

COLUMBIA TOWNSHIP

MASTER PLAN

DRAFT

MARCH 2020

**FINAL DRAFT APPROVED BY PLANNING
COMMISSION WITH FEW MARCH 2020**

Section 1- Introduction

The Planning Process

The purpose of a community plan is to provide guidance to public and private decision makers with regard to future changes in land use and the allocation of resources. A Master Plan contains information about physical and social features, community facilities, existing land use and economic trends.

The plan identifies key land use issues and then establishes goals and actions to address the issues. A future land use plan also becomes part of the recommendations section and guides local officials when making future zoning and land development decisions.

About the Columbia Township Master Plan

This Plan was originally prepared in 2001 with the assistance of many individuals and groups throughout the Township. The Columbia Township Planning Commission, Township Board members and Township Staff worked with Gove Associates, Inc. in defining the scope and developing the overall Plan. This Plan is not a zoning ordinance, mandating specific land use codes and other enforcement measures; instead, this Plan is a guide to share existing planning desires, pursue community-supported new land use practices and implement changes to future zoning regulations.

An essential responsibility of Columbia Township is not only utilizing the Master Plan, but updating its goals and recommendations for future development and redevelopment. Generally, a Master Plan should be updated every five years in a fast growing community and every 10 years for a slower growth community. In 2008, the Planning Commission determined that, in order to take advantage of new information developed for the Black River Watershed Plan by the Southwest Michigan Commission that the Plan should be amended. It was also decided to ask property owners within the Township if they would be interested in having eligibility for the Van Buren County Farmland Preservation Program. To those ends, Michigan Township Services, Inc. was asked to provide assistance in updating the Plan.

While using the Columbia Township Master Plan, the following points should be kept in mind;

- The Plan is not permanent. It should be reviewed and updated every 5 to 10 years to ensure that its goals and objectives are being met and are still consistent with the overall desired vision of the community.
- The Plan is not inflexible. It can be amended if such an action is deemed necessary.

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- The Plan is not a law. It documents the physical, social and land use-related features, as well as the overall community vision and land use goals and objectives of Columbia Township much like a snapshot photo done at a point in time (in this case, the year 2001 with an update to 2020).
- The Plan's maps are not zoning maps. Instead, the maps within the Plan are a community guide for future zoning decisions (such as requests for re-zoning by property owners).
- The Plan is not a basis for property tax assessment. All assessed property in Michigan is based upon existing land uses.

The Columbia Township Planning Commission

The Columbia Township Planning Commission is the body responsible for developing and adopting the Columbia Township Master Plan. While highly suggested, the Township Board is not required to adopt the plan. Amendments to the adopted plan are also the responsibility of the Columbia Township Planning Commission, unless the Township Board exercises its option, by resolution, to retain final approval under the Michigan Planning Enabling Act, adopted in 2007.

How to Use the Columbia Township Master Plan

The Columbia Township Master Plan is broken into eight sections, which are influenced by two key themes: Existing Land Use and Future Land Use. While both Existing and Future Land Use issues are noted throughout the Master Plan, a description of Columbia Township's Existing Land Use is prominently covered in Section 4. Columbia Township's Future Land Use vision is covered in Section 7.

This Plan is to be used as a guide for community land use decisions by the Planning Commission, Township Board, Township Staff, business people, residents, nonprofit organizations and developers. Columbia Township has developed a Vision for the Township's future, as well as specific Goals and Objectives to better define and reach the Vision (see Section 6). An Implementation Schedule of detailed projects to undertake over the next 20 years is provided in Section 8 to further guide the Township's Vision to Reality. It is up to each Columbia Township resident and any participant in Columbia Township's land use development, redevelopment and preservation, to constructively utilize this Plan and communicate its overriding intent of serving Columbia Township in maintaining and further advancing its quality, rural way of life.

Section 2 – Community Description

Introduction

Columbia Township is a rural community in the north-central portion of Van Buren County, occupying approximately 36 square miles or about 21,827 acres. Primary land cover is agriculture, lakes and woodlands. The Village of Breedsville is located in the southwestern quadrant of Columbia Township, and the unincorporated Village of Grand Junction is located at the intersection of CR 215 and Phoenix Road/CR 388. The current Community Development Plan for Columbia Township identifies areas along CR 215 from the Village of Breedsville to Grand Junction and east to Saddle Lake, as well as around Upper Jephtha Lake and western Great Bear Lake, as areas for Medium Density Residential development. The remaining areas of the Township are identified as Wetland and Agriculture-Low Density Residential.

Vegetation/Woodlands

In Columbia Township, various species of hardwoods exist, including Ash, Beech, Oak, Elm, Hickory, Maple, Walnut and Pine. These hardwoods are mainly second growth, and found on poorly drained mineral soils.

Topography/Physiography

Van Buren County's topography was molded by glacial activity which resulted in moraines, till plains, outwash plains, lake plains/drainage ways and areas where muck and silt deposition collected from melted glacial water activity. Columbia Township's topography ranges from a high of 753 feet above sea level to a low of 620 feet above sea level.

Water Resources

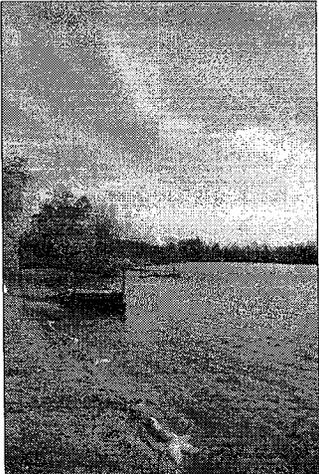
Water is an important resource in Columbia Township. Water resources are abundant, with numerous lakes and streams within Columbia Township providing recreational and irrigation opportunities for the area. There are over 1,000 acres of lakes and over 20 miles of rivers and streams within the Township.

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Lakes

The lakes in Columbia Township are what draw many people. Lakes are valuable for the array of recreational, agricultural and economic opportunities that they offer and provide a community with extensive opportunities for recreation in every season. People visit lakes for numerous reasons but one attribute that will keep them coming back is clean, healthy water. Columbia Township has over 1,000 acres of lakes that contribute to the unique quality of life in the Township. This abundance of fresh water is valued highly for its contribution to the unique ecological, recreational and agricultural value that these lakes present.

Lakes in Columbia Township include:

	LAKE NAMES	ACRES
	• Coffee Lake	40.4
	• Deer Lake	30.4
	• Great Bear Lake	166.0
	• Jephtha Lakes Upper / Lower	114.2
	• Lake Eleven	53.9
	• Lake Fourteen	69.5
	• Lake Moriah	17.0
	• Little Bear Lake	46.1
	• Mud Lake	23.4
	• Munson Lake	38.5
	• North Lake	60.6
	• Saddle Lake	283.0
	• Silver Lake	50.1
	• Stillwell Lake	18.3
	TOTAL ACRES	1,011.4

Rivers in Columbia Township include the southern branch of the Black River, Melvin Creek and the Great Bear Lake Creek/Drain

Black River Watershed

The Black River watershed encompasses approximately 183,490 acres in Allegan and Van Buren counties through its rivers, lakes, streams and wetlands. Of the total watershed 56.2% lies in Van Buren County; Columbia Township has over 1,000 acres of lakes and streams connected to the Black River Watershed. The abundance of water resources within the Township provides residents and

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visitors alike a vast array of water-related activities that they can enjoy throughout the seasons. The importance of this resource to the community means that careful attention must be paid to its protection and conservation.

The Black River Watershed Plan was completed by the Van Buren Conservation District through a Section 319 grant from the United States Environmental Protection Agency and administered by the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality. That plan focused specifically on nonpoint source pollution that can be delivered by indirect means such as runoff from farms and residential lawns, paved roads and parking lots, and redevelopment or new construction areas. This type of pollution poses serious threats to water quality and the function of the Black River Watershed.

Floodplains

In September 2008, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) published preliminary Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRMs) for Van Buren County. For the first time these maps delineated flood plains in Columbia Township. Those floodplains were mainly located along the Black River, however, several inland lakes were also included. The final maps were adopted December 3, 2009. A floodplain is defined as a land area that has a 1% chance of flooding each year. Not all of these streams are shown on the Flood Insurance Rate Maps.

Wetlands

Wetland areas, as defined by the National Wetlands Inventory, are defined as *“land characterized by the presence of water at a frequency and duration sufficient to support, and that under normal circumstances does support, wetland vegetation or aquatic life and is commonly referred to as a bog, swamp, or marsh”*. Wetlands are mainly found around the Township lakes and areas adjacent to Township rivers and creeks.

Drains

In addition to the Black River, a system of drains has been developed to keep properties in low lying areas dry. These are maintained by Van Buren County

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using funds budgeted by the Township. Drains are listed on the VBCO interactive maps. < <http://www.vbco.org/vanburenmaps.asp>>

Soils

The soil base in Columbia Township, as identified by the Soil Survey Conservation Service in the Soil Survey of Van Buren County, Michigan, has 22 soil types, each with its own unique characteristics and limitations for agriculture, residential and recreation development.

Agricultural Lands

Agriculture, Open Space, and Vacant lands make up approximately 84% of the land use within Columbia Township. Farming creates jobs, provides a product for sale, and provides vast areas of open space and scenic corridors. Farmland also provides substantial environmental benefits, including floodplain protection, groundwater recharge, and wildlife habitat. In addition, the tradition of family-owned farms has been passed down from generation to generation; supporting a strong social structure focused on community and family.

Based upon agricultural statistics for Van Buren County, agriculture will continue to be a prominent economic force. However, since at least 1992 there has been a loss of farmland county-wide, as well as fluctuations in the number of active farms in the value of agricultural products.

Table 2-1 Van Buren County Farmland and Agricultural Statistics 1987-2002

	1987	1992	1997	2002	2012
Total Acres of Farmland	190,251	206,781	189,432	176,260	125,089
Acres in Orchards	18,663	19,232	15,480	10,281	9,480
Acres in Vegetables	14,853	13,734	12,069	10,553	7,242
Acres in Corn (for grain)	35,282	38,255	34,695	31,870	55,362
Acres in soybeans	9,684	23,679	24,704	29,321	18,730
Total Number of Farms	1,278	1,164	1,217	1,160	1,113
Number of Orchards	373	312	256	N	158
Number of Veg Farms	201	158	104	91	98
Average Size Farm	149	178	156	152	157

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Median Size of Farm	N	N	73	57	50
Total Market Value of Agricultural Products	69,624	84,931	104,868	96,724	194,664
Average Market Value of Agricultural Products per Farm	54,549	72,965	86,169	83,382	174,900
Hogs & Pigs Inventory (Farms)	147	119	68	36	21
Hogs & Pigs Inventory (Numbers)	56,167	52,055	29,477	24,985	4,614
Hogs & Pigs Sold (Farms)	152	116	64	41	33
Hogs & Pigs Sold (Numbers)	84,358	103,464	56,245	67,997	4,655

Source: 1987, 1992, 1997, 2002, 2012 U.S. Census of Agriculture

Land Preservation Areas

Five land preserves are within the Township; two are conservation easements managed by the Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy, two conservation areas are run by the Michigan Nature Association and one is under the direct supervision of Columbia Township.

Other Natural Resources

There are features in any community that any resident would readily recognize as important to the character of the area and to their personal quality of life. These features are often the ones that residents will use to identify or connect themselves with a community. Some of these features may be cultural, such as a rural village business district, centennial farms, or similar man-made features. Other features used to connect a community to its residents will be natural; lakes, woods, wildlife, views, and other similar features. How these elements are included in the fabric of Columbia Township have a profound influence on the community's value.

Native Vegetation

Native vegetation refers to the plant life that exists as a natural part of the landscape. It is increasingly recommended that native plants (vegetation that grows naturally in climate zone II and more specifically within 40 miles of Lake Michigan) be used because of their performance, site enhancement, and life cycle cost-benefits. Native plants typically cost more initially (depending on local availability); however, they are most cost-effective in the long run because they require less water and fertilizer, are more resistant to local pests and diseases, and better manage storm water runoff. Native plants provide habitat for birds, butterflies and other wildlife, help to buffer noise, filter air pollution and provide us with beautiful scenery.

Woodlands

Woodlands act as a type of buffer and moderator of flooding, erosion, and noise and air pollution and are important to the township's quality of life. Much of the woodlands within Columbia Township are either in small parcels, usually left from agricultural clearing, or large areas where farms have not been established and where intensive development has not yet occurred. Various species of hardwoods exist, including Ash, Beech, Oak, Hickory, Maple, and Walnut. These hardwoods are mainly second growth, and found in poorly drained mineral soils that were not suited for agricultural needs. Roadside rows of Sugar Maple are often found near old farmsteads. These "sugar-bushes" are an important feature left over from the settlement period of Columbia Township. There are also stands of pine on sandy soils and Cedar or Tamarack in wetlands. These may be second growth or the evergreens may be isolated remainders from virgin pre-settlement forests.

Aesthetically pleasing roadways with natural vegetation tend to be more popular than roads with little vegetation or highway clutter. Trees within the public domain should be managed for their aesthetics and for the critical role that they play in air quality mitigation through the filtering of air and noise pollution. Mature roadside trees are sometimes considered hazardous, but they are always seen as attractive and valuable and should be managed and maintained as part of the community identity. To the extent possible, roadside improvements should respect and maintain these important landmarks.

Wildlife

A rich variety of wildlife is present in Columbia Township, providing a truly valuable living classroom of diversity regarding Amphibian, Bird, Mammal, Reptile and Aquatic Species. Typical of wildlife found in most lower Michigan, the diversity of species include frogs, toads, rabbits, white-tailed deer, squirrels, fox, bats, turtles, snakes, ducks, pheasants, turkey and a variety of waterfowl species.

The presence of an array of wildlife means that protection of their habitat is necessary to ensure their survival. Michigan's wildlife is one of the most precious resources. Surveys consistently show that residents value wildlife as part of their quality of life. In addition, wildlife is valued throughout Michigan for the contribution it makes to tourism, recreation, hunting, and fishing. As a result, there is an increasing appreciation of the role that wildlife contributes to the economy and quality of life of Michigan residents.

As with other natural features, it is important to remember that wildlife does not respect jurisdictional boundaries. As a result, it is important to coordinate activities with other local governments on the basis of biological or ecological boundaries rather than on purely political ones. In rural areas, there are significant opportunities for wildlife management, simply because of already existing, abundant wildlife habitat. This makes planning for wildlife habitat protection possible, by identifying areas of high wildlife value and encouraging development elsewhere. Even with the development of scattered rural areas, large open spaces still may be found throughout the Township. This means that there is ample opportunity for movement of wildlife among habitat locations. It will require strong coordination of local governments and private landowners to ensure that wildlife considerations are included in the review of development plans.

Climate

Columbia Township, like all of Michigan, experiences seasonal changes. This means that the area can support a variety of activities from swimming in the summer to snow skiing in the winter.

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Table 2-2 identifies climate information for the Columbia Township area, as reported from the National Weather Service station in South Haven, Michigan.

