnicity. Almost 97% of the community indicated they were white in the 2010 Census, with African-Americans (1%), American Indians (1%), Asians (0.5%) or others (0.5%) making up the remaining three percent. This is fairly typical of rural communities, although it should be noted that Cass County as a whole is somewhat more diverse than Porter Township, but not significantly, as about 90% of Cass County residents indicated they were white in the 2010 Census.

Planning Implications

Population Growth and Change. Although a significant amount of new growth is not expected over the next thirty years, the demographic makeup of the community will shift nevertheless. By 2030 or 2040, nearly one-half of the Township's population will be over the age of 65, and it is important to begin planning for this transition now. Average household size decreased from 2000 to 2010 and it is likely that it will continue to decrease as families have fewer children and "empty nesters" remain in the Township. To accommodate the increasing number of senior residents, the Township should consider the following:

- Prioritize senior-friendly housing types or senior housing communities
- Prepare for possible oversupply of housing as fewer families will replace the aging cohorts.
- Attract small businesses to provide basic goods and services, reducing the amount of travel time required.
- Attract health care facilities.
- Encourage senior-friendly design in buildings, such as at-grade entrances and easy-to-read signage.
- Encourage walking paths with resting spots and areas for social interaction.

Chapter 3. Environmental Conditions

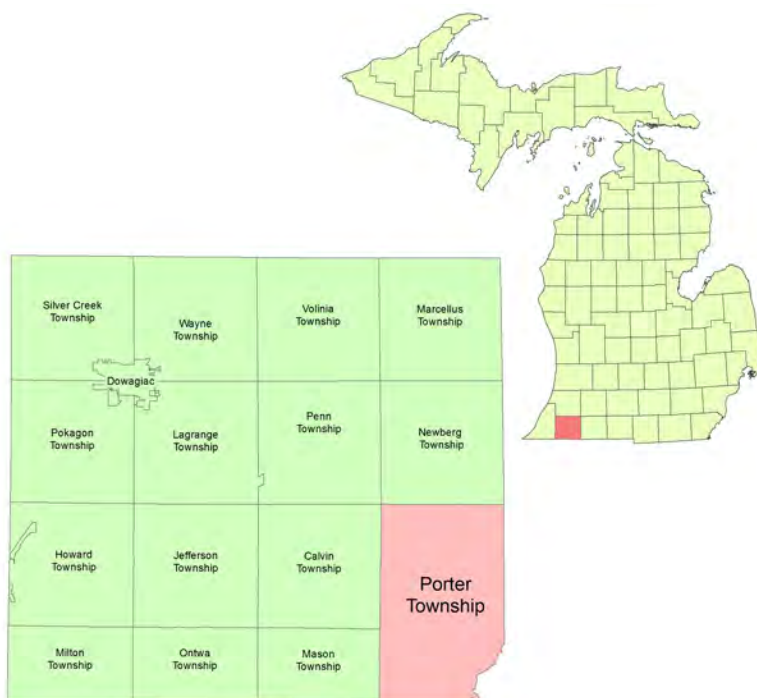
Porter Township is situated in the southeast corner of Cass County, and has an area of approximately 55 square miles, making it the largest township in Cass County in terms of land area. It is bounded on the west by Calvin and Mason Townships, on the north by Newberg Township, and on the east by Constantine and Mottville Townships in neighboring St. Joseph County. To the south of Porter Township is Elkhart County, Indiana, with the cities of Elkhart and South Bend, Indiana located just a few miles to the southwest.

The landscape of Porter Township is characterized by the diversity of land forms and uses found in the community, ranging from productive agricultural lands, wooded habitats, several lakes, streams and scenic views with both new and old human development dotting the landscape.

This chapter of the Master Plan analyzes environmental conditions in Porter Township and discuss key implications as they relate to the future of the Township over the next thirty or more years.

Climate

According to the Michigan State Climatologist Office, temperatures in Porter Township range from an average temperature of 24 degrees (Fahrenheit) in January to an average temperature of 72 degrees in July. The average annual precipitation is about 39 inches and the average annual snowfall is about 39 inches. While Porter Township does not receive as much snowfall as some other communities to the north, its rolling hills and abundant open space are conducive



Map 1. Location Map of Porter Township, Michigan

to many outdoor wintertime activities. In the summer months, the abundance of lakes attract a number of visitors to the Township, many of whom own seasonal dwellings on or near one of the Township's many lakes.

Lakes and Rivers

Porter Township is home to several large lakes, including Shavehead Lake, Baldwin Lake, Long Lake, Indiana Lake, Coverdale Lake, Birch Lake, Bair Lake, Robbins Lake and several other smaller lakes and streams. Many of the Township's lakes are lined with both year-round and seasonal residential development, and offer residents opportunities for recreational activities such as fishing, canoeing and boating. Some of the Township's larger and more notable lakes are discussed below.

Shavehead Lake. Named after a 19th century Pottawatomi chief, Shavehead Lake is a large and beloved lake in the west portion of Porter Township. Its horseshoe-shaped surface area covers about 289 acres, and much, but not all, of the lake is lined with both year-round and seasonal residential development. It is popular for fishing and other recreational uses.

Baldwin Lake. Like Shavehead Lake and many other lakes in the Township, Baldwin Lake is a popular inland lake that is lined with year-round and seasonal residential development. It has an area of about 260 acres and is located in the southern portions of the Township, just to the west of Long Lake.

Long Lake. Long Lake is slightly smaller than Baldwin Lake with an area of about 240 acres, but it has many similar characteristics. It is a long, narrow lake that stretches about two miles from its northernmost point, just south of US-12 to the southern tip a half-mile north of the State line.



Long Lake is one of many popular inland lakes found in Porter Township

Watersheds

A watershed is a region of land that is drained by a particular river or river system. Typically these systems include many smaller tributaries such as creeks and streams that feed into a larger river and are influenced by elevation or the lay of the land. All of Porter Township lies within the St. Joseph River regional watershed. In addition to lands that drain directly to the St. Joseph River, the Township also includes the following sub-watersheds:

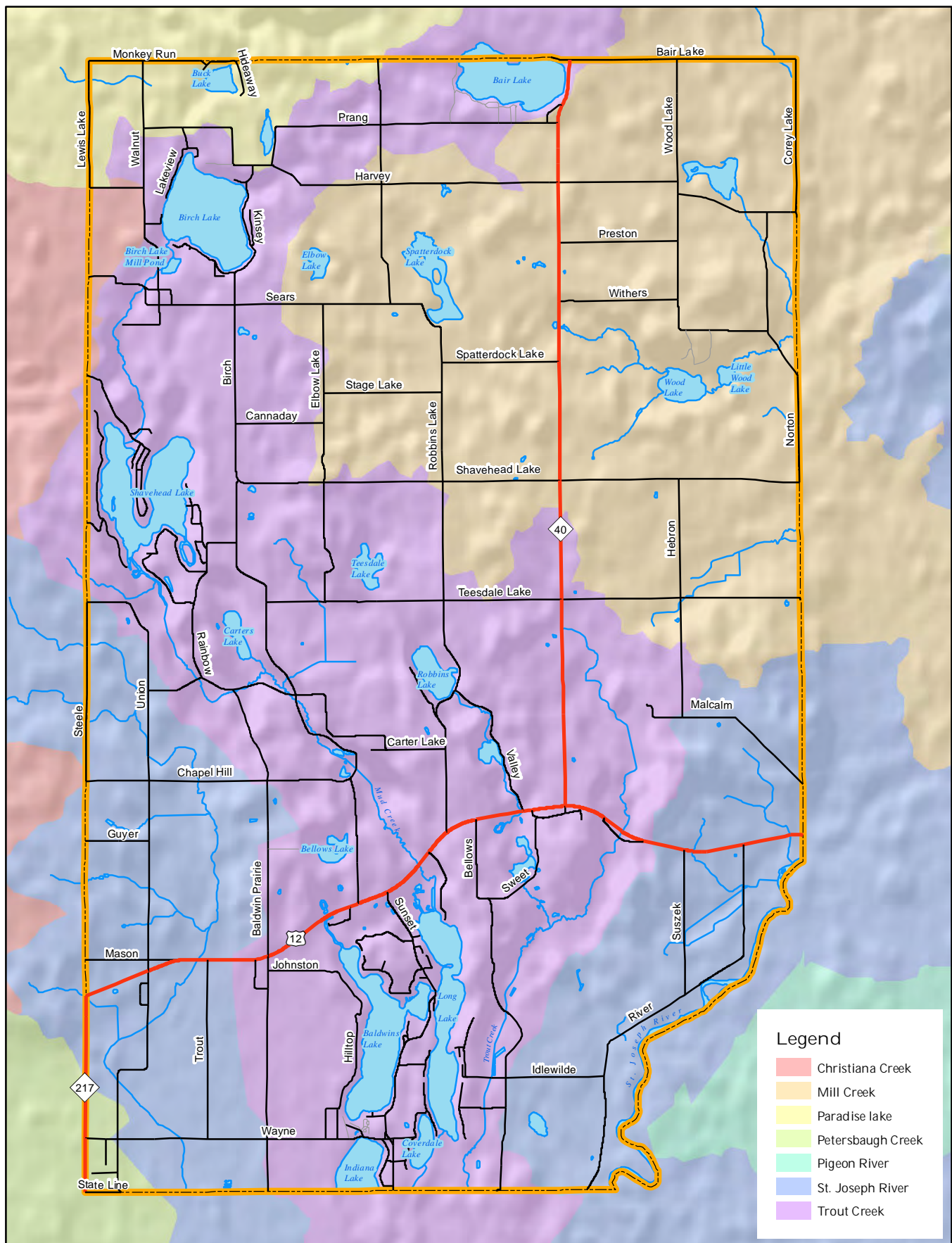
Trout Creek. This sub-watershed drains from north to south throughout the Township. Most of the Township's Lakes, including Bair Lake, Birch Lake, Shavehead Lake, Robbins Lake, Long Lake, Baldwin Lake, and others are all contained in this watershed, and many of them are connected via small streams such as Mud Creek, which connects Birch Lake, Shavehead Lake, Carters Lake, Long Lake and Coverdale Lake. This sub-watershed spans thousands of acres and covers most of the Township.

Mill Creek. The Mill Creek sub-watershed is located in the northeastern portions of the Township and also contains several lakes, including Elbow Lake, Spatterdock Lake, Wood Lake and Little Wood Lake. It generally directs water from north to south and connects to the St. Joseph Watershed.

Portions of Porter Township also lie within the sub-watersheds for Christiana Creek, Mill Creek, Paradise Lake, Petersbaugh Creek and the Pigeon River.

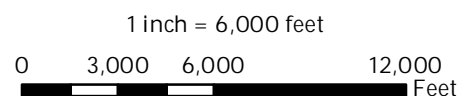
As Map 2 illustrates, land uses and water quality in one body of water can impact an area far beyond the boundaries of that lake, a point that is demonstrated particularly well by the Trout Creek sub-watershed, where the connectivity between several of the lakes is easily noticed. For example, if water quality in Birch Lake begins to deteriorate, this can lead to similar problems in lakes that are “downstream,” such as Baldwin Lake or Coverdale Lake.

It should also be noted that water quality within a watershed is directly related to the land management practices within that watershed. For example, if a new development creates a large amount of impervious surfaces (i.e. asphalt) and stormwater is not properly managed, it is possible that the volume and velocity of the runoff into the creek, stream, or river could increase to a point that stream bank erosion occurs. This can increase the amount of silt material on



Porter Township Master Plan

Cass County, Michigan



Map 2. Watersheds



Williams & Works

the streambed and change the chemistry of the water, or alter the turbidity and temperature of the water. All of these changes may have an effect on the wildlife that is dependent on the stream for survival.

