

# Chapter 1 INTRODUCTION

## INTRODUCTION

Generally, the purpose of this Master Plan is to provide policy that guides decision making for future land and infrastructure development within Mason County. Specifically, key planning issues are identified; community character is described; goals and policies are outlined; existing and future land uses are described and mapped; public facility standards are established; transportation improvements are identified, and specific implementation measures are recommended.

Specific Objectives of the Plan (adapted from the 2006 Master Plan Update) include:

- To prepare a plan that is consistent with the Michigan Planning Enabling Act, P.A. 33 of 2008 as amended.
- To provide the framework for the Mason County Planning Commission to serve in a proactive, coordinating capacity for all planning committees and commissions within the county.
- To provide a legal basis for county zoning in those portions of the county under county zoning pursuant to the Michigan Zoning Enabling Act, P.A. 110 of 2006, as amended.
- To prepare a plan that is technically sound, internally consistent, and that focuses on current issues and future needs.
- To provide a means for residents to participate in determining the future of their community.
- To provide a broad framework for the county's decision-makers to assist them in both long-term and day-to-day matters.
- To search for innovative, creative, and sound ways in which to improve life in Mason County consistent with community goals.
- To minimize land use conflicts and inappropriate uses of land.
- To designate areas of land for uses in keeping with the natural soil properties, vegetation, terrain and availability of public sewer and water in anticipation of future development.
- To insure public use of land for recreational, civic, educational, and religious needs.
- To provide for an improved system of public services according to current and projected needs.

## PLAN PURPOSES

This Plan is adopted by the Mason County Planning Commission to promote public health, safety, and welfare through planning for the appropriate use of land and water resources and the provision of adequate public facilities and services. Although this Plan states specific land use and development policy and proposes specific land use arrangements, it has no regulatory power. It will be implemented by county and local zoning decisions, public facility and infrastructure improvements and the actions of private property owners acting consistent with the Plan.

Photo 1-1  
**Mason County Lake Michigan Shore**



*Photo by Robert Garrett*

The Planning Commission adopts this Plan pursuant to authority in the Michigan Planning Enabling Act, P.A. 33 of 2008. The Mason County Master Plan will be used most frequently to guide decisions by the Mason County Planning Commission and County Board of Commissioners in review of proposed rezoning requests by landowners under County Zoning; and on whether or not to approve local plans and rezoning approvals submitted for review under the appropriate planning or zoning enabling act. The Plan will also guide recommendations made by the County Planning Commission to county and state authorities on roads, parks, county buildings and other infrastructure, as well as on future PA 116 Farmland and Open Space Preservation applications, and grant requests.

The land area covered by this Plan includes the entire area of Mason County and all 20 units of local government in the county. It is intended to promote sensible and sustainable inter-jurisdictional land use planning. It is hoped that this Plan will guide the formation of Township, City and Village plans consistent with it and that subsequent local zoning and infrastructure decisions will also be made consistent with it.

All proposed future land use arrangements and policies presented in this Plan were developed based on a blending of:

- The natural capability of the land to sustain certain types of development or use and the important natural functions played by unique land and water resources in the area.
- The relative future need for residential, commercial, agricultural and industrial land uses; as well as the existing land use distribution.
- The relationship of agricultural and undeveloped lands to existing community character and the economic base of the county.
- The capabilities of the transportation network to sustain different types of development in different areas of the county.

- The desires of local residents and public officials as expressed through their participation in visioning sessions, the local leader survey and public Planning Commission meetings.

This Plan has a time orientation of twenty years into the future. It is heavily influenced by the “Concept of Sustainability:” that a community should make decisions today that meet the needs of the present without undermining the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

### **OVERVIEW OF PLANNING PROCESS**

This Plan is an update of the Master Plan prepared by the Planning and Zoning Center in 2006. The planning process to prepare this Plan carried on a Mason County tradition of providing broad public input opportunities. A County-wide land use and planning survey was conducted in 2012. The survey was statistically valid and sent to a random sample of property owners to result in a 95% confidence interval. An identical digital survey was administered to offer all residents an equal opportunity to participate. The mail-in survey yielded 203 responses while the on-line survey yielded 599 responses. The survey results were used to develop updated goals, objectives and implementation steps. Survey results are included in the appendix.

