

Chapter 6 PLAN IMPLEMENTATION & INTERJURISDICTIONAL COORDINATION

INTRODUCTION

As important a benchmark as this Master Plan represents, the initiatives proposed in this Plan will not implement themselves. It will take the concerted efforts of citizens, elected officials and local and county administrative officials to bring this Plan from concept into reality. It will take continued support and commitment for many years. However, the goals of this Plan and the strategies proposed to implement it offer the promise of a much better future than that likely to occur if recent trends continue unchanged.

Benefits to all groups will be numerous and most visible in terms of an increased quality of life that can retain and attract new businesses and jobs, and greater satisfaction of residents. An increased quality of life comes from improved use of the transportation system, improved public facilities, creation of more distinctive residential neighborhoods and commercial areas and retention of the scenic character of the landscape (so cherished by residents and visitors). Many indirect benefits will also occur. These include improved access to information needed for decision-making and better cooperation among units of government.

The central ingredients to successful Plan implementation will be:

- Commitment by the County Planning Commission, the County Board of Commissioners, citizens and support from local units of government. Implementation of the Master Plan will require the county and local governments, businesses and citizens to drop some old habits and adopt some new approaches. This is not always easy to do. However, the desired vision will not be reached without commitment by all involved.
- A better educated citizenry and local officials. While many citizens and officials want trends to change, they lack the knowledge to make them change or do not understand the cause and effect link of actions they take on an ongoing basis. Information about more appropriate residential development patterns, the fiscal and land use constraints of extending urban services, modern farming and forestry methods, scenery and open space preservation, natural resource protection and other tools to sustain the quality of life in Mason County need to reach citizens and officials or they will not understand why and how local decision-making must change.

FOCUSING ON PRIORITIES

It is easy for a Planning Commission at either the county or local level to become distracted with ongoing tasks or ad hoc, controversial issues. Still, the Commission needs to prioritize its tasks. Time needs to be set aside for high priority items. These include the preparation of an annual report and work program for the next year, and when appropriate, the five-year Plan update. These are discussed below.

Annual Tasks

An annual report on all activities undertaken by the County Planning Commission with a special focus on actions taken to implement the Plan should be made to the County Board of Commissioners. A proposed work program that identifies priorities and projected expenses for the next year should also be prepared and submitted in time to be included in the annual budget process. The Planning Commission should also continue to review proposed public facilities in the county for consistency with the Plan. Periodically, and at least once each five years, the Master Plan should be thoroughly reviewed and updated by the County Planning Commission.

Top Priorities

The Planning Commission can not be expected to accomplish all of the strategies listed in the goals, objectives and strategies. Many of these can only be accomplished by other agencies or groups. It is key that discussions begin with those groups so that they understand the goals, find agreeable common ground where there are differences and obtain a commitment to the action.

One approach to establishing priorities is to use the following standards:

- Make a high priority those actions that are the precursor to other steps. One example is the strategy to develop a regional economic development plan. This needs to happen before the county and local governments can insure that public infrastructure and services can be provided to appropriate lands.
- Those actions that are assigned to a particular group are a high priority.
- A lower priority may be those actions that do not assign a group or broadly identify the "county," as the responsible party.
- If an action does not list a responsible party, it remains a lower priority until a group or agency steps forward.

The following activities should be the key priorities of the Planning Commission for the next five years:

1. Update the County Zoning Ordinance to be consistent with this Plan as recommended in Chapters 3 and 4.
2. Work with the County Road Commission, bike and recreation groups, and other stakeholders to develop a Complete Streets plan which would identify key roads and corridors which will accommodate pedestrian and bike facilities. The plan will be consistent with the County Parks and Recreation Plan and identify key community employment centers, areas of residential density, and popular bicycle routes to connect these attractions together. The Plan will include cross-sections for roadways planned for complete streets amenities and phasing. Phasing should comport with County priorities for roadway improvements, including reconstruction and repaving, when possible, however, bike lane and sidewalk enhancement should not be dependent upon it.
3. Educate all local units of government in the county about the vision, goals, objectives and strategies of the updated County Master Plan and provide technical assistance in the integration of these elements into local plans and zoning decisions through monthly updates to the County zoning ordinance. Consider a County Planning and Zoning related Facebook page that could be updated regularly with agenda, packets, relevant land use matters, and Master Plan implementation projects.
4. Educate all citizens about the vision, goals, objectives and strategies of the updated County Master Plan and provide technical assistance in the integration of these elements into property owner development and redevelopment efforts.

