

Chapter 10 FUTURE LAND USE

INTRODUCTION

Good land use planning is essential to the future quality of life in the Tri-Communities. Actual future land uses are difficult to predict and guide to achieve desired results. A future land use map and plan expresses local and use goals and policies and provides a land use scenario which a community may use as a physical guide. Goals and policies, in turn, drive land use and development decisions.

The Future Land Use Map accompanying this chapter depicts generalized future land use in the City of Saugatuck, the City of the Village of Douglas, and Saugatuck Township and anticipates community land use needs for the next 25 years. These future land use arrangements are based on a variety of sources, including a survey of area leaders, the citizen opinion survey, a series of Town Meetings, joint workshops of members of all three planning commissions and governing bodies, and information in this Plan, with an emphasis on border issues. Proposed future land use is based on analysis of each existing land use, impacts of area trends, projected future land use needs if current trends continue, and the relationship of land use activities to the natural resource base. All proposals are intended to be consistent with the goals and policies presented in Chapter 1, which were originally created in 1989 with substantial public input and then updated as a part of this planning process.

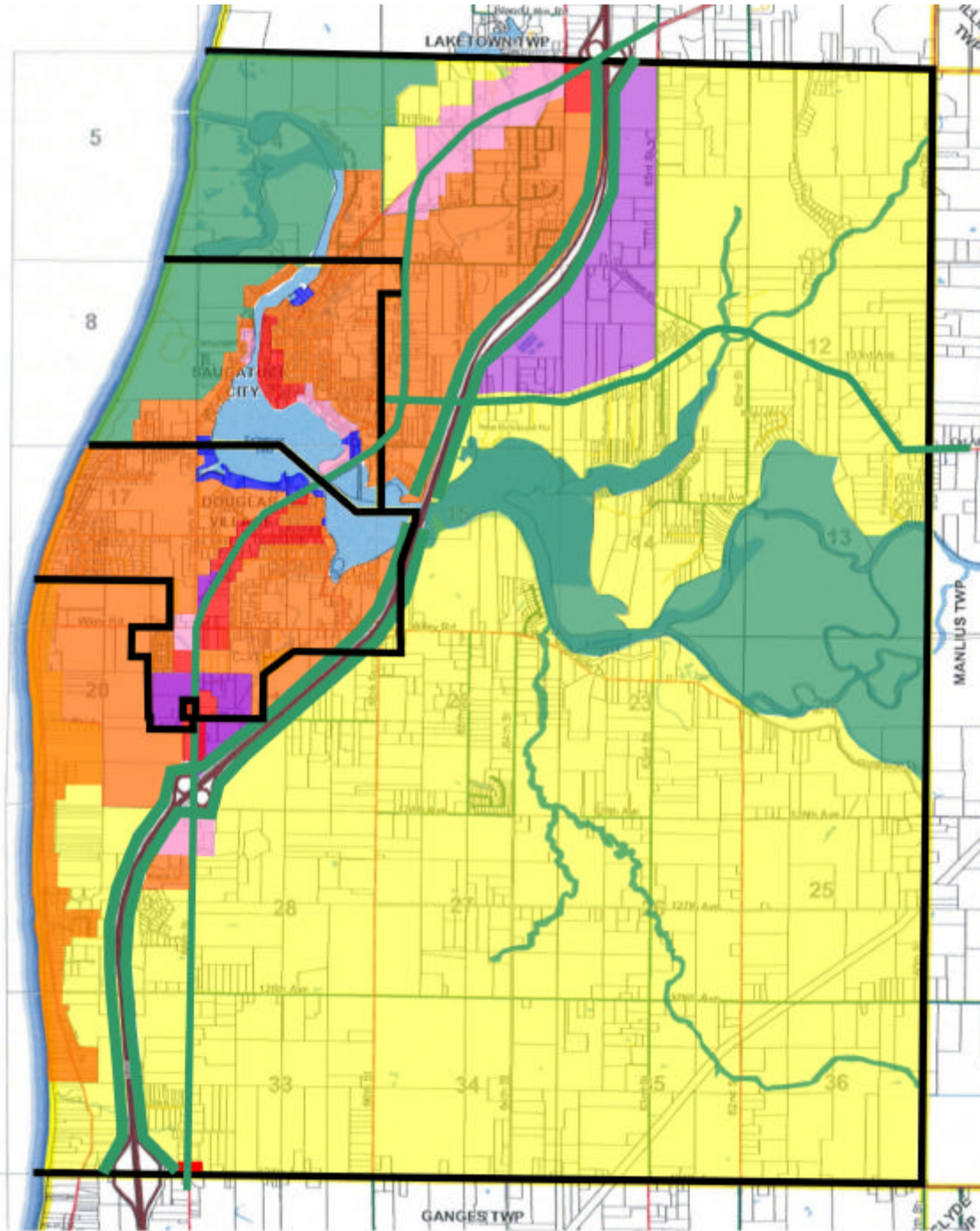
A few key planning and design principles were used to evaluate alternative land use arrangements. With slightly different trends and projections, application of the same principles could lead to different conclusions and differences would be related to the amount of particular land uses more than their location or relative relationships to adjoining uses. Likewise, there are many areas in which alternative land use arrangements would be satisfactory providing they remained in keeping with these basic planning principles. Consequently, it is crucial that this plan be regularly reviewed and updated at least once every five years to insure its continued relevance in planning for future land use needs.