Additionally, a Town Meeting was held in 2012 at the Ramada Inn for any resident to participate. Over 70 people attended and were asked to develop “Big Ideas” for Mason County as well as a vision statement. Key areas of focus included:

- Trails/Recreation
- Economy/Economic Development/Technology/Agriculture
- Transportation
- Education
- Quality of Life

The full report is included in the appendix along with survey results. Notices of each meeting and survey availability were announced in the *Ludington Daily News*, and posted locally. The planning process used in developing the Mason County Master Plan included many meetings of the County Planning Commission.

Image 1-2  
 Word Cloud of Community Input Desires for Mason County



As part of the planning process, the Mason County Data Book was prepared in order to update demographic, economic, natural resources, transportation, and public facilities information. The Mason County Data Book, updated in 2012, provides a snapshot view of the county in 2012 that serves as the basis for formulating goals, policy and strategies for the future.

Other documents also help to inform Mason County decision makers and help them plan for the future. These include the Mason County Recreation Plan, that describes specific park and recreation projects for the near future. The Mason County US-10/US 31 Access Management Plan, which was developed in 2006, sets forth goals and recommendations for improving safety and efficiency of travel along the US-31 and US-10 highways.

It would be many decades before the potential buildout population that ranges from 185,009 to 792,288 persons might be reached (depending on density selected by future developers). Portions of the county could develop at a density which appears to be far greater than residents envision or desire. Such a density of development could place a strain on the ability of communities to provide services, and would greatly alter the quality of life of residents as there would be little open space left that was not in public ownership.

**VISION BASED PLAN**

This plan is vision-based, with strategies intended to guide future county actions and decisions. It is not intended to establish precise boundaries of land use areas or exact locations of future types of developments, even though the Future Land Use Map has districts with distinct edges. These maps should be considered as general guides, and the Plan’s function is to guide growth toward long-range, broad-based goals, and only generally indicate its location.

A primary challenge of a vision-based Master Plan is to combine the needs and desires of the citizenry with the land’s suitability and capability for sustaining those needs and desires, as matched by the ability of a municipality to provide public services throughout its jurisdiction. Such planning will minimize the potential for land use conflicts and inappropriate uses of land for the long term betterment of all residents.

## HOW TO USE THE PLAN

There are six critical components to using this Plan as a decision making guide.

- First is the background information in the Mason County Data Book, as a separate document that provides basic information and trends in demographic, economic, land use, natural resources, tax base, transportation and public facilities of the county.
- The second component is the vision, goals, objectives and strategies in Chapter Two. These are based on public input from 2012 and reflect where citizens want their county to be over the next twenty years.
- Third is the Future Land Use Plan, Future Land Use Map and associated policies presented in Chapter Three.
- Fourth is the Zoning Plan in Chapter Four. This lays out the changes in county and local zoning that are needed in order to implement the Future Land Use Plan.
- Fifth is the transportation and other infrastructure discussion in Chapter Five. This describes future improvements in roads, sewer and water to accommodate new development over the next 20 years.
- Sixth are the implementation strategies and inter-jurisdictional coordination steps found in Chapter Six. They outline the steps the county, townships, cities and villages need to take in carrying out the recommendations of this Plan.

This Plan is a statement by the County Planning Commission regarding the present and desired future character of the county and strategies to assure that character. As a formal and tangible document, this Plan is intended to instill a sense of stability and direction for county, city, village and township officials, and for Mason County citizens and businesses.

Every effort has been made to present factually correct, up to date and complete information in this Plan and the accompanying Mason County Data Book. Information was obtained from local, state and federal sources. Ultimately though, this Plan is a general document, and any site-specific decisions should be thoroughly investigated with original research materials before proceeding. The Plan is not regulatory like zoning. It is a policy guide to give direction to many future actions, including changes to the County Zoning Ordinance.