

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Brooks Township Master Plan

Brooks Township is a rural community located in Newaygo County, Michigan. The township borders the City of Newaygo and is located approximately 32 miles north of Grand Rapids.



Brooks Township is connected to that large metropolitan center via M-37 and M-82/US-131.

Collectively, Brooks Township and the City of Newaygo form a desirable “small

town” example of an environment considered highly attractive to families and visitors. The area is rich in natural features including large tracts of forested lands, the Muskegon River and associated tributaries, lakes and wetlands, rolling topography, and an abundance and variety of flora and fauna. The area is generally characterized by low density residential development and possesses an emerging base of commercial and industrial opportunities.

The qualities that make a community desirable can be lost if not carefully managed. This is of major concern to Brooks Township. The township acknowledges that population growth will likely result in heightened demand for the conversion of open space to residential and other intense forms of use; pressures to develop M-37 and M-82 for commercial purposes; potential requests for the provision of “urban infrastructure” such as public water and sanitary sewers to serve high growth areas near the City of Newaygo and around the township’s populated lakes; and, the implementation of other facilities and services necessary to meet the needs of a growing and diverse population. It is the goal of the township to establish a workable program within which these demands and pressures will be evaluated and directed. This will help ensure that the desired qualities existing today will be carried over into the township’s future.

The Brooks Township Master Plan represents the framework for the above program. It is the public’s vision of the township’s future. As such, the plan

attempts to:

- recognize and balance the interests and desires of all residents and landowners; provide a basis of support for the Township Zoning Ordinance; recognize and protect the township's natural features, many of which are unique and/or fragile in character; recognize the City of Newaygo as the area's central city; recognize and, as appropriate, coordinate land use opportunities along the township's perimeter with the City of Newaygo and neighboring townships; delineate land development types and patterns consistent with the needs and desires of township residents; recognize that the intensity and/or density of certain land uses requires location in or near areas served by public infrastructure such as all-season roads, public water, sanitary sewers, etc.; recognize the importance of maintaining the township's rural character; and, achieve the quality of life desired by township residents.

The Brooks Township Master Plan - Legal Basis

The Master Plan was prepared by the Brooks Township Planning Commission. The Commission is a body of local residents appointed by the Brooks Township Board under the provisions of Michigan Public Act 168 of 1959, the

Township Planning Act. Pursuant to Act 168, the Commission is charged with preparation and adoption of the Township Master Plan.

The Brooks Township Planning Commission also serves as the Township Zoning Board. As such, the Commission has administrative responsibility for a variety of zoning functions including site plan review and initial preparation of zoning ordinance text and map amendments.

The Master Plan and Zoning Relationship

It is a common, but false, perception that the master plan and zoning ordinance are synonymous. While the two instruments are intricately linked, they serve different purposes. As illustrated by the following chart, the master plan is a visionary document providing support for the zoning ordinance. The zoning ordinance is a regulatory document governing the present day use of land. It is a tool used to achieve the recommendations of the master plan.

MASTER PLAN <i>[Visionary-Establishes Policy]</i>
Guides Land Use
Future/Visionary Document
Supports Zoning Ordinance
Adopted by Planning Commission

ZONING ORDINANCE <i>[Regulatory-Land Use Law]</i>
Regulates Land Use
Present Day Document
Implements Master Plan
Adopted by Township Board

Building on a Foundation of Prior Planning Activity

In addition to the zoning relationship, the Master Plan is also intrinsically linked to several other township planning instruments. These include the former Brooks Township Plan (1994), the Brooks Township Land Use Vision (1999), and the Brooks Township Recreation Plan (1999).



The Land Use Vision represents a unique plan (planning exercise) combining the input and expertise of local, regional and state agencies and organizations in order to identify land

use issues of concern, and methods for resolving those concerns. The findings and recommendations of the Land Use Vision were used extensively in the preparation of the new Master Plan.

The previous Master Plan provided important detail concerning the township's historic make-up and patterns of change. The plan also identified a series of goals and objectives used to guide growth and development during the plan's implementation phase. This information served as important building blocks for preparation of the current plan.

While not a plan, per se, the Zoning Ordinance represents an important planning tool pursuant to the implementation of the Master Plan. Much of the township's historic land development is based on the regulatory standards of the Zoning Ordinance.

The Recreation Plan represents a comprehensive planning document reflecting the township's identified recreational need and outlining action programs for addressing those needs. Demographic and other data found in the Recreation Plan were used during preparation of the new Master Plan.

Due to their extensive use in the preparation of this document and continued relevance, the Land Use Vision and the Recreation Plan are classified as supplementary (support) instruments to the Brooks Township Master Plan. The Zoning Ordinance will continue to serve as an important plan implementation tool.

How Does the Plan Impact Residents and Property Owners?

Although the Master Plan is not a regulatory instrument, like zoning, it can be extremely important to residents, property owners, business entrepreneurs, interest groups, future investors and others. For example, the plan:

- identifies and spatially delineates the land use districts programmed for the township;
- details levels of acceptable land use intensity and/or density for identified plan districts;
- recognizes the need to protect the Muskegon River, its tributaries and other water resources as well as prairies and woodlands;
- supports the identification, purpose, and regulations of the township's zoning districts; and
- details goals and objectives concerning the township's future growth.

The above information can be very useful pursuant to future investment decision, identifying development opportunities, and qualifying needed programs and services.

Updating the Plan

Communities experience change. That change may simply involve the aging of the existing populace and land use. Or, it may entail new residents, new developments, new lifestyle demands, philosophical changes in attitude regarding land stewardship, and/or other such adjustments. As time progresses,

Brooks Township will likely experience a combination of these factors. Accordingly, it is important that the Master Plan be periodically reviewed and, as necessary, updated to reflect community needs and desires. The necessity to update should not be viewed as a weakness of the document in place, or the process as a whole. Master planning is evolutionary. It is a strategy by which current and future residents are given the opportunity to build on past efforts, and to lead the township in a forward direction.