TABLE 2-2 – TEMPERATURE AND PRECIPITATION DATA FOR COLUMBIA TOWNSHIP AREA

Month	Average Maximum Temp. (F)	Daily Temp.	Average Minimum Temp. (F)	Daily Temp.	Precipitation (Inches)	
					Average	Depth of Snow on Days with Snow Cover
January	24.8		18.1		2.05	18.5
February	26.8		19.6		1.37	12.5
March	36.2		28.1		2.39	6.2
April	46.5		37.4		3.28	2.0
May	56.5		46.8		3.02	0.0
June	65.9		56.3		3.38	0.0
July	70.5		61.8		3.54	0.0
August	69.5		60.7		3.62	0.0
September	63.4		54.0		4.20	0.0
October	53.2		44.3		2.85	0.4
November	42.0		34.9		3.24	4.3
December	30.0		23.7		2.86	18.2
Annual	48.8		40.5		35.8	5.2

SOURCE: Midwest Regional Climate Center; Gove Associates Inc. 2001

Generally speaking, January is the coldest and July is the warmest month for the area. Precipitation averages over three inches during seven (7) months of the year, with the wettest months being August and September.

Social Features

Table 2-3 shows the historical population of the Township and County between 1960 and 2010. According to Table 2-3, Columbia Township's population almost doubled between 1960 and 2000 and then dropped slightly by 2010. During the same period, Van Buren County grew 57.6 percent, from population of 48,395 to 76,258.

TABLE 2-3 - HISTORIC POPULATION TRENDS 1960 - 2010

	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010	%CHANGE 1960-2010
Columbia Twp.	1,374	1,657	2,248	2,552	2,714	2,588	88%
Van Buren Co.	48,395	56,173	66,814	70,060	76,263	76,258	58%

SOURCE: US Census

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Table 2-4 provides population projection trends to Year 2020. The estimated growth is hard to calculate with the down trend lines since 2009.

TABLE 2-4 - POPULATION PROJECTION TRENDS TO YEAR 2020

						CHANGE	
	1980	1990	2000	2010	2020	2010-2040	
Columbia Township	2,248	2,552	2,714	2,585	2,720	+135	
Van Buren County	66,814	70,060	76,263	76,288	76,300	+12	
State of Michigan	9,262,044	9,295,297	9,938,444	9,883,640	9,950,000	+1,100,000	

SOURCE: US Census; The Economic & Demographic Outlook for Michigan through 2040; U of M for MDOT 2012.

Age distribution of a community influences the types of facilities and programs needed. Table 2-5 shows Columbia Township's median age (37.6) is similar to Van Buren County's medium age (40.1). Approximately 28 percent of Columbia Township's population is 19 years old or younger, with an additional 57.5 percent being between the ages of 20 and 64.

TABLE 2-5 - AGE DISTRIBUTION 2010

								Median
	< 5	5-19	20-24	25-44	45-54	55-64	65+	Age
Columbia Twp.	154	569	138	602	418	329	378	37.6
Van Buren Co.	4,872	16,530	3,933	18,084	12,077	10,239	10,523	40.1
Michigan (%)	6.0	20.6	6.9	25.7	15.1	12.7	13.8	38.8

SOURCE: U.S. Census

Male and Female Distribution

Many communities have a higher proportion of females since women generally have a longer life expectancy. Throughout Michigan, females account for approximately 51 percent of the state's total population in 2010. By comparison

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Table 2-6 shows that Columbia Township has proportionally slightly more males (51.9%) than that of Van Buren County and the State of Michigan.

TABLE 2-6 - GENDER DISTRIBUTION 2010

	Male		Female		
	Population	%	Population	%	
Columbia Twp.	1,342	51.9	1,246	48.1	2588
Van Buren Co.	37,803	49.6	38,455	50.4	76,258
Michigan	4,855,361	49.1	5,041,903	50.1	9,897,264

SOURCE: U.S. Census

Racial / Ethnic Distribution

According to Table 2-7 Columbia Township and Van Buren County have a higher proportion of white Hispanic/Latino and “other” racial/ethnic residents than Michigan as a whole and fewer black, American Indian or Asian residents in all other U.S. Census categories.

TABLE 2-7 – RACIAL/ETHNIC DISTRIBUTION 2010

	White	Black	Hispanic Latino*	American	Asian, or	Other	Total
				Indian Or Alaska Native	Pacific Islander		
Columbia Twp.	2,215	68	372	32	4	269	2,588
	85.5%	2.6%	14.3%	1%	0.1%	10.4%	
Van Buren Co.	66,916	3,235	7,758	637	613	4,857	76,258
	87.7%	4.2%	10%	0.8%		6.4%	
Michigan	7,852,317	1,391,269	436,358	55,723	248,265	336,066	9,883,640
	79.4%	14.1%	4.4%	0.5%		3.4%	

SOURCE: U.S. Census, *Note: Hispanic/Latino can be any race so they are included only by race in the total.

Household Distribution

Household distribution can influence a community's commercial, social, and recreation needs since the distribution often identifies unique community traits. According to Table 2-8, the Township and Van Buren County have higher proportions of family and married couple households than the State of Michigan as a whole. Nonfamily household totals are, therefore, lower within the Township

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and Van Buren County than statewide. Persons per household and average family size all are relatively close in size for the Township, County and State of Michigan.

TABLE 2-8 - HOUSEHOLD DISTRIBUTION 2010

	Total House Holds	Family Households				Nonfamily Households			Per House hold	Average Family Size
		Total	Married Couple Families	Married Couple w/child <18	Female w/ No Spouse	Total	Living Alone	65+, Living Alone		
Columbia Twp.	964	693	532	201	100	271	210	74	2.66	3.08
Van Buren Co.	28,928	20,434	15,342	6,382	3,500	8494	6,955		2.66	3.07
Michigan (%)	100.0	70.6%	41.3%	20.1%	n/a	29.4%	24.1%	9.4%	2.61	3.09

SOURCE: U.S. Census

Persons with Disabilities

Table 2-9 provides a summary of Columbia Township's known population with mobility or self-care limitations. When planning for future public, residential, commercial and industrial land use developments, Columbia Township should ensure that all such developments/facilities are easily accessible to those with mobility limitations and meet Americans with Disabilities Act requirements.

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TABLE 2-9 - PHYSICAL DISABILITIES - 2000

	Total Population 16 - 64	Persons 16 - 64 w/a Mobility or Self-Care Limitation	Persons 16 - 64 w/a Work Disability	Persons 65 and Over w/a Mobility or Self-Care Limitation
Columbia Twp.*	1,756	60	252	125
(% of Population)	64.7	2.2	9.3	4.6
Van Buren Co.*	46,825	915	5,186	4,500
(% of Population)	61.4	1.2	6.8	5.9
Michigan (%)*	64.7	2.9	5.8	2.3

* Based on 1990 U.S. Census, Physical Disability Distribution (2000 Census Population Applied to 1990 Physical Disability Distribution % of Population)

SOURCE: U.S. Census; Gove Associates Inc. 2001

Employment

Table 2-10 identifies employment trends in Columbia Township, Van Buren County and Michigan for comparison years 1997 through May, 2016.

TABLE 2-10 - LABOR FORCE EMPLOYMENT/UNEMPLOYMENT

	1997	1998	1999	2000	2010	2016
Columbia Township						
Labor Force	1,150	1,150	1,175	1,175	1,252	1,345
Employed	1,050	1,075	1,075	1,100	1,084	1,249
Unemployed	100	75	75	75	168	96
% Unemployed	8.7	6.5	6.4	6.4	13.4	7.1
Van Buren County						
Labor Force	36,625	36,900	37,550	37,675	37,775	35,235
Employed	34,575	35,250	35,925	36,000	32,682	32,533
Unemployed	2,050	1,650	1,625	1,650	4,069	2,694
% Unemployed	5.6	4.5	4.3	4.4	10.8	7.6
State of Michigan						
% Unemployed	4.2	3.9	3.8	3.6	11.3	5.1

SOURCE: Michigan Department of Career Development, 2001; Gove Associates Inc., 2001; American Fact Finder 2016, Bureau of Labor Statics

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According to Table 2-10, unemployment in Columbia Township, Van Buren County and the State of Michigan has varied between 2000 and 2016. Columbia Township's unemployment was, on the average, approximately three percent higher than Van Buren County and the State of Michigan during that period.

TABLE 2-11 - EMPLOYMENT DISTRIBUTION 2016

	Columbia Township		Van Buren County		Michigan
	#	%	#	%	%
Employed persons over 16	1,249	100.0	32,533	100.0	100.0
Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries					
Hunting and Mining	75	6.0	1,461	4.5	1.2
Construction	72	5.8	2,162	6.6	5.0
Manufacturing	226	18.1	5,880	18.1	18.0
Wholesale Trade	9	0.7	901	2.8	2.4
Retail Trade	117	9.4	3,673	11.3	11.3
Transportation, Warehouse & Utilities	51	4.1	1,422	4.4	4.2
Information	35	2.8	310	0.9	1.6
Finance, Insurance, Real Estate, Rental & Leasing	24	1.9	1,534	4.7	5.5
Professional, Scientific, Management, Administrative, & Waste Management Services	91	7.3	2,608	8.0	9.4
Education, Health, & Social Services	250	20.0	6,825	21.0	23.7
Arts, Entertainment, Recreation, Accommodation & Food Service	231	18.5	3,114	9.6	9.5
Other Services (except public administration)	46	3.7	1,345	4.1	4.7
Public Administration	22	1.8	1,298	4.0	3.5

SOURCE: U.S. Census SF3, 2000; 2016 American Fact Finder

Table 2-11 highlights employment distribution for Columbia Township, Van Buren County and the State of Michigan. In Columbia Township, the largest employment category is Education, Health, & Social Services (20.0%), followed by Arts, Entertainment, Recreation, Accommodation & Food Service (18.5%), Manufacturing (18.1%) and Retail Trade (9.4%). Van

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Buren County's largest employment category is Education, Health, & Social Services (21.0%), followed by Manufacturing (18.1%), Retail Trade (11.3%) and Arts, Entertainment, Recreation, Accommodation & Food Service (9.6%).

Socio-Economic Characteristics

According to Table 2-12, which provides a summary of socio-economic characteristics, Columbia Township's median household income and per capita income are lower than both Van Buren County and the State of Michigan. Therefore, it is not surprising that the percentage of Columbia Township's population below the poverty level is higher (at 19.4%) than either Van Buren County (at 17.5%) or the State of Michigan (at 16.3%).

TABLE 2-12 - SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS FOR 2016

	Median Household Income	Per Capita Income	Percentage of Population Below Poverty Level
Columbia Township	\$40,428	\$20,239	19.4
Van Buren County	\$47,141	\$23,943	17.5
State of Michigan	\$50,803	\$27,549	16.3

SOURCE: American Community Survey 2012-2016

Section 3 – Community Facilities and Structures

Introduction

To properly address the needs and desires of Columbia Township's land use needs, as well as administer specific implementation actions identified in this Plan, a clear administrative structure and related funding is needed. The following section will identify the Township's organizational structure, services, budget and other related information.

Organizational Structure

The residents of Columbia Township elect a five-member Township Board. The elected officials serve on behalf of the interests of fellow Township residents, and oversee the budget and administration of Township business.

The Township Board appoints members to the Planning Commission, Zoning Board of Appeals, and the Board of Review Committee. Additionally, the Township hires members for fire department and township staff and other contractual services; as well as coordinating volunteers

Standard Operation Procedures/Staff Description

The Township Supervisor manages the over-all administration of Columbia Township's budget and on-going projects/activities. The Clerk manages Township voting, meeting and related records, as well as facilitates additional duties as designated by the Supervisor. The Treasurer manages the Township budget, billing and taxpayer records, as well as facilitates additional duties as designated by the Supervisor. The Township Zoning Administrator manages zoning, planning, code enforcement and site plan review issues, as well as facilitates additional duties as designated by the Supervisor. One part-time secretary aids secretarial duties at the Township Hall.

For further information go to www.Columbiatwp.com

Emergency Services

Fire and Police Protection

Columbia Township has a volunteer Fire Department. The Department maintains stations on Phoenix Road and 52nd Street in Grand Junction. Police protection is provided by the Van Buren County Sheriff Office.

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EMR, EMT

Life EMS provides ambulance service under contract for the entire Township. Emergency service barn is on 52nd Street. The station is located in Gobles.

Township Operating Budget

Columbia Township operates on a fiscal year, which runs April 1st to March 31st. The funding of Township operations is mainly provided through the collection of property taxes and state shared revenue. Additional revenue from state grants and charges for services, including cemetery lot sales, occur during the typical Township fiscal year.

Sample - Columbia Township Operating Budget

Budget Allocation
General Fund
Fire Fund
Road Fund
Ambulance Fund
Liquor Fund
Hospital Fund
Police Fund
Seniors Fund
Special Assessments Fund
Housing Rehabilitation Fund
Total Budget

Schools

Educational needs for Columbia Township are served by two school districts: Bloomingdale and Bangor Community Schools. The two school districts are shown on Map 3-1. Total enrollment within the two school districts was approximately 1,749 students in the 2015/2016 school year.

Other schools that service the area: Van Buren County Vocational Technical Center, and the Van Buren County Intermediate School District, both located in Lawrence, service all the schools in Van Buren County for addition vocation classes. Many students are involved in dual enrollment with Kalamazoo Valley Community College and Lake Michigan College.

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Cemeteries

Three cemeteries, open to all residents, are maintained by the Township. These include the Township Cemetery south of the Township Hall, Thompson Cemetery west of 46th Street, and Breedville Cemetery on CR 380 east of Breedsville. The Township budget includes funds for maintenance and personnel.

Parks and Recreation

Currently, Columbia Township maintains one park, immediately south of the Township Hall. It is an open, manicured field, which can be used for baseball/softball games. Four land preserves are within the Township; two are conservation easements managed by the Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy, one is a conservation area run by the Michigan Nature Association and one is under the direct supervision of Columbia Township.

There are 17 local lakes and ponds within its borders. Public boat access to many of these bodies of water is available. The Kal-Haven State Park trailway crosses the Township from the northeast quadrant of Section 13 to the southwest quadrant of Section 6. The cities of Bangor, South Haven and Gobles have additional parks, as does the village of Bloomingdale. The Van Buren State Park is approximately 20 miles from Columbia Township, providing beachfront access to Lake Michigan and 434 campsites, picnic facilities, and trails.

Libraries

Columbia Township currently has access to four libraries within 10 miles of Grand Junction. The Pullman Public Library is located on 56th Street in Pullman. The Bangor Public Library is located on Division Street. The Gobles Public Library is located on East Main Street. The South Haven Public Library is located on Broadway. Each library provides a wide range of reading and visual aid materials for Township residents.

Hospitals

Medical services for Columbia Township are available at Bronson South Haven Hospital on S Bailey Avenue in South Haven, Allegan General Hospital on Linn Street in Allegan, and Bronson Lakeview Hospital on Hazen Street in Paw Paw.

Transportation

Columbia Township is served by the Van Buren County road system, as well as a variety of private service roads leading to Township lakes. State Road M-43 is located approximately two miles south of Columbia Township, connecting the City of Kalamazoo to the east to South Haven to the west. Another major east/west roadway is CR 384, which goes through Grand Junction and the upper half of Columbia Township. The major north/south roadway is CR 215, which connects northern Columbia Township and Grand Junction with M-43 to the south. A major east/west roadway that goes through Grand Junction Center to South Haven is CR 388/Phoenix Road.

Utilities

Consumers Energy services Columbia Township with electricity and some natural gas. Indiana Electrical Power (aka AEP) also services some areas. Private propane providers located throughout the area provide gas service to individual businesses and residences. Currently, there is no public sanitary sewer service or public water service available within the Township.