- Consider a County Planning and Zoning related Facebook page that could be updated regularly with agenda, packets, relevant land use matters, and Master Plan implementation projects.
5. Directly use this Plan in the analysis and review of proposed rezonings, zoning text amendments, and new or amended master plans submitted to the County Planning Commission for statutory review and approval. This means recommending approval for actions consistent with the Plan and denial or modification for actions inconsistent with this Plan.
 6. Exercise review authority in ways to improve local decisions by guiding decisions toward integrated and coordinated solutions based on the core objectives and strategies in this Plan.
 7. Provide training and technical assistance to local governments on general planning, zoning and capital improvement programming.
 8. Monitor local and county agency decisions and periodically inform local governments and the County Board of Commissioners on the status of efforts to improve land use decision making in Mason County.
 9. Strongly advocate the county budget for and maintain digital parcel records of all property in the county with the system fully in place and regularly updated.
 10. Support FEMA in its efforts to get the Townships to adopt the floodplains ordinance consistent with their mapping efforts.
 11. Provide technical assistance and guidelines on alternative approaches to deal with identified land use and infrastructure problems.
 12. Join efforts with others outside the county to modernize planning and zoning enabling legislation and to authorize new tools to better manage growth and preserve open space.
 13. Design guidelines should be developed and promoted by the County Planning Commission that illustrate how to protect rural and scenic character and open space values on private residential, commercial, industrial, public and institutional properties. An example is the Grand Traverse Bay Region Development Guidebook that illustrates a preferred development approach that protects scenic quality, open space, water quality and sensitive environments.
 14. Residential development standards should be prepared that set aside open space and utilize vegetative buffers along roadsides and where there are sensitive environments, greenways and potential trail and wildlife corridors. These standards should be adopted as part of site plan review, cluster ordinances, conservation subdivision ordinances, site condominium ordinances and planned unit development ordinances.
 15. Important vistas in the county should be identified and wherever private land is involved an effort to preserve the vista should be initiated through either voluntary measures by the landowners, purchase of development rights or conservation easements, or through smart designs that protect the vista as a part of the development process. The County Planning Commission should pursue creation of design guidelines as the first educational initiative after the vistas have been identified.
 16. The number of county parks should be expanded per the elements of the Mason County Park and Recreation Plan, but special attention should be given to establishment of new county parks in the northern and eastern parts of the county and along the Pere Marquette River.
 17. Preparation of a county subdivision control ordinance.
 18. Development of a county-wide affordable housing plan and implementation strategy.

DEALING WITH ISSUES OF GREATER THAN LOCAL CONCERN

Local jurisdictions frequently deal with issues that have implications beyond the jurisdiction (both intra-county and inter-county). Public interests that are broader than simply local interests include (but are not limited to) those in Table 6-1.

Photo 6-1

Recreational Facilities are Abundant in Mason County



Photo by Mark Wyckoff

Table 6-1 Issues of Greater than Local Concern

Protecting the Environment and Natural Resources

- Watersheds and water quality
- Wetlands protection
- Floodplain protection
- Land pollution (contaminated sites)
- Soil conservation and stormwater pollution
- Air pollution
- Groundwater pollution
- Oil and gas pollution
- Noise pollution
- Water pollution of inland lakes (esp. Hamlin Lake, Round Lake and others), rivers and streams (Pere Marquette, Sable and others)
- Protection of sand dunes and areas with steep slopes
- Wildlife corridors and fish and wildlife habitat protection
- Protection of unique and endangered species
- Sustainability of privately owned forest land
- Water surfaces that are under control of multiple local jurisdictions, especially as relates to keyhole development
- Use of public access sites
- Maintaining a “sense of place” where that sense is the major attraction for tourists and the service sector economy.

