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MEMORANDUM

To: Laketown Township Planning Commission
From: Gregory L. Ransford, MPA 
Date: May 8, 2018
Re: Comprehensive Review of Current Master Plan Documents, Recommendations

Pursuant to the Master Plan Framework, this memorandum serves as our comprehensive review of the current master plan documents. Those documents include the:

- 1991 Master Plan
- 1996 Master Plan amendment
- 2005 Master Plan amendment
- 2008 Blue Star Highway Subarea Plan

The purpose of this review is to ensure compliance with the Michigan Planning Enabling Act (MPEA), Act 33 of 2008, as amended, as well as gain an understanding of the current language, and identify any unnecessary or antiquated provisions. In addition, the review serves to create the basis of each land use classification chapter by capturing relevant language to combine with the outcomes of the public workshops and Planning Commission direction.

We have organized our comments below by section of the existing master plan documents. For simplicity, we have not included reference within this memorandum to any grammatical errors, punctuation errors, writing format needs, or other minor errors that require revision within the plan. We will perform those changes without your direction and immediate oversight.

Pursuant to our response to your Request for Proposals and as outlined in the Master Plan Framework, we will highlight the proposed changes we note herein, once they are completed, within each of the related land use classification chapters and provide them at the appropriate meeting for your review, direction, and approval. The ultimate design is to establish goals for each land use, recommendations to achieve those goals, and strategies to accomplish the recommendations. Consequently, it is important to keep this format in mind as we provide recommendations below.

It is important to note that a master plan is a policy document and the zoning ordinance is law. Considering this, a master plan should not contain provisions specific to types of land uses permitted, dimensional requirements, density, and the like. As you will review in our comments below, we note several occurrences in this regard.

1991 Master Plan

Current Plans and Policies

- (Pages 1-2)
 - This language is outdated and unnecessary. It provides an overview of the history of your master plan as well as the City of Holland, the Tri-Community Comprehensive Plan, and Fillmore Township. We recommend its removal.

Goals and Objectives

- (Pages 4-7)
 - We recommend relocating numerous goals and objectives to their respective land use chapters and eliminating this section.

Natural Features

- (Pages 8-15)
 - We recommend relocating some of these provisions to the various land use chapters or the Appendix, updating data and State references where necessary, and eliminating the remaining language, if not found otherwise useful following the workshops.
 - Specifically, language proposed for elimination includes, but is not necessarily limited to, the Flood Plain District and the uses identified (page 10), since this language is more appropriate as zoning ordinance provisions rather than within the master plan. We always recommend avoiding provisions that are specific to dimensions or identify permitted uses in a zoning district within the master plan.

Township Character

- (Pages 16-26)
 - We recommend updating this language (which was performed in the 1996 and 2005 master plan documents) with the most current data and relocating it to the Appendix. While the language is useful, its position within the front of the document creates a less user-friendly master plan.

Future Land Use, Existing Development Trends

- (Pages 27-31)
 - We recommend relocating portions of the land use classifications, such as Agriculture/Vacant, Single Family Residential, and Multiple Family Residential, to their respective land use chapters and eliminating the remaining language. A majority of the language seems irrelevant or outdated. Moreover, some of the classifications identify uses or density, which is more appropriately included in the zoning ordinance rather than within the master plan.
 - The Commercial, Office/Service, and Industrial land use classifications merely identify locations within the township where such uses exist, generally without any guiding language. These can also be eliminated.

Future Land Use

- (Pages 31-35)
 - The master plan appears to contain one (1) *ultimate* goal, which is, “Promote a balanced land use pattern with the predominant residential and agricultural character of the township supported by appropriate amounts of commercial and industrial development.”
 - We wanted to highlight this ultimate goal because of the frequency in which it appears within the document. In our opinion, this goal is very basic and too generalized to serve a useful purpose. As a result, we propose its elimination. While we propose its elimination, we believe there is sufficient existing language within the text to preserve its theme.
 - This section identifies Agricultural, Rural Estate, Low Density Residential, Medium Density Residential, Neighborhood Commercial, Community Commercial, Light Industrial, and Public/Semi-Public land use classifications.
 - We recommend relocating numerous goals/objectives of these land use classifications to their respective land use chapters and eliminating this section. We propose this relocation for three (3) reasons; 1 – to remain consistent with our approach to streamlining the master plan; 2 – numerous classifications seem outdated, utilize antiquated approaches to land preservation, and identify density or uses, which are more appropriately located in the zoning ordinance and; 3 – the Neighborhood

Commercial and Community Commercial classifications do not appear on the Future Land Use map.

