

MASTER PLAN

CITY OF CARSON CITY, MICHIGAN



DECEMBER 2, 2002



City of Carson City

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Adoption of Carson City Master Plan.

- WHEREAS,** The City of Carson City is a Michigan Municipal Corporation operating under a charter adopted February 2, 1960, which was ratified on March 14, 1960 and went into effect on April 1, 1960; and
- WHEREAS,** The last City Master Plan was completed in 1967.
- WHEREAS,** Hiring of the planning firm of Langworthy, Strader LaBlanc & Associates, Inc. of Grand Rapids, Michigan to assist in the preparation of an updated City Master Plan.
- WHEREAS,** Proper and sufficient public meetings were held to gain the citizens perspective regarding the broad variety of issues that exist in the city and help develop the plan,
- WHEREAS,** The City Planning Commission held several meetings and worked diligently into incorporate citizens wishes along with the current natural occurring city development and put into a final Master Plan document,
- WHEREAS,** The City Council reviewed the Master Plan on November 19, 2002,
- WHEREAS,** According to planning law the Master Plan needs to be adopted by the City Planning Commission,
- and, NOW THEREFORE,**
A motion by Betty Kellenberger, seconded by Dan Cusack to adopt the revised and updated City Master Plan during the City Planning Commission meeting on December 2, 2002.

Motion passed; 6 ayes, 0 naves, 2 absent, 1 vacant.



Fred C. Brown
Secretary

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Introduction

A rural center straddling State Highway 57, Carson City is located in the midst of some of Michigan's best farmland. The City typifies Michigan's small towns with its main street lined with businesses, well kept homes, and a wonderful riverside park. Behind the commercial frontage lie mature residential neighborhoods on narrow streets, shaded by trees planted generations ago.

Both an asset and a limitation, the City's location away from the State's large urban centers has preserved a quiet life style, but has also limited its prospects for widespread growth and development. Recent designation of a Renaissance Zone adjacent to the City and cooperative agreements with the abutting township have generated interest in and created the potential for an economic rebirth in the City. Additional lands available for residential development have also generated interest in Carson City as a desirable place to settle, build a home, and raise a family.

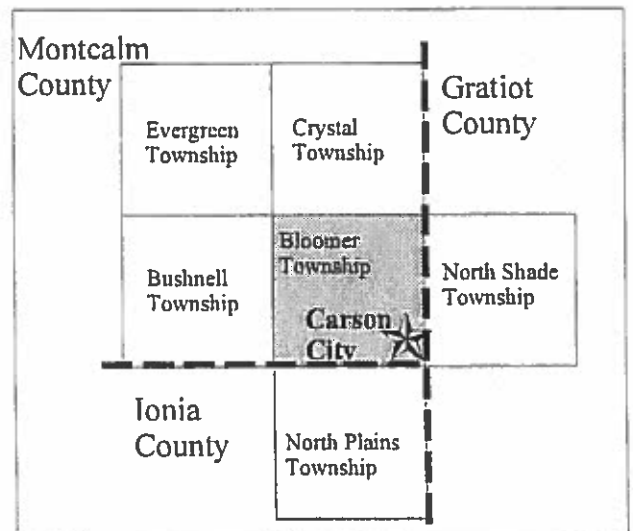
These recent and anticipated changes in the character of the City and its surrounding area have created the need to prepare this Master Plan. Of course, the purpose of the Plan is to establish a framework for the future of the community to be used in making community development decisions in the coming years. The Plan provides a profile of the community, identifying current conditions and past trends. It also identifies those issues of particular concern to the City's officials and residents and proposes actions to address them.

While the most frequently referenced part of any Master Plan is the future land use map, it must be understood that the map is only part of the Plan. It is a graphic representation of the goals and policies contained within the document. When referring to the Plan, however, it is essential to consider those goals and policies, along with other relevant information in the document, as well as the Plan map.

One final word of caution...the work is not finished even after the Master Plan is adopted. The last chapter of this document contains advice on using the Plan and keeping it current. The Planning Commission and City administration should regularly review the Plan to ensure its continued applicability. No crystal balls were consulted in the planning process. Events can occur, philosophies may change, and opportunities will arise. Some may have been anticipated, while others may not. Therefore, a routine review should be conducted regularly to make adjustments in the planning recommendations, if needed. Otherwise, there will be a tendency to allow the Plan to fall into disuse as it becomes less relevant over time.