Wetlands

Wetlands play a critical role in regulating the movement of water within watersheds. Wetlands are characterized by water saturation in the root zone, or above the soil surface, for a certain amount of time during the year. The fluctuation of the water table above and below the soil surface is unique to each wetland type.

Wetlands store precipitation and surface water and then slowly release the water in associated water resources, ground water, and the atmosphere. They help maintain the level of the water table and may serve as filters for sediments and organic matter. They may also serve as a sink to catch water, or transform nutrients, organic compounds, metals, and components of organic matter. Wetlands have the ability to impact levels of nitrogen, phosphorous, carbon, sulfur, and various metals. Without them, water quality decreases, areas are prone to flash flooding and habitat for specialized plants and animals is reduced.

A state-wide wetland inventory completed by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR) indicates that approximately 900 acres of wetlands are located within Porter Township. As Map 3 illustrates, many of these wetlands are located near stream corridors, but the rolling terrain found in Porter Township has caused wetlands to form in low-lying areas throughout the Township.

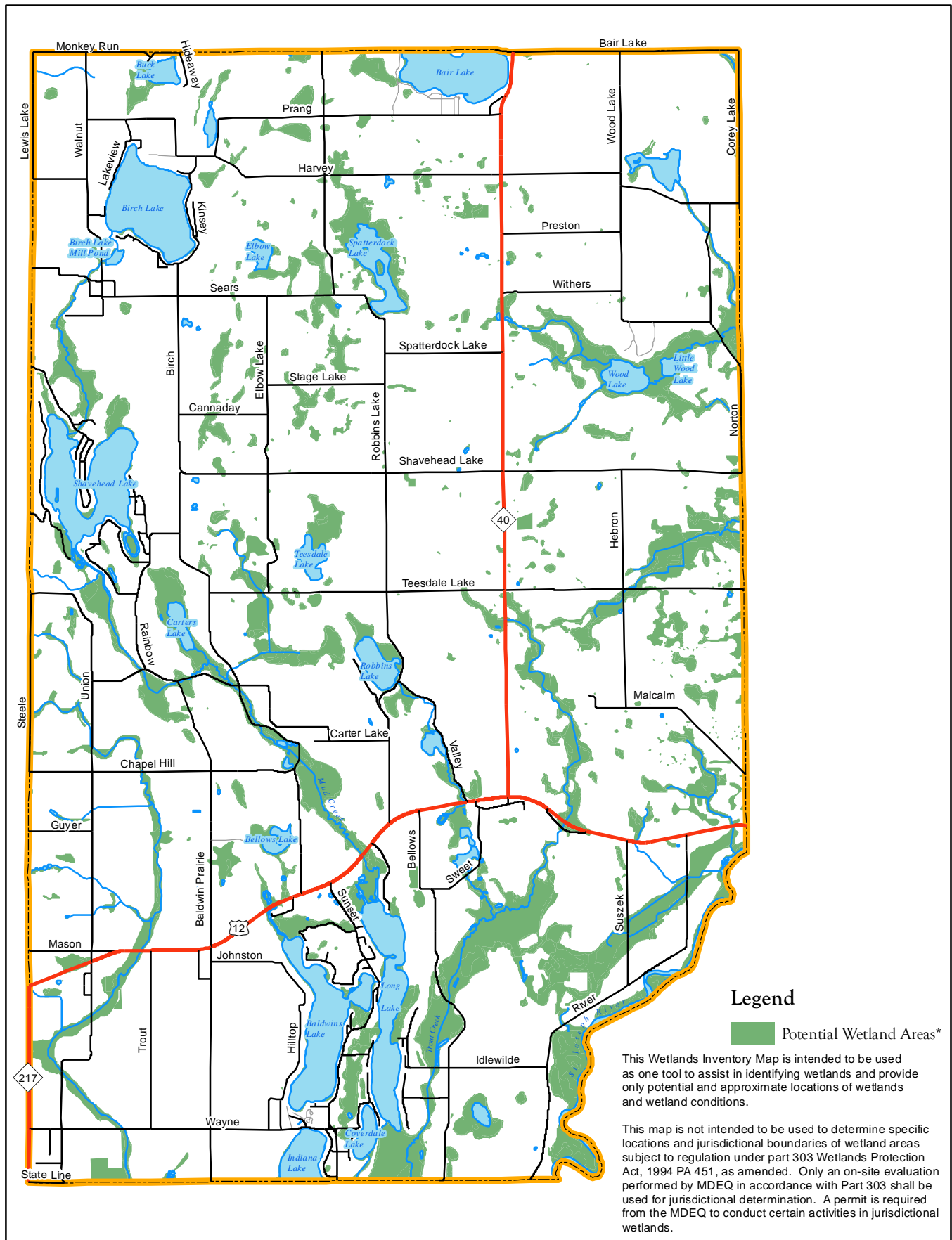


Wetlands play a critical role in managing the movement of water within an ecosystem

Soils

Soil composition is an important aspect of planning for many reasons.

Agricultural productivity is dependent on the fertility of the soils. Some soils are not well suited for individual septic systems and therefore may threaten ground water or surface water quality due to lack of proper filtration, while other soils



Porter Township Master Plan

Cass County, Michigan

Map 3. Wetlands

1 inch = 6,000 feet

0 3,000 6,000 12,000 Feet



Williams & Works

may not be deemed suitable for structural development. With the soils of the Township classified, areas can be appropriately designated for a suitable use.

The United States Department of Agriculture Soil Conservation Service has classified the soils of the Township into many different general soil associations, and Map 4 illustrates the different soil textures found in Porter Township:

Sandy. Sands are loose and single-grained. Soil materials classified as sands contain 85-100% sand-sized particles, 0-15% silt-sized particles, and 0-10% clay-sized particles.

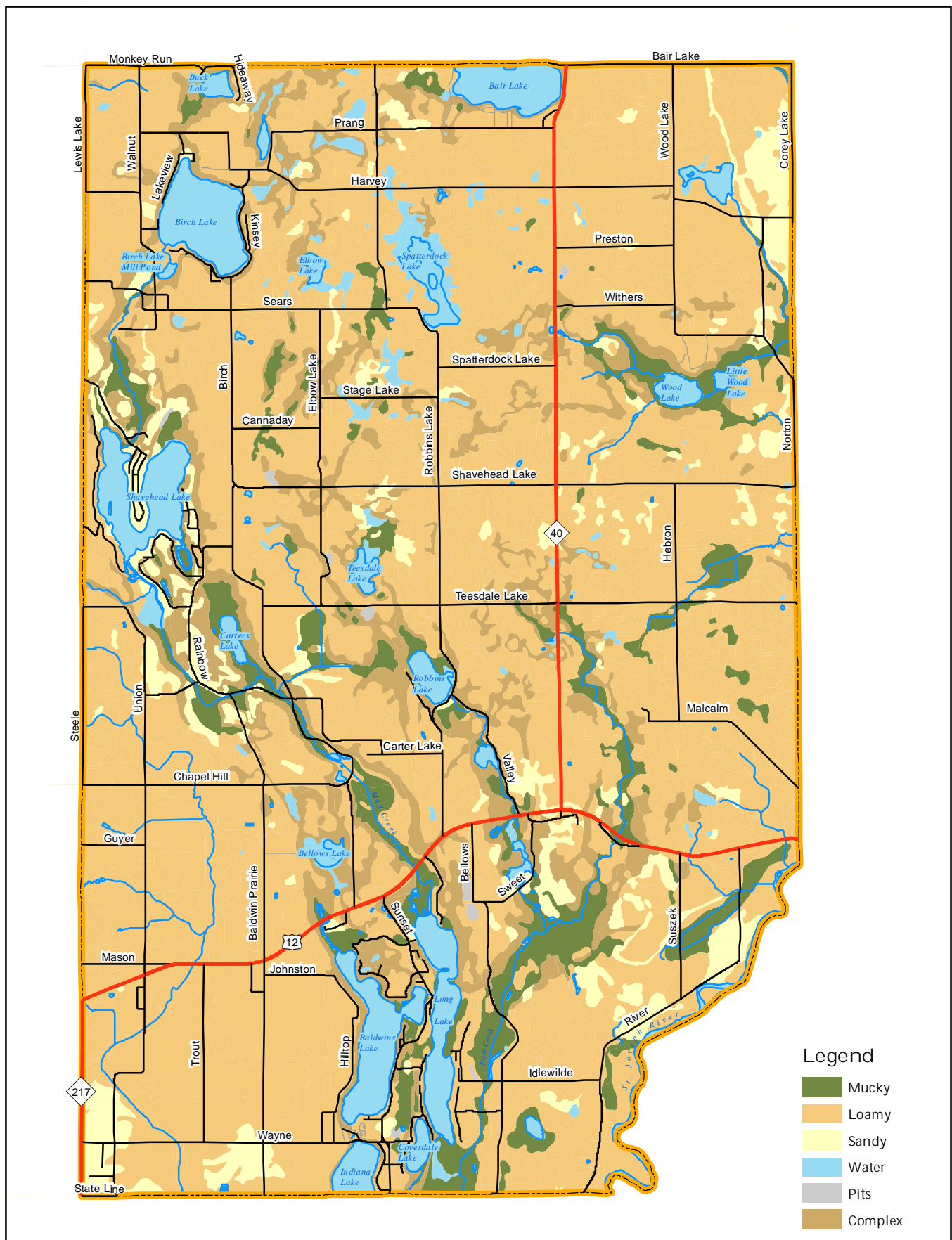
Loamy. Loam is soil material that is medium-textured and is composed of a mixture of clay, silt and sand. Soil materials classified as loams contain 7-27% clay, 28-50% silt and less than 52% sand. Most of Porter Township's soils are considered to be loamy.

Muck. Muck is extremely dark in color and contains well-decomposed organic soil mixed with mineral soil material. Mucky soils contain at least 20% organic matter.

Complex. Complex soils are characterized by the presence of two or more kinds of soil occurring in such a pattern that they cannot be shown separately on a soil map.

Pits. Pits are open excavations from which the soil and underlying material has been removed, exposing material that supports little or no plant cover. Pits may have standing water at varying depths.

Map 5 illustrates the engineering limitations of the soil types found in the Township for dwellings with basements. Soils that are "not limited" have characteristics that are generally favorable to development. Soils that are "somewhat limited" have characteristics that are not favorable to development without special planning or design. Soils that are "very limited" have characteristics that are highly unfavorable to development, and development on these soils may result in increased construction maintenance and costs.



Porter Township Master Plan

Cass County, Michigan

Map 4. Soil Texture

Based on USDA Soil Survey

1 inch = 6,000 feet
0 3,000 6,000 12,000 Feet



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Groundwater

As the population in and around Porter Township changes and as agricultural activities and practices evolve, natural resources will inevitably be impacted. The groundwater supplies in the Township, even though abundant, can be affected as greater demand is placed on groundwater supplies.

There are many different ways groundwater can become polluted, but two primary contributors are application of fertilizer on crops and residential lawns and septic tank drainfield effluent. Proper fertilizer application management and septic tank maintenance may help to significantly reduce nitrate levels. Abandoned wells may also be a threat to ground water quality if they have not been properly closed or “capped.” Open wells may expose groundwater supplies to surface contaminates.

Since all drinking water in Porter Township is derived from groundwater sources protecting this key resource is of vital interest to the Township.

Planning Implications

While Porter Township’s population has not grown significantly in recent years, it is possible that the Township’s natural features, such as its lakes, streams and breathtaking scenery, will attract new residents. While the population projections in Chapter 2 do not suggest that an explosion of growth and development is inevitable, there is still a risk that without effective planning and growth management, the development of the Township could eventually begin to degrade the natural features that so many residents enjoy.