PLANNING AND DESIGN PRINCIPLES

The Future Land Use Map (see Map 10-1) depicts generalized land use, which is implemented through the mapping of zoning districts and applied during the site plan review process. The following planning and design principles are the technical foundation in support of the proposed land use arrangements graphically depicted on the Future Land Use Map. These principles are consistent with the goals and policies in Chapter 1 and should remain the basis for reviewing any subsequent changes to the proposed Future Land Use Map. These planning principles are:

- Protection of public health and safety
- Conservation of natural resources
- Environmental protection
- Minimizing public service costs
- Efficiency and convenience in meeting land use needs
- Insuring compatibility between land uses.

Map 10-1
Future Land Use Map



Legend

- | | |
|--|---|
| Rural Low Density Single Family Residential/Agricultural | Commercial |
| Medium to High Density Single and Multi-Family Residential | Industrial |
| Mixed Use Residential/Commercial | Greenspace, Preserve |
| Waterfront Mixed Use | Highway Buffer |

Often a land use decision based on one principle also advances another. For example, prevention of filling or construction on floodplains protects public health and safety, conserves natural resources, protects the environment and minimizes public service costs. It may also create a valuable buffer or open space between uses and help insure compatibility.

Protection of Public Health and Safety

Key situations in which this principle is applied include:

- Avoiding construction in areas which present natural hazards. In the Tri-Communities, these include areas too close to the Lake Michigan shoreline at high risk from erosion from coastal wave action; floodplains; saturated soils and wetlands; soils not well suited for support of foundations or safe disposal of septic wastes; and steep slopes.
- Avoiding construction where an intensive land use activity is not adequately serviced by all weather public roads; and
- Avoiding construction in areas with soils contaminated by hazardous and/or toxic waste.

Conservation of Natural Resources

Failure to consciously protect nonrenewable natural resources exposes a community to unbridled destruction of those resources which are the foundation for an area's character and quality of life. Conservation of natural resources usually focuses on: land, water, minerals, certain soils (such as prime farmland), wetlands, sand dunes, areas supporting an abundance and diversity of wildlife, and unique forested lands. Areas where the land and the water meet are the most important. Indiscriminate land subdivision frequently reduces the size or alters the shape of land, thereby compromising the resource value and production potential of those lands. This occurs frequently in prime agricultural areas and once lost, these lands may never be reclaimed for food production purposes.

If widespread, such losses can dramatically alter the character of an area. These changes reflect lost opportunities – usually higher public service costs and gradual degradation of an area's tourism potential.

Environmental Protection

This principle aims at preventing pollution, impairment or destruction of the environment. While there is considerable overlap with natural resource conservation issues, environmental protection measures focus primarily on air and water quality, and the impact of activities where the water meets the land. Environmental quality is best preserved by planning for appropriate land use activities in and near sensitive environmental areas, and managing development accordingly.