Community Profile

The characteristics of an area, including but not limited to physical, social and economic, shape its past, present and future. In 1967, the Carson City Planning Commission prepared a Master Plan that included information about the many characteristics of Carson City. The process to update that plan is again being undertaken. This community profile will look at more recent social and economic demographics set forth in the previous plan for the purpose of establishing some baseline trends.



Population, Housing And Economy

Population

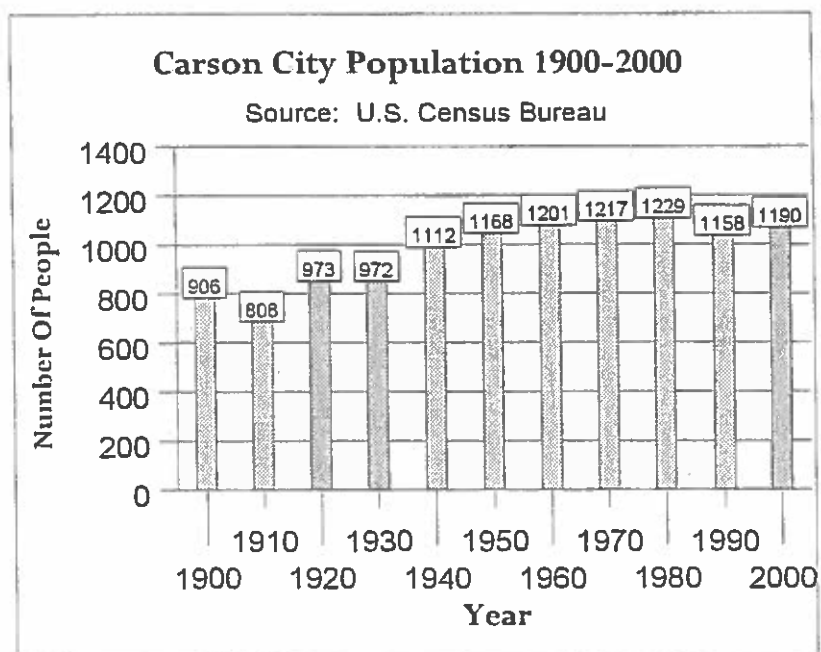
A historical look at Carson City's population shows a decline just after the turn of the century (see chart entitled Carson City



Population 1900-1990). Rapid growth in the city came to an end at that time (*A Master Plan For Carson City, 1967*).

Since then, small fluctuations in the City population have occurred but remained relatively stable.

Most recently (over the 1990's), the population has remained relatively constant, showing only a modest increase. Carson City's growth rate since 1990 (2.8%) did not keep pace with that of the State of Michigan (6.9%) or Montcalm County (15.5%).