- Public/Semi-Public
 - Our opinion regarding the Public/Semi-Public classification remains the same as we presented during our organizational meeting. We recommend removal of this classification. While we believe it is important to address public/semi-public uses in the master plan, especially recreational opportunities, the reason for our proposed removal is because if a public park or other public/semi-public use is ever abandoned, it would render the property dormant since the classification does not support any other type of land use. Given that your zoning ordinance allows for public uses in various zoning districts, this removal does not cause any conflicts between the master plan and the zoning ordinance.

Community Facilities and Services

- (Pages 36-41)
 - We recommend relocating the relevant recreation information regarding parks that exist within the township to the new Recreation and Facilities Chapter, but eliminating references to parks outside of your borders. In the instance the Planning Commission desires to keep the references to parks outside of the township, we can appropriately relocate them to the Appendix.
 - Community Facilities
 - The provisions within this section seem to serve no purpose and should be eliminated. They merely identify the township hall, the former township hall, and the I-196 rest area.

Utility Services

- (Pages 41-42)
 - We recommend relocating these provisions, as applicable, to the new Public Utilities Chapter.

Transportation

- (Pages 43-47)
 - We recommend relocating these provisions, as applicable, to the new Transportation Chapter.

Appendix A

A significant amount of Appendix A is specific to zoning ordinance language regarding access management, which again should not be located within the master plan. We recommend revising these provisions into recommendations and strategies within the appropriate chapters. This is very valuable information that should not be overlooked in an appendix.

Appendix B

A significant amount of Appendix B is specific to zoning ordinance language regarding site development and landscaping, which again should not be located within the master plan. We recommend revising these provisions into recommendations and strategies within the appropriate chapters. This is also very valuable information that should not be overlooked in an appendix.

Sign Guidelines

We are unsure of the purpose of this section and recommend that it is eliminated, particularly given that the language appears to be more appropriate as zoning ordinance language.

1996 Master Plan Amendment

Township Character

This language is an update to the previous demographic data. As noted above, we recommend updating this language with the most current data and relocating it to the Appendix. While the language is useful, its position within the front of the document creates a less user-friendly master plan.

Future Land Use

While updated from the 1991 plan, we maintain the same recommendation as noted above, to relocate numerous goals/objectives of these land use classifications to their respective land use chapters and eliminating this section.

Oddly however, the Neighborhood Commercial classification was removed from the text but now appears on the Future Land Use map.

2005 Master Plan Amendment

This language is the most recent update to the previous demographic data. As noted above, we recommend updating this language with the most current data and relocating it to the Appendix. While the language is useful, its position within the front of the document creates a less user-friendly master plan.

2008 Blue Star Highway Subarea Plan

We believe this language remains significant and useful within the master plan. However, based on recent Planning Commission comment, the related public workshop will be valuable in obtaining community sentiment to help determine if it remains relevant. Despite this, we provide the following observations and recommendations:

- Has the township discussed the formation of a joint planning corridor with Saugatuck Township along the Blue Star Highway?
- Is the public sanitary sewer agreement to provide infrastructure east of the I-196 interchange still valid?
- Does the Tri-Community Plan remain within Saugatuck Township?
- Although the existing structure of the plan could be maintained, to achieve consistency with the remainder of the new land use chapters, we recommend restructuring the Planning Principles into goals, recommendations, and strategies.

Needed Components in the Master Plan

Zoning Plan

In accordance with the MPEA, the township is required to include a Zoning Plan within the master plan. A zoning plan can be as simple as a statement and/or table that indicates the relationship between the master plan classifications and the zoning ordinance districts. We believe that such a simplistic zoning plan is appropriate as any plan that is more specific could limit the flexibility of your zoning and land use decisions. To assist with this illustration, below is an example of the zoning plan we drafted for Olive Township.

Chapter Nine Master Plan Map

Introduction

Complementing the text of the Master Plan is its map, which identifies land use classifications by which the township organizes and intends future improvements and uses. These classification terms are intentionally general

in nature so as to not necessarily be specific to one use or type of uses permitted by the Zoning Ordinance and its map.

