

Chapter One INTRODUCTION

Introduction

This Chapter provides an overview of the Cass County Master Plan and the Master Plan's role, importance, preparation process, and principal policies.

The plan concerns itself with long-range planning to guide and manage future growth and development in response to growth, development and preservation interests. The Plan is intended to be continually evolving in light of changing aspirations, changing conditions, and evolving strategies to address growth, development and preservation.

A Regional Planning Initiative and "Local Participating Municipalities"

This Master Plan is the culmination of an extraordinary effort by Cass County to prepare a planning tool that not only serves the county region as a whole but functions as the official master plan of six local communities. These communities are:

- | | |
|------------------------|-----------------------|
| Village of Edwardsburg | Silver Creek Township |
| Village of Vandalia | Volinia Township |
| Pokagon Township | Wayne Township |

These communities were uniquely involved in the development of this Master Plan as it applies to their jurisdictions specifically. For the purposes of this Plan, the six communities are referred to as "Local Participating Municipalities."

This Plan is not intended to usurp the wisdom of officials at the city, village and township level. This Plan is founded on the principle that all land use and infrastructure decisions that do not involve issues of greater than local concern should be made at the local governmental level.

This Master Plan is not a law or regulatory document, but a "policy plan" to be implemented through regulatory and non-regulatory tools, including zoning provisions in the case of the six Local Participating Municipalities.

Purpose of the Master Plan and Enabling Authority

Purpose

It is the principal purpose of this Master Plan to establish strategies for managing growth that protects and enhances the unique character of Cass County and the quality of life within. In doing so, the strategies emphasize balancing environmental protection, resource management, housing and economic development, to encourage a sustainable economy that provides prosperity for all and without sacrificing the county's rich natural resources and environmental integrity. This purpose equally applies to the six Local Participating Municipalities within the context of the local conditions that characterize each.

Zoning Ordinance Must be Based on a Master Plan

The Michigan Zoning Enabling Act, which provides Michigan municipalities with the statutory authority to adopt zoning, stipulates that a municipality's land development regulations "...shall be based upon a plan designed to promote the public health, safety, and general welfare, to encourage the use of lands in accordance with their character and adaptability, to limit the improper use of land, to conserve natural resources and energy..."

This Master Plan addresses this statutory requirement and establishes a strong legal foundation for the zoning regulations of the six Local Participating Municipalities.

Enabling Authority

This Master Plan was prepared under the authority of the Michigan Planning Enabling Act (P.A 33 of 2008, as amended). The Act delineates the purpose of a master plan and certain procedures for its preparation including communications with regional governmental entities, public hearings, and approval requirements. The county followed the statutory requirements for the development and approval of this Plan. The six Local Participating Municipalities similarly complied with the procedural requirements of the Act, in general orchestration with the county.

Purpose of the Master Plan

Section 7(2) of the Michigan Planning Enabling Act (MCL 125.3807) provides:

The general purpose of a master plan is to guide and accomplish, in the planning jurisdiction and its environs, development that satisfies all of the following criteria:

- (a) Is coordinated, adjusted, harmonious, efficient, and economical.*
- (b) Considers the character of the planning jurisdiction and its suitability for particular uses, judged in terms of such factors as trends in land and population development.*
- (c) Will, in accordance with present and future needs, best promote public health, safety, morals, order, convenience, prosperity, and general welfare.*
- (d) Includes, among other things, promotion of or adequate provision for 1 or more of the following:*
 - (i) A system of transportation to lessen congestion on streets.*
 - (ii) Safety from fire and other dangers.*
 - (iii) Light and air.*
 - (iv) Healthful and convenient distribution of population.*
 - (v) Good civic design and arrangement and wise and efficient expenditure of public funds.*
 - (vi) Public utilities such as sewage disposal and water supply and other public improvements.*
 - (vii) Recreation.*
 - (viii) The use of resources in accordance with their character and adaptability.*

Elements of the Master Plan

This Master Plan consists of the following key components:

Chapter One (Introduction) presents an overview of the purpose and role of the Plan, the process followed in its preparation, and key planning policies.

Chapter Two (Planning Issues) presents important planning issues facing the county and Local Participating Municipalities.

Chapter Three (Goals and Objectives) presents goal and objective statements in response to the planning issues identified in Chapter Two.

Chapter Four (Future Land Use Plan) presents future land use policies.