Siting Public Facilities or Providing New Public Services

- Solid waste and recycling
- Emergency services (fire, ambulance, police) – to achieve greater efficiency (involves the U.S. Forest Service, and DNR)
- Transportation/roads
- Public transportation
- Trails (siting of) – federal, state, local, and property owners
- “Regional” park facilities (very large, e.g. pool or hockey rink – needs a large customer base)
- District library and district boundaries for libraries
- Mental and other health facilities
- Provision of senior services – location of facilities, including handicapped services
- Extension of utilities
- Schools (especially if consolidation is considered)

Maintaining a Sustainable Economy and Promoting Economic Development

- Real (livable) wages, job opportunities for young adults and families with children
- Lack of seasonal workers – lack of an intermediate job base
- Harbors (Ludington and Pere Marquette Township)
- Adequate lifelong educational opportunities for all citizens: health of the West Shore Community College
- Adequate affordable housing for middle and low income persons

Table 6-1 (Continued) Issues of Greater than Local Concern

Land Use

- LULU's (locally unwanted land uses that meet a regional need, such as gravel pits, junk yards, landfills, communication towers, electric generating windmills, etc.)
- Large scale development (resorts, shopping center, airports, etc.)
- Density in some rural areas that is too high to cost effectively service and a current zoned density that will exacerbate this problem.
- Compact settlement pattern vs. dispersed settlement pattern and the associated impacts on infrastructure extensions or establishment of infrastructure
- Siting affordable housing—especially mobile home parks
- Lack of similar regulations and enforcement across jurisdiction boundaries
- Compatibility of land uses along jurisdiction boundaries regarding zoning and land use issues
- Loss of open space
- Regional focus on open space preservation and farmland preservation
- Protecting important viewsheds and rural corridor views.

Other

- A growing nonresident (largely seasonal) population that (for the most part) does not vote locally, but does pay taxes locally
- Lack of a tax or fee of users of state and federal resources here
- Inter-jurisdictional equity issues
- Intergenerational equity issues
- Sustainability

In many instances, these issues of greater than local concern revolve around common environmental features (which do not respect municipal boundaries), infrastructure, and the needs of special populations.

It takes a basic change of attitude toward other jurisdictions to effectively deal with these issues. It takes recognition that the citizens of both (or several) jurisdictions face the same potential loss or gain. It takes acceptance that the other jurisdiction is not in competition or opposition, at least not on every aspect of the issue. It takes the ability to exercise mutual respect in areas of overlapping responsibilities and mutual support where responsibilities are separate, but compatible in pursuit of common goals and a common vision of the County. By jointly engaging the issues, common ground can usually be found. It is the common ground that is most often used as the basis for effective inter-jurisdictional cooperation.

ROLE OF KEY PLAYERS

It will take the efforts of many different groups to implement the Mason County Master Plan. Key among them are the local planning commissions and governing boards, the County Board of Commissioners and the County Planning Commission.

The framed text on Table 6-2 on the next three pages lists the traditional roles and responsibilities of local planning commissions, local governing bodies, the County Board of Commissioners and the County Planning Commission. These traditional roles are proposed to be continued, but some changes are also proposed to strengthen the ability of these entities to take actions to implement this Plan. These changes are summarized in the text following Table 6-2.

Table 6-2
Traditional Responsibilities of the Local Government Decision-makers

County Board of Commissioners

The County Board of Commissioners must take the lead in order to initiate planning in Mason County. Its basic statutory and administrative responsibilities are as follows (not all of these are currently being performed):

- Adopt the County Master Plan.
- Periodically hold a joint meeting with Planning Commission to go over issues of common interest. This could begin by meeting with a Committee of the County Board of Commissioners as opposed to the entire Board.
- Adopt amendments to the Mason County Zoning Ordinance and adopt subdivision regulations.
- Continue funding for the planning/zoning program each year including funds for training and continuing education of commissioners and staff, and for public education on planning and zoning.
- Continue hiring consultants as recommended by the Planning Commission and pursuant to an approved work program and budget.
- Continue to provide adequate funds for Zoning Ordinance administration and enforcement.
- Ask Planning Commission to prepare an annual report of activities and a proposed work program for the next year, in enough time to be considered in the budget process.
- Ask Planning Commission to review proposed capital improvements for consistency with the Plan prior to the County Board or other public agency action.
- Develop regional contacts and initiate and coordinate activities with representatives of other units of government on various issues of greater than local concern.