It is important to remember that in many cases the effects of land uses in a community are not localized. Many of the Township’s abundant lakes and 900 acres of wetland areas are connected, so land use practices in one area can have an impact on another area several miles away. Protecting water quality - both of the Township’s numerous lakes as well as the groundwater - should be a key priority of the Township in the future. It is important not only to the Township, but to the entire southwest Michigan region.

Chapter 4. Land Use and Housing

This chapter looks at land use and housing trends in Porter Township. Both of these topics have significant relevance to planning and can have significant impacts on the character of a community and the quality of life of the Township's residents.

It is important to compare the number of housing units, vacancies and the quality of existing housing stock to the population projected in Chapter 2 so that surpluses or deficiencies in housing can be estimated. Examining land use patterns and trends is also a critical component to assessing the future viability of natural features, farmland and utilities.

Land Use/Land Cover

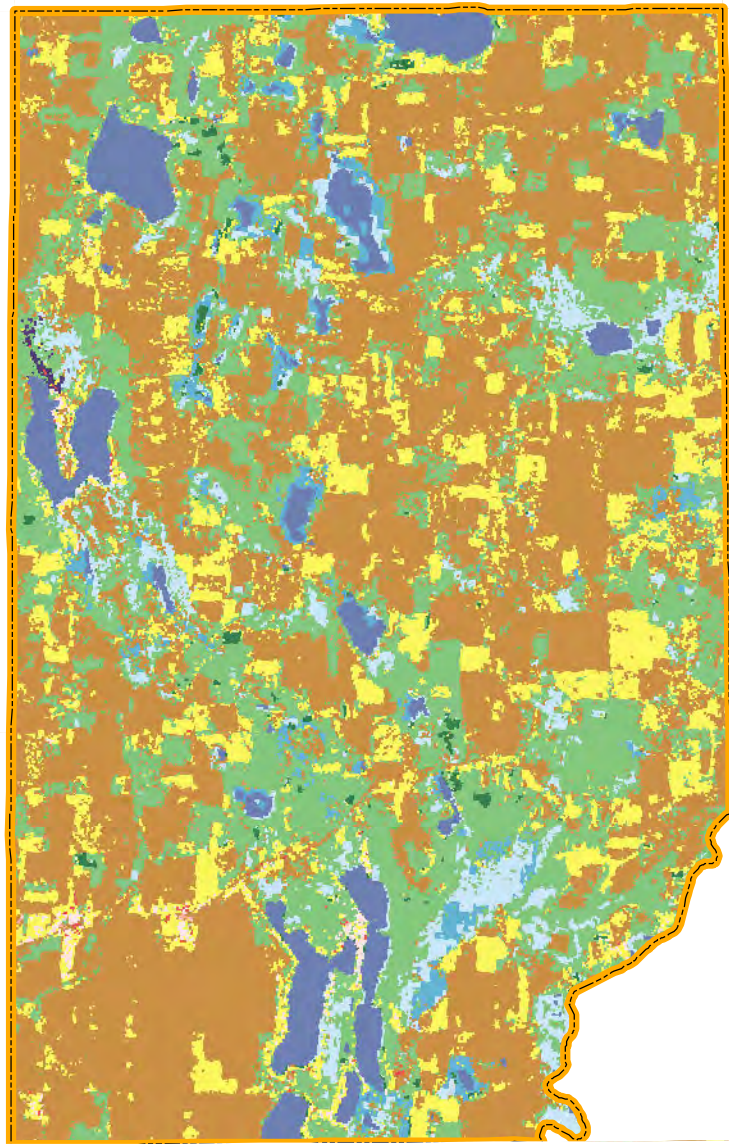
Land cover describes the vegetation or land use that occupies the land in a given community. The land cover data analyzed for this plan is part of the larger National Land Cover Dataset (NLCD) as prepared by the United States Geological Survey (USGS) in 1992, and updated in 2001 and 2006.

Map 6 illustrates land cover in Porter Township in both 1992 and 2006.

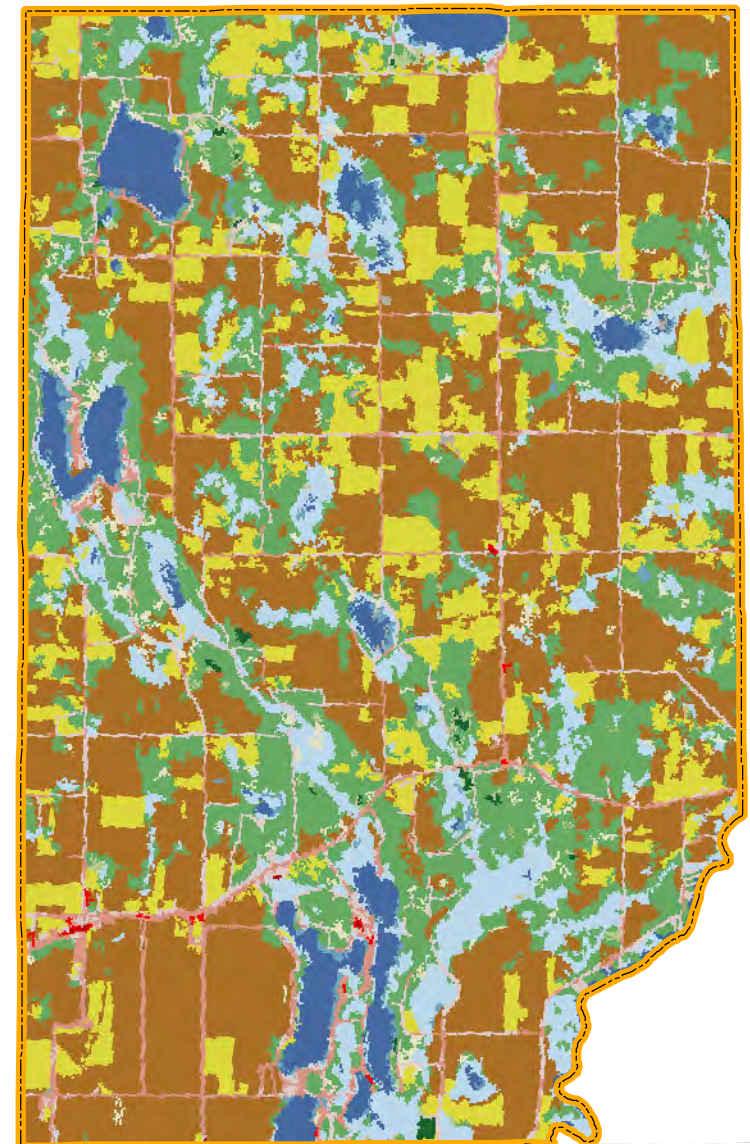
By comparing the 1992 and 2006 data, the overall change in land cover can be determined, which can provide insight into the patterns of development experienced in a particular community. In Porter Township, however, except for some waterfront development and large-lot development along county roads, very little has changed in the last 20 years, which is logical considering that the population has not changed considerably in that time. It should be noted that many of the obvious differences between the 1992 and 2006 map (for example, roads are clearly visible on the 2006 map) are due to improved remote sensing technologies, and not necessarily a change in land cover.



Porter Township is characterized by rolling hills and abundant scenic open spaces.



1992



2006

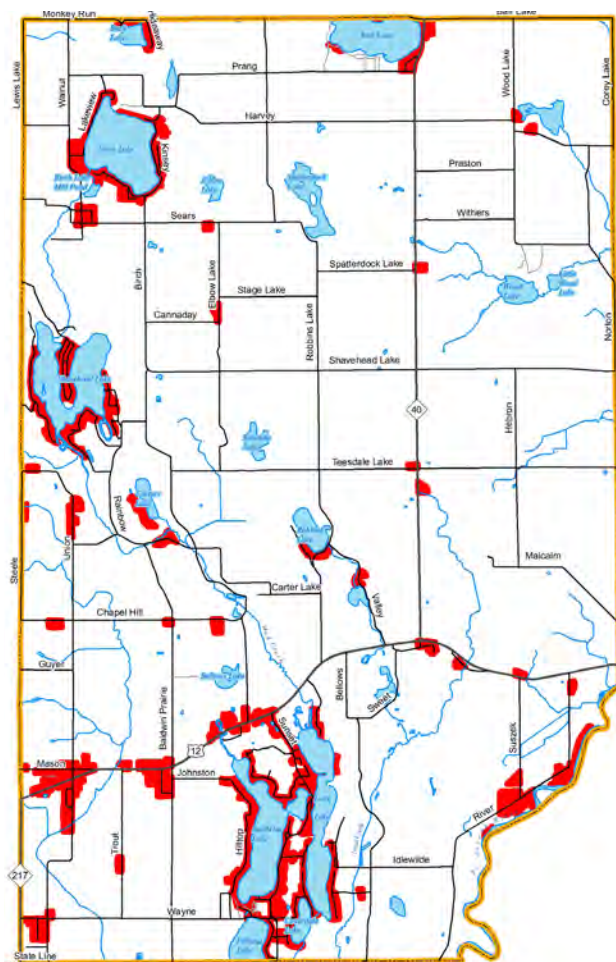
Porter Township Master Plan

Cass County, Michigan

Map 6. Land Cover, 1992-2006

Legend

- | | | | |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------|
| Open Water | Bare Rock/Sand/Clay | Mixed Forest | Row Crops |
| Perennial Ice/Snow | Quarries/Strip Mines/Gravel | Shrubland | Small Crops |
| Low Intensity Residential | Transitional | Orchards/Vineyards/Other | Fallow |
| High Intensity Residential | Deciduous Forest | Grasslands/Herbaceous | Urban/Recreational Grasses |
| Commercial/Industrial/Transportation | Evergreen Forest | Pasture/Hay | Woody Wetlands |
| | | | Emergent Herbaceous Wetlands |



Housing Characteristics

According to the 2010 Census, there were 2,215 total housing units in Porter Township, and 1,602 of those are occupied, resulting in a vacancy rate of about 27%. However, this is somewhat misleading due to the fact that about 76% of the vacant housing units were dwellings for “seasonal, recreational or occasional use.” This means that, of the total 2,215 total housing units in the Township, about 21% were seasonal homes. Given the number of lakes and the rural nature of the Township, a high number of seasonal homes is expected.

A greater proportion of Township residents own their homes when compared to Cass County. Of the

occupied (year-round) housing units in the Township, the vast majority (85%) are owner-occupied while only about 15% are renter-occupied, compared to 80% and 20%, respectively, for the County.

The majority of residential development in Porter Township is located on or near the Township's many inland lakes. Map 7 illustrates, in general terms, the developed areas of Porter Township.

One of the central tenets of the 2002 Master Plan was to maintain the rural character of the Township, and in a survey that was sent to Township residents in support of the Plan, residents indicated that maintaining the rural character of the Township and preserving farmland were generally among their top priorities.