Chapter Five (Coordinated Public Services) presents policies addressing the coordination of public services with the goals, objectives, and future land use policies.

Chapter Six (Implementation) presents key measures to effectuate the policies of the Plan.

The Appendices present an overview of conditions and trends in the county including the Local Participating Municipalities, addressing such features as roads, land use, public services, soils, topography, water resources and demographic features.

Importance and Application of the Master Plan

The importance and application of this Master Plan are demonstrated within the context of both long-term interests and day-to-day planning efforts.

Support for Long Term Interests

For both Cass County and the six Local Participating Municipalities, there are a number of interests that can be expected to continue for years to come. Some of these important interests include:

- Protecting and enhancing the overall character of the county.
- Protecting and enhancing the character of the six Local Participating Municipalities including the rural character of the townships of Pokagon, Silver Creek, Volinia, and Wayne, and the more urban fabric of the villages of Edwardsburg and Vandalia.
- Protecting the quality of life.
- Protecting natural resources, including farmland, forest lands, wetlands, water resources and wildlife.
- Minimizing tax burdens.

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- Ensuring appropriate land use and adequate services to protect the public health, safety, and welfare.
- Ensuring compatibility with the use and development of neighboring properties.

The Master Plan supports these long-term interests by providing future-oriented strategies that seek to further these interests. Chapter Three establishes goals and objectives, and Chapter Four establishes future land use strategies, to secure these and other long-term interests.

Support for Day-To-Day Efforts

In addition to furthering long-term interests, the Master Plan also plays an important role in day-to-day planning and zoning efforts:

- Advisory Policies: The Plan is an official advisory policy statement of Cass County and the six Local Participating Municipalities, and it should be readily shared with existing and prospective landowners and developers. The Plan informs all of long term intentions regarding land use and encourages development proposals more closely integrated with the official policies of the Plan.
- Regulatory Programs: The Plan establishes a practical basis for the Local Participating Municipalities, and to a lesser degree the county, to revise, update, or otherwise prepare regulatory programs intended to ensure that the policies of the Plan are implemented.
- Review of Land Development Proposals: The Chapter Three goals and objectives and Chapter Four land use policies should be reviewed when consideration is given to future proposed rezoning requests, site plans, and related land use proposals, to further establish a record upon which the proposal can be evaluated.
- Public Services Improvements: The identification of a planned future land use pattern enables the county and the six Local Participating Municipalities to prioritize areas in need of current or future public services improvements and plan accordingly. Chapters Five and Six provide important guidance in this area.
- Intergovernmental Coordination: This Plan provides the basis for county officials and the officials of the Local Participating Municipalities to communicate effectively with nearby counties and communities, regarding both the impact of their planning and zoning actions and opportunities for mutual gain through coordinated land use and public services efforts.

- Factual Reference: This Plan includes a factual overview of trends and conditions in the county and the Local Participating Municipalities. This factual profile can educate county and local officials and residents and aid in the review of development proposals, encourage constructive discussion of planning issues and policies, and serve as a base line for future studies.

How the Plan Was Prepared

Cass County adopted a master plan in 2002. With the repeal of the County Planning Act in 2008, replaced by the Planning Enabling Act (Public Act 33 of 2008), and interest by Cass County and the Local Participating Municipalities in maintaining current policies regarding growth, development, and preservation, the county and the Local Participating Municipalities embarked on the development of a wholly new plan in the winter of 2012.

One of the first tasks undertaken was the holding of a “Future Vision” Town Meeting. The purpose of the Town Meeting was to gain insight into some of the thoughts of local residents about current aspects of the county and aspirations for the future.

“Future Vision” Town Meeting Results

Aspects of the county about which participants were most **proud**:

natural features	education
scenic/rural character	farming
recreation	diversity

Aspects of the county about which participants were most **sorry**:

loss of industry	lack of jobs
lack of internet access	roads
drugs	blight

Future visions of the county that participants found most important were:

natural resources	farms
education	jobs

A series of focused workshop meetings was also held with each of the Local Participating Municipalities at the onset of the project. The results of the workshops were the development of future land use concepts.

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The 2002 Master Plan was evaluated as to its continued applicability to the county today and its strengths and weaknesses, including within the context of input received during the planning process. A blueprint was developed to guide the development of the new master plan and officials county-wide were given an opportunity to comment on the conceptual changes suggested for inclusion in the new Plan.