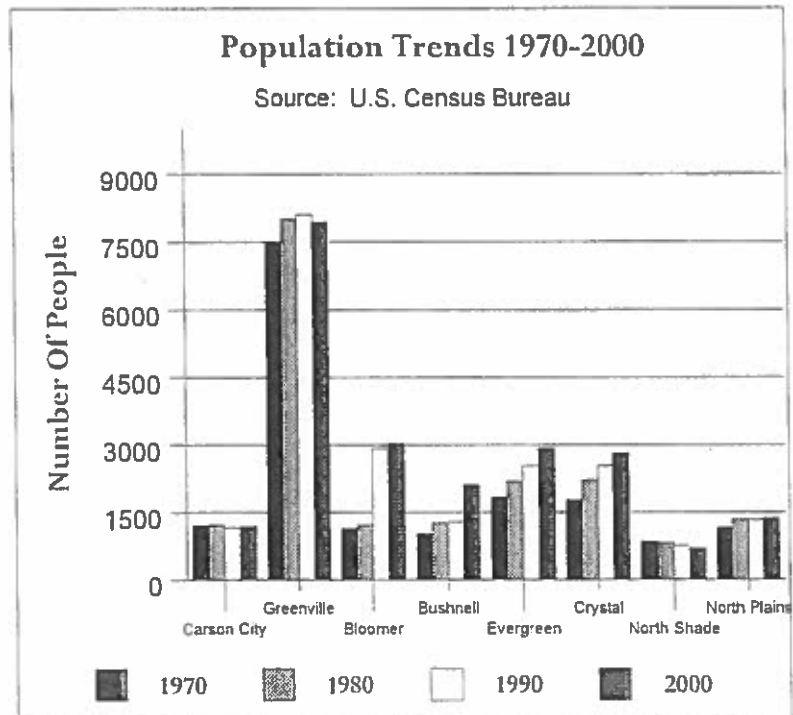


Population Change 1990- 2000

Geo-graphic Area	Census 1990	Census 2000	Change	
			Number	Percent
Montcalm County	53,059	61,266	8,207	16%
Carson City	1,158	1,190	32	3%
Greenville	8,101	7,935	(166)	-2%
Bloomer Township	2,922	3,039	117	4%
Bushnell Township	1,291	2,111	820	64%
Evergreen Township	2,531	2,922	391	15%
Crystal Township	2,541	2,824	283	11%
North Shade Township	758	706	(52)	-7%
North Plains Township	1,333	1,366	33	3%

Population increases occurred in the majority of the municipalities surrounding Carson City in the 90's. Carson City experienced a 2.5% increase, while Greenville declined. Bloomer Township, which surrounds Carson City, experienced a 4% population increase. Bushnell and Evergreen Townships, west and northwest of Carson City, experienced substantial population growth. In fact, Bushnell Township had the highest growth rate in Montcalm County.

A brief look at historical population trends in the municipalities surrounding Carson City shows similar growth patterns (see chart entitled Population Trends 1970-2000). Bloomer Township experienced the largest numerical increase, more than doubling its population between 1980 and

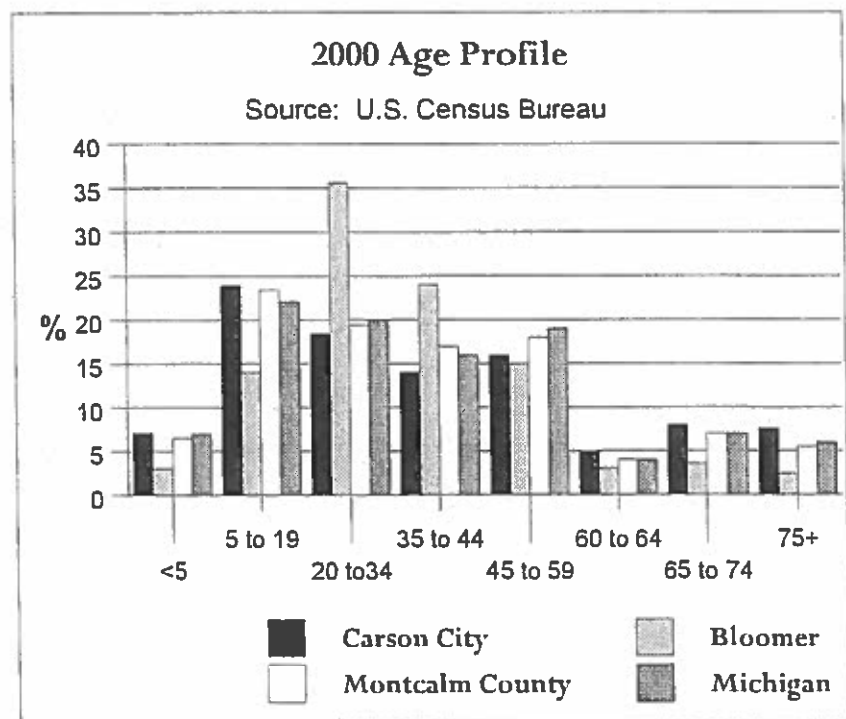


1990. The population increased by 1,813 people, over 147%. This change, however, was mainly due to the construction of two State correctional facilities in Bloomer Township in the late 1980's. Between 1990 and 2000 a shift occurred, with only slight growth in Bloomer Township and an explosive increase in Bushnell Township. Carson City's population, on the other hand, did not experience any substantive change.

Age

The median age for Carson City is 35.5, higher than that of Bloomer Township's 34.1, comparable to Montcalm County at 35.6 years, and the State of Michigan at 35.5 years.

The age profile of Carson City's population (see chart entitled 2000 Age Profile) mirrors that of Montcalm County and the State of Michigan. However, in comparison to the City, County, and State Bloomer Township shows considerable deviations. There were fewer individuals under 20 and more in the 21-39 category in Bloomer Township. This may represent the influence of the prison population..