In many communities, residential growth primarily takes the form of conventional subdivisions. Based on the 2002 survey results, however, it is

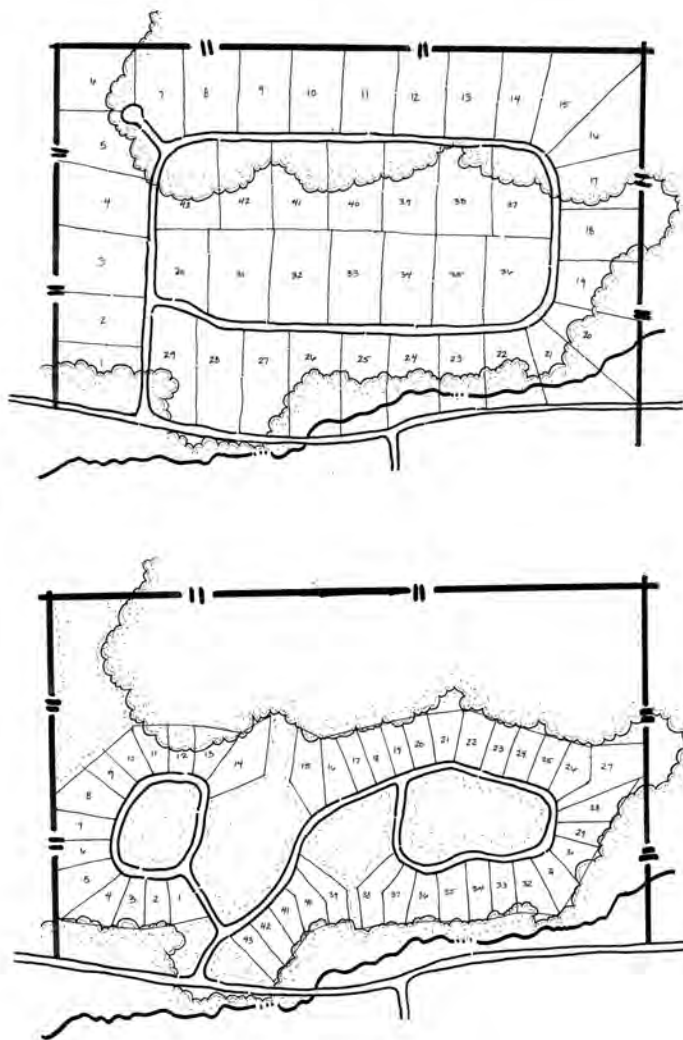


Figure 4.1. In a conservation or “cluster” design, homes are placed on smaller lots and the remaining land is preserved as open space. Many feel that this type of development preserves natural features and promotes a more rural aesthetic.

safe to say that residents are concerned about significant increase in subdivisions and similar developments, as many believe that these types of development can degrade the natural features and rural scenery that residents value.

One way in which the Township could accommodate residential development and protect the rural character of the Township is by encouraging conservation or clustered development forms. This form of development allows for a number of homes to be clustered on smaller lots in a subdivision, with the remaining space protected as permanent open space. Figure 4.1 illustrates the differences between a conventional and a conservation or cluster development.

Housing Types

In Porter Township, the overwhelming majority of homes are single-family dwellings. According to the American Community Survey, administered by the US Census Bureau, there are no multi-family homes in the Township.

As the Township continues to age and as seniors begin to comprise a higher proportion of Township residents, it may be appropriate to encourage alternative housing types, including single-family homes on small lots, two-family homes or attached housing such as condominiums or apartments. These more intense forms of housing should be located in proximity to businesses and public utilities.

Planning Implications

Porter Township has not experienced much change in land cover over the last twenty years, largely due to the fact that the Township has not experienced a significant amount of population growth over that time. Most of the Township's residential development is located on or near the Township's many lakes, and many of those are seasonal homes. Single-family homes and farmsteads also dot the landscape throughout the community. It is likely that this pattern of development will continue, and given the population projections outlined in Chapter 2, it is possible that the Township will continue to experience only limited amounts of residential development.

However, as the Township begins to age and a larger proportion of residents become seniors, there may be an increased demand for more senior-friendly living arrangements, such as homes on smaller lots, more walkable communities or attached housing in close proximity to goods and services. Considering the rather homogeneous array of housing currently found in the Township, it may be appropriate for the Township to consider encouraging a more diverse range of housing options to meet this potential need.

Chapter 5. Community Facilities & Infrastructure

Community facilities play a fundamental role in augmenting civic engagement, sponsoring cultural events, and promoting community pride. For many, high quality recreational opportunities are quality of life indicators and such facilities can be found in and around Porter Township. In addition to recreational facilities, public schools provide local spaces for interaction, learning, and community building, and safety services provide a compulsory service to the community.

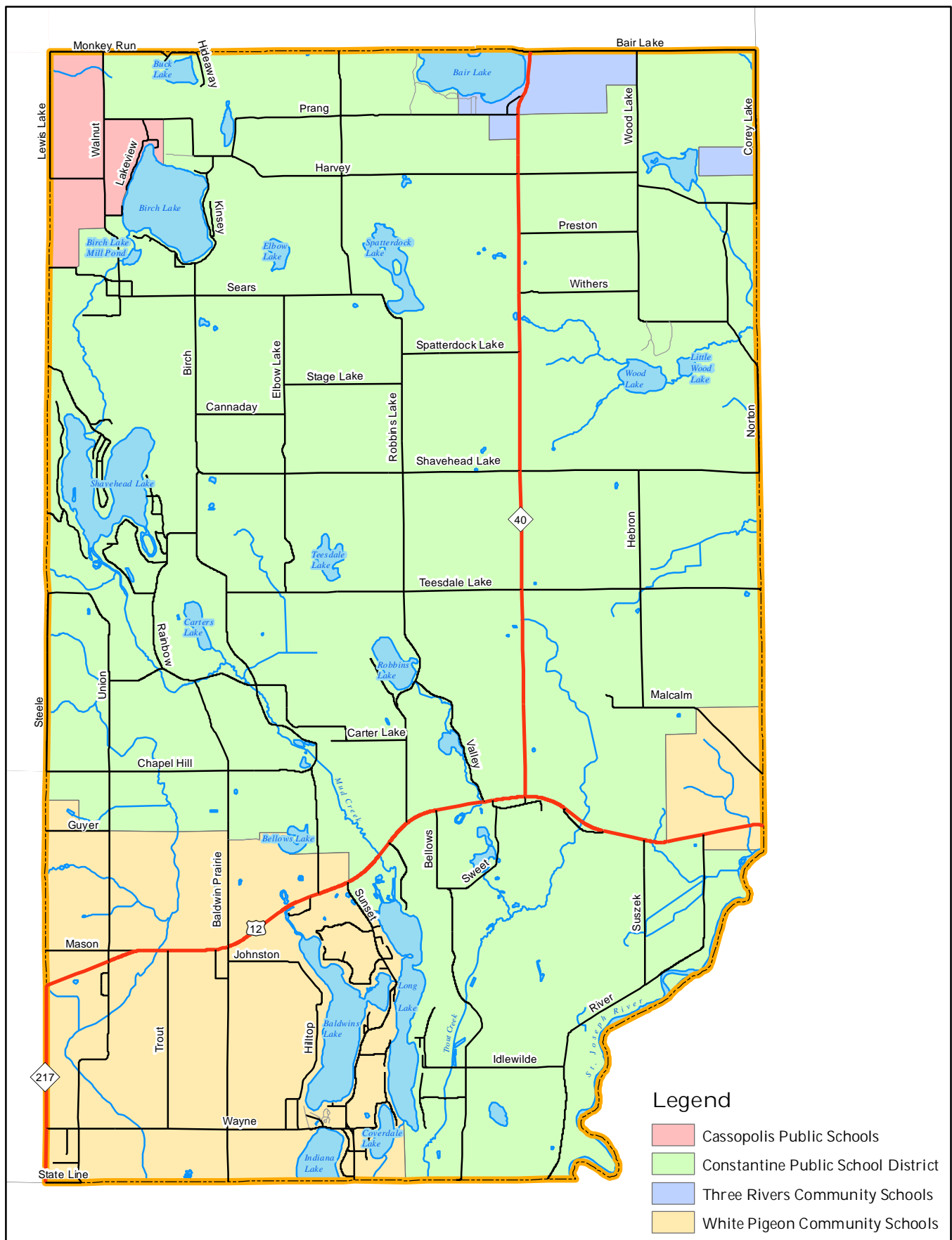
Other public facilities, such as a well-maintained transportation network, are essential to the health of any jurisdiction as it links activities and land uses within a community to those in the broader region. Additionally, public utilities are an important element of a community. Through the safe and efficient disposal of wastewater, communities can achieve an improved quality of life for local residents, and in Porter Township the public sewer systems aid in protecting the quality of both ground water and surface water. Utility systems also have the potential to aid in growth management by enabling greater densities in selected locations.

Educational Opportunities

Porter Township is served by four school districts: Constantine Public School District, White Pigeon Community Schools, Cassopolis Public Schools and Three Rivers Community Schools.

Constantine Public School District

This district contains two elementary schools (Eastside and Riverside), one middle school, one high school and one tech high school. All five schools are



Porter Township Master Plan

Cass County, Michigan

1 inch = 6,000 feet
0 3,000 6,000 12,000 Feet

Map 8. School Districts



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located within the Village of Constantine, which is about four miles from the eastern border of Porter Township. The Constantine Public School District enrolls about 1,474 K-12 students and the majority of Porter Township is located within this district. The School District also provides a number of recreation and community services to the public, including boy/girl scouts, little league baseball, a fitness center, and others.



Enrollment data from the school district indicates that while it has fluctuated over the last 5 years, enrollment in 2012 is nearly the same as it was in 2008.

Year	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Enrollment	1482	1513	1466	1459	1474

White Pigeon Community Schools

White Pigeon Community Schools are located in the Village of White Pigeon in St. Joseph County, about five miles to the east of southern Porter Township. This district has a total enrollment of 780 students and consists of three schools: Central Elementary, White Pigeon Middle School and White Pigeon High School. The school district offers a number of extra curricular activities and aids in providing recreational opportunities to the community. Residents who live in southwest Porter Township, as well as a small portion of eastern Porter Township, live in this school district.



Enrollment in White Pigeon Community schools has declined somewhat in recent years. This may be due to a slight decline in population in the Village of White Pigeon and White Pigeon Township, a reflection of the fact that many families are having fewer children, or that families are choosing to enroll their children elsewhere.

Year	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Enrollment	857	846	813	789	780

Other School Districts in Porter Township

A limited number of parcels in the northwest portion of Porter Township along the western portion of Birch Lake are within the Cassopolis School District.

Cassopolis schools are located in the Village of Cassopolis, which is about seven miles west of northwest Porter Township. This district contains three elementary schools (Red Brick, Sam Adams and Squires) as well as a middle and high school.

A small number of properties in Porter Township are within the Three Rivers Community Schools district. Located in the City of Three Rivers, about 6 miles to the northeast of Porter Township, this district contains four elementary schools (Andrews, Ruth Hoppin, Norton and Park) along with a middle school, a high school and the Barrows Adult Education facility. Most of the schools are within the City limits, although Norton and Park Elementary are located to the west and south, respectively, of the City.

Parks and Recreation

Parks. Porter Township contains five parks. Two are located on Shavehead Lake and are referred to as Harmon Parks. The east park is a swimming beach on Shavehead Lake and the west park is a public boat launch. Both of these areas are relatively small with limited parking.

Like Shavehead Lake, Birch Lake also contains one small public beach and the Henry Sears boat launch which is maintained by Cass County. Bair Lake also contains one public swimming beach.



Dr. T.K. Lawless County Park. A County-owned park located in parts of Newberg and Porter Township, Dr. T.K. Lawless Park is an 820-acre nature park that contains a variety of recreational uses, including trails for walking and biking, a disc-golf course, ball fields, picnic shelters, a group camp. The park also boasts amenities such as modern restrooms, electricity, potable water and telephone service.

About 160 acres of this park is located in northern Porter Township, at the northeast corner of Harvey Street and Walnut Road. The park is open year round and charges a small fee for entrance.

In addition to these facilities, the Constantine Public School district offers additional recreational opportunities for residents, including little league, boy/girl scouts, a fitness center, and others.

Private Recreational Facilities. In addition to the local and Cass County parks discussed above, Porter Township also contains a number of privately-owned recreational facilities that serve both residents and visitors.