Minimizing Public Service Costs

Public service costs may be minimized by encouraging new land uses where existing infrastructure is not used to capacity and where expansion can be most economically supplied. This also results in compact settlement patterns, prevents sprawl, and is favored by taxpayers because it results in the lowest public service costs both for construction and maintenance.

Efficiency and Convenience in Meeting Land Use Needs

To be efficient in meeting future land use needs, communities must make better use of existing infrastructure and plan for infrastructure expansion in a manner which keeps the

costs low and does not create huge areas where infrastructure will not be fully used for many years. It also means locating future land uses so that travel between activity centers is minimized. For example: building schools, neighborhood commercial activities, day care facilities, fire and police protection, etc. near the residential areas they serve. This saves municipal costs on initial road construction and future maintenance, reduces everyone's gasoline expenditures, and conserves fossil fuel supplies for future use.

Insuring Compatibility Between Land Uses

A central objective of land use planning is to locate future land uses so that they are compatible with one another. This prevents future nuisance situations between adjacent land uses, such as loud sound, ground vibrations, dust, bright lights, restricted air flow, shadows, odors, traffic, and similar impacts. A few obvious examples of incompatible land uses include factories, drive-in establishments, or auto repair facilities adjacent to single family homes. With proper planning, land uses can be tiered to buffer impacts and orderly development can occur. Examples include: commercial service establishments on highway frontage with backlot wholesale, storage, or office uses abutting a residential area; or single family residential uses adjacent to park and recreation areas.

DEVELOPMENT AND CONSERVATION AREAS

The Future Land Use Map for the Tri-Communities was prepared by first identifying conservation areas and then examining the suitability of remaining lands for various development purposes. Quality farmland is a diminishing resource, and as long as farmers wish to farm, farmland is desired to be protected from conversion to other uses or from impacts by other uses.

Other natural resource areas include sand dunes, wetlands, floodplains, streams, creeks and drains, the Kalamazoo River, Lake Kalamazoo, and areas at high risk of erosion along Lake Michigan. These areas are proposed for very limited future development in keeping with their fragility and importance in buffering Lake Michigan storms, filtering and storing water during periods of flooding, draining stormwater from land, providing habitat for a wide range of plants and animals, and for their wide ranging open space values. Destroying these resources would destroy the essential qualities which continue to attract residents and tourists to the area. If conserved and wisely used, waterways and farms will become a natural greenbelt system that continues to enhance the area for years to come. Local zoning ordinances should be reviewed to ensure they include adequate conservation practices.

PRESERVATION OF COMMUNITY CHARACTER

Community Character: The image of a community or area as defined by such factors as its built environment, natural features and open space elements, type of housing, architectural style, infrastructure, and the type and quality of public facilities and services. Moskowitz and Lindbloom. **The Latest Illustrated Book of Development Definitions**, Rutgers University, 2004, p 83.

The character of the Tri-Communities is largely a product of its natural environment, nestled on the shores of Lake Michigan and the Kalamazoo River and defined by steep, rolling dunes to the west and lush orchard country and farmland to the east. The area is best known as a resort community with a strong appeal to artists and artisans. The predominant land use in the Tri-Communities is agricultural (3,110 acres), followed by single family residential (2,242 acres). Prime farmland is generally concentrated in the

south central part of the Township. The rural areas of the Township are the southern agricultural, northeast, and riverfront-dunes areas. Residential areas in the Tri-Communities vary widely in character between the rural areas of the Township and the urbanized areas of Saugatuck and Douglas. While single family homes are the predominant residential land use in the area, multiple-family housing can be found in both the City and in the Village.

RESIDENTIAL

Residential use will continue to be the predominant developed land use in the Tri-Communities. The existing residential areas in Saugatuck and Douglas provide a rich and interesting mix of housing sizes, styles and ages. The challenge in the next twenty years will be maintaining the older housing stock and ensuring that the growing ranks of part-time residents and absentee owners does not result in housing deterioration. The preservation of neighborhood character should be done by maintaining scale, context and materials of the community.

Residential development in the Township is planned to be low-density single family homes with 1 or more acres per lot. This includes areas of the Township both north and south of the Kalamazoo River and all of the area east of the Interstate except for a large section of land north of Old Allegan Road on the west side of 63rd Street, which is planned for industrial use. Rural residential is planned at 2.5 acres or more.