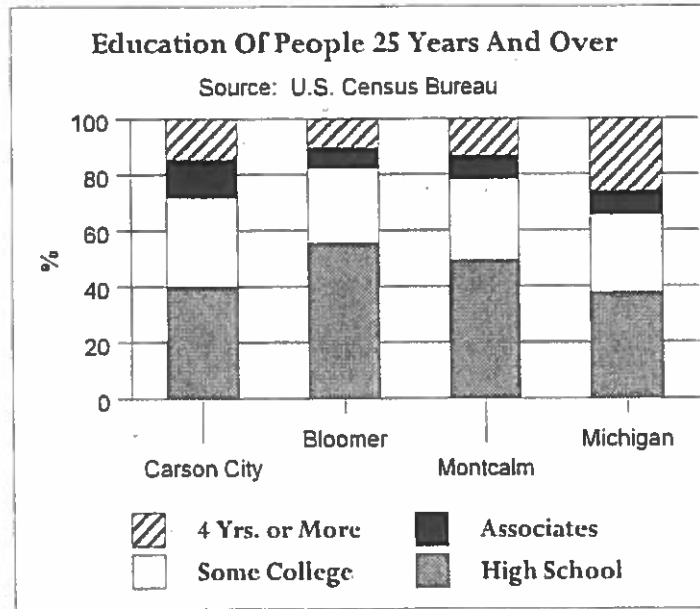


Education

According to the 1990 Census, the majority of students, elementary through high school, in Carson City are enrolled in public schools. Most students attend the Carson City-Crystal Area public schools.

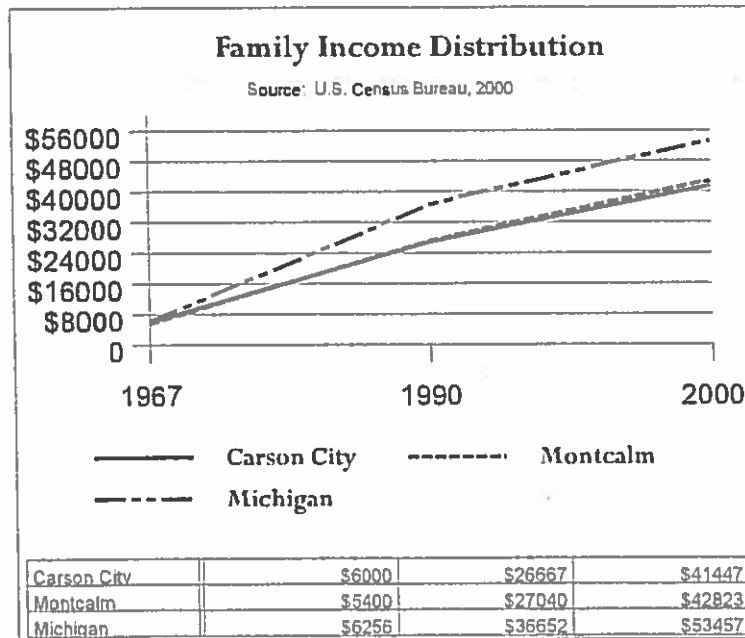
A look at the population who have completed their education shows that a majority have achieved a high school education with 39% going on for a higher education. A recent comparison of completed education levels in the City, 1990 to 1998, shows no change.

A comparison of educational attainment in Carson City to educational attainment in Bloomer Township and Montcalm County (see chart) shows little deviation with the exception of those who have completed 4 or more years of college. A larger percentage of the population in Carson City have completed their bachelor degrees or higher education in comparison. Though this percentage is higher for the City, it is still less than the State of Michigan (Michigan, 18%).



Income

The Master Plan For Carson City (1967) indicated that the median family income (MFI) was \$6,000. At that time, it was above the MFI for Montcalm County, and below that of the State.



