

Chapter Five Future Land Use



Crystal Lake

Before outlining the Township’s future land use plan, it is worthwhile to examine the 2010 Lake Township Master Plan and review whether it adequately anticipated future developments and was the foundation for successful land use management in the Township. The 2010 Master Plan stated: *“Lake Township will consider this planning effort a success if there is very little change in the Township land use over the next twenty years.”*

Land use patterns have not changed significantly since 2010. So, the 2010 Master Plan met one of its primary goals. Now the question going forward is whether there needs to be a change in direction or emphasis. Based on public input received during this Master Plan update process, from a broad, overall perspective, most Township residents are satisfied with current land use patterns and major shifts are not warranted. That is not to say there are no concerns about how well the Township is implementing and enforcing its zoning ordinances, and some of the goals and objectives in Chapter

4 are directed at those concerns. But the purpose of this Chapter is to examine land use more broadly.

At least since 2010 when the Master Plan was first prepared, the Lake Township growth management concept has been to guide and control population densities and distribution, and limit business growth to maintain the rural, open space and woodland atmosphere. The Township has strived to maintain an ecological balance, open space, high levels of sanitation and low levels of pollution. A principal foundation of this Plan should continue to be the maintenance of the unique and high value environment of Township.

The 2010 Plan identified two major types of development pressure that could alter the Township's land use characteristics. Both are still relevant. One was pressure for more commercial development to service the tourism and recreation visitors to the Township, and the other was pressure for increased residential development, especially on hillsides, ridgelines, and other non-lakefront property.

Future Commercial Development - The Township's zoning does not provide for new commercial development, except for limited opportunities in a small Commercial Resort district along Deadstream Road. There have been no new commercial developments in that district and no requests for variances or modified zoning to allow businesses in other parts of the Township. So, in the last twelve years, there has not been significant pressure for new businesses. But visitation to Sleeping Bear Dunes is still trending upward, so the concern remains highly relevant. The public input received on the Master Plan update included some comments expressing the desire for increased services, though most residents seem very satisfied with the status quo and would be opposed to new commercial development.

To ensure that the principal goals of this Master Plan are met, the Planning Commission should consider eliminating of the existing Commercial Resort District. Commercial businesses which are currently operating would be 'grandfathered' and can continue as they have. New businesses in that district seem out of character with the general residential quality of the district.

Variances for new or expanded commercial establishments can and should be given fair and thoughtful consideration. The key consideration should be whether the proposed establishment is consistent with preserving and protecting the natural environment and maintaining the generally quiet and rural character of the Township.

Future Residential Development – The 2010 Master Plan predicted that “the Township will be faced with typical incremental development that, if not wisely managed, has the potential to degrade not only the natural environment, but may result in general urban type sprawl, placing public service burdens on the citizens and taxpayers, along with a reduction of the basic attractiveness of the Township for residents and visitors alike.” The 2010 Plan emphasized that visible ridge top development was a major threat. Most residential development in the last twelve years has taken place along the lakeshores and within existing subdivisions. But the concern raised is still relevant today, and the question going forward is whether the current zoning is adequate to provide the protections most of our residents want.

Lakeshore Development - Very little undeveloped property exists along the lakeshores. So, housing density will not change significantly unless the zoning is altered to allow developments like apartments, condos, or resorts; but such a change would be completely inconsistent with the overall land use goals of this Plan. So, there is no reason to change the lakeshore zoning to allow anything other than single-family residences. Property in the lakeshore district continues to be very desirable and property values continue to escalate. The pressure to replace or expand older, smaller dwellings with newer, larger homes will surely continue. So, as spelled out in Chapter 4, the Township needs to evaluate the current ordinances (basic zoning as well as watershed overlays) and determine if specific changes are needed to prevent degradation of the lakes and shorelines.

Outside of the Lakeshore District, all land in the Township that is not part of Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore is zoned for moderate density residential development. There are two zoning districts:

- Residential Single-Family District (R-1) which allows single-family dwellings or duplexes on lots that are at least 12,000 square feet (slightly more than a quarter acre).
- Residential Rural District (R-2) which allows single-family dwellings, duplexes, or mobile homes on lots that are at least one acre.

Both districts allow condominium developments, subject to site plan approval. Most of the land in the R1 District is in platted subdivisions or along lakeshore areas with larger existing lots, though there are several tracts totaling several hundred acres that could be subdivided into the allowed fraction of an acre lots. There is much more undeveloped land in the Township in the R2 District, which can be divided into one-acre lots. Between the two districts, the potential exists for hundreds of new home sites. But as a practical matter, the potential for high levels of development is probably not as significant as those numbers suggest. Much of the vacant land may not be that desirable due to the lack of water frontage or attractive views. Several large parcels are owned by or under non-development conservation easements with the Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy.

The question for future land use planning and zoning is whether the current allowed density is low enough to assure that the principal goal of assuring the rural, open-space and woodland character of the Township is maintained in the future.

Other Considerations

Site Plan Approval Criteria – One of the purposes of this Master Plan is to guide, not only future zoning, but to provide guidance for other land use decisions. Consistent with the overall goals of this Master Plan, when assessing site plans for approval, especially those involving condominium or planned residential developments, the following criteria are of particular importance in helping determine if approval should be granted; a site plan should be viewed more favorably if it:

- Minimizes housing density and keeps the number of dwellings below the generally allowed number per acre.
- Minimizes the removal of natural vegetation and stays well within allowed removal standards.
- Maximizes the natural screening of buildings to preserve the natural, woodland appearance of the subject property.
- Includes natural, undeveloped common areas.

Short-term Rentals - It would be possible to amend the zoning ordinance to exclude or limit any new short-term rental units (STR's). But zoning restrictions can not eliminate pre-existing uses, so any already existing STR would be allowed to continue to operate as they have. A fairer and more complete way to control STR's would be to adopt a police-power ordinance along with zoning, which would regulate not only the location of STR's but would regulate the operation of STR's and tenant behavior.

Neighboring Jurisdictions - The future land use Portion of the 2010 Master Plan borrowed heavily from a Benzie County comprehensive plan. Since then, planning and zoning efforts at the County level have been abandoned. So, no coordination of this Plan with any County-wide plans is possible.

A review of zoning maps of neighboring townships shows they have similar general land use plans, especially for land bordering on or near Lake Township. Lakeshore residential and other residential districts predominate in the areas of Crystal Lake, Benzonia and Platte Townships near Lake Township. One difference worth noting is the existence of Rural Preservation districts in the neighboring townships. Those districts allow agriculture and forestry, but limit housing to minimum lot sizes of 2.5, 5, 10 or even 20 acres depending on the exact location. So, as discussed above, if Lake Township were to amend its zoning to further limit future housing density, it would not be incompatible or out of place in comparison to neighboring jurisdictions.

The Lake Township Future Zoning Plan:

To assure that the overall goals of this Master Plan are met, as discussed above, there are two possible changes to the Township's

zoning plan that warrant consideration. Otherwise, the current zoning map and plan generally appropriate and in keeping with the overall goals of this Plan. The first possible change is the elimination of the Commercial Resort zoning district along Deadstream Road, and the second is whether the current residential zoning districts allow higher density housing than is desirable. Both changes should be considered by the Planning Commission after further detailed assessment and an opportunity for public input.

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