Camp Tannadoonah is a summer camp for children ages 6 to 16, located on the north side of Birch Lake. Camp Friedenswald is a camp located on the north side of Shavehead Lake, and is for people of all ages and is supported by the Mennonite Church. Shady Point Campground is an RV Camp located on the north side of Bair Lake. Amenities at Shady Point Campground include a boat launch and boat rental, dock space rental, an activities building, a playground and a swimming area.

Transportation Network

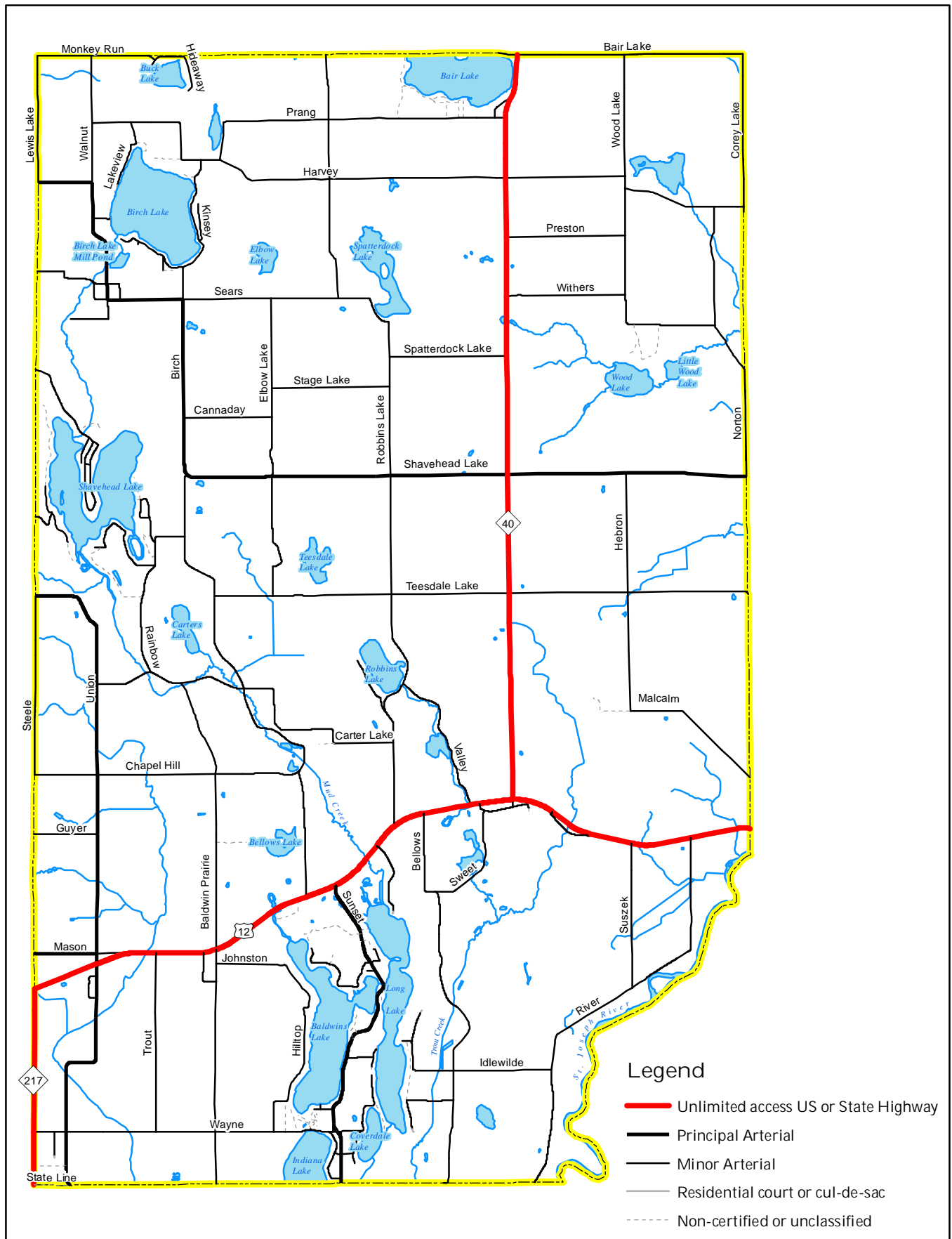
A safe and well-balanced transportation network is essential to the health of any jurisdiction, as it links activities and land uses within a community to those in the broader region. Transportation plays a critical role in determining the nature and intensity of land uses that occur throughout a community.

Porter Township's land uses do not generate significant congestion on the level that many more populated communities experience, and the Township's state and federal roads provide high-quality connections to neighboring communities and the region. Map 9 illustrates the Township's road network.

The southern portion of the Township is bisected by US-12, which terminates in Detroit on the east and in Chicago on the west, connecting the Township with communities near (Niles, Buchanan, Coldwater) and far (Ann Arbor, Michigan City, IN). Additionally, M-40, which runs from Allegan and through Paw Paw, terminates at US-12 in the southern portion of Porter Township.



M-217 in southwest Porter Township is ripe for development



Porter Township Master Plan

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Map 9. Road Classification



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Another significant highway in Porter Township is M-217, which connects the Township with I-80/90. This road is not only significant because of its regional connection, but it is also a four-lane highway that could be served with public sewer services. These amenities, in addition to the fact that I-80/90 is only minutes from the southern border of Porter Township, result in a potentially ripe opportunity for significant economic development.

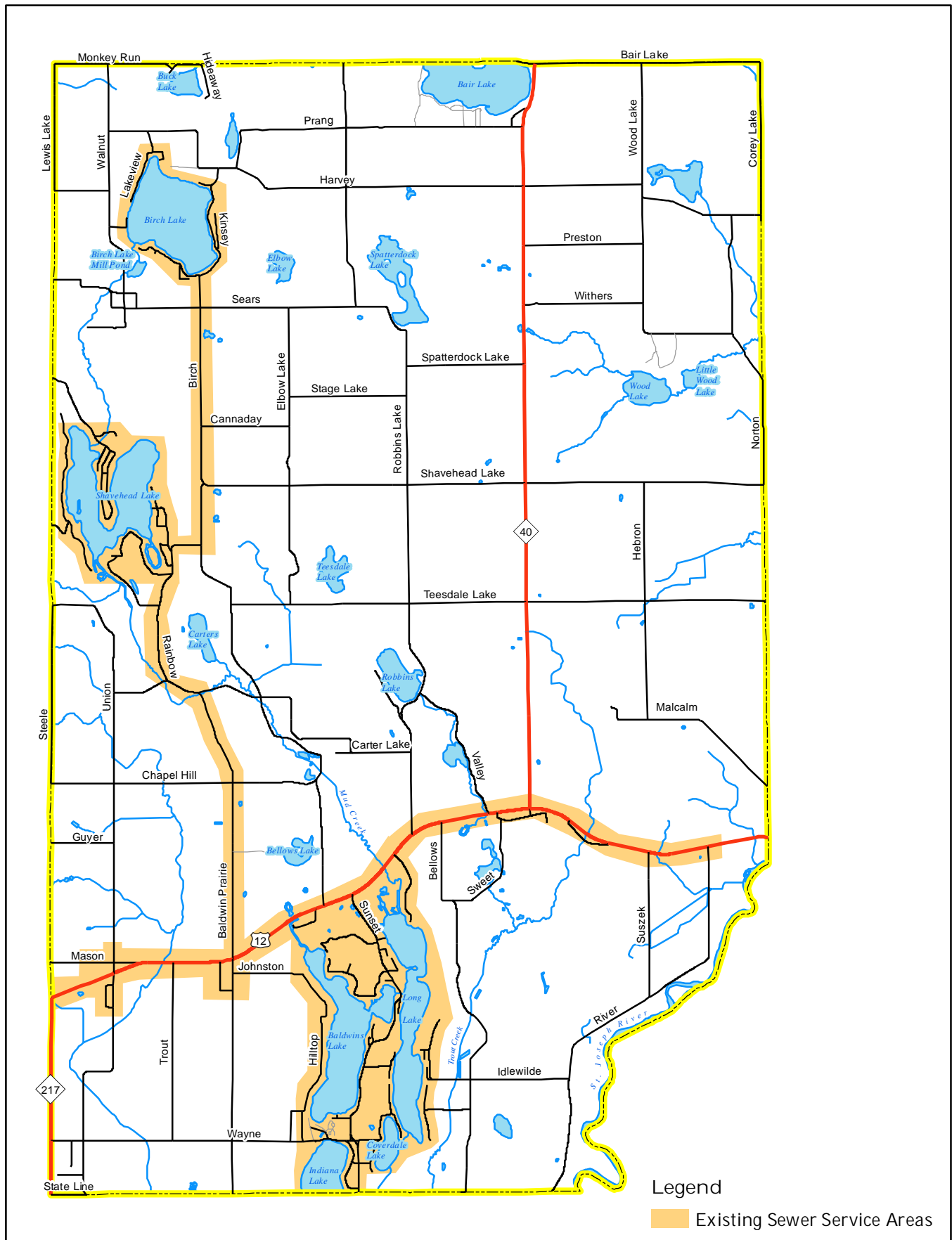
Public Utilities

Public utilities are an important aspect of land use planning. The location of water and sewer lines can aid in guiding growth and development because more intense land uses can be planned and developed in areas with those services. Porter Township does not offer public water services but many of the more developed portions of the Township are served by the Township's wastewater treatment system.

Porter Township owns and operates its own wastewater treatment system. The system serves properties on Birch Lake, Shavehead Lake, Baldwin Lake, Long Lake, Coverdale Lake and Indiana Lake, as well as US-12 from approximately the eastern border of the Township through the town of Union. M-217 is not currently served by water or sewer services, but the Township's sewer system could serve this area were development to occur. Map 10 illustrates, generally, areas of the Township served by public sewer facilities.

The Township's wastewater treatment plant was constructed in 2004-2005 and has a capacity of 400,000 gallons per day. The plant is operating at about 29% capacity during the fall, winter and spring (September through May), treating about 115,000 gallons per day. The plant's usage increases during the summer as the seasonal homes near the lakes are occupied. During this time, the plant treats about 165,000 gallons per day.

Given the recent construction of the wastewater treatment system and availability of additional capacity, the Township should consider guiding new development to areas that are (or could be) served by public sewers.



Porter Township Master Plan

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Map 10. Sewer Service Areas



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Planning Implications

High-performing school districts and recreational opportunities are viewed by many as quality of life indicators and can attract both year-round and seasonal residents, and such indicators are found within Porter Township. While the Township does not have the population base to support more intense public recreational amenities, many of these needs are met by the school facilities near the community along with the numerous private camps found in the Township. Additionally, Dr. T.K. Lawless Park found in northern Porter Township contains a number of improvements and is open to residents all year for a small fee.

The Township currently contains the infrastructure necessary to support a growing population and increasing employment base. The Township is situated near as is well-connected to a major interstate highway (I-80/90) and that could be served with public utilities and seems ripe for development. The Township may consider working to promote this area to attract new businesses and employment for residents.

The Township's public sewer system is extensive and serves many of the Township's lakefront properties, preserving water quality and allowing for increased residential densities in certain areas. While much of the growth potential that is enabled by the extensive sewer system has yet to be realized, the Township should consider planning future growth and development near these utilities, given the potential for the plant to handle additional wastewater. This would work to not only protect the quality of groundwater in the Township, but may also help to control future growth patterns that, if uncontrolled, may eventually undermine the natural features and scenic views that attract residents in the first place.

Chapter 6. Goals and Objectives

Introduction

Based on input received during previous planning activities and from local officials, a series of nine broad goal statements has been developed. Each goal is supported by more specific objectives, and the policies of this plan are based on these statements. The goals are intended to describe a desirable end state or the condition of the Township twenty to thirty years into the future. They are intentionally general but attainable through concerted effort. The objective statements tend to be more specific and may be regarded as milestones in the journey to achieve the larger goal.