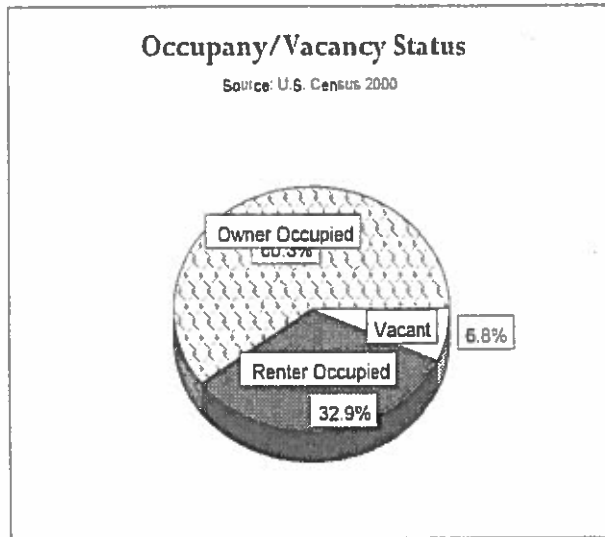
The 2000 Census showed that the MFI for Carson City was \$41,447. Since 1967, Carson City has fallen slightly below the MFI for Montcalm County (\$42,823) and further below the State (\$53,457).

Housing

The 2000 Census indicated that there were 532 housing units in Carson City. While most of those units were owner occupied (64.7%), this represents a very low proportion of home ownership. By comparison, this percentage is 81.6% for the County and 87.7%

for Bloomer Township.

The homeowner vacancy rate of 1.2% indicated in the Census suggests a need for additional housing, as was also indicated by individuals who attended the Master Plan Focus Group Meeting held in Carson City in May, 1999.

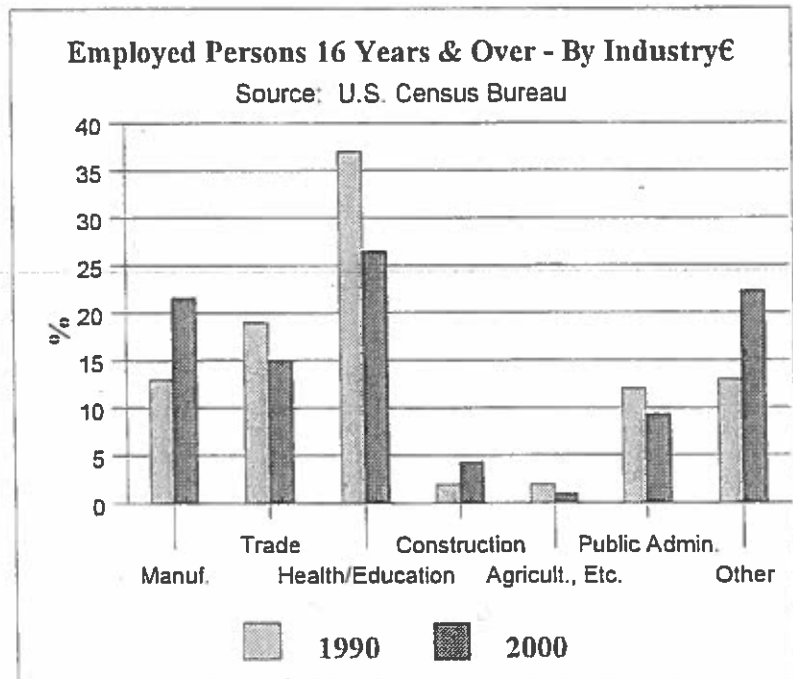


Approximately 44% of the total housing stock in the City was built before 1940. Less than 8% of the City's housing units were built within the past 10 years. As of the 2000 Census, the median value of owner-occupied homes in Carson City was \$73,600, compared to \$76,400 for all of Montcalm County.

Rental housing, accounts for over 35% of all occupied dwellings in Carson City.

Employment

The 1967 Master Plan for Carson City reported that 30% of the City's employment opportunities were generated by the hospital and the schools. In 1990 this figure had risen to 37% and in 2000, the Census showed a decrease in the percent of people employed in health or educational services fields (26.5%). While these two industries continue to be large employers of City residents, their dominance is diminishing. The State correctional facilities and McKinley Trucking Co. are gaining prominence as major employers. Also of significance is that the proportion of persons employed in manufacturing increased to nearly one-quarter of all workers.



The Michigan Employment Security Agency (MESA) reported lower unemployment rates in Carson City than in Bloomer Township and Montcalm County for 1970, 1980 and 1990. That trend is currently continuing, with the 1999 year-to-date average at 4.3% for Carson City and 6.3% and 5.5% for Bloomer Township and Montcalm County, respectively.

Existing Land Use

The map entitled "Existing Land Use" shows the predominant land uses by parcel. This is a snapshot of how the land is used currently. It does not necessarily reflect zoning, just the predominant use. The following is a breakdown of each category, as shown on the map:

Single Family Residential - areas having detached single family housing units with associated structures, such as garages, tools sheds, etc. This is the largest category of uses. Most of the land area in the City is occupied by single family homes.