New residential construction in the Township should be encouraged on soils capable of safe septic disposal. The best locations for concentrations of such housing are northeast of Saugatuck and southwest of Douglas.

Downtown Saugatuck features larger, older homes that contribute to the downtown's charm, many of which have been converted to profitable bed and breakfast establishments. Most of the City's year-round residents live above the steep ridge ("the hill") which separates the waterfront area from the rest of the City. The Kalamazoo Lake shoreline is partially lined with condominiums along Lake Street, which has diminished the scenic view of the Lake over time. The policy is to encourage viewing easements and single family residences.

Approximately 25 blocks of long-established neighborhoods surround the center of the City of the Village of Douglas. There are also concentrations of homes along Lakeshore Drive, Campbell Road, 130th Street and Water Street. Many of these established neighborhoods consist of 100-year old homes mixed with homes that are less than 30 years old. Some modern subdivisions on larger lots also exist on the west side adding to the rich variety of home sites in the Village.

As depicted on the Future Land Use Map, residential character in the City of Saugatuck and the City of the Village of Douglas is desired to remain medium to high-density single and multiple-family residential. This is largely characterized by 2-4 dwelling units per acre with a few pockets of lower and higher density. Permitted density is as established in each zoning ordinance.

COMMERCIAL

There will continue to be four primary commercial areas within the Tri-Communities. Commercial uses in downtown Saugatuck are primarily oriented to tourists and seasonal residents. Downtown Saugatuck will continue to serve as the major center for

commercial tourist activities. This should be encouraged. However, the downtown area should not be permitted to expand outside the area presently zoned for downtown commercial use. Appropriate measures should be instituted as necessary to mitigate impacts of the city center on adjoining residential areas. Downtown Saugatuck and the Douglas Village Center are characterized by compact building arrangements which limit parking spaces. Parking is problematic in downtown Saugatuck and in the Douglas Village Center, especially during peak tourism months. Heavy pedestrian traffic also exacerbates parking and access problems. The buildings and parking on many properties are poorly designed, so any opportunity to improve design, safety, and function should be seized.

Another commercial center is located along Blue Star through Douglas. This commercial area along Blue Star from the bridge south to the freeway interchange should be encouraged to continue to redevelop with a primary focus on local commercial services, with some tourist oriented businesses, and a secondary focus on highway related uses near the interchange. The present commercial zoning of Blue Star south of the Douglas interchange should not be expanded, but small areas representing existing commercial establishments at the freeway and M-89 interchanges should continue to be recognized. Expanding commercial in these areas will, over time, only detract from more appropriate commercial areas in Saugatuck, Douglas and along north Blue Star Highway.

Lastly, the area along north Blue Star Highway between Clearbrook Drive and the I-196 freeway interchange (Exit 41), which is presently developed for a variety of land uses, should be encouraged to be mixed use residential and commercial. Highway service-related commercial should serve the immediate interchange area. General business uses like drug stores, banks, and hardware stores should be encouraged in the general business area in Saugatuck and Douglas and not in interchange areas. Allowing general business establishments to spread will increase the number and length of trips for local residents, will require all trips to be by motor vehicle, which causes a corresponding waste of fossil fuels, and it increases the potential for existing businesses in the City and Village to fail, since the "critical mass" of general business opportunities in a single location is not present.

INDUSTRIAL

A small number of industrial land uses exist in the Tri-Communities. Less than 1% of the total land area is devoted to industrial uses. Office furniture manufacturing is the major industrial activity. The Haworth facility in Douglas is located along Blue Star north of Wiley Road. A small industrial area exists along Blue Star in Douglas near Exit 36 that should continue to be developed for light industrial uses. If a large light industrial concern, or industrial office facility were to be interested in a location in the area, the land between I-196 and 63rd Street at the northern freeway interchange (Exit 41) should be considered. This land is well-suited for light industrial activities as it could be efficiently served with sewer and water. Moreover, its location near the freeway would provide good visibility for the companies that locate there, along with easy access to the north interchange. Due to its proximity to the freeway, trucking could occur with little impact on residential and commercial uses. The Tri-Communities is located 180 miles from Detroit, 150 miles from Chicago and 36 miles from Grand Rapids along a major interstate highway. This is an advantageous location for small scale, light industrial development.