Other Agencies in the Township

Government Agencies

The Township utilizes the Van Buren County Road Commission for road maintenance for the public roads. The Road Commission is located in Lawrence. The Van Buren County Transit located in Bangor provides transportation for residents located in Van Buren County. The State Police post is located in Paw Paw.

Local Agencies

The Township Neighborhood Watch meets regularly at the Township Hall. This service brings neighbors together to protect and watch out for each other. Senior Services, located in Paw Paw, is a full service agency to help with the needs of the aging. Services include: meal, fun activities, transportation, support, in-home care, and many more. Community Mental Health provides crisis intervention, treatment, assessment, prevention, and a 24 hr hotline. St. Vincent DePaul, in Bangor, operates a food pantry, thrift store and provides other services for people in need.

Section 4 – Existing Land Use

Introduction

Before pursuing specific future land use objectives, an inventory of existing land use in Columbia Township is necessary. The inventory depicts the existing distribution and location of land uses within the Township. Understanding existing land use patterns empowers the community to make an assessment of both good and bad land use practices currently found within Columbia Township. The goal is to better clarify the reasoning concerning the designation and justification of proposed future land use classifications within the Township.

Land Use Classifications

The existing land uses within Columbia Township are categorized by land uses and specific classifications. The Existing Master Plan Map utilizes base map information from MIRIS data and incorporates a Township-wide windshield survey completed in early 2001. The following are the classifications used in the land use inventory:

Residential

This classification indicates an area in which dwellings with their accessory buildings occupy the major portion of the land and can include:

- Single-Family Dwelling Units
- Multiple-Family Dwelling Units, which are one or more buildings containing two or more dwelling units each. This subcategory includes duplexes, apartments, townhouses and multiple-family condominiums.
- Manufactured Homes, which include mobile homes and modular housing unit designs. These residential units are assembled primarily off-site and anchored upon paved slabs or sub-foundations

Columbia Township Master Plan

Agricultural/Open Space/Vacant

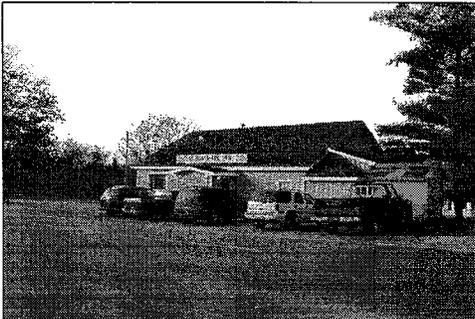
This category includes areas used for the production of crops, orchards, or the raising of livestock. This open space and forest areas, as well as wetlands and lakes, are also part of Columbia Township's rich natural land inventory. Agriculture, open space and vacant land account for 87.7 percent of the entire Township land use area, while inland lakes occupy over four percent of the Township.

Conservation/Preserve Area

An area used for the conservation and preservation of animals, waterways, wetland, trees and plant life and/or land occupying a specific parcel or parcels.

Commercial/Retail and Service

This category includes areas, with or without structures, where goods are distributed or services are provided. The category includes areas in which retail and wholesale goods are sold, personal or business services are provided, or in which professional offices are located. Structures, adjacent land and parking areas dedicated for the use of employees and customers are included in the category.



Industrial/Manufacturing

This classification includes areas where raw or unfinished materials or commodities are used to produce a product or service. Manufacturing processes often produce noise, odors, vibrations, light or other emissions that may be detrimental to surrounding land uses.

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Public

This category includes areas or facilities used by Columbia Township, School District, County or State agencies to meet the needs of the community. This classification includes Township offices, schools, public meeting places, public parking lots and other uses.

Quasi-Public

This classification identifies land or facilities used by a limited number of persons with particular interests and nonprofit organizations, such as churches, private schools, private cemeteries, private clubs and related activities.

Recreation

A facility or area used for recreational activities, including water parks, golf courses and ski areas. This category includes all structures, adjacent land and parking areas dedicated for use by employees and customers of such recreational areas or facilities. Category also includes open space and forest land, as well as abandoned agricultural fields and flood plains. Lands in this category consist of both suitable and unsuitable areas for development.

Trends and Analysis

Columbia Township covers an area of approximately 21,827 acres. The Township is primarily agricultural lands, open space and single-family residential. Water bodies are also a prominent component of the total area of Columbia Township, thereby magnifying the importance of proper land use management to preserve and protect the rural and natural beauty, and water resources of the Township.

Columbia Township Master Plan

TABLE 4-1 - EXISTING LAND USE IN COLUMBIA TOWNSHIP, 2001

Land Use Type	2001 Land Use	
	Acres	Percentage
Residential, Single-Family	1,011	4.6
Residential, Multiple-Family	7	< 0.1
Residential, Mobile Home	317	1.5
Agriculture, Open Space, Vacant	19,150	87.7
Commercial/Retail	29	0.1
Industrial/Manufacturing	36	0.2
Public	81	0.4
Quasi-Public	23	< 0.1
Recreation	20	< 0.1
Conservation/Preserve Area	226	1.0
Lakes	927	4.2
Total	21,827	100.0

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Section 5 – Community Input

Introduction

The Columbia Township Master Plan can only be comprehensive when it provides inclusive community input. The overall vision, goals and objectives of the plan must be based upon a foundation of statistical data, topological mapping, geological data, urban land use theory and public insight.

Regarding the Columbia Township Master Plan, community input was provided by the following:

- Distribution of a community-wide questionnaire - August 9 through October 9, 2018
- Input by members of the Planning Commission, Township Board and Township staff.
- Holding a public information gathering session on August 22, 2018 at the Columbia Township Hall.
- Provision of updates, memos and mapping data at the monthly Planning Commission meetings.

The following provides a review of both the community-wide survey and public information gathering session:

Columbia Township Community Survey Overview

Columbia Township Survey Distribution

Between August 2018 and October 2018 a planning survey questionnaire was developed, distributed, collected, tabulated and analyzed by the Planning Commission. A postcard with information on how to complete the questionnaire (online, printed copy in the Township Hall, or via request that a physical questionnaire be mailed) was mailed using the Columbia Township Property Appraiser's property tax list of homeowners. Approximately 2,067 surveys were mailed with a seven percent response rate (143 respondents).

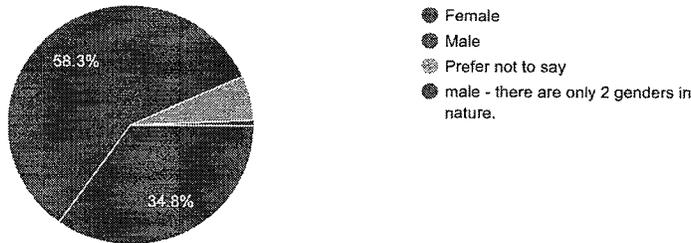
The full results of the survey can be found in Appendix A.

Demographics of Respondents

The responses to inquiry via survey and participation were not necessarily consistent with the demographics of Columbia Township, per the U.S. Census. The following charts represent respondent demographics, succeeded by corresponding demographics of Columbia Township.

Gender of Respondents

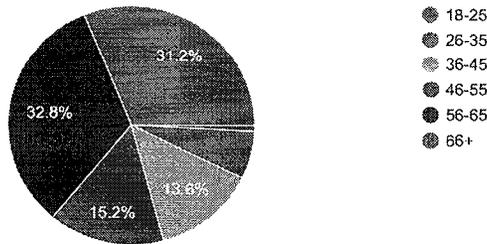
132 responses



The population of Columbia Township is 52% male, 48% female.

Age of Respondents

125 responses



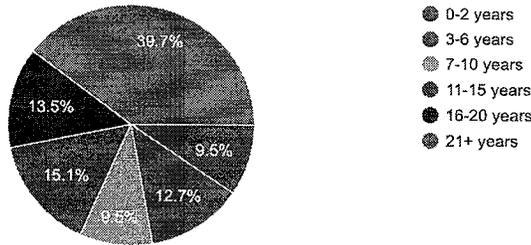
The ages of the population of Columbia Township are:

- 15-24: 11.2%
- 25-34: 10.3%
- 35-44: 14.3%
- 45-54: 15.6%
- 55-64: 14.6%
- 65+: 15%

Thus, participation of respondents aged 56+ are overrepresented and participation by resident under the age of 35 are underrepresented, when compared with the Township population. ¹

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Tenure of Respondents

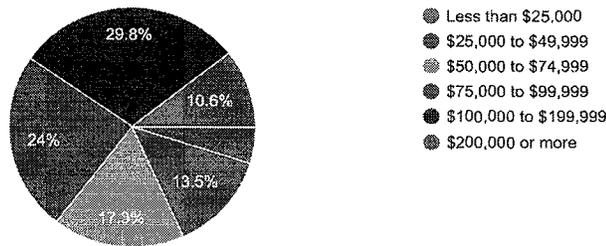
126 responses



Respondents tenure was equitably spread among those who were in Columbia Township 10 year or less, 11-20 years, and more than 20 years, providing an even spread of experiences of the community.

Annual Household Income

104 responses

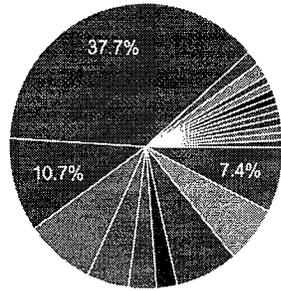


When compared with the population of Columbia Township, respondents with higher annual household incomes were overrepresented with 40.4% of respondents having household incomes over \$100,000 compared with 12% of the population having this same level of household income. Conversely, 62% of the population has a household income of \$50,000 or less, compared to 18.3% of respondents.

Major Wage-earner Industry

122 responses

Comment [1]: Is it possible to expand this? The values are not very useful as presented?

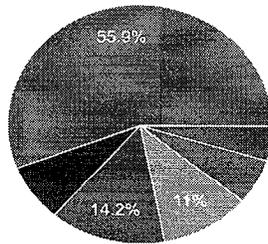


- Agriculture
- Mining
- Construction
- Manufacturing
- Retail/Wholesale
- Transportation, communications, an...
- Finance, insurance, real estate
- Government (includes education)

▲ 1/3 ▼

Residency per Year of Respondent

127 responses

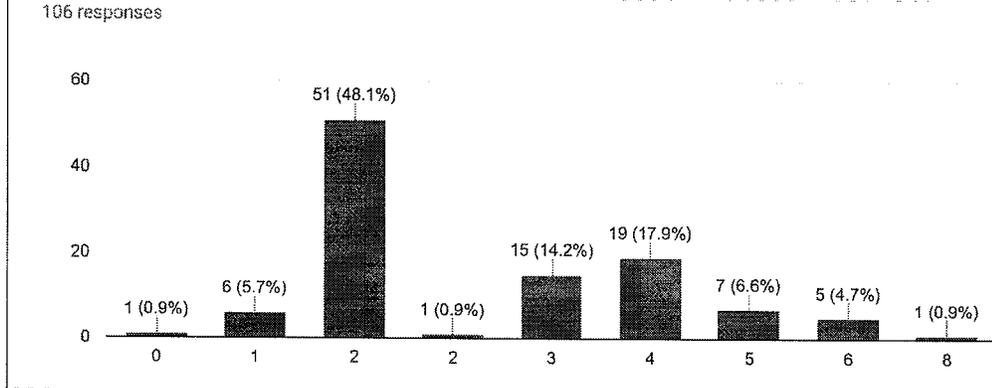


- less than 1 month
- 1-2 months
- 3-4 months
- 5-6 months
- 7-9 months
- 10-12 months

Approximately 75% of respondents report to be residents for at least half of the calendar year, with approximately 25% of respondents reporting seasonal residency.

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Members per Household

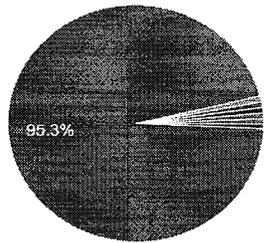


The number of household members of respondents is consistent with the number of household members in Columbia Township, Van Buren County, and the State of Michigan: 2.5 members per household.

Own vs Rent

Note: Only one respondent rents property while the other 128 own property in Columbia Township.

129 responses



- Rent
- Own
- OWN A LOT
- 40 acre wetland/wooded hunting property
- Original home owned by the family, passed down through three generations.
- OWN LAND NO HOME
- land contract

Comment [2]: Not sure what the 2nd 2 is?

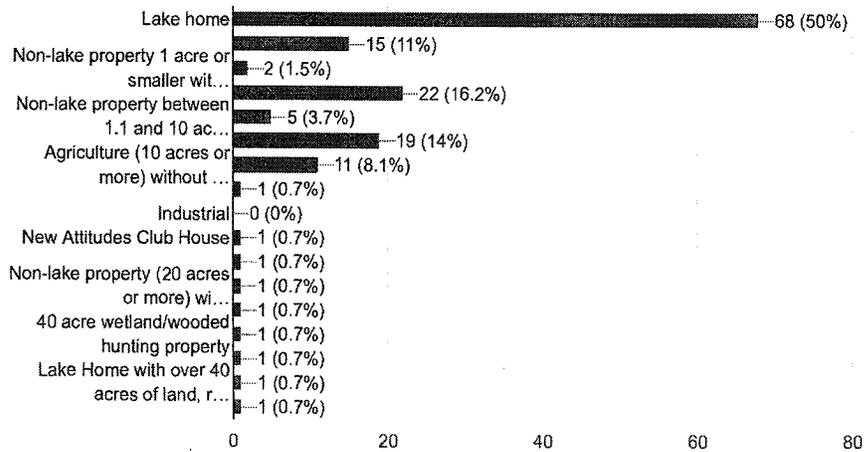
Comment [3]: hm... I never noticed that. I will try to figure it out

Comment [4]: Why is "Own a Lot" all in camps? Perhaps we should clarify: rent home, own home, own lot? Probably can combine red own with purple, and orange own lot with blue own land. Maybe call own lot/land?

Comment [5]: I used the chart the system created based on the responses. There are a couple I think I need to go back and change. This one and the industry one are two of those.

Property Type

136 responses



While generally regarded as an rural agricultural community 50% of respondents identified as having lake home property, with less than 10% of respondents identified as having 10+ agricultural acres.

Vision Growth & Population

Participants were asked about their vision for the future in terms of land use, growth, community and population. Overall, responses were divisive with little clear, consistent direction. While not an overwhelming interest in seeing population growth, there was consistent reaction in not wanting a population decrease, such that the overall interest was in maintaining current population levels. There was a general trend toward increasing economic development through both commercial and residential uses in town.

The emphasis suggests an interest in focused growth in town and in commercial areas, rather than in agricultural or lake areas. Of those expressing an interest in growth, the focus appears to be on smaller niche enterprises including wineries (69.4%), coffee shops (63.7%), bars (43.4%), restaurants (90.3%), retail establishments (62.9%), and marijuana provisional centers (12.1%).