County Planning Commission

The County Planning Commission is responsible for:

- Preparing and maintaining a plan for the development and protection of the County. It will adopt the Master Plan as a replacement for its 2006 Plans.
- Preparing and proposing amendments to the County Zoning Ordinance, and conducting required public hearings.
- Making recommendations on proposed Township plans and/or rezoning or text amendments.
- Attempting to prevent incompatible planning and zoning along governmental boundaries.
- Reviewing and commenting on proposed new public lands, facilities or improvements for consistency with the Master Plan.
- Review and comment on proposed PA 116 Farmland and Open Space Enrollments.
- Periodically reviewing and/or preparing various state or federal grant applications.
- Receiving, storing and sharing data from the Michigan Resource Inventory Program.
- Providing information and education services for the U.S. Bureau of the Census.
- Serving as County Council for the Resource Conservation and Development Program of the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture.
- Receiving citizen comments on local planning and zoning issues and acting upon or referring those comments as appropriate.
- Educating citizens and representatives of local units of government on various county planning and zoning issues.

Table 6-2 (Continued)
Traditional Responsibilities of the Local Government Decision-makers

- Learning about and staying up-to-date on the responsibilities of the Planning Commission and on various tools available to implement local plans.
- Coordinating planning and associated development regulations with other governmental units and public agencies.

Local Governing Bodies

Local city or village councils and township boards of trustees also have specific planning and zoning responsibilities. These include:

- Appointment of qualified persons to serve as members of the local Planning Commission and Zoning Board of Appeals.
- Adoption of ordinances recommended by the Planning Commission for implementation of the Master plan, including when supported by the governing body, a zoning ordinance and subdivision regulations.
- Providing an adequate budget for the Planning Commission to carry out its responsibilities including keeping the Plan and Zoning Ordinance current, and receiving proper training on their roles, responsibilities and new tools and techniques for improving the community.
- Providing adequate staff and financial resources (including setting fee levels) for proper enforcement of adopted regulations.
- Conducting required public hearings prior to acting on zoning, subdivision or infrastructure development matters.
- Receiving and acting upon citizen complaints related to planning and zoning issues and as appropriate, referring matters to the Planning Commission for action.
- Coordinating actions with representatives of other units of government on issues of greater than local concern.

Local Planning Commissions

Planning commissions in cities and villages in the County are organized under the Michigan Planning Enabling Act, PA 33 of 2008. Township planning commissions are organized under PA 33 of 2008. Some of their principal responsibilities include:

- Creating, adopting and maintaining a local Master (or master) plan to guide future land use change and to serve as the legal basis for the local zoning ordinance.
- Creating, maintaining and administering responsibilities under the local zoning ordinance (for those municipalities with local zoning).
- Advising the local governing body on proposed rezonings, text amendments, plats, land divisions, capital improvements and related planning and zoning decisions.
- Responding to the recommendations of the County Planning Commission on planning and zoning issues.
- Making recommendations on special projects or delegated responsibilities (e.g. zoning ordinance enforcement)
- Working with property owners in order to try and achieve good development (or redevelopment)
- Educating citizens on the values and benefits of planning
- Receiving citizen comments on local planning and zoning issues and acting upon or referring those comments as appropriate.
- Learning about and staying up-to-date on the responsibilities of the Planning Commission and on various tools available to implement local plans.

CONCLUDING THOUGHT

This Master Plan represents hundreds of hours of input by the County Planning Commission, citizens and local government officials in Mason County over the past year. The circumstances it is intended to address did not occur overnight and they will not be resolved overnight. However, this Plan sets forth another option to a future that will inexorably be created if existing trends and uncoordinated decisions continue. Existing trends are fueled to a very great extent by existing plans, regulations and institutional relationships. To create a future different from existing trends, then current plans, policies, regulations and institutional relationships must also be changed.

Perhaps the catalyst for that change is for the preferred vision of Mason County, and what it takes to get to that vision, to be part of the "story" of Mason County that every resident, of every age, knows by heart. So, for example, if all Mason County residents know by heart that clustering, conservation subdivisions, community service districts, farmland preservation, design guidelines and vegetative buffers are necessary for Mason County to remain largely rural and scenic and continue to have a high quality of life, there is a greater chance that Mason County will have these characteristics. It is up to the County Planning Commission with support of the County Board of Commissioners to achieve this level of citizen understanding of and support for this Plan.

Photo 6-2

Citizens will need to Commit to Preserving the Characteristics Necessary to Maintain a Desired Quality of Life