Multi-Family Residential - areas of multiple family apartment structures. Only one concentration of multi-family housing is found in Carson City, at Second and Linden Streets, just north of the high school.

Group Residential - includes adult foster care homes and residential facilities for the aged. The largest area is found in the northeast corner of the City, near the multi-family housing complex.

Commercial - areas predominantly used for the sale of products and services, including those businesses in the central business district. Most of Carson City's commercial lines both sides of M-57. A few isolated businesses are found south of M-57 in predominantly residential neighborhoods, while other, more intense, commercial is located in the northern part of the City, adjacent to the railroad tracks and older industrial buildings.

Industrial - areas used predominantly for manufacturing. Relatively little industry is currently found in the City.

Public/Quasi-Public - includes such land uses as schools, churches, government offices, cemeteries, parks and utilities. These are scattered throughout the community and include West Park on the extreme western edge of the City, the cemetery in the northwest corner, and large school sites both north and south of M-57.

Vacant - areas of land not currently developed. There is very little vacant land available for development in the City.

Agricultural - areas of land used for the production of farm commodities. Surprisingly, the City does still contain some small parcels of farm land.

The existing land use map shows that Carson City is a developed community. The City is predominantly residential neighborhoods with most of its commercial properties in the central business district along Main Street, or M-57, the major arterial roadway through the City. There are only two large industrial companies in the City, Renaissance Power Co., located in

the northeastern quadrant of the City, and the plastics company located on Main Street in the former Creamery Building. Overall, compared to many other small communities, Carson City has kept its land uses predominantly distinct, which minimizes land use conflicts.

Carson City has two evident residential sectors. To the north of Main Street are many older homes, probably constituting the original village. Beyond the Middle and High School are the multi-family apartment complexes and the Carson City Senior Apartments. These complexes are relatively new but located on the outskirts of the original neighborhoods and the City. A majority of the homes to the south of Main Street were built later than 1950 and make up more recent residential development in the City.










The few vacant parcels within the City Limits, mostly in the northern part of the City, appear to be predominantly committed to residential development or possibly the addition of commercial businesses. There are only three agricultural parcels located at the edges of development within the City Limits.

The significant natural features are along the western edge of the City, Fish Creek and Mill Pond. Fish Creek runs north-south with Mill Pond located just north of Main Street, forming the northern boundary of Carson City West Park. The City's parks are strategically located close to these water bodies, capitalizing on their use for recreational aesthetics.

Existing Land Use

Carson City

Montcalm County, Michigan

-  Carson City Limits
-  Single Family Residential
-  Multi-Family Residential
-  Group Residential
-  Commercial
-  Industrial
-  Public/Quasi-Public
-  Vacant
-  Agricultural



LSL
 LANGWORTHY
 STRADER
 LEBLANC &
 ASSOCIATES, INC.



500 0 500 1000 Feet

Data Sources: Base & Parcel Information -
 OMM Engineering, 1999 Land Use Information -
 Langworthy Strader LeBlanc & Associates, Inc.

December 2002

Issues

Carson City Master Plan Focus Group Results

Knowing what the citizens of Carson City think about different types of land uses, locations for growth, and those aspects of community character that are important to them is essential to the success of the Master Plan. To solicit public input, the City actively involved a number of stakeholders including business owners, elected officials, civic leaders, and representatives from

surrounding townships, through the creation of a focus group. The focus group provided thoughtful insight into community issues and identified a variety of concerns.

A focus group meeting was held with citizens and decision makers on May 24th, 1999 at the Carson City Hospital in which a variety of assets and liabilities were identified in the City. More than 30 citizens provided their perspective regarding the broad variety of issues that exist in the City. Participants were asked to comment on three topical areas:



- Residential/Community Character/Environmental;
- Commercial and Industrial Development; and
- Community Services/Coordination.

The information and opinions derived from the workshop will help shape the Master Plan. A summary of the issues is provided on the following pages.

RESIDENTIAL/COMMUNITY CHARACTER/ENVIRONMENTAL



Most Significant Issues: The school system and a “sense of community”.