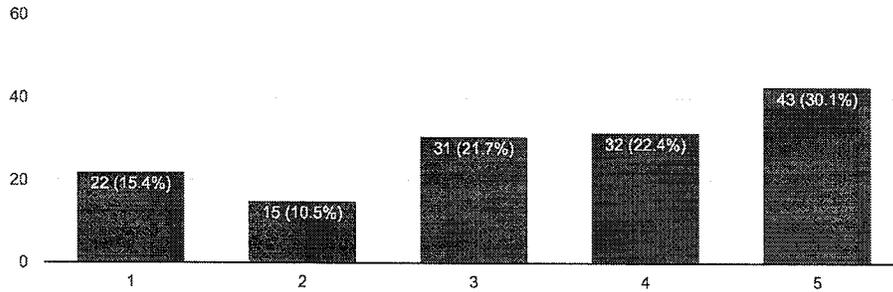
(Note: 1=strongly disagree and 5=strongly agree)

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Commercial Development

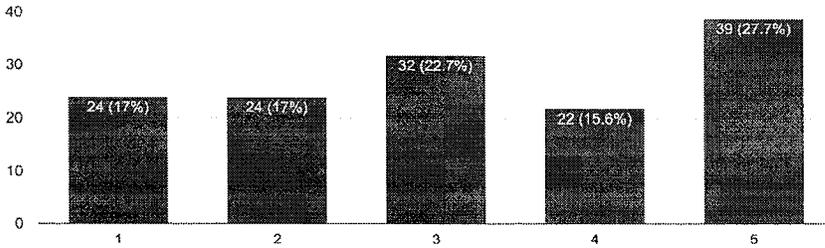
Would like to see increased commercial development, especially along County Road 388

143 responses



Would like to see increase commercial development, in general

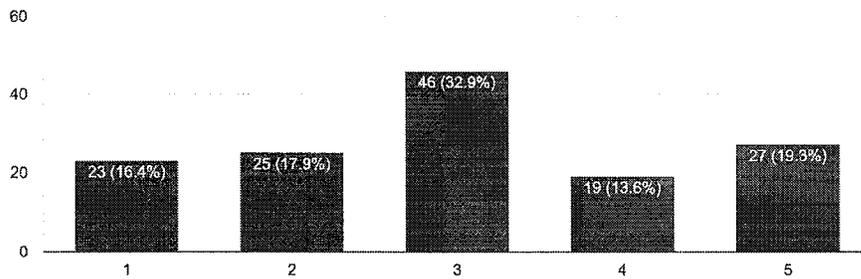
141 responses



Population

Would like the population to remain the same

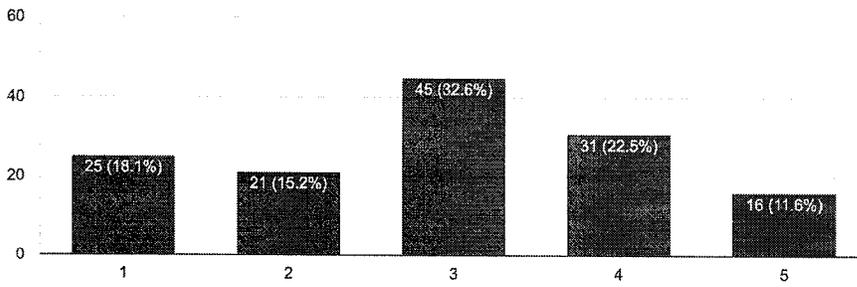
140 responses



Would like to see population increase.

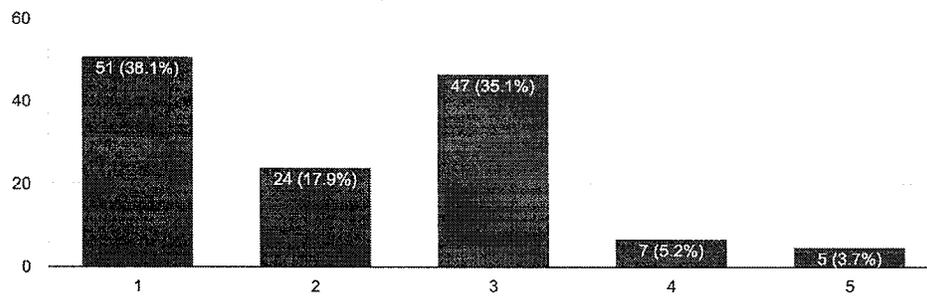
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138 responses



Would like to see population decrease.

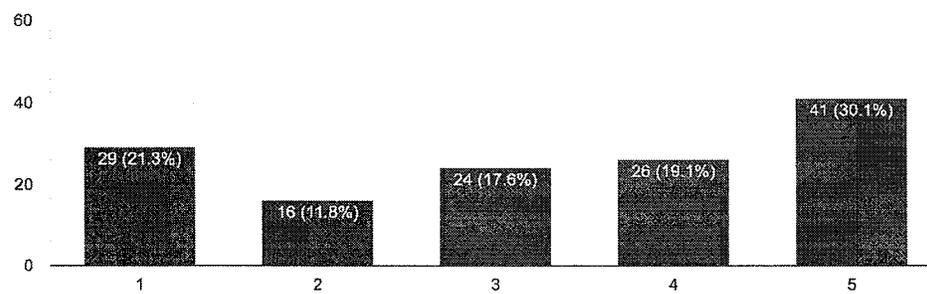
134 responses



Tourism

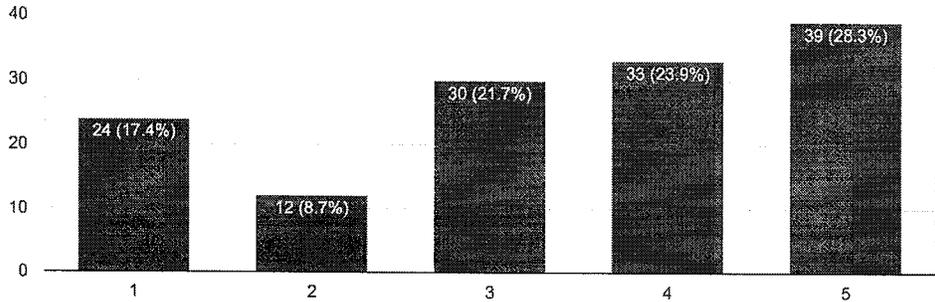
Would like to see growth as a tourist destination

136 responses



Would like to see economic growth stimulated by encouraging businesses related to tourism

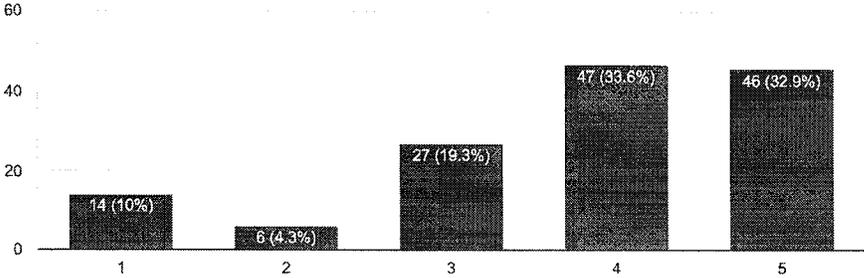
138 responses



Business/Economic Growth

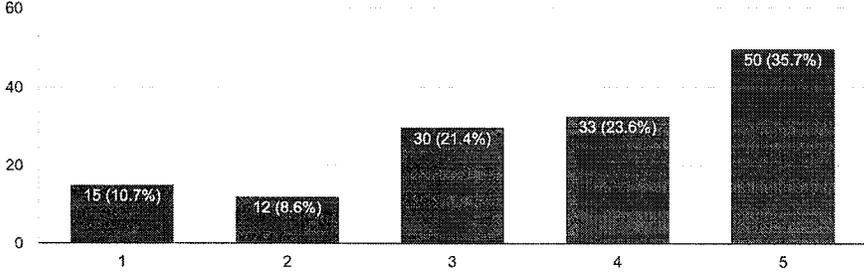
Would like to see economic development through both commercial and residential uses in town

140 responses



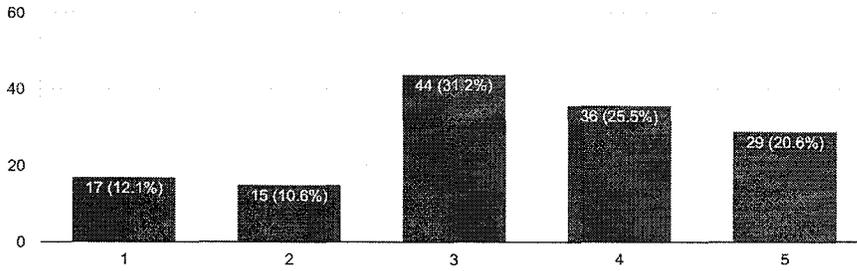
Would like to see greater diversity in business growth

140 responses



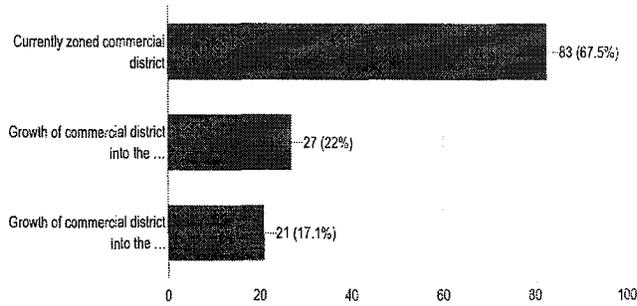
Would like to see growth stimulated by a common identity (theme, feel or look) among the various businesses or buildings

141 responses



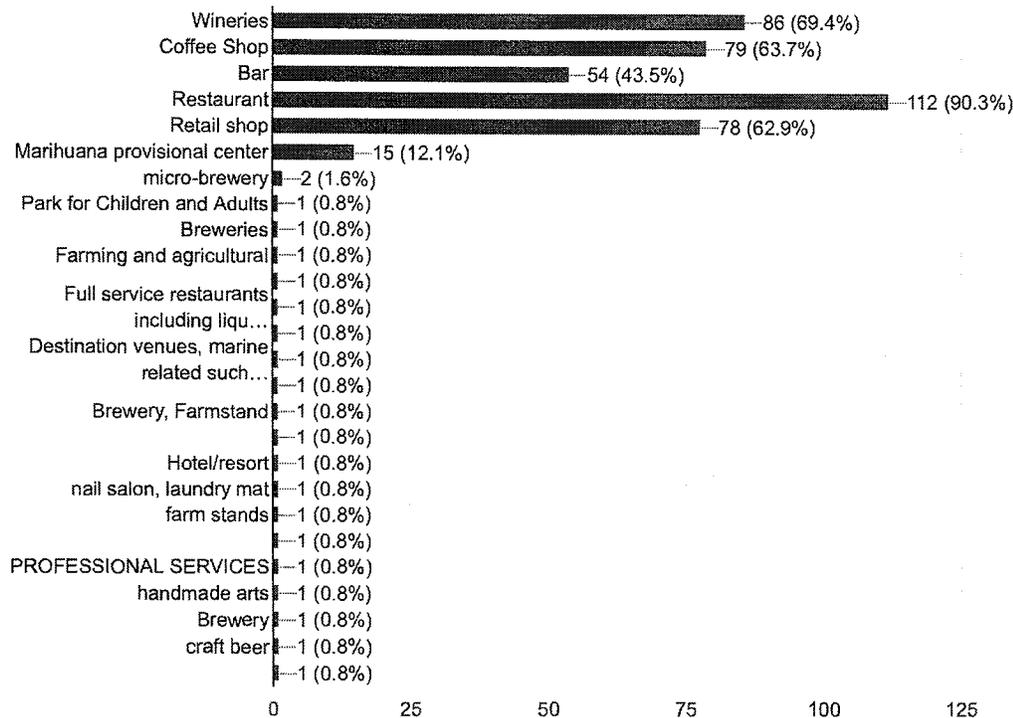
Would like to see growth in these areas of the township

123 responses



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Would like to see these types of commercial development grow

124 responses



Summary of Comments on this Section

Comments included an overarching desire to keep the small town, agricultural, quiet atmosphere of the township while comprehensively promoting well-thought zoning to improve business growth. Citizens are concerned about keeping with zoning laws after zoning is effectively managed and in place. While some citizens expressed a concern about marijuana in the township, most of the respondents are in support of growing facilities. No one expressed support of a provisional center and some expressed that they were against a provisional center. As business growth is addressed respondents want to ensure that growth is encouraged with small-town values and in the spirit our local agricultural community.

(Full comments can be seen in the appendix.)

Township Qualities

Respondents indicated that locally-owned businesses, safe walking and biking along town streets, township maintained recreational opportunities, protection of forests, lakes, and agriculture in the township, unique small town/agriculture community character, green development policies and green buildings, public safety, recycling opportunities, internet access and speed, cell phone coverage, and road conditions are all areas in which the majority

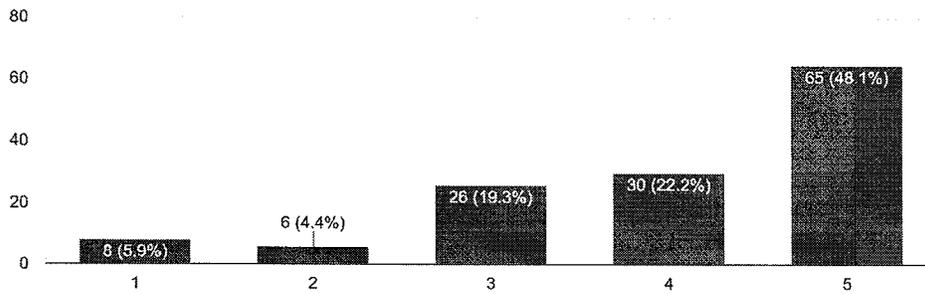
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of respondents (50% or more scored 4 or 5) feel are important to the township. Of moderate importance (50% or more scored 3, 4 or 5) to respondents were commercial signs that are generally uniform in size and gateway signs or monuments welcoming people into the township at its borders along its busiest streets. Of little importance (50% or more scored 1 or 2) to respondents were curb-lined streets in residential areas and snowmobile or ORV use of town streets.

Note: All of the items below were rated by how important they were to the citizen for the future of Columbia Township. 1 was equal to unimportant and 5 equal to very important.