An effective goal serves as a useful guide for policy decisions by the Planning Commission, Township staff and the Township Board. For a goal to be useful, it should meet the following criteria:

- **Define a desired end.** A goal statement should describe a desired end state, outcome or result. The statement may be worded in either the present or future tense, but if the future tense is used, it should be stated as a prediction, rather than a hope.
- **State in positive terms.** For a goal to be effective, it should state a positive outcome, as opposed to avoidance of an undesirable result. It is tempting to state goals as the reversal of an undesirable trend, such as “Porter Township will limit significant additional development in agricultural areas.” This statement, however, does not address the underlying issue: Protection of the Township’s productive farmlands for the benefit of future generations.
- **Bold, but realistic.** For a statement to be meaningful, it needs to require effort to achieve. If goals were achieved without effort, they would simply be re-statements of current trends. On the other hand, a goal also needs to be realistic. Goals that are impossible to achieve will languish, resulting in community frustration and acrimony.

- **Reflect a consensus.** Most importantly for goal setting, the goal must reflect a community consensus on a particular issue. Since implementation of these goals will require broad community support, the goals need to reflect community ideas and values. A statement that does not reflect the ideas and values of a broad section of the community is doomed to failure.

AGRICULTURE AND FARMLAND PRESERVATION

Goal 1

The Township will prioritize the preservation of farmland for agricultural use and in 2040, 80,000 acres of land will remain in active agricultural use. A thorough understanding of agriculture's role in the community will guide future policy decisions related to land use.

Objectives

- Conduct a detailed analysis of local farmland to identify agricultural properties in active use.
- Educate agricultural land owners regarding the farmland preservation opportunities currently available through the State Department of Agriculture, and actively assist landowners who decide to participate in these programs.
- Encourage landowners to enroll in the Michigan Department of Agriculture's Farmland and Open Space Easement Program.
- Sponsor public outreach programs that would inform the public of the benefits of local farming and the methods available to preserve farmland.
- Explore the possibility of enacting a local transfer of development rights (TDR) program that would preserve farmland while encouraging higher development densities in specific, pre-determined areas.
- Review and adjust the zoning ordinance to enhance flexibility and adaptation to both traditional and modern agricultural activities.

- g) Maintain the viability of preserving farmland by encouraging greater opportunities for agribusiness and agricultural markets. For example, the Township could create a regularly occurring community sponsored farmer's market.

NATURAL FEATURES AND SCENIC PRESERVATION

Goal 2

Porter Township's scenic landscape will be preserved through a commitment to preservation, conservation, and restoration of natural resource areas.

Objectives

- a) Create an inventory of key natural features in the Township. Such an inventory will become a critical guidance resource in the protection of the Township's important natural features and character.
- b) Review and strengthen the Township's Wetland Ordinance.
- c) Develop programs with the Cass County Conservation Club to protect native trees and shrubs.
- d) Designate "clusters" of land for future development, and discourage conventional "strip" development patterns.
- e) Educate Township residents about the importance of wetlands and their role in the natural environment, and foster a greater public understanding of wetland protection initiatives.
- i) Establish landscaping requirements for new development that encourages use of native plants, which are best suited for local soils, climate, and conditions.

WATER RESOURCES, ACCESS, AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Goal 3

Water in Porter Township will be clean and provide vital habitats for wildlife, while promoting responsible recreational use and enjoyment.

Objectives

- a) Revise the zoning map to create buffers and overlays to protect significant lakes, streams and rivers in the Township.
- d) Encourage community lake associations to become actively involved in relaying information from the Township, the conservation district, and the Michigan Department of Natural Resources concerning water usage rules, regulations, and laws to Township residents.
- c) Discourage the use of lawn and agricultural chemicals such as fertilizers, insecticides, and defoliants near lakes, rivers, and streams.
- d) Where appropriate, expand the Township's wastewater collection system near lakes or other significant natural features to protect surface water and groundwater.
- e) Encourage the planting of trees and shrubs near lakeshores and riverbanks.
- f) Foster an understanding of the importance of storm water management in maintaining clean and sustainable water resources, and consider storm water management in all land use decisions.
- g) Encourage low-impact stormwater management techniques like rain gardens and sunken landscape islands rather than large, unattractive detention areas.

COMMERCIAL AND INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT

Goal 4

Businesses in Porter Township will be responsible, economically viable, and provide meaningful services and employment opportunities while being sensitive to the community's character and natural landscape.

Objectives

- a) Encourage future industrial development along M-217. This four-lane thoroughfare is important in that it connects the Township with I-80/90 and could be served by the Township's sewer services.
- b) Encourage commercial development to be centered in and around Union.
- c) Work with Cass County, Mason Township and regional economic development agencies to attract employment opportunities to M-217.
- d) Recruit and grow locally owned specialty niche shops and services that complement the Porter Township economy.

UTILITIES AND WASTEWATER DISPOSAL

Goal 5

Future industrial, commercial, and intense residential development will be located near, and be served by, existing utility infrastructure. Expansions of these systems will be carefully coordinated with the future land use plan of the Township.

Objectives

- a) To attract businesses along M-217, develop and implement a plan to extend utilities along M-217 in a rational and sequential fashion, when appropriate.

- b) Coordinate land use and zoning policies with planned extensions of utility systems.
- c) Develop and adopt utility policies to ensure that expansion of the systems will be driven by land use objectives and not by revenue considerations.

PEOPLE, HOUSING, AND COMMUNITY

Goal 6

Porter Township will provide a variety of housing for the entire spectrum of society with particular attention to its aging population.

Objectives

- a) Encourage new residential development to be walkable and to provide open spaces for parks and common areas.
- b) Revise zoning map to reflect existing growth trends and patterns as it relates to housing and residential development.
- c) Encourage senior-friendly housing (e.g. one-story structures with easy access) in proximity to services to minimize the amount of travel required for seniors.

TOURISM AND MARKETING

Goal 7

Porter Township will play a role in attracting visitors to Michigan while serving as a “gateway” community that has the ability to provide services, amenities, and information for travelers along and between the State line.

Objectives

- a) Construct unified, attractive features at major entrance points to the Township. Key entrance points may include:

- M-217. This road leads directly to U.S. 12 and Union
 - Sunset Boulevard/County Road 23. This road leads directly to attractive lakeshore properties and small businesses long Baldwin Lake and Long Lake.
 - U.S. 12. Connecting the town of Mottville with Porter Township, this road crosses the St. Joseph River and would be an ideal location for a gateway feature.
 - M-40. This scenic route along Bair Lake leads to the town of Jones and also is the access point for two campgrounds.
- b) Establish points of interests for visitors, such as Valley Road, which has been published in Reader's Digest as one of the top most scenic roads in the United States.
 - c) In cooperation with neighboring communities, undertake promotional efforts to attract visitors to area events and recreational features.
 - d) Promote agri-tourism by promoting the Lake Michigan Shore Wine Trail, which is roughly 30 miles to the west of Porter Township.
 - e) Work with the three youth camps located in the Township to market in metropolitan areas such as South Bend, Indiana and Kalamazoo.

RECREATION

Goal 8

Porter Township will maintain access to safe and well-maintained public and private parks and recreational facilities, and will encourage expanded recreation opportunities throughout the Township.



Bikers ride on rural trails in T.K. Lawless Park

Objectives

- a) Develop undeveloped public land into public parks.
- b) Participate in the Michigan Heritage Water Trails program, which already has an established water trail along the St. Joseph River. The program can showcase the Township's natural features, encourage responsible use of waterways, show how Michigan's history was influenced by water, and encourage agri-business and economic development among communities that share waterways

TRANSPORTATION AND ROADS

Goal 9

Porter Township's transportation network will contain well-maintained, safe and accessible roadways along with non-motorized trails and bike paths where appropriate.

Objectives

- a) Develop an access management plan for M-217 to foster a corridor that is safe, attractive and facilitates orderly traffic flow.
- b) Develop a recreational non-motorized trails system. This system would include walking trails as well as bike trails. The goal of the system would be two fold: to connect Porter Township with existing regional non-motorized trails and to provide greater connectivity within the Township.

Chapter 7. Future Land Use

Introduction

The Porter Township Master Plan establishes general patterns of land use to guide growth and development for the next twenty to thirty years. This Plan constitutes a practical and integrated approach to accommodate the impacts of growth suggested by the implications of existing growth patterns. The chief intent is to foster efficient patterns of development that preserve the community's significant natural features and unique character while accommodating additional seasonal and year-round residents.

The residents of Porter Township have indicated that they wish to preserve water quality within the Township and protect the Township's rural character. They also recognize the Township's agricultural heritage and the seasonal nature of many of the Township's residential areas. To honor these values, this land use framework seeks to preserve open spaces and natural features, provide for economic opportunity and services in appropriate areas and preserve the rural aesthetic and recreational areas.



Porter Township is home to some of the region's most breathtaking scenery

The overall purpose of the future land use designations is to guide new development in logical and viable patterns while offering fair, and in some cases, value-enhancing opportunities for development, where reasonable and appropriate. Many areas of the Township are served with public sewer utilities, and most new development should be directed to these areas.

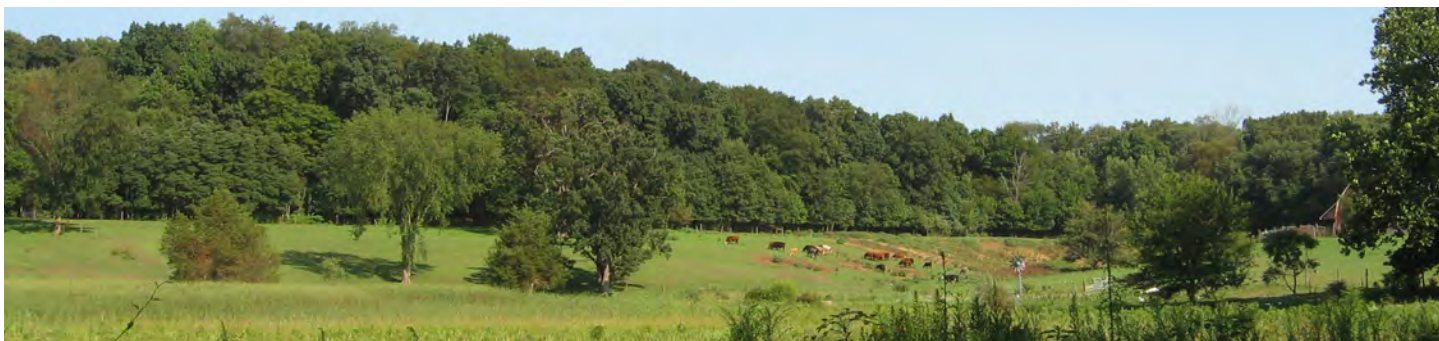
This chapter describes the future land use designations as illustrated on the Future Land Use Map (Map 11). Each Future Land Use designation is intended to foster a character distinctive of that district and unique to Porter Township. The future land use designations on the map are meant to be seen as general with indistinct edges. Along the margins, where two or more designations adjoin, either land use class may be appropriate.

