

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

The Purpose and Planning Process

The purpose of the West Traverse Township Master Plan is to provide guidelines for future development, while protecting the natural resources and rural character of the Township. This plan presents extensive background information including socio-economic data on the Township; description and mapping of natural resources and existing land uses; and inventory of existing community facilities. The background information is analyzed to identify important characteristics, changes and trends occurring in the West Traverse Township. Community concerns were identified based on a citizen survey conducted in 2005, previous planning efforts, and input from a Master Plan working group. Goals and policies were developed to guide future development based on the background studies, key land use trends and community issues. These goals, along with a detailed map of existing land use, provided the basis for the Future Land Use Map which specifies where the various types of future development ideally will be located in the Township. This plan also provides suggestions for implementation of the identified goals and policies. The guidance provided by this Master Plan will be utilized in reviewing and updating the West Traverse Township Zoning Ordinance, as appropriate.

Location and Regional Setting

West Traverse Township is located on the north side of Little Traverse Bay, in the western part of Emmet County, which is situated in the northwest region of Michigan's Lower Peninsula. West Traverse Township is one of the smallest Townships in the State comprising approximately 13 square miles of the County's 468 square miles of land area. The Township's irregular size and shape is due to the shoreline of Lake Michigan. The maximum distance from the north boundary to the south boundary is approximately four miles, with the east to west distance at nearly six miles. West Traverse Township is bounded on the south by the City of Harbor Springs and Little Traverse Bay, on the west by Lake Michigan, on the north by Friendship Township and on the east by Little Traverse Township. The City of Petoskey, Charlevoix and Traverse City are approximately 7, 25 and 72 miles southwest of the Township, respectively.

Enabling Legislation

The development of a Township Master Plan is authorized by Township Planning Act (Act No. 168 of the Public Acts of 1959, as amended).

An act to provide for township planning, for the creation, organization, powers, and duties of township planning commissions: and for the regulation and subdivision of land.

The following is a citation of MCL 125.322 Purpose of Plans, section 2 of the act.

The purpose of plans prepared pursuant to this act shall be to promote public health, safety, and general welfare; to encourage the use of resources in accordance with their character and adaptability; to avoid the over-crowding of land by building or people; to lessen congestion on public roads and streets; to facilitate provision for a system of transportation, sewage disposal, safe and adequate water supply, recreation and other public improvements 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.

The Status of Planning and Zoning in West Traverse Township

West Traverse Township adopted a permanent Township Zoning Ordinance in 1972. West Traverse Township adopted an initial Master Plan in 1981 and amended the plan in 1993. Due to changes and growth pressures in the Township, the Master Plan has been thoroughly reviewed and updated. The Master Plan Update for West Traverse Township utilized information from the earlier planning efforts as a starting point, and updated the information as appropriate.

West Traverse Township established a Planning Commission in the early 1990s; however, a planning committee existed prior to the formal establishment of the Planning Commission. Since adopting the Zoning Ordinance in 1972, the Township has been responsible for the administration of zoning regulations in the Township.

Updated zoning ordinances supported by up-to-date comprehensive land use plans are considered the main tool Michigan communities have at their command to control land use patterns and development pressures. In order to exert local control over future development, West Traverse Township decided to develop a Township Zoning Ordinance coordinated with the Master Plan.

The Little Traverse Bay Band of Odawa Indians purchased and placed in tribal trust approximately 80 acres of property in the northeast part of the Township. The property is developed as housing for tribal members. This property has been placed in tribal trust and sovereign nation status, thus is not under the jurisdiction of West Traverse Township.

Figure 1-1
Location Map, West Traverse Township