In other words, while the land use classifications are related to the Zoning Districts identified on the Zoning Ordinance map, as shown in the table below, specific future uses are determined by numerous natural and manmade features of the landscape such as public utilities, topography, soils, road improvements, surrounding uses, existing densities, and etcetera, as well as other planning considerations such as compatibility, public safety, access and etcetera. Consequently, while the land use classifications of the Master Plan map are designed to serve as a guide for future uses they are not considered to be a mandate for immediate improvements, public, private or otherwise. Ultimately, while the Master Plan Map identifies areas for future uses, the feasibility of a proposed use is determined by the Zoning Ordinance and its regulations regarding height, area, bulk, location and etcetera for each of its Districts.

Terminology

Table of Master Plan Terms & Zoning Ordinance Map District Terms

Master Plan Map Terms	Zoning Ordinance Map Districts
Agricultural Preservation	Agricultural
Rural Residential A	Rural Residential, Low Density Residential, Medium Density Residential
Medium Density Residential A	Multiple Family Residential, Mobile Home Park
Town/Neighborhood Center	Borculo Overlay
Commercial	Commercial
Light Industrial	Light Industrial
General Industrial	Heavy Industrial
Sensitive Areas	Resource Development

Street Plan

As you will note within the Master Plan Framework, we propose addressing the required street plan within the Transportation Chapter. While the township does not own any of its roads, the basis for the legislation that requires a street plan is to ensure that communities consider “complete streets,” which address motor vehicles, pedestrians, bicyclists, and the like. The related language will likely be brief to satisfy the MPEA.

Master Plan Terms (Land Use Classification) and Master Plan Chapters

While not part of the zoning plan nor required by the MPEA, we believe it is also appropriate to provide an association between the master plan terms and the master plan chapters as it assists the reader to understand the document. We recommend, following the reorganization of the master plan by creating individual land use classification chapters, to incorporate similar language together with the zoning plan. Below is an example of Master Plan Map section content we drafted for Olive Township.

Terminology

Relationship of Master Plan Map Terms to Master Plan Chapters

Several Chapters of this Master Plan identify the interests, recommendations and strategies regarding future land uses in the township. While the interests, recommendations and strategies will likely always evolve, the intended uses related to the chapter titles will remain the same. Those chapter titles can generally be related to the Master Plan map terms as provided in the table below.

Master Plan Map Terms	Master Plan Chapters
Agricultural Preservation	Agricultural Uses
Rural Residential	Residential Uses
Town/Neighborhood Center	Borculo
Medium Density Residential A	Residential Uses
Commercial	Commercial (& Industrial) Uses
Light Industrial	(Commercial) & Industrial Uses
General Industrial	(Commercial) & Industrial Uses
Parks, Recreation, Natural Areas	Recreation
Sensitive Areas	-

Master Plan Map

As you are aware, accompanying the master plan text is its map. We will need to examine the map further to ensure its design remains appropriate or if changes should be performed. As aforementioned, we minimally recommend the elimination of the public/semi-public classification from the map.

Master Plan Framework

While our initial discussions generally projected workshop dates, as a result of the save-the-date postcard and to avoid mailings “on top of each other,” as well as staff availability, we have revised the Master Plan Framework and delayed the workshops to dates further from your upcoming meeting. As a result, the overall Framework is only extended by approximately one (1) month. We believe this will not only provide for better organization and timing of the workshops for the township, but for attendees as well. A copy of the revised Framework is attached.

Environmental Chapter

Lastly, and although not included within the proposed Framework, we may propose the inclusion of an environmental chapter, if the existing language is otherwise not better served throughout multiple chapters. We believe there is valuable information to maintain within the existing text regarding the environmental character of the township. If necessary, we do not expect this chapter to change the proposed framework timeline.

Public Workshops

Available Dates

The following dates are available to conduct the three (3) identified public workshops, as well as maintain a reserve date for a fourth workshop, if necessary.

- Monday, June 25 – Northern Laketown
- Thursday, July 12 – Blue Star Highway
- Monday, July 23 – Agricultural

- Thursday, July 26 – Reserved

Organizational Items

As you will note in the template postcards, we identify the township phone number to call to RSVP or to an email address we have created. The reason we identify the township phone number is because typically respondents expect and prefer to call the township hall. As a result, we need staff to track the number of participants received via phone calls. We will manage the workshop email.

Lastly, we propose in the postcards that the township will provide snacks and refreshments. We presume this can be arranged.

Planning Commission Direction

While additional revisions to the master plan may be appropriate, we believe the aforementioned are minimally necessary to adequately provide an update to the plan and prepare the text for the incorporation of public contributions. We will be prepared to discuss these items further at your May 17, 2018 meeting. If you have any questions, please let us know.

GLR
Principal Planner

Attachment