Future Land Use Designations

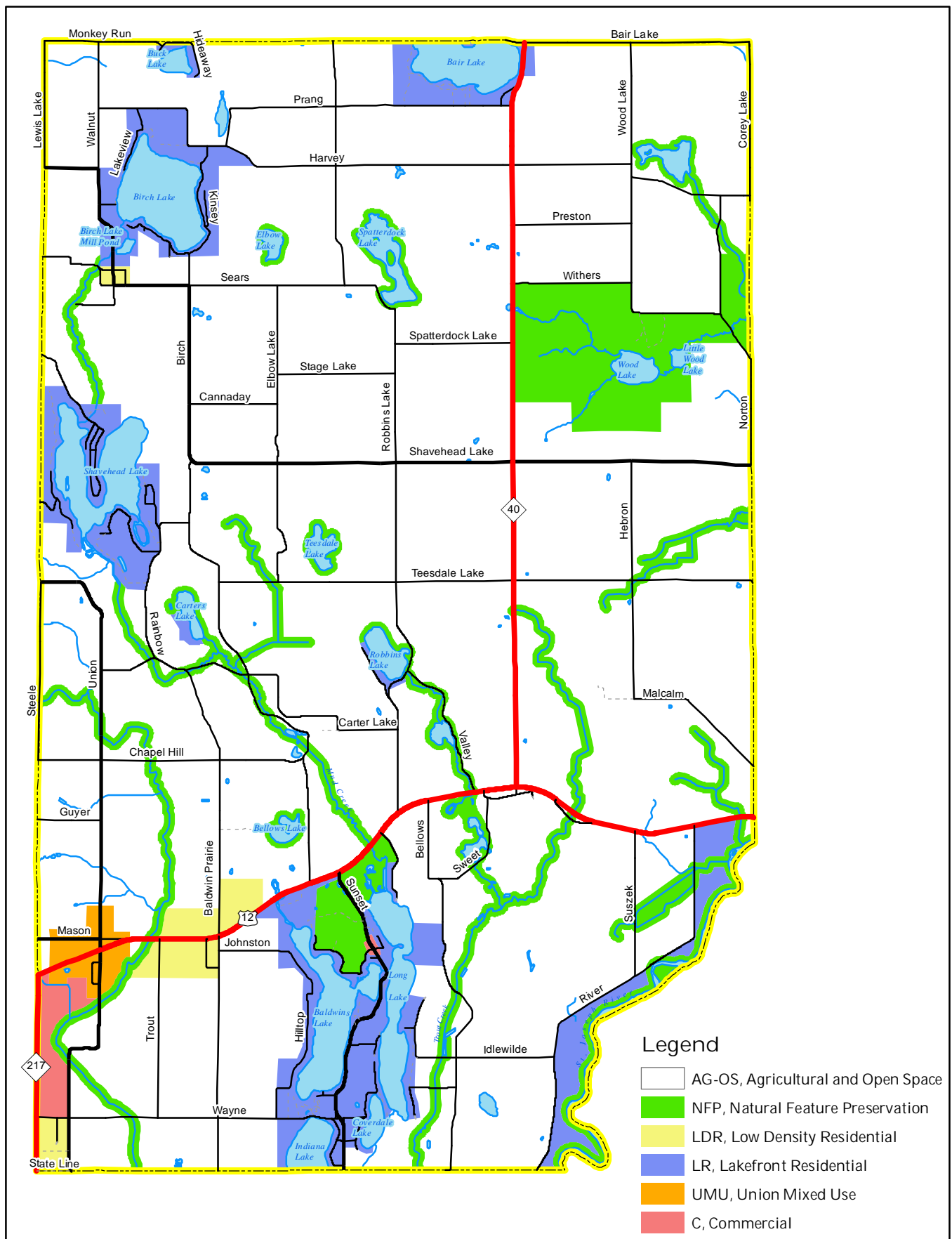
Agricultural and Open Space

The Agricultural and Open Space designation is intended to accommodate farming and agricultural support services, and it recognizes the desire by homeowners for a rural environment and the strong agricultural heritage of Porter Township. This designation is characterized by large contiguous tracts of land which creates the opportunity for greater economies of scale in agricultural production, as well as for the suppliers of agricultural goods and services.

This land use designation is also intended to encourage the preservation of wetlands, woodlands, and open spaces which are useful because they aid in water retention and ground water recharge, provide valuable habitat for wildlife, and have important aesthetic and scenic values. Agricultural activities are encouraged as the primary land use, and new development in this designation should be directed to areas not in active agricultural use, where feasible.



Porter Township contains thousands of acres devoted to agricultural activities, and this Plan seeks to maintain and strengthen the role of agriculture in the community



Porter Township Master Plan

Cass County, Michigan

1 inch = 6,000 feet

0 3,000 6,000 12,000 Feet



Williams & Works

Map 11. Future Land Use

Data source: The Michigan Center for Geographic Information (2012)

Porter Township should consider proactive approaches to maintaining and preserving agricultural land uses. These efforts may include educating agricultural landowners about opportunities to preserve their land through state programs. While Cass County currently does not have a farmland preservation program, the Township should be actively involved in regional planning efforts in order to maintain these plan goals.

Natural Feature Preservation

Porter Township is blessed with significant areas of river valleys and corridors, inland lakes, wetlands and groundwater recharge areas, wildlife habitat, recreation areas and forestlands. These lands contribute an important rural aspect to the Township's character and an over-arching focus of this Plan is to preserve such features so that future generations may continue to enjoy the benefits of a well-preserved natural environment.



An overarching focus of this plan is to preserve Porter Township's abundant natural features so that future generations may continue to enjoy a well-preserved natural environment

The majority of the lands within the Natural Feature Preservation designation are around the Mud Creek and Trout Creek corridors, along with lands around Wood Lake in the eastern portion of the Township. While some of the NFP area is in public or quasi-public ownership, efforts should be directed to protect and provide for additional public stewardship. This will include a broad range of activities including cooperative efforts to expand Township and/or County parks and encouraging conservation easements within sensitive areas. Lands not in public ownership may experience very low-density development integrated with the key natural features, appropriately set back from stream corridors.

Uses in the Natural Feature Preservation designation areas may include single-family dwellings, resource conservation and resource-based production, and **natural resource based recreation**. As resource-based production activities proceed, some land modification is likely to occur such that portions of those areas may become appropriate for low intensity development. In addition, **environmentally friendly agricultural activities that do not permanently and negatively modify the natural landscape of the area are likely to continue**.

With regard to development intensity, either very large lots or very small, cluster patterns may be effective. In the former instance, large lots would include standards to restrict the clearing of vegetation and habitat and to regulate impervious surfaces so that the natural environment on each lot is protected. With regard to smaller lots, the standards for development on the lots would be related to protection of features, but large portions of the entire parcel would be permanently preserved in a natural state.

Low Density Residential

The Low Density Residential designation is intended to accomodate single family homes in traditional suburban neighborhood patterns. Over the years, limited single-family development has occurred in a few areas and this designation seeks to define and guide future development of similar sizes and scales to areas that are relatively close to goods and services and are or may be served by the Township's public sewer system.

Lots in this designation will typically range from 1/2 acre to 2 acres, although smaller lots are also contemplated in conservation/cluster development forms with an area set aside as permaently protected open space. Developments in this district should contain sidewalks where practical and single-family homes to accomodate varying ages and income levels. Two-family homes (duplexes) may also be appropriate in this designation.

Lakefront Residential

Porter Township is home to some of the region's most popular and scenic inland lakes, and historically most residential development in the Township has occurred around them. They are highly valued for both their ecological significance and beautiful scenery. Thus, lakefront residential areas warrant special consideration in this Plan.

The Township has committed to preserving the water quality in these lakes through planning and the placement of a public sewer system that serves Birch Lake, Shavehead Lake, Baldwins Lake, Long Lake, Coverdale Lake and Indiana Lake. These lakes and others are surrounded by seasonal and year-round residential development. In these areas, regulations should recognize existing development patterns while applying standards that support the long-term viability of the lake. Significant additional development is not contemplated in these areas, but redevelopment of older homes may occur as seasonal dwellings are converted into dwellings for year-round use.



The Township's numerous lakes are home to most of the community's residential development and are highly valued for both their ecological significance and beautiful scenery

For lakes that have not been developed, wetlands and other natural features have generally eliminated the prospect of development, and pre-settlement characteristics of the water body and surrounding land should be preserved. In these areas, intense development is not encouraged.

In addition to residential uses, limited commercial land uses designed to serve the lakefront residential and seasonal population may also be appropriate in this designation. Convenience stores, bait/tackle shops and similar uses are likely to be placed in these areas.

Union Mixed Use

Located at the intersection of US-12 and M-217, Union is an unincorporated settlement that serves as the commercial center of Porter Township. This plan seeks to strengthen Union's place as the heart of the Township by creating a mixed-use village center. This center is envisioned as a small-scale node of retail, service or office uses and medium density residential uses. While intense growth is not anticipated in Union, new development and redevelopment should be designed and sited in a manner that enhances walkability and creates a sense of place.

Commercial or office buildings within this designation should be built to the front property line where possible. These buildings should face the street and facades should be transparent, and parking areas should be located behind the buildings where feasible. Residential uses are also encouraged in Union either as single-family homes, duplexes or small multiple-family developments.

All development in Union should be encouraged to preserve trees and other key natural features, and the Township should also consider requiring or encouraging sidewalks where feasible. Small recreational amenities, such as a small park, may also be incorporated into development in Union.



The Union Mixed Use designation envisions an inviting, pedestrian-scaled node of commercial and residential uses in Union.

Commercial

Commercial development provides investment in the community, access to goods and services for residents and employment opportunities. With the completion of M-217 that connects Union to I-80/90 to the south, Porter Township has been presented with an area ripe for development. Thus, this Master Plan envisions an area of commercial uses along M-217. Development in this designation should include corporate headquarters, multi-tenant professional office buildings, hotels and limited retail commercial uses designed primarily to support workers and travelers. This designation may also include multiple-family residential uses such as apartments or condominiums.



Regional commercial and office uses are contemplated in the Commercial district along M-217.

Sites should be carefully designed to minimize off-site impacts and the Township should apply development standards that emphasize high-quality architecture, landscaping, and the preservation of trees and other natural features. Uses that are adjacent to residential neighborhoods should include transition areas and buffers to minimize potential adverse effects.

A small commercial node is currently found on Sunset Road south of US-12 and this plan anticipates and encourages the continuation of this small node of commercial services. While some expansion may occur in the future, this plan recommends that this area remain a small scale node of limited commercial uses and neither anticipates nor encourages the development of a large commercial center in this area.

Zoning Plan

Section 33, (2), (d), of the Michigan Planning Enabling Act requires that Master Plans adopted after September 1, 2008 include a zoning plan to explain how the future land use designations on Map 11 relate to the zoning districts contained in the Township's Zoning Ordinance and discuss factors to be considered in reviewing requests to rezone lands in the Township.

In considering a request to rezone property in Porter Township, the Township must consider the future land use map and the future land use descriptive narrative of this Plan in making a decision. The succeeding table should be used to evaluate the degree to which the proposed rezoning is, or may be, consistent with this Plan together with an evaluation of specific request. The proposed rezoning decision should also consider whether the proposed site may be reasonably used as it is currently zoned, whether the proposed site is an appropriate location for any and all of the land uses that might be permitted within the requested zoning district, whether there may be other locations in the community that are better suited to accommodate such uses and any potential detrimental impact on the surrounding property that could result from the proposed rezoning.