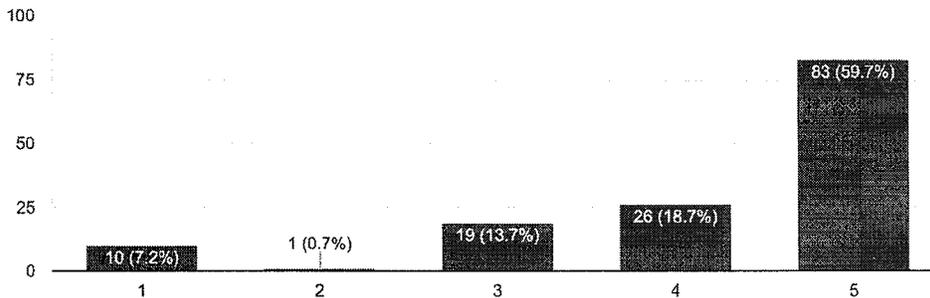
Locally-owned businesses

135 responses



Safe walking and biking along town streets

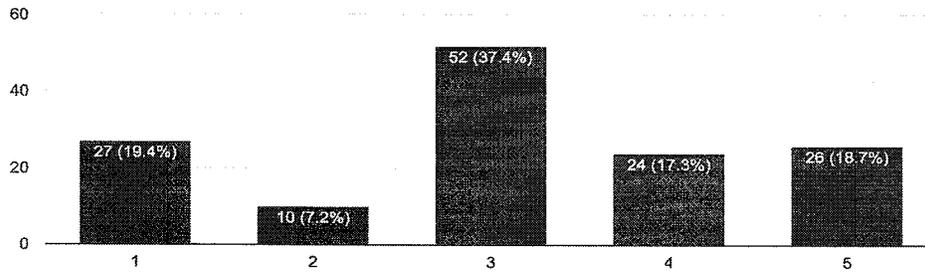
139 responses



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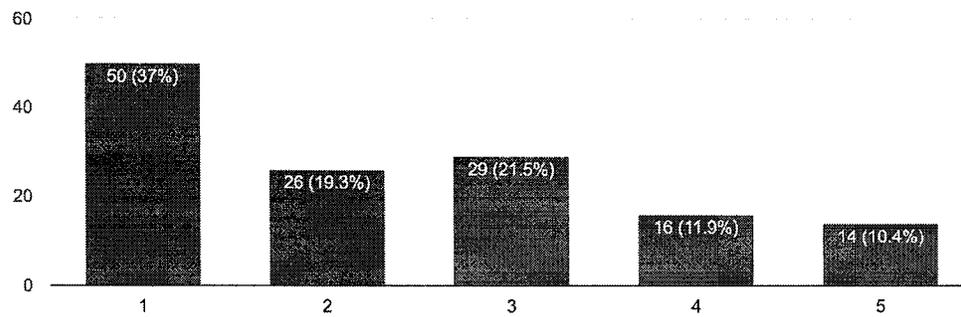
Commercial signs that are generally uniform in size

139 responses



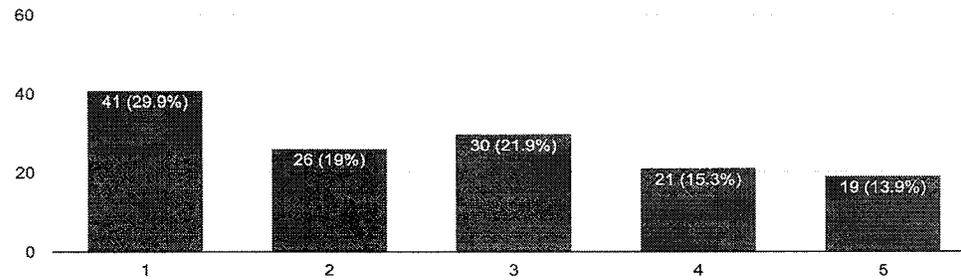
Curb-lined streets in residential areas

135 responses



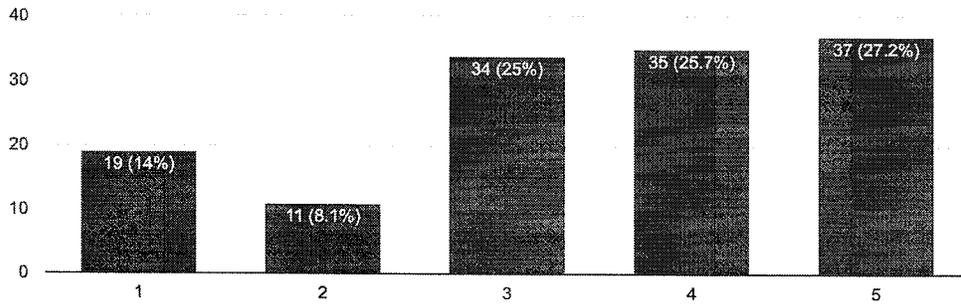
Snowmobile and ORV use of town streets

137 responses



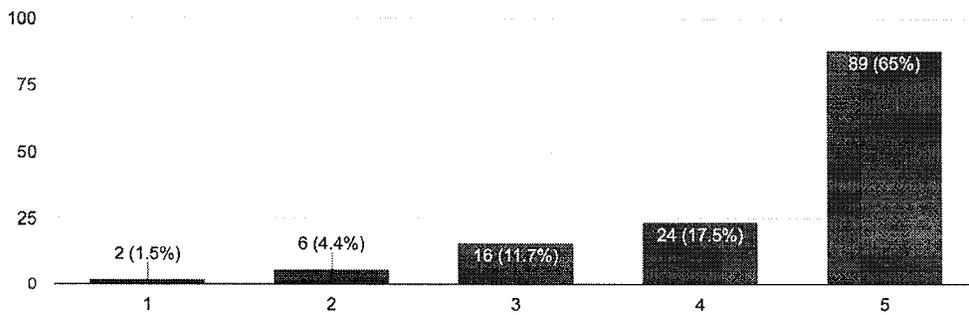
Township maintained recreational opportunities

136 responses



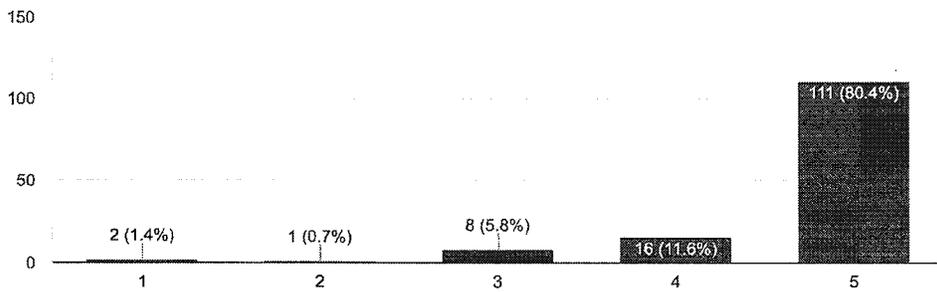
Protection of forests in the township

137 responses



Protection of lakes in the township

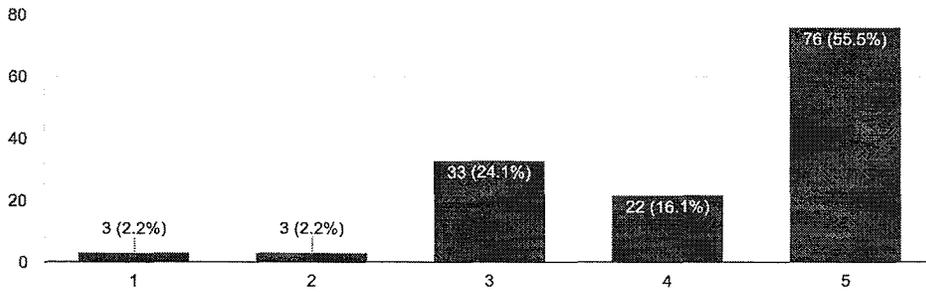
138 responses



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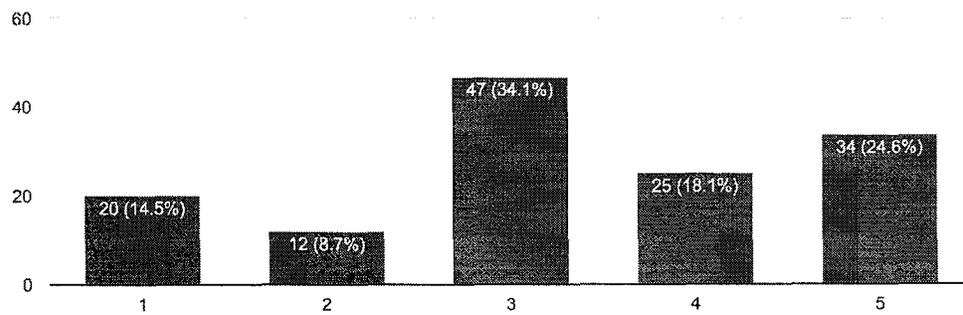
Protection of agricultural lands in the township

137 responses



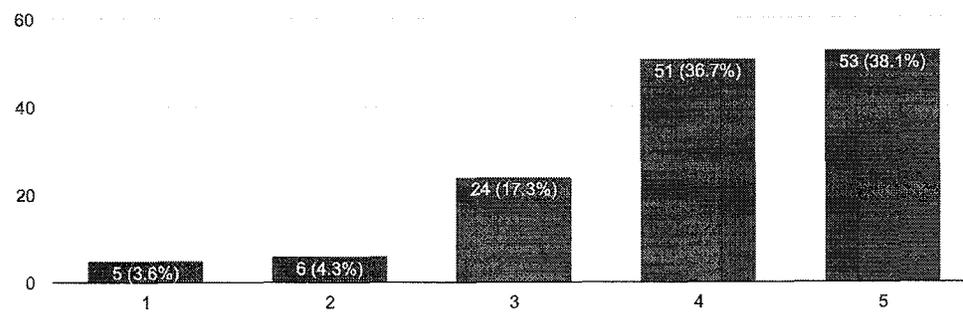
Gateway signs or monuments welcoming people into the township at its borders along its busiest streets

138 responses



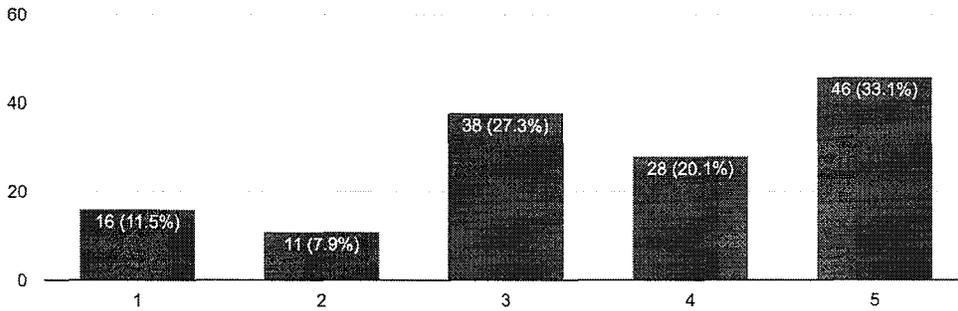
Unique small town/agriculture community character

139 responses



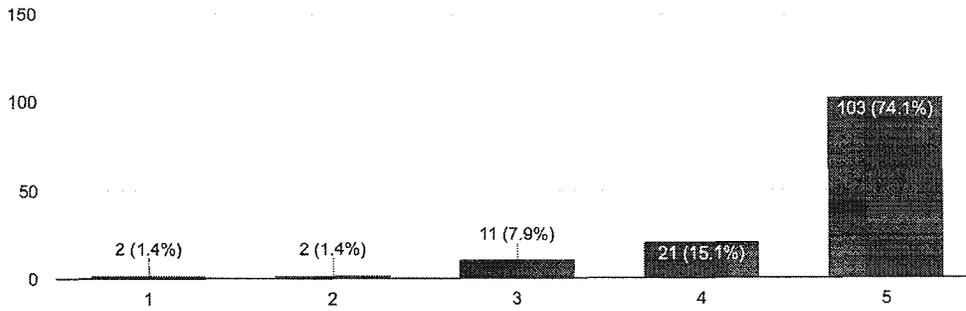
Green development policies and green buildings

139 responses



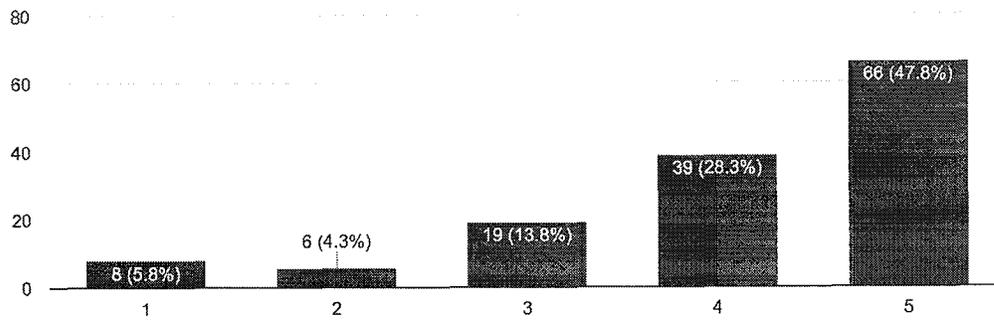
Public safety

139 responses



Recycling opportunities

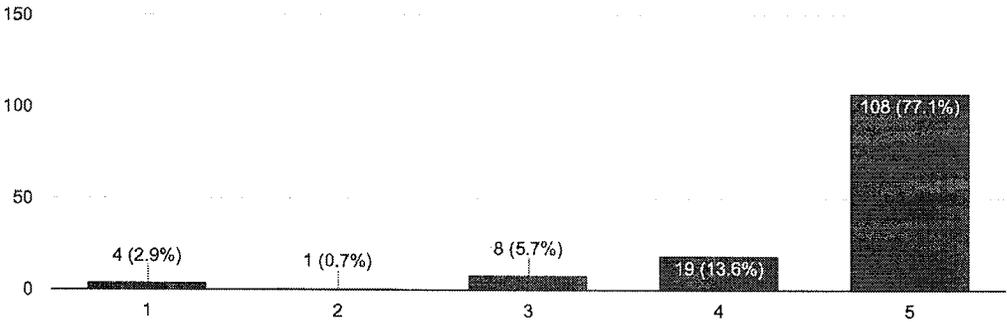
138 responses



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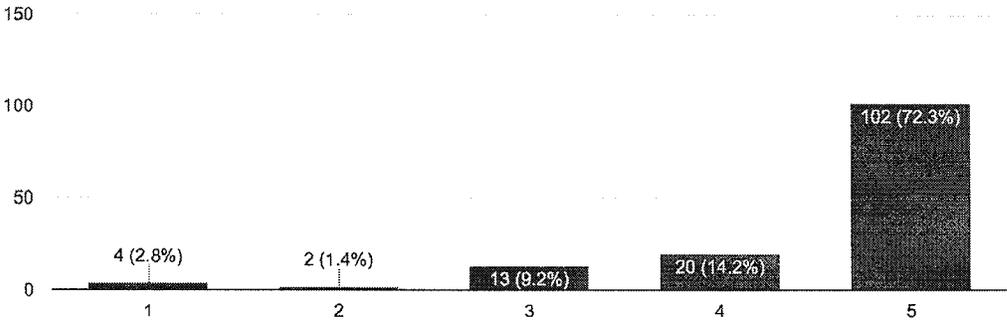
Internet access

140 responses



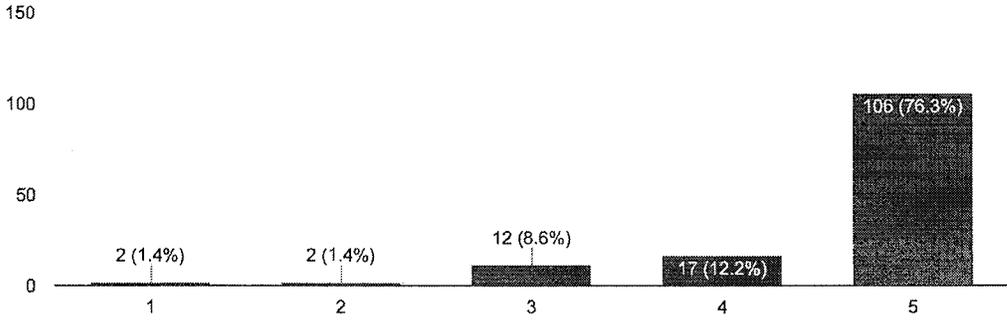
Internet speed

141 responses



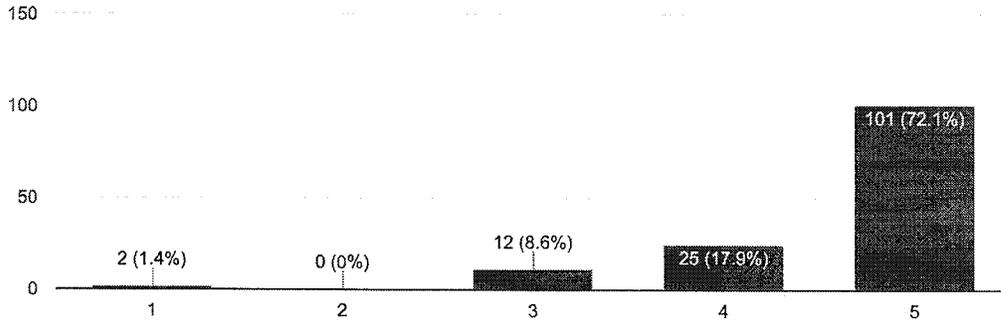
Cell phone coverage

139 responses



Road conditions

140 responses



Summary of Comments from this Section:

Overwhelming respondents mentioned concerns about internet availability and capabilities, cell phone coverage, and road conditions. In addition to these items, respondents would like to see better recycling options, sidewalks to children to travel down, and no ORV usage on the roads.

