

Chapter One

OVERVIEW

INTRODUCTION

This Chapter provides an overview of the Master Plan, its role and importance, how it should be used, and the process followed in its preparation. It presents the framework for what follows by defining what the Master Plan is and what it is intended to accomplish. Understanding the fundamentals of what the Hillsdale Township Master Plan will enable the residents and officials of the Township to appreciate the role it plays in assuring the future welfare of the Township, its residents and its resources. Embracing this Plan as a vital tool in preserving and enhancing the public health, safety, and welfare of the Township is essential if this Plan is to be effective.

WHAT IS THE HILLSDALE TOWNSHIP MASTER PLAN?

Purpose

Just as individuals and families plan for their future well-being, so must municipalities. Just as individuals may open savings accounts in order to purchase new farm equipment five years in the future, or develop plans for a larger home for a growing family, municipalities must look to the future and take specific actions to address the current and future needs of the community. Such actions may involve improvements to the roadway network, improvements to the level of emergency services, and the pursuit of new local employment opportunities.

The Hillsdale Township Master Plan is a policy document which identifies how growth within the Township, and associated land development and public services, should be guided to best assure the future welfare of the community. The Master Plan can generally be described by the following key words and phrases:

FUTURE ORIENTED: The plan concerns itself with long-range planning to guide and manage future growth and land use. The plan is not only a picture of the community today, but a guide to how the community should evolve over the next ten to twenty years in response to growth and community aspirations.

GENERAL: The plan establishes broad principles and policies to address future growth, land use, and public services.

COMPREHENSIVE: The Plan is comprehensive in that it addresses all principal types of land use and the practical geographic boundaries of each.

A PLAN: The Plan is a specific tangible document which consists of both text and maps, a key portion of which presents and illustrates the Township's policies regarding its planned future land use pattern and delivery of public services.

DYNAMIC: The Plan is intended to be continually evolving in light of the aspirations of local residents, changing conditions in the Township, and new strategies to manage growth, land use, and public services.

The Hillsdale Township Master Plan was prepared by the Hillsdale Township Planning Commission, under the authority of the Michigan Township Planning Act, P.A. 168 of 1959. The Act provides for the development of plans by a Planning Commission for the purposes of, in part:

"...to promote public health, safety, and general welfare; to encourage the use of resources in accordance with their character and adaptability; to avoid the overcrowding of land by buildings or people; to lessen congestion on public roads and streets...and to consider the character of each Township and its suitability for particular uses judged in terms of such factors as the trend in land and population development."

This Master Plan is not a regulatory document, but a "policy plan" to be implemented through regulatory tools. For example, though the Master Plan is not a zoning ordinance, the Master Plan's recommendations and policies will serve as a basis for updating the current Hillsdale Township Zoning Ordinance. In fact, the Michigan Township Rural Zoning Act which provides Hillsdale Township with the statutory authority to adopt zoning regulations, stipulates that a municipality's zoning ordinance "shall be based upon a plan..." This Master Plan has been prepared, in part, to meet this statutory requirement and maintain a strong legal foundation for the Township's zoning regulations.

Elements of the Master Plan

The Hillsdale Township Master Plan consists of four key components:

- 1) An overview of the Township as it exists today, its intended characteristics in years to come, and important planning considerations (Chapter Two).
- 2) A set of goals and objectives intended, in part, to guide the development of a strategy for future land use and public services in the Township (Chapter Three).
- 3) The planned future land use pattern for the Township (Chapter Four).
- 4) Background studies which provide a review of conditions and trends in the Township (Appendix).

IMPORTANCE & APPLICATION OF THE MASTER PLAN

The importance and application of the Hillsdale Township Master Plan are reflected in both the long term interests of the Township and the day-to-day administration of the Township's planning and zoning program.

Long Term Interests

There are a number of interests shared by residents and officials of Hillsdale Township today that can be expected to continue for years to come and be similarly shared by new future residents and Township officials. Some of these key interests include:

- Minimizing increased tax burdens.
- Protecting open spaces, natural resources, and rural character.
- Assuring appropriate land use and adequate services to protect the public health, safety, and welfare of Township residents and visitors.