AGRICULTURAL

In the agricultural areas of the Township, farmers are encouraged to farm their land as long as they desire to do so. Should farmers decide to stop farming and develop their land, low density single family residential homes in clusters with at least 50% permanently preserved open space should be encouraged to preserve the rural, low density character of the Township. Agriculture is a major contributor to the economy and rural character of the Tri-Communities, providing a contrast with the more intensely developed areas of Saugatuck and Douglas. Agriculture should be continued as long as it is economical to do so.

WATERFRONT MIXED USE

Most of the non-wetland shoreline in Saugatuck and Douglas has been developed. The balance is in private ownership. The waterfront should continue to be maintained and where necessary, redeveloped with a mix of single and multiple-family residential uses along with waterfront-related commercial developments such as marinas and other ship/shore activities. Condominiums line the shore of Kalamazoo Lake along Lake St. and block a scenic view of the lake. New development along the shore should preserve a view of the lake from the public right-of-way and consist of single family residences. Further, waterfront zoning should be consistent across all three governments.

Much of the City's downtown waterfront has an excellent system of interconnected public and private walkways providing shoreline access. This magnifies the attraction of Saugatuck as a tourist haven. Public boat access is more limited, and parking for car and boat trailers is scarce. Private marina space is also limited and expensive. Additional public waterfront properties should be acquired as pocket parks to enhance the recreational potential of the water. The S.S. Kewatin stands as a symbol of the area's shipping history – a local historical landmark. The steamship is moored in Kalamazoo Lake and draws thousands of tourists every year. It should not be allowed to fall into disrepair. If the Kewatin cannot be adequately maintained in the future, then it should be removed so it does not become a blight on the shoreline. Mooring of other large vessels along the Kalamazoo Lake shoreline should be prohibited, as this would block the limited public access to the waterfront.

GREENSPACE AND PRESERVE

The northwest corner of the Township, along with the most of the land in Saugatuck west of the Kalamazoo Lake should be preserved for public open space and the portion that remains in private ownership should be maintained for low intensity uses (like the art colony and church camp). The City of Saugatuck has been working with conservation groups since 2003 in an effort to purchase 413 acres of beach and dune land on property formerly owned by shipbuilder Frank and Gertrude Denison. If the Denison property is sold to conservationists, the plan is to add 161 acres on the south side of the Kalamazoo River to the city of Saugatuck's Oval Beach. The 252 acres on the north side of the river would become part of Saugatuck Dunes State Park. The City, Village and Saugatuck Township, where all of the property is located, have stood behind the acquisition. It is in the public's interest for the deal, as it stood during the creation of this Plan, to go through. The Denison property is largely sand dunes with some coastal wetland, and is a haven for at least five populations of rare species. Those species are the pitcher's thistle, a plant listed as threatened both by the state and federal governments, the zigzag, bladderwort and the prairie warbler, Blanchard's Cricket Frog and the Virginia Meadow Beauty.

The Ox-Bow summer school of art and artist's residency is also located near the City and Township border on a 15-acre campus near sand dunes, marshes, a quiet lagoon, and dense forests. The central hub of the school is a 19th-century inn that houses students and provides space for classes and dining. The campus has been kept largely natural and provides numerous recreational opportunities, such as canoeing, biking, and hiking. As such, the Ox-Bow campus fits nicely with the surrounding greenspace/preserve area denoted on the Future Land Use Map. Similarly, the Presbyterian Church Camp occupies a large dune parcel south of the Oval Beach. While activities at the camp are changing to more year around activities, as long as the overall intensity of use at the site remains low, it is a compatible use. A strong effort should be made to acquire an easement across the camp property for a walking/biking path from Campbell Road in Douglas to the Oval Beach.

HIGHWAY BUFFER

The Tri-Community area is unique in that it is one of the few areas in Michigan that still has a substantial amount of natural vegetation lining I-196 and the north section of the Blue Star Highway from the bridge to Exit 41. These forest stands provide noise buffering for abutting land uses and provide for an aesthetically pleasing highway that enhances the character of the community. Retaining and protecting this natural highway buffer even as adjacent properties are developed should be strongly encouraged.

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