Residents of Carson City feel that there is a “sense of community”. Sense of community arises from many traits, including pride in the place that you live and pride in the quality of education,

health care, and services that are provided in the community. Carson City is a desirable place to live for families because of these traits, but there is a strong concern about the lack of funding for the school system and how it may affect the future of the community.

Residential

There is a need for additional residential areas - There is a need for additional residential areas within the City that provide for higher-end housing and larger lot sizes than currently allowed in existing residential zones to meet market demand.

Also a need for a senior assisted living facility- Additional facilities that could provide care for seniors is desirable in the community.

Need for Rentals - There are currently many rental units (homes) and two rental complexes in the city. Despite the City's existing high proportion of renter-occupied units, there remains a perception among some residents that additional well-maintained rental units should be provided for both families and individuals.

Community Character

Small community draws people - The small size of the community, a sense of safety, family heritage, friendliness and pride in the community attracts new residents and creates a "sense of community".

Planning preserves community character - Pro-active planning will help to preserve the existing community character!

Recreational/Environmental

Many recreational facilities with the exception of tennis, golf, and trails - The existing parks and recreational facilities in Carson City are a source of great pride for the community. Some would like to expand these facilities to include the opportunities for tennis, golf and walking/biking trails.

Recreational programs lacking - Though there are adequate facilities, there is a need to expand recreational programs for all age groups.

Few environmental concerns with awareness in the future - There have been sites of environmental concern in the City, but currently those sites are being remediated. The City is completely serviced by water and sewer, eliminating concerns about groundwater contamination for residences. It is anticipated that growth of commercial or industrial areas

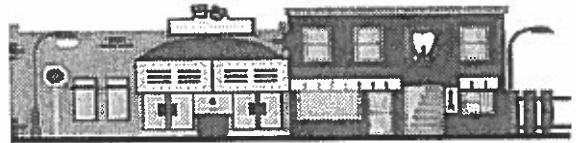
in the City will be planned with regard to maintaining the health of the environment.

COMMERCIAL AND INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT

Most Significant Issue: **The appearance of the Downtown in terms of vacant/dilapidated buildings and the need for more variety in businesses downtown.**

Several downtown buildings were identified that detract from a positive visual image of the central business district (CBD). About a half dozen buildings were identified as being in need of repair and, in some instances, may need to be torn down. While the roadway improvement project along Main Street has enhanced the appearance of the CBD, the overall image of the downtown will not improve significantly until the building vacancy/condition issue is addressed. Most feel that an aggressive effort is needed to tackle these concerns.

Other issues related to commercial and industrial development are highlighted below:



Services and Size of the Downtown

Need for more variety in shopping opportunities - Most people travel to Alma, St. Johns, and Greenville to get the comparison goods that are not available locally. This involves a ½ hour or more trip in most instances. Several types of businesses were identified that would strengthen the retail/service mix such as:

- restaurants serving breakfast and lunch;
- clothing store;
- gas station;
- motel; and
- medical plaza (office space).

Expansion of the Commercial area is desired but not at the expense of the Downtown - The desire to expand the commercial district was discussed as a possibility. While expansion to the east may be most appropriate, it was recognized that there is a strong demand for continued commercial expansion west of the downtown area. Overall, it was felt that if the commercial strip were to be expanded (east or west) it should not be at the expense of the core-two block downtown area.

Downtown Design Improvements

Sidewalks for pedestrians- Safe connections are needed between major activity centers such as the elementary school, downtown and the Carson City West Park. In addition, a “walker friendly” downtown should be encouraged. A downtown enhancement grant, received in 2001, has helped this effort greatly.

Traffic light downtown- Interest was expressed in exploring the possibility of a light downtown at the location of Main/Division and at the location of M-57/Garlock to address safety concerns. However, recent intersection improvements to provide separate turn lanes have resulted in significant benefits.

Economic Development Opportunities

Lack of infrastructure in Renaissance Zone- Without infrastructure readily available, the Zone lacks the “readiness” to quickly respond to economic opportunities. However, it was felt that prospective businesses must first be identified before any major capital improvements can be made. Overall, there is not a clear outline on how to develop the necessary infrastructure in the zone. A list of opportunities and constraints need to be identified.

Coordinated marketing efforts- The perception is that little is being done to effectively market the Zone for economic development opportunities. There is a desire to improve coordination between the Montcalm Alliance Board and the communities with land in the Zone.

Investment in education- A robust community is needed to support economic development including further investment in local education. This is necessary to improve the level of local “readiness” to attract new business opportunities.