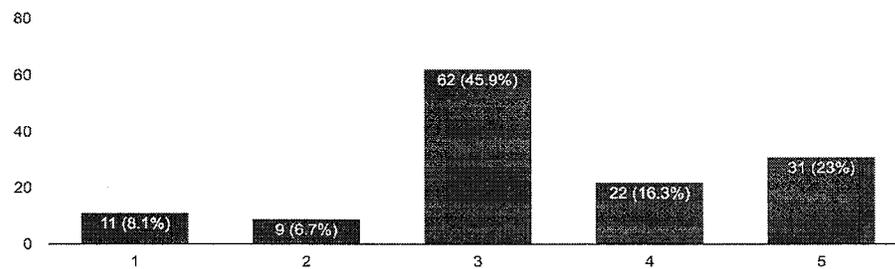
Future Land Use

Respondents indicate that moderate regulation is desired in most land use situations except commercial development. In the case of commercial development, respondents indicated that regulation is more important. None of the other categories indicated that 50% or more of the respondents found regulation to be of importance (score of 4 or 5).

Note: All of the items below were rated by how much regulation citizens would like to see of those items in Columbia Township. 1 was equal to unimportant and 5 equal to very important.

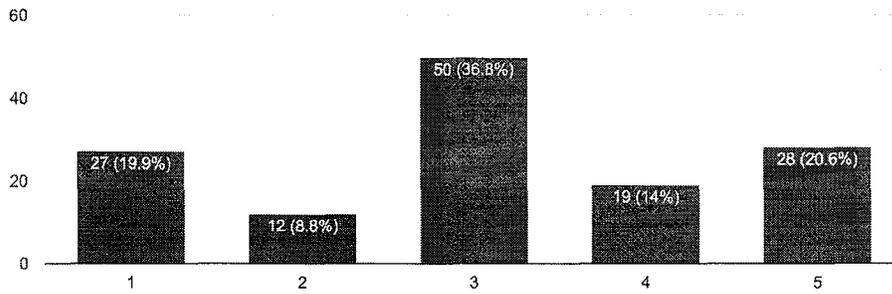
Single family homes

135 responses



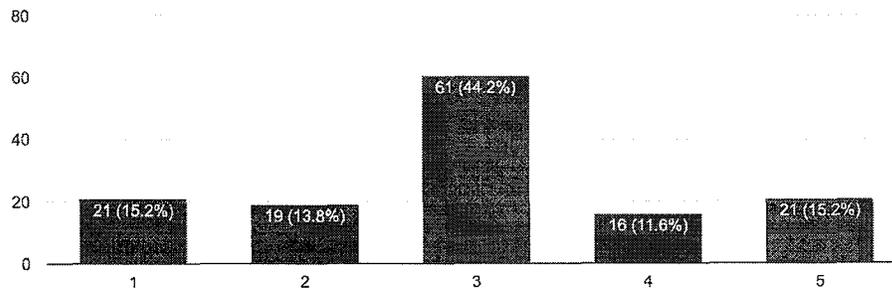
Multi-family dwellings (apartments, rental duplexes, etc.)

136 responses



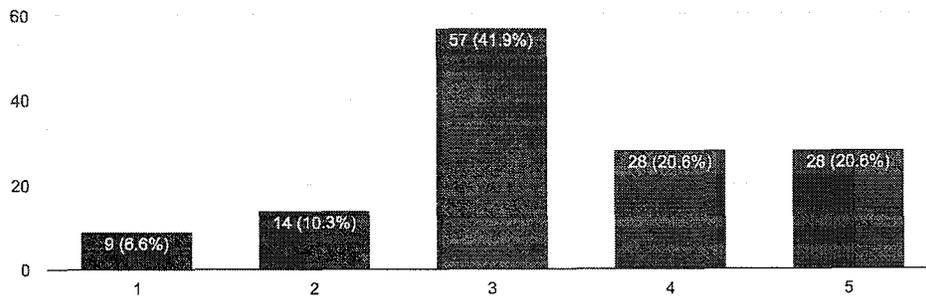
Accessory dwelling units (mother-in-law, guest houses, etc.)

138 responses



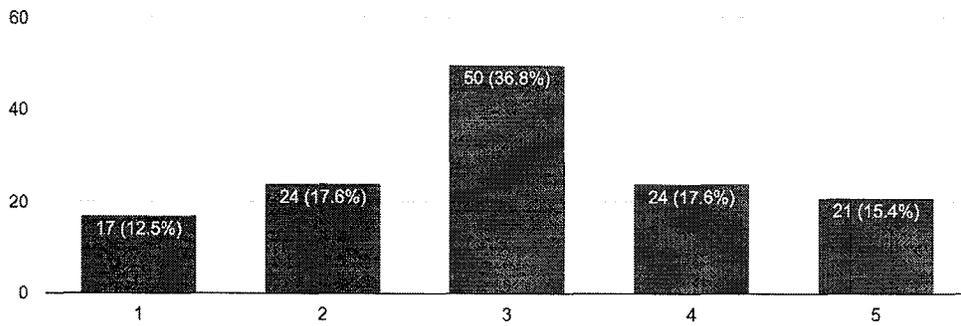
General business

136 responses



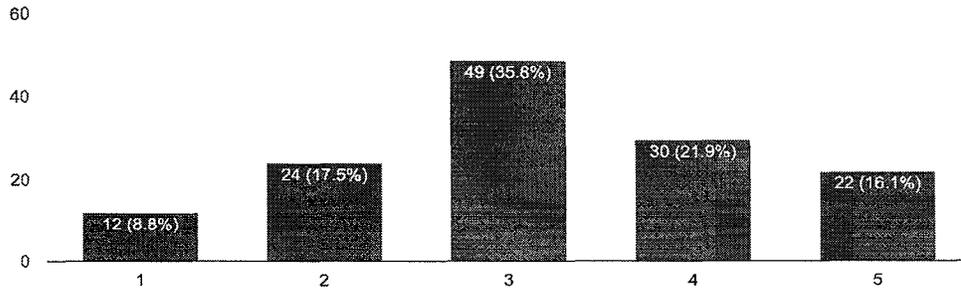
Business intermixed with residential

136 responses



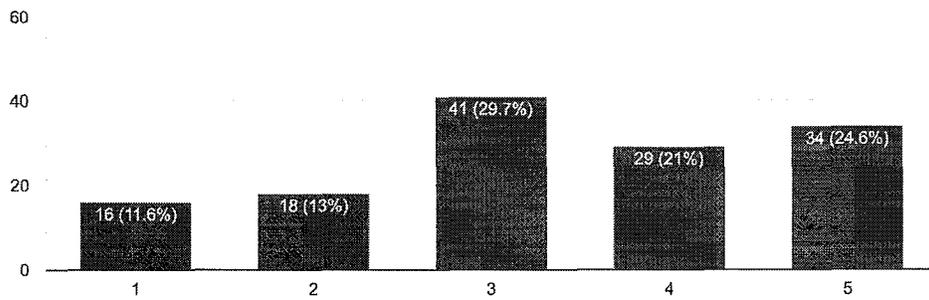
Business intermixed with agricultural

137 responses



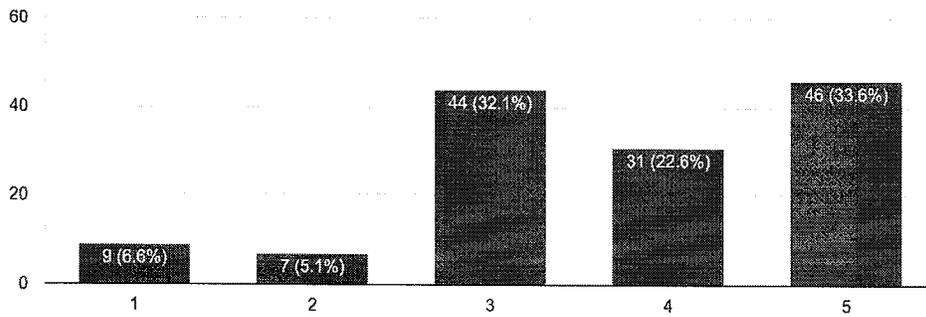
Tourism-based business or activities

138 responses



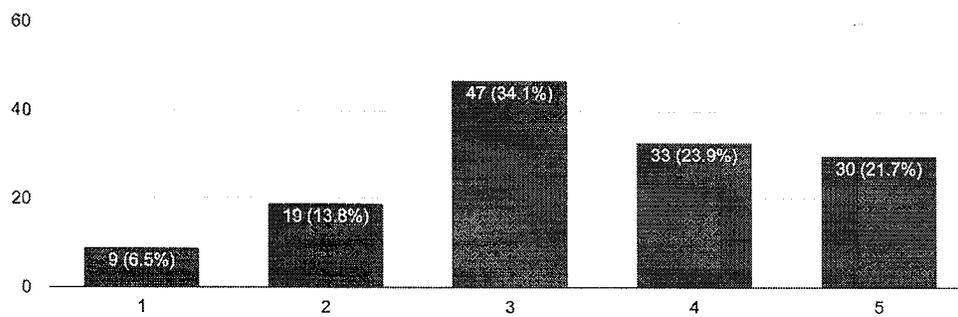
DRAFT Columbia Township Master Plan
Quality of commercial development

137 responses



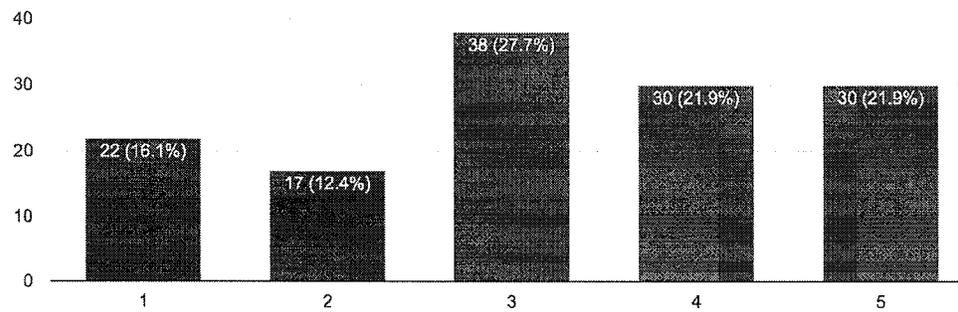
Agri-business/Agri-industry

138 responses



Wind farms or other alternative energy production

137 responses



Summary of Comments on this Section

Overwhelming respondents mentioned a concern about random zoning and the need to adhere to good zoning practices that include keep business out of the agricultural district. Respondents also mentioned a need to blight enforcement, appropriately stimulated business growth, and reduced regulation as higher priorities. Windmills and other green energy are a more contentious topic with some respondents in favor and others against these measures. Less mentioned items were a need for a senior living complex and more regulation on rentals.

Community Events/Activities/Parks

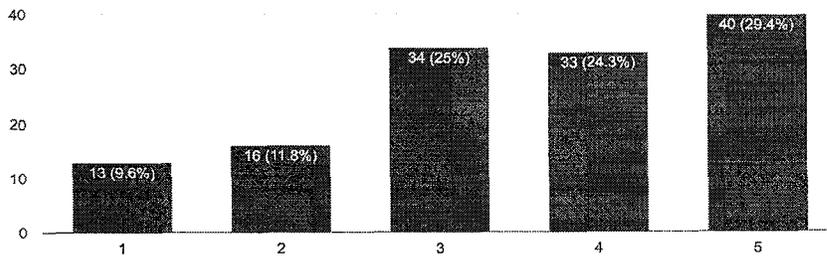
Generally, respondents see community events, activities, and parks to be of importance. Using a scale, we can rank the items below in order of importance. 1 point was given for each rating of 3, 2 points of each rating of 4, 3 points for each rating of 5, no points for a rating of 2, and subtract 1 point for each rating of 1. In doing so, following is are the items listed in order of importance:

1. Improvements to existing parks (207 pts)
2. Community festivals (204 pts)
3. Informal community gathering place (171 pts)
4. Outdoor community arts (142 pts)
5. Performing arts opportunities (121 pts)

Note: All of the items below were rated by how much time and resources respondents would like to see Columbia Township invest in them. 1 was equal to unimportant, 2 was equal to undecided, 3 was equal to slightly important, 4 was equal to moderately important, and 5 equal to very important.

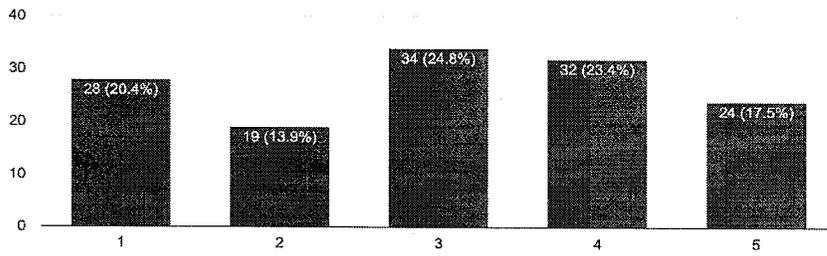
Improvement to existing parks

136 responses



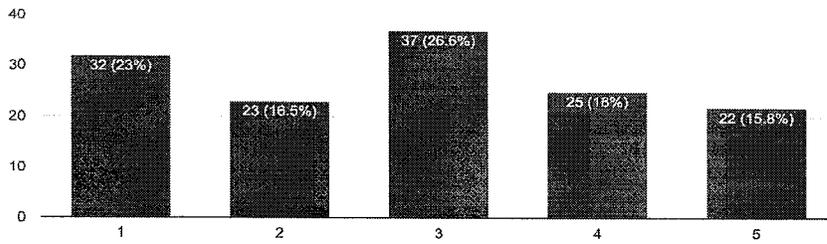
DRAFT Columbia Township Master Plan
Outdoor community arts

137 responses



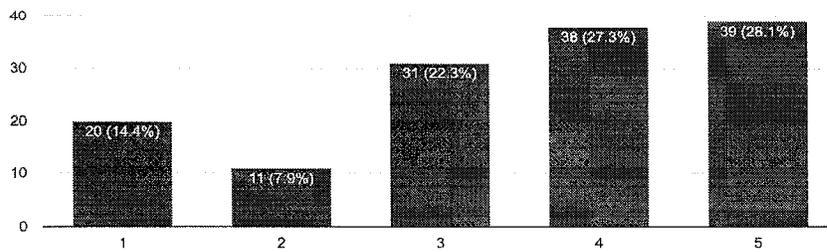
Performing arts opportunities

139 responses

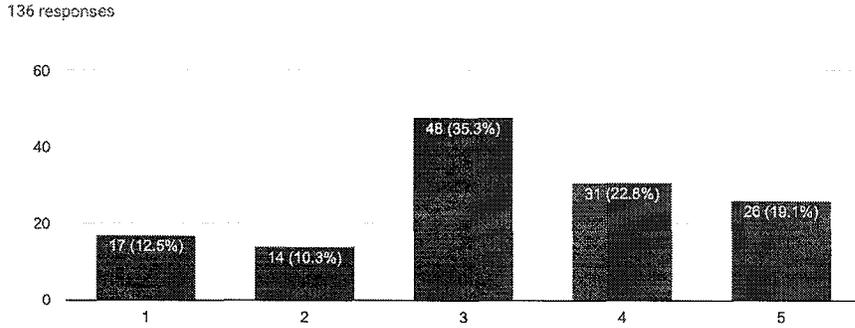


Community festivals

139 responses



Informal community gathering place



Summary of Comments on this Section

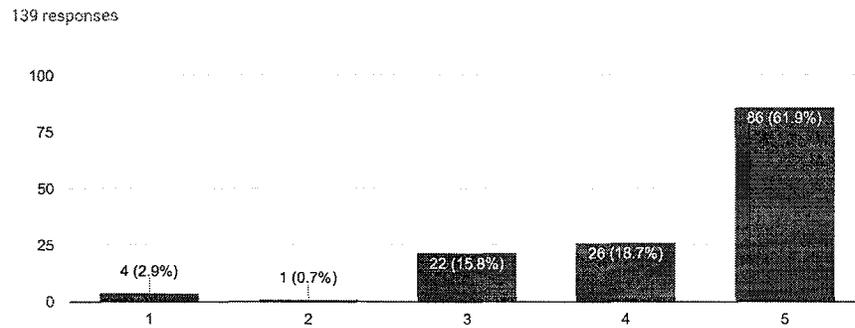
The primary concerns mentioned in comments were that roads need improvement, additional restaurants and bars are wanted, and community space is desired. Improvements to the current community space behind the township hall and at the KalHaven trail crossings were mentioned as desirable. Keeping with the peaceful and quiet setting of the community is of utmost importance. Some additional comments indicated a desire for more policing, cleaning the lakes, finding ways to increase attendance in township meetings, annually survey citizen and tell them how the data is being used, creating a community center that includes indoor sports, clean up the town, and keep any current/future parks in excellent shape.