The Hillsdale Township Master Plan supports these long term interests by providing a future-oriented strategy which aggressively seeks to protect them. Chapter Four establishes specific future land use strategies to secure these and other long term interests.

Day-To-Day Administration

The Hillsdale Township Master Plan plays an equally important role in the day-to-day planning and zoning efforts of the Township:

- Advisory Policies: The Plan is an official advisory policy statement which should be readily shared with existing and prospective landowners and developers to inform them of the long term intentions of the Township regarding land use and public services and, thus, more closely integrate development proposals with the policies of the Plan.
- Regulatory Programs: The Plan establishes a practical basis for the Township to revise, update, or otherwise prepare regulatory programs intended to assure that the policies of the Plan are implemented, including zoning and land division regulations.
- Review of Rezoning Requests: Chapter Three includes a list of Township goals and objectives which should be reviewed in light of future proposed rezoning requests to further establish a record upon which the rezoning request can be evaluated.

Equally important, Chapter Four provides policies regarding the planned future land use pattern and public services in the Township. These Chapters also provide valuable reference points upon which such rezoning requests should be evaluated.

- Public Services Improvements: The cost-effective use of Hillsdale Township's tax dollars requires the identification of a planned future land use pattern in order to pinpoint future population centers in the Township and areas planned for commercial and/or industrial growth. While some areas in the Township may require future improvements to public services and infrastructure, such as roads and fire protection, population centers and commercial and industrial areas typically require higher levels of public services. This Plan provides the Township with the ability to plan ahead and better pinpoint areas of future need, rather than always playing "catch-up" while the Township's health, safety, and welfare may be at risk. Chapter Three is invaluable in this regard.
- Intergovernmental Coordination: This Plan provides the basis for Hillsdale Township to communicate effectively with its neighbors regarding both the impact of neighboring planning and zoning issues and opportunities for mutual gain through coordinated efforts in the areas of land use and public services.

HOW THE PLAN WAS PREPARED

In 1995, the Hillsdale Township Board directed the Planning Commission to begin the process of developing a Master Plan. This decision was made after several years of consideration and discussion in response to concerns over the management of growth and development in the community. The Township sought the expertise and experience of a professional planner to assist them in the preparation of the Master Plan document. The development of the Master Plan followed a purposeful sequential process which took approximately two years. It was the intent of the planning process that the Township would provide substantive opportunities for public participation and develop an understanding of citizen desires and community conditions.

The Planning Commission's initial efforts were directed at establishing a data base about the Township for use during the planning process. This involved a review of physical and cultural conditions in the Township including soils, topography, road network, existing land use

patterns, public services, and demographic characteristics. In the summer of 1996, the Planning Commission surveyed the residents of the Township to establish an understanding of the local desires and aspirations regarding future land use in the Township. After the surveys were returned, the Planning Commission directed its efforts at the development of goals and objectives statements upon which the policies of the Plan could be founded.

Several alternative future land use patterns were then developed based upon the results of the survey, the data collected to date, and the goals and objectives statements. The Planning Commission studied these alternatives and selected the most preferable alternative. Based upon the selected alternative, the Planning Commission assembled a complete draft of the Plan suitable for presentation to the residents of the community.

The Planning Commission held a public hearing on the draft Plan in June of 1997 and was subsequently adopted in August of 1997.

MASTER PLAN UPDATING

In 2005, the Planning Commission briefly reviewed the Plan to determine the need for updating. The Planning Commission found that there had been very little growth or changes within the Township. This may have been due to an economic downturn that was experienced nationwide, but to a greater degree in Hillsdale County. The unemployment rate had climbed to just over 20% and did not drop below 10% until about 2010. With these findings, it was decided that no changes or updating to the Plan was needed at that time.

In 2013, the Planning Commission again looked at the need for updating and decided that the Plan would be completely reviewed and updated during the 2014 calendar year. In April of 2014, a proposal was developed that the Planning Commission would periodically review and update a part of the Plan at each meeting with a goal of having the updating completed by the end of 2014. The updating was completed in the fall of 2015 and was adopted for use as of January 1, 2016.