The County Planning Commission then assembled a complete draft of the Plan and the draft was reviewed and revised based on, in part, input from each of the Local Participating Municipalities. Each of the planning commissions of the six Local Participating Municipalities subsequently held a public hearing on the revised draft and forwarded final comments to the County Planning Commission. The County Planning Commission further revised the draft plan and held a public hearing as well. The County Planning Commission subsequently finalized the Plan for adoption and following adoption by the County Planning Commission, each of the planning commissions of the Local Participating Municipalities similarly adopted the Plan.

Cass County Overview

Cass County is a vastly rural region in the southwest corner of Michigan along the Indiana state line. Comprised of 20 local municipalities, the county covers 508.5 square miles and had a 2010 population of 52,293.

Some of the county's most defining features include its abundant agriculture and other open spaces including woodlands and wetlands, its more than 165 lakes and the lakefront neighborhoods along many of their shorelines, its handful of small incorporated communities that offer a "town and country" feel, and the county's fundamental reliance on the greater regional area for employment and services including the St. Joseph/Benton Harbor area to the northwest, the Three Rivers and Kalamazoo areas to the east and northeast, and the South Bend and Elkhart areas to the south in Indiana. The county could be described as a lake and agriculturally-based bedroom community, with comparatively small scattered settlement areas offering more urban lifestyles and support services. The City of Dowagiac, the only city in the county and the largest of the five incorporated communities, had a 2010 population of nearly 6,000 and sits just eight miles northwest of the centrally located and county seat of the Village of Cassopolis.

Regional access to the Cass County area is afforded by Interstate 94, approximately nine miles to the north, and Interstate 80/90, approximately two miles to the south in Indiana. Access is further facilitated by US -131 and US 31 to the east and west respectively, and the presence of five state highways throughout the county that link the county to these freeways. U.S. 12 travels across the entire county in its southern third. The City of Dowagiac operates a small airport as well.

CASS COUNTY COMMUNITIES

City

Dowagiac

Villages

Cassopolis
Edwardsburg
Marcellus
Vandalia

Townships

Calvin
Howard
Jefferson
LaGrange
Marcellus
Mason
Milton
Newberg

Ontwa
Penn
Pokagon
Porter
Silver Creek
Volinia
Wayne

Aside from South Bend and Elkhart in Indiana, with populations of approximately 100,000 and 50,000 respectively and both within 10 miles of the county's southern border, the next closest major urban city of 100,000 or more population is Grand Rapids in Michigan, a community of more than 200,000 and a more than 1.5 hour drive for most county residents.

A detailed review of the county conditions, and those of the six Participating Local Municipalities can be found in the Appendices of this Plan.

Overview of Planning Policies

As is discussed in more detail in Chapter Four, the planned primary growth areas are Cassopolis, Dowagiac, and Edwardsburg. Secondary growth areas include Barron Lake, Marcellus, Union, Vandalia, Jones and Pokagon. Cassopolis, Dowagiac, and Edwardsburg are recommended to provide a wide variety of uses typically associated with small urban centers including residential uses of varying density, industry, and locally and regionally-oriented commercial growth. The balance of the designated growth areas are programmed for residential growth primarily, along with limited locally-oriented commercial services.

This Plan recommends the county's existing urbanized areas be the focus of growth.

Except for several planned commercially-oriented nodes scattered throughout the county and planned lakefront residential development along many of the county's lakes, the balance of the county is planned principally for agriculture, resource conservation, and rural residential development. Planned rural residential areas are principally limited to the Howard and Milton Township areas and portions of the southern third of Jefferson Township, with the balance and greatest portion of the county planned primarily for agriculture.

The principal policies embodied in this Master Plan for each of the Local Participating Municipalities can be summarized as follows:

Village of Edwardsburg: A compact pedestrian-friendly residential community, with a mixed-use M-62 corridor and a small US-12 business district.

Village of Vandalia: A variable density pedestrian-friendly residential community centered along a mixed-use M-60 corridor.

Pokagon Township: An agricultural community with principal urban growth limited to the Dowagiac area and extending along M-51, and in the Pokagon and Sunnerville areas.

Silver Creek Township: An agricultural/residential community with urban growth limited to the lake areas and segments of M-51 and M-62.

Volinia Township: An agricultural/residential community with small commercial nodes at several intersections.

Wayne Township: An agricultural community with principal urban growth areas in the Twin Lakes area and segments of M-51 and Marcellus Highway.