New Policy Development

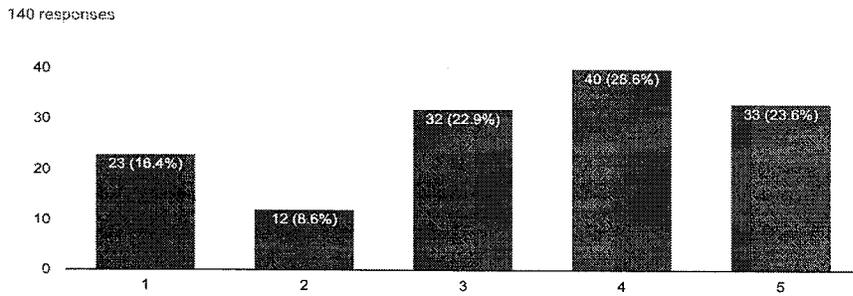
Respondents are strongly in support of enforcement of existing blight/junk ordinances and wish to adjust zoning as necessary to increase commercially zoned properties. More than 50% of the respondents are willing to pay additional taxes to see their concerns and areas of importance addressed.

Note: All of the items below were rated by how much respondents agree with each statement. 1 was equal to strongly disagree and 5 equal to strong agree.

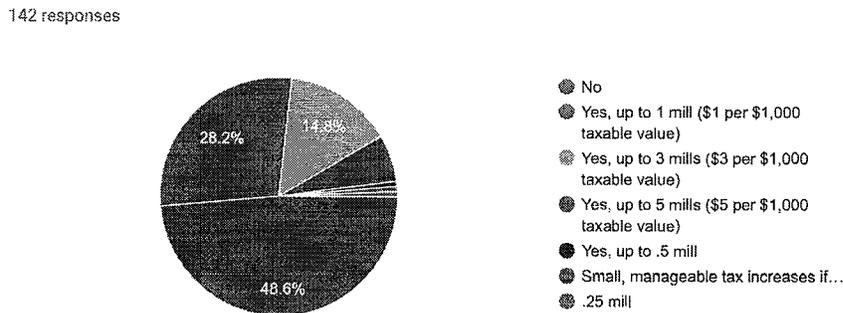
Enhance township appearance through enforcement of existing blight or junk ordinances



Adjust zoning to allow for more commercial properties within the township



If policies are created to support your concerns in any category in this survey, are you willing to have your taxes increased?



Summary of Comments on this Section

While many respondents indicated that they paid enough taxes already, others clarified that taxes paid should show more apparent impact and the Township should be “smart” about how the monies were allocated. Specific issues that respondents indicated warranted tax funds were enforcement of ordinances (in particular blight), road improvement, and improvement of services (more law enforcement). There was mention of supporting green energy, education, and increasing business/commercial opportunities, although not in residential zones.

Promoting the Township

Respondents were asked how to best promote Columbia Township, with responses indicating support for retaining an identify as an agricultural community. Toward this end, many respondents supported agri-tourism, recreational opportunities (including the KalHaven Trail, boating, fishing, biking, etc.) and promotion of access to clean lakes. Most respondents were in favor of the growth and promotion of business opportunities. Approximately 10% of

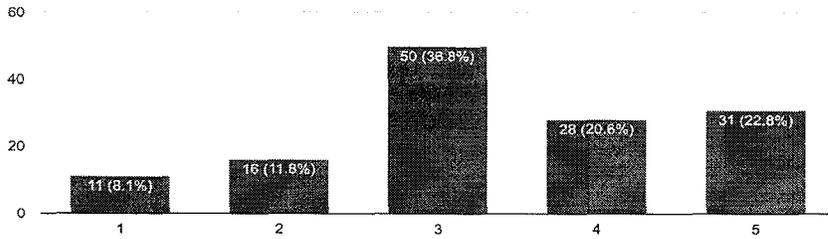
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respondents, on average, indicated that promotion of the Township in any of these areas was very unimportant and, by extension, undesirable.

Note: All of the items below were rated by how much regulation citizens would like to see of those items in Columbia Township. 1 was equal to unimportant and 5 equal to very important.

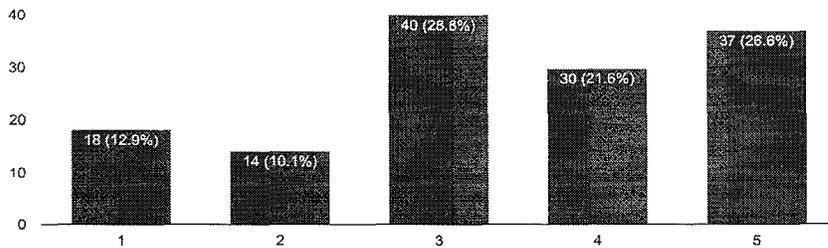
Promotion of the township as a primarily agricultural community

136 responses



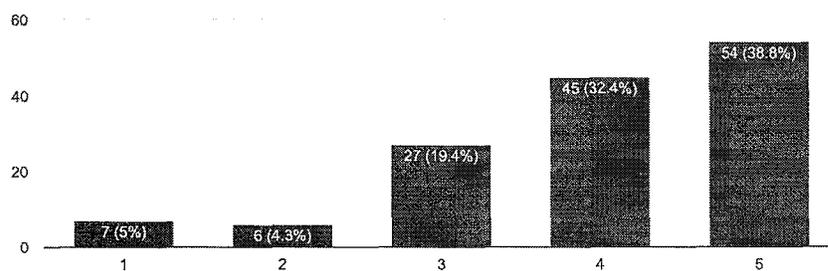
Promotion of the township as an agri-tourism community

139 responses



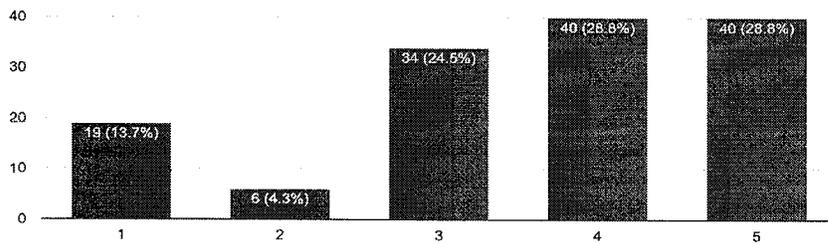
Growth and promotion of recreational opportunities (including KalHaven Trail, boating, fishing, biking, etc.)

139 responses



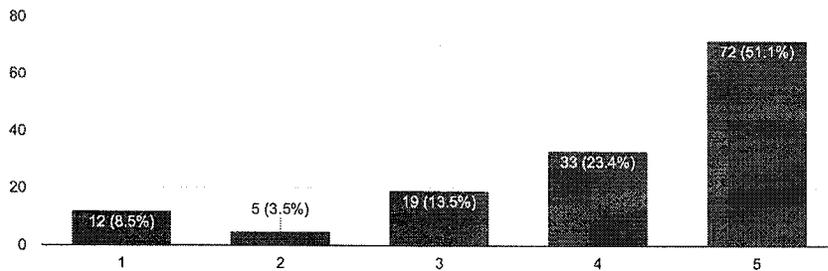
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Growth and promotion of business opportunities

139 responses



Growth and promotion of cleanliness and accessibility of lakes

141 responses



Comments in the section

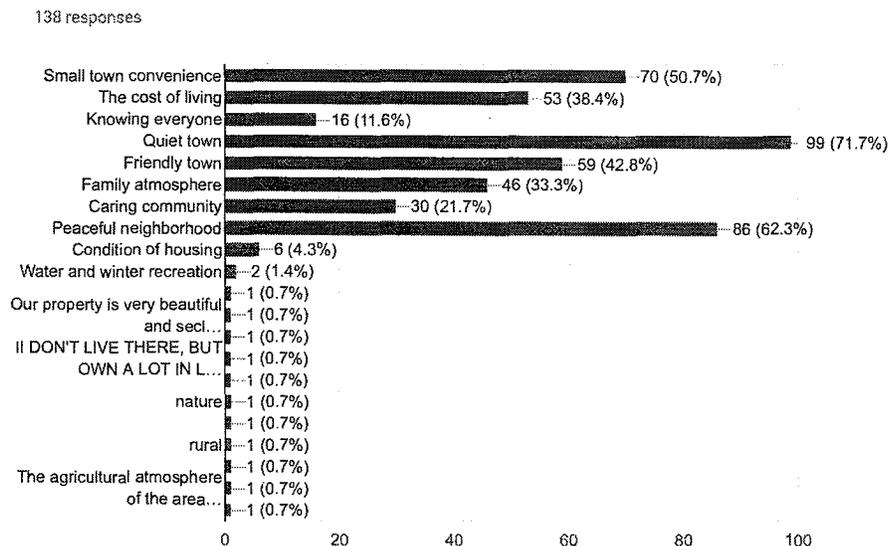
Keeping the lakes and KalHaven clean is a recurring comment of respondents. Comments indicate that at least one lake resident believes that all lake residents should have more say in township decisions because they pay more taxes while another respondent indicates that he/she feels that non-lake residents are ignored. Comments also indicate that many respondents are not aware of what agri-tourism is while others do or don't wish to see agri-tourism in the township. Cleaning up blight is also mentioned in these comments.

Quality of Life

Consistent with the focus on the natural and agricultural aspects of the township, in the questions about what citizens enjoyed most about living in Columbia Township, the majority of respondents replied that they enjoyed the quiet, peaceful neighborhoods and small town convenience. Respondents agreed that they enjoyed the cost of living, and friendly, family atmosphere.

Note: All of the items below were rated by how much regulation citizens would like to see of those items in Columbia Township. 1 was equal to unimportant and 5 equal to very important.

The items that citizens like most about living in Columbia Township



Comments on what could be done better in Columbia Township

While there were aspects that respondents enjoyed about Columbia Township, there were areas in which respondents felt improvements could be made. Many comments revolved around enforcement of blight, noise, and rentals, as well as on improving the road conditions. While some respondents expressed an interest in increasing businesses and/or better supporting new businesses, others expressed a preference for zero growth on businesses. Similarly, while some expressed an interest in more affordable/lower income housing and rental properties, others expressed an interest in decreasing use of rental properties and/or increasing regulation of rental properties. Respondents expressed an interest in maintaining the “country feel” and so did not want additional street lights. There was some request for lower taxes and increased police protection. Finally, some residents felt that there was not enough communication and suggested use of social media (Facebook) and/or email blasts.

Community Feedback Session

On August 22, 2018 a community feedback session concerning public input on future land use in Columbia Township was held at the Township Hall and moderated by Julie Pioch, District Coordinator of the Michigan State University (MSU) Extension.

20 residents were in attendance. Following is the agenda and questions asked during this session:

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Agenda:

1. Introduction to Master Plan process - Leslie Elrod, PC Chair
2. Overview of meeting - Julie Pioch
 - a. Current demographics
 - b. Current land use
 - c. Current zoning - maps
3. Envision the future of Columbia Township
4. Re-arrange seating by asking people to move to a table where there are at least two people who you have never met or at least never talked to.
5. In small group, assign someone to write down key points from the group's discussion. Assign someone to talk to the larger group about those key points.
6. Small group get to know each other (quick round robin)
7. Where do you live or own property and how long have you lived here?
8. Why do you live or own property in the township? What made you choose Columbia Township?
9. When you tell people where you live how do you describe the community?
10. Complete worksheet (questions)

Questions:

1. Give a few examples of things that make you proud about the community.
2. Give a few examples of things in the community that make you cringe, keep you up at night, make you worry or you are sorry about.
3. Imagine you moved away for 20 years and came back to the place you live now. Ideally what would you see when you returned?
4. As you envision the future of this community in 20 years - what big hairy audacious goals do you think Columbia Township should be working on now to get to that ideal reality you imagined?

Summary of responses:

Thing that make you proud:

The aspects that attendees reported made them proud to be a resident of Columbia Township revolved predominantly on the natural beauty and natural features of the area (lakes, agriculture, woodlands and wildlife). Attendees expressed an attraction to the small-town ambiance with friendly, hard-working people in an area with low population density with little industry. People claim to enjoy the recreational opportunities and community events.

Things that bother you:

While attendees expressed an enjoyment of the natural setting, there were aspects that attendees found undesirable. Most often cited issues included blight, litter, crime, and roads in disrepair. Some attendees indicated frustration at the lack of access to jobs, housing, technology (cell phone coverage, cable, and internet) and services in general. Noise from a variety of sources (raceway, semi-trucks, jet skis, snow mobiles, quads) interrupted the quiet solitude for several respondents. A few attendees expressed concern for the aging population, poverty, and increased taxes.

What you hope to see in 20 years:

When asked what they would hope to see in 20 years, there emerged a divide with some respondents envisioning natural resources, parks and recreation, agritourism (specifically mentioning hay rides, u-pick and farm markets), and poverty diminishing through generally flourishing agriculture. Others envisioned economic development in town and commercial areas with businesses ranging from antique stores, gift shops and restaurants to physician offices, Dairy Queen, coffee shops (Biggby or Starbucks), grocery store and hair salon. People envisioned better technology services with some envisioning hovercrafts and drones, eliminating the need for road improvements.

Attendees envisioned a brighter future of decreased blight, lower crime, better living conditions with nice landscaping and sidewalks in town and a choice of service providers. Perhaps in keeping with the utilization of natural resources, attendees expressed an interest in recycling, solar and wind power, and additional parks and recreational areas. Attendees hoped to see greater diversity, newer homes, and higher educational attainment levels of future residents.