Future Land Use Category	Primary Compatible Zoning District	Additional Potentially Compatible Zoning Districts	Evaluation Factors and Features to Determine Eligibility for Additional Potentially Compatible Zoning Districts
Agricultural	Agricultural	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Parks, Campgrounds & Recreational Areas - Scenic Preservation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - If lands are not in active agricultural use - If the soils and geography of the land lends itself to recreational uses - If the property contains scenic views
Lakefront Residential	Lake Residential	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Residential R1 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - If the property is not adjacent to a lake or river
Low Density Residential	Residential R1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lakefront Residential - Residential R2 - Trailer Park 	If public sewers are available
Union Mixed Use	None	None	This will likely require a new zoning district to be created in Union that allows mixed uses, shallower building setbacks and greater residential densities
Commercial	Commercial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - South Development Park - Industrial 	If the property is near or along the eastern portion of M-217 between US-12 and the State line
Natural Feature Preservation	Scenic Preservation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Parks, Campgrounds & Recreational Areas 	If the development of property would not adversely impact the unique natural features and/or characteristics of the area

In all cases, this zoning plan below should be applied as a guideline for the Township Planning Commission subject to the appropriate application of the discretionary authority permitted to the Township Planning Commission, Township Board, case law and good planning practice. Nothing in this zoning plan will preclude the Township Planning Commission and Township Board from considering amendments to this Plan to better serve the public interests of the community.

Complete Streets

This Plan supports complete streets principles. Complete streets are thoroughfares that are planned, designed and constructed to allow access to all legal users safely and efficiently, without any one user taking priority over another. Users in Porter Township primarily include pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists, users of assistive devices and truck-drivers. Complete streets can result in increased safety for non-motorized users, improved public health, a cleaner environment, mobility equity and enhanced quality of life through increased modal choices and more inviting streets.

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

Porter Township is a rural community and many complete streets concepts are not feasible here. However, complete streets concepts may be appropriate over the long term in the Union Mixed Use future land use designation (see Map 11), as this plan envisions Union becoming a small-scale village center containing residential, commercial and recreational uses arranged in a walkable, pedestrian-scaled atmosphere.

The community should work jointly with surrounding communities to enhance transportation corridors for people of all abilities if the opportunity arises. This

may include sidewalks in certain locations; pedestrian signals and signage; bike lanes; local and regional multi-use trails; and other features.

Some features may be accomplished through simple road restriping and the addition of signage, while other projects may be more involved and may only be practicable when coordinated with relatively major roadway improvements. The Township should cooperatively work with neighboring communities, the Cass County Road Commission, MDOT, and other pertinent agencies in implementation of this policy.

Chapter 8. Implementation

Introduction

For a Master Plan to truly impact growth and development in a community, it must be followed and carried out. The following strategies are established to implement the goals and objectives and land use recommendations of this Plan. It should be noted that many strategies will be long-term in nature and that many entities in addition to Porter Township will need to cooperate in order to fully implement the recommendations of this Plan. The descriptions of strategies in this Plan are intentionally general to allow the Township the flexibility to prepare specific work assignments and prioritize each strategy as a part of its overall municipal operations. Therefore, it will be important for the Township Board and staff to develop a detailed set of work assignments to set this plan in motion.

Primary responsibility for implementing the Plan rests with the Township Board, the Planning Commission, and Township staff. In order for the Future Land Use Plan to serve as an effective guide for continued preservation and growth in the Township, it must be implemented. This is done through a number of methods that may include ordinances, programs, and administrative procedures, which are described in this Chapter. Some of the implementation strategies require significant public and private investment. Each strategy is important; as it contributes to achieving the overall vision expressed by the Plan.

Zoning Ordinance Revisions

The Zoning Ordinance is the primary implementation mechanism for this Plan. This implementation strategy contemplates a comprehensive evaluation of the Ordinance in light of the community's goals, objectives, and Future Land Use Plan. This will include a revision of the Zoning Map, as appropriate, to support the future land use map, and a revision of some zoning standards to better conform to the future land use designations in this Plan. In addition, the

Ordinance should be evaluated for flexibility to address innovative development techniques and for its ability to control inefficient development patterns.

Specific examples of revisions may include (but should not be limited to):

- Evaluation of the zoning districts when compared to the Future Land Use map
- Developing design standards to govern new development in commercial and industrial districts
- Development of zoning standards to regulate development in Union
- Language to encourage farmland preservation
- Strengthening landscaping standards, where appropriate.

If the Township develops a new zoning district for Union, form-based standards should be strongly considered in this area. Form-based standards would allow a greater variety of land uses on those properties while more strongly governing building architecture and placement. Standards pertaining to the design and placement of buildings along this corridor would be an effective tool to create an attractive, walkable corridor with a strong sense of place, and to discourage typical suburban “strip” development. If form-based standards are not enacted, the Township should review standards to ensure that new development in Union is walkable and scaled to accommodate pedestrians as well as automobiles.

Responsibilities. The Planning staff and the Planning Commission may implement this strategy. This is likely to be an extensive task with multiple elements – each with unique challenges that may require each activity to be addressed independently – and it is likely that outside support will be needed. Any resulting amendments to the Ordinance should be reviewed by the Township’s legal counsel and ultimately adopted by the Township Board.

Promotion of Farmland Preservation

The Michigan Department of Agriculture’s Farmland and Open Space Preservation Program includes several instruments that the Township can help to promote. The program also authorizes the Township to participate in several

methods to encourage agricultural operations. Following are tools that should be endorsed and advertised by the Township, to the extent possible:

1. **Purchase of Development Rights.** This is a permanent, voluntary restriction on the land between the property owner and the State that preserves the land for farming in exchange for a cash payment. This State program is currently not funded, but may be in the future.



2. **Farmland Development Rights Agreements.** This is a temporary, voluntary restriction on the land between the property owner and the State; which protects the agricultural use of the land in return for tax benefits and special assessment exemptions. This tool is commonly known as P.A. 116.



3. **Local Open Space Easement.** These are also voluntary and temporary, but represent an agreement between the landowner and the Township; where certain tax benefits and exemptions from various assessments are made possible.

4. **Conservation Easement Donation.**

Conservation Easement Donations are permanent restrictions voluntarily entered into by the landowner between the same and the State; preserving the land for either farmland or open space.

5. **Designated Open Space Easement.** This is a temporary, voluntary restriction on the land between the property owner and the State; which maintains the land as open space in return for tax benefits and special assessment exemptions.

6. **Transfer of Development Rights.** Legal authority to establish a transfer of development rights program is unclear, as State enabling legislation has

Protection of farmland is a key component
of this Master Plan

not been enacted. The Township may work with legislators to craft such legislation to promote transfer of development rights as an effective and viable means to preserve open space and farmland. As the Township explores the possibility of creating a program, procedures and regulations that govern the transfer of rights should be aligned to meet local objectives.

Public Education and Outreach

The planning process is persistently changing with shifting social and economic concerns and unique land use challenges. Attitudes of residents toward growth, economic development, traffic, protection of natural resources, and other pertinent land use issues will likely differ from person to person depending on their personal circumstances. It is vitally important for Township officials to continue to seek educational opportunities for residents to inform them of the issues of highest priority.



Communication with residents is a key component of any successful planning activity

An element of this strategy includes, first and foremost, the continued education of Township officials. In addition, the Township should endeavor to educate the public on current planning trends and the benefits of implementing the goals and objectives in this Plan. Every public meeting, including those hosted by the Planning Commission and Township Board, should be instructive for the public.

Further, Township officials should encourage the establishment of committees, to which some of the responsibilities for achieving the goals of this plan may be delegated. These committees could focus on topics that are of great importance to the community, such as a Farmland Preservation Committee or an Economic Development Committee.

The Township should also look for ways to provide residents with news and information regarding their Township government. Possibilities include

enhancements to the Township's website, and developing a series of informational material that could be kept at the Township Hall. Additionally, the Township should keep lines of communication open between the Township and its lake associations, small business owners and other stakeholders in the community.

This may be accomplished by scheduling and holding joint meetings between the Planning Commission and Township Board; scheduling or attending meetings with lake associations; reaching out to business owners and key community stakeholders; and asking for and encouraging public involvement on key issues facing the Township.

Responsibilities. The Township Board, Township Planning Commission, and staff will need to be responsible for seeking and attending seminars and conferences on current planning topics, as well as establishing new community organizations that may develop and implement educational activities or publish literature that may also be posted on the Township's website.



The Township should strive to establish and maintain an open dialogue with the lake associations located in its boundaries

Coordinate with Neighboring Communities

Some of the goals in this plan will not be achievable without the cooperation of the Township's neighboring municipalities, County and State agencies. Porter Township should be engaged in discussions pertaining to development along the M-217 Corridor. This corridor could serve as the primary catalyst for local economic development over the coming years, and the extent to which efforts to attract new business and industry can be coordinated will be helpful to the Township. Additionally, coordinating some site and design standards for zoning districts along this corridor will help to create a unified aesthetic, establishing a greater sense of place within the community.

The Township should also work to form alliances with Cass County and other regional organizations, such as the Southwest Regional Planning Commission, to market the Township as an agricultural and recreational destination. The County can also be a valuable catalyst in developing a farmland preservation program, and can be an important resource in educating the public about important issues in the region that may affect Township residents.

Responsibilities. The Township Board, Township Planning Commission, and staff will need to be responsible for advocating seasonal or bi-annual meetings with governing bodies in neighboring communities; and maintaining open lines of communication.

Marketing and Promotion

Porter Township already experiences an increase of residents during the summer months, particularly on weekends. The Township should look to



Farmers' Markets serve as community gathering places during the summer and help support local growers

further capitalize on this influx of people by increasing promotional and marketing efforts in the community. This would help local businesses gain new patrons and provide goods and services to residents and visitors. The Township should consider the following options:

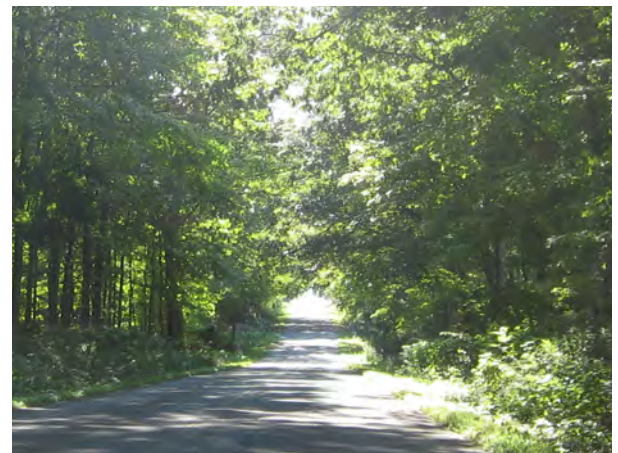
- **Farmer's Market:** The Township could work with the local businesses and neighboring communities to study the potential for locating a weekly farmer's market in or near Union to support local farmers and growers. Alternatively, it could be located on or near the Township's properties, near the intersection of Baldwin Prairie Rd and US-12, given its relatively central location.
- **Promote Local Businesses:** Informational materials and newsletters provided by the Township could be sponsored by a local business each month in an effort to educate residents about the economic benefits of shopping at locally-owned businesses. Studies have shown that when people shop from locally-owned businesses, only \$0.27 of every dollar leaves the community

compared to \$0.57 of every dollar that leaves the community when shopping at national chain stores. Businesses would apply for the opportunity to be featured on the website or in the informational materials.

- **Regional Marketing Effort:** While many of the Township's lakes are well-known destinations, there is a perception that the Township is still largely "undiscovered" by many residents of southwest Michigan. Therefore, the Township should work to raise its profile in regional marketing materials and brand itself as an destination for outdoor recreation such as hiking, biking, camping and others. This may be accompanied by erecting gateway features and wayfinding signage at key points in the Township to provide both a sense of place within the community and a valuable sense of direction for visitors.
- **Promote the Township's Natural and Scenic Resources.** Porter Township contains invaluable natural resources; not many communities contain one of the nation's most scenic drives, as outlined in *Readers Digest*. The Township should be proactive in promoting these vital community resources, which may provide a positive impact on the local economy.



A partnership with the State, County or other regional agencies could help spur economic development in Porter Township



The Township may be able to market its natural scenic beauty to regional visitors