Attract clean industries- Non-polluting industries are desired that can be contained in an attractive industrial park setting complete with landscaping. There have been efforts to encourage agriculture-related businesses (soy bean by-products, etc.) but more specific opportunities need to be identified. A significant step in this direction and a catalyst for others to follow has been the construction of a \$200 million dollar power plant in the City.

COMMUNITY SERVICES/COORDINATION

Most Significant Issue: **Coordination between the city and surrounding townships is necessary to address future development in the area.**

While many issues and concerns were expressed during the focus group workshop, the need to improve coordination between the City and its neighbors was, one of the greatest concerns which arose. Carson City does not have a limitless supply of land available for development. In fact, the supply of suitable vacant land for residential projects is in short supply. Further, while the townships have an abundance of vacant land, priorities such as preserving rural character and farmland may not be conducive to wide spread development, and the services necessary to support such development do not exist. It is essential, therefore, that the City and surrounding townships work together as a "community" to address the needs and objectives of each. The recent completion of a "425" agreement between the City and Bloomer Township marks an important step in this direction. Such efforts to coordinate land development opportunities and share tax revenues provide outstanding examples of mutual cooperation for the good of the entire "community".

Additional issues which were raised relating to community cooperation and public services by the focus group included the following:

Community Cooperation

Partnership with surrounding townships - There is a strong desire to build a relationship between Carson City, Bloomer Township, and North Shade Township in Gratiot County so there can be a mutually beneficial arrangement that creates opportunities for land development, extensions of infrastructure, and economic expansion.

Better coordination - The City and townships need to have more dialogue with each other so that concerns and issues may be properly, and adequately, addressed. A greater sense of trust must be developed so the communities may work together towards common goals.

Support the school system - As one community, the City, townships, and school system must work together to build a stronger educational system that will serve to attract new residents and industries. A stronger sense of confidence is needed in the community about its schools.

Promote shared efforts - The Carson City Fire Department presently serves not only the City but the surrounding community as well. Additional efforts, like the use of one fire department, should be encouraged in order to reduce public costs and encourage a cooperative spirit. The use of special projects, such as the park playground, could also be used.

Public Services

Make efficient use of existing infrastructure - Carson City as well as the surrounding townships cannot afford to have insufficient infrastructure, or infrastructure that is too

costly. Residents felt very strongly that the entire "community" must work together in every way possible so that infrastructure will not only serve to attract new development, but will also create a safe, healthy, and affordable land use pattern that will enhance the area.

Improve downtown area - Many sidewalks have been repaired in the downtown area. However, other infrastructure improvements are needed, along with overall upgrading of the buildings themselves. The downtown needs to create a positive image to visitors and new residents so that they will readily identify with Carson City and see it as a prosperous area. Participants expressed that a stronger sense of confidence is needed in downtown.

Obtain grant monies - Research the possibility of applying for grants to improve the community.

Vacate or improve railroad - The railroad has suffered from neglect and if it is to be of service to future industrial users on the north side of the City, it will need to be repaired. How the vacating of the railroad would affect the area's qualification as a Renaissance Zone, however, is uncertain. An alternative would be to improve the rail corridor if there is a chance for potential industrial users to take advantage of it.

Parks - A great source of pride is the Carson City West Park, located on the west side of downtown Carson City along M-57. Recent park improvements, including the construction of a community-wide sponsored play area in 1998, has created a popular place for children to play.

Vision and Goals

The Vision and Goals of a community are the building blocks for future land use decisions. The Community Vision summarizes the overall planning direction for Carson City; what types of development are desirable, and what quality of life the community will be able to offer its residents. The Goals found in this chapter will assist in strengthening the residential, commercial and industrial areas of Carson City; encourage infill development and new construction within the City; and serve to protect those features that contribute to the small town, rural character of the entire “community”.



Carson City contains both a mixture of City services and small town characteristics. The City will face the challenge of ensuring that its “built” environment, that is its existing neighborhoods, businesses, and infrastructure, remains attractive to residents and investors while maintaining the small town qualities that have made it a desirable place to live. The Community Vision helps establish this foundation.

COMMUNITY VISION

Carson City will be a friendly, safe and attractive community defined by its vibrant downtown, balanced housing stock and local support for small businesses. A cornerstone to the community character is the quality education system, ample employment opportunities and proximity to