Your biggest goal for the township in 20 years:

The attendee's biggest goals for Columbia Township in 20 years were quite varied. Some stressed purposeful growth, development and enforcement through the creation/maintenance of a solid master plan and ordinances while others focused on educating residents about engaging in land beautification, community pride, and communication. Others expressed an interest in improving the economy, technological access, and attracting youth.

Section 6 – Goals and Objectives

Goal 1: Preserve natural and peaceful environment.

Strategies:

- A. Rural traits of quietness, privacy, stable property values, and an identity apart from the city should be a priority and enforced by strong zoning.
- B. Update zoning requirements to include methods for preservation of larger lot sizes in agricultural areas.
- C. Pursue participation in the Van Buren County Farmland and Open Space Preservation Program in order to take advantage of available grant opportunities. Complete all requirements and submit the required resolution.
(Note: https://www.vbco.org/landpreservation_2.asp)
- D. Review and update zoning and site plan review requirements which promote the protection of lake and water quality such as impervious surface limits, building location restrictions, setbacks for buildings, wells and septic systems, and shoreline landscaping.
- E. Include MDOT Stormwater Management Plan (SWMP) research in amending zoning ordinances related to the watershed. (Note: https://www.michigan.gov/mdot/0,4616,7-151-9621_11041_91575---,00.html). Utilize the FEMA floodplain maps for flood insurance and MDNR High Risk Erosion Area map as overlay zones to simplify regulation and avoid duplication of state and federal regulation.
- F. Amend Site Plan Review of the Zoning Ordinance to include both regulated and unregulated natural resources, such as wetlands and floodplains, to be shown on the site plan.
- G. Incorporate public safety into long-range master planning to provide for security and safety.

Goal 2: Provide for growth of business within the Township, taking into account Goal 1.

Strategies:

- A. Investigate zoning ordinances to ensure that commercial requirements are not unreasonably restricting businesses from starting or succeeding in the Township.
- B. Review and adjust zones to accommodate usage demands.
- C. Identify businesses that are compatible with the Township and develop a plan to attract them.
- D. Concentrate commercial uses in those areas where adequate public infrastructure (transportation, water, and sewer) is available to support such activity. Evaluate and cluster commercial uses to better serve traffic through the Township.
- E. Amend zoning map to identify appropriate commercial areas without negatively impacting the natural landscape.
- F. Investigate the viability of overlay districts for improved business growth.

Goal 3: Utilize zoning to drive 21st century technology enhancements in the Township.

Strategies:

- A. Review zoning ordinances to ensure continued technological advancements throughout the Township.
- B. Discuss desirability of providing regulations for Wind Energy Conversion Systems (wind turbines) and solar panels
 - 1) Simplify regulations for small-scale, individual, onsite-use alternative energy generation.
 - 2) Address as needed utility-scale alternative energy generation while providing appropriate protection for adjacent properties.

Goal 4: Planned Residential Zones.

Strategies:

- A. Utilize zoning for planned management of affordable housing.
- B. Focus on maintaining low residential density.
- C. Ensure through zoning the residential character and rural peacefulness of the Township are maintained.
- D. Ensure that any multiple unit/ parcel developments will preserve open space, natural features, wetlands, and wildlife.

Goal 5: Provide for public parks, recreation and open space opportunities within the Township.

Strategies:

- A. Continue to seek funding to improve existing Township-owned land.
- B. Identify and promote the availability of public access for Township residents.
- C. Encourage private development which retains natural space, open space, and provides recreational facilities.

Section 7 - Introduction

Upon designating an overall vision and specific community goals and objectives, a future land use plan and map can be developed to better implement and envision the before-mentioned Township vision, goals and objectives.

The intent of this section will be to review the effects of past land use trends common to rural communities and present proposed future land use in various land use categories.

Past Land Use Trends - An Overview

Before the future land use plan is presented, it is important to understand the effects of past land use trends common to rural communities. Some past decision areas that have been identified as impactful to current needs are residential zoning placement and lack of mobile home park designation, commercial zoning, and agritourism designations.

Locating homes on sub-parceled agricultural or open space land fronting rural roadways is an inefficient method of residential development. This method depletes usable agricultural property, increases driveway/roadway traffic, and builds residential "walls" around agricultural property, which impacts farm equipment ingress/egress. Furthermore, this form of residential development often leads to difficult residential vs. agricultural land use complaints, such as complaints concerning chemical use, organic smells, and noise of farm equipment.

Lack of designations for appropriate uses of various forms throughout the township contributes to confusion, lack of appropriate supports to citizens, and excessively limiting land use when not necessary.

Columbia Township's Future Land Use Plan

The future land use plan for Columbia Township is tied to concerns raised from community input as well as the vision statement and specific community goals and objectives as noted in Section 6. The underlying objective of the future land use plan will be to preserve the overall rural, agricultural and water resources of Columbia Township.

It is essential to note that any area designated on the future land use map for a specific land use DOES NOT guarantee such land use will actually occur in the future. Instead, the designation is a proposed future use to further advance the land use planning vision, goals and objectives of Columbia Township. Beyond applying specific public or nonprofit land use controls, or the outright purchase of land, Columbia Township is limited in influencing the future development of private property.

Agricultural Land Use

The proposed agricultural lands were selected based upon existing land practices and the desire to preserve large agricultural property and open space. Given this perspective, the preservation of large agricultural areas in Columbia Township is best accomplished by considering the application of specific zoning concepts when updating the Township's existing zoning code to this Master Plan.

Effective zoning codes and administration can be a valuable instrument in Columbia Township's goal of preserving agricultural land, open space, and the community's rural character while ensuring landowner rights concerning resale value and development.

The desirability of residential living in a country-environment has served to reduce the amount of land used for farming. What was once a largely agricultural countryside is now shared with numerous single-family residences.

Non-Zoning Strategies

There are also *non-zoning* strategies available for farmland preservation. These include various Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development activities included in the Farmland and Open Space Preservation Program. These are voluntary programs for owners designed to preserve agricultural land which has a market value that exceeds its value as agricultural land or open space. They involve agreements between landowners and the State to restrict future development or types of land use in exchange for tax benefits or exemptions. They may also involve outright owner donations or, as available, State funding in some form.

Van Buren County Farmland Preservation Program

In 2004 the County adopted its own Farmland and Open Space ordinance and with it established the Van Buren County Farmland and Open Space Preservation Program. The program, which is now based on the State's Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act and the zoning statute, provides landowners opportunities for preserving farmland and open space areas in locations where property market values exceed their agricultural values.

This is an elective program that allows property owners who meet certain criteria to sell future property development rights to Van Buren County via grants provided by the State of Michigan. Although the funding and operation of this program has been curtailed due to State budget priorities, if funded, it would represent a potential opportunity for farmers and others who have an interest in preserving agricultural land.

Farmland Preservation Target Areas

The Farm Use Preservation Map (Appendix ___) notes Township areas where properties exist that are likely to be candidates for farmland preservation.

As shown, the farmland preservation area is defined by the current Agricultural zoning district in the Township except those areas specifically zoned otherwise.

Columbia Township Participation in Van Buren County Farmland Preservation Program

The Township will allow participation in the Van Buren County Farmland Preservation program provided that the property owner meets or exceeds all of the County's requirements and the property is in conformance with the Columbia Township Master Plan. Part of the County's requirement includes support from the Township. The Township has determined that in order to support applications to the Van Buren County Farmland Preservation program the applicant's property must:

1. Be located within the portion of the Township's future land use map designated for 'Agriculture,'
2. Have at least 51% of the land in active agricultural use,
3. Be at least 20 acres in size,
4. Have mineral rights owned by the landowner, and
5. Have the 25% match required by the Michigan Department of Agriculture, which can be accomplished by:
 - a. private payment,
 - b. grant(s),
 - c. reduced payment received by the landowner, or
 - d. if the people of the Township approve a tax levy.

In determining eligibility for the County Farmland Preservation Program, the scoring of all applications and scoring criteria are established by the County without involvement by the Township.

Natural Areas and Conservation Land Use

The Township's Agricultural zoning district also includes woodlands and other natural areas. Typically, these are included as part of the larger existing residential and agricultural properties. This district also includes the conservation preserves described in Section 2. These areas, along with the many agricultural properties, are part of the rural, agricultural effect that is considered important by Township residents; preservation of natural areas is strongly supported.

The majority of woodlands and other natural areas are part of private farms and residences and are subject to sale or use at the discretion of the owners. The sale of timber or other resources or changes to the landscape on these properties has

the potential to impact the appearance of the surrounding areas. In addition to these changes, property can be divided to allow additional homes. None of these changes, which continue to occur, require rezoning or zoning ordinance language changes.

While these changes cannot be prohibited, they can be encouraged, by good land-use practices and with strong community awareness, to take place in ways that help to preserve natural features and that reduce their effects on the surrounding community.

Section 2 describes several areas defined as conservation preserves that have been set aside by owners to protect them from future development and to ensure their natural features remain in the community. Over time, the number of conservation preserves could change if more property owners decide for themselves, based on economic considerations and other factors, to take this course of action.

Residential Land Use

The proposed residential lands were selected based upon existing land practices and the best practice of clustering residential properties. Based upon community input, public discussion, and review of existing land-use practices within Columbia Township, residential development priorities were identified as follows:

1. Single-family housing around lakes should be at a low density.
2. Mobile home parks/manufactured housing should be located in designated development areas along main thoroughfares and be under strict site planning procedures.
3. Any development of residential housing should have a minimal impact on existing farmland, open space, and natural areas.

Clustered housing development is a valuable residential planning tool, providing an attractive alternative to traditional, sprawling, linear and land-consuming "tract" residential development. Clustered development promotes the preservation of large areas of open space while still providing the landowner financially valuable developmental rights. Essentially, residential development is allowed within a smaller area of the larger undeveloped or agricultural parcel.

Promoting purposeful development is more cost-efficient for developers, landowners, and taxpayers, and is more environmentally sensitive than rural large lot residential zoning or traditional subdivision development, both of which allocate the entire parcel to private development and easements for streets and related infrastructure. The underlying principles when reviewing any future residential development in Columbia Township should be based upon identified impact criteria, as defined within the Vision Statement, Goals and Objectives found in Section 6.

Future land use for mobile home residential development

Mobile Home Residential has been identified as a viable housing option. However, the location and development of Mobile/Manufactured housing is best done in a clustered, concentrated planning approach, to better facilitate the special development needs and impacts such residential housing places upon Columbia Township. Future Mobile Home Residential housing sites within Columbia Township have been identified in Section 11 near Grand Junction, increasing Mobile Home Residential dedicated land by 8 acres.

Commercial Land Use

Currently, Commercial Land Use is limited in Columbia Township. Pursuant to community feedback, additional Commercial Land Use is identified in the Future Land Use map. New Commercial Land Use will be located in Sections 4, 5, 6, 8, and 9 along and within 300 feet either side of CR 388. Areas will complement existing commercial land use providing a centralized area for Columbia Township residents to be served by future commercial businesses.

Industrial Land Use

Industrial land use in Columbia Township consists of one 36 acre plot. Per survey results and township needs, future expansion is not desired.

Agriculture, Open Space, Recreation and Conservation/Preserve Land Use

The new future land use map continues to keep agricultural land use and natural/wildlife areas as a priority. No significant changes to the size of these areas have been made.

Future Land Use Distribution

Table 7-1 presents the statistical breakdown concerning land uses associated with the accompanying Future Land Use Map.

TABLE 7-1 - PROPOSED FUTURE LAND USE DISTRIBUTION IN COLUMBIA TOWNSHIP

Land Use Type	Land Use Distribution	
	Acres	Percentage
Residential	6420	28.3
Agricultural	14500	63.9
Commercial	200	0.9
Industrial	40	0.2
Public	150	0.7
Conservation/Preserve Area	250	1.1
Lakes	1100	4.9
TOTAL	22,660	100.0

SOURCE: Update source once received

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In this plan are discussions of sensitive and valuable land and resources in Columbia Township, including prime agricultural soils, wetlands, surface water, wood lots and potential areas of contamination. Maps illustrating these areas are included. These are intended to form a basis for discussion and decisions regarding the suitability of land for particular uses and the designation of lands best left open as open space.

Section 8 - Implementation

This section will highlight the implementation steps that Township citizens, leaders, business owners, and interested community groups can take to support the identified goals and objectives of the Columbia Township Master Plan. Specifically, the implementation section will present specific programs, tools, and actions that can help the Township move towards a sustainable rural, agricultural community in the years to come.

A partnership of people and institutions provide the essential fuel to propel any community initiative forward. Cooperation between individual organizations and governmental agencies are in the best interest of Columbia Township as it strives to preserve and enhance its rural character, natural environment, and agricultural heritage through this Master Plan.

The following project list is a working portion of the Master Plan to ensure we continually work toward the goals of the township.

Goal 1: Preserve Natural and Peaceful Environment

Strategy Number	Project	Timing	Funding Source
1A and 1B	Reevaluate our zoning after adoption of the Master Plan	1-2 years after adoption of Master Plan	None needed
	Reevaluate zoning categories and lot sizes in zoning ordinances	1-2 years after adoption of Master Plan	None needed
1C	Monitor the status of the Van Buren County Farmland and Open Space Preservation Program and when active again, pursue participation	Ongoing	None needed
1D, 1E, and 1F	Review and update zoning ordinances and site plan review requirements to protects waterways by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring MDOT storm water management plans are followed. • Show all wetlands and flood plains on site plans 	1-2 years after adoption of Master Plan	None needed
1G	Incorporate public safety into Master Plan	By Nov. 2020	Planning Commission Budget

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Goal 2: Provide for Growth of Business within the Township, taking into account Goal 1.

Strategy Number	Project	Timing	Funding Source
2A	Review ordinances for overly restrictive requirements on commercial properties.	1-2 years after adoption of Master Plan	None needed
2B	Review zoning requests related to Future Land Use Map.	Ongoing	General Funds
2C	Research ways to attract businesses that are compatible with Township goals	Ongoing	TBD
2D, 2E, and 2F	Establish commercial zones	By Nov. 2020	Planning Commission Budget

Goal 3: Utilize Zoning to Drive 21st Century Technology Enhancements in the Township.

Strategy Number	Project	Timing	Funding Source
3A	Conduct an ordinance review to determine ordinances that are impacted by technology.	1-2 years after adoption of Master Plan	None needed
3B	Hold a discussion regarding Township position on alternative energy option.	1-2 years after adoption of Master Plan	TBD

Goal 4: Planned Residential Zones

Strategy Number	Project	Timing	Funding Source
4A, 4B, and 4C	Establish appropriate residential future land use per needs with a focus on maintaining low residential density while maintaining rural peacefulness.	By Nov, 2020	Planning Commission Budget
4D	Review ordinances regarding multiple unit/multiple parcel development to ensure ordinance preserves open and natural space.	3-4 years after adoption of Master Plan	None needed

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Goal 5: Provide for Public Parks, Recreation and Open Space Opportunities in the Township.

Strategy Number	Project	Timing	Funding Source
3A	Research funding options to improve current township owned land.	Ongoing	None needed
	Recommend funding options to Township Board.	Ongoing	None needed
3B	Identify and promote public access and lands.	1-2 years after adoption of Master Plan	None needed
	Review development related ordinances to ensure in compliance with Goal 5.	1-2 years after adoption of Master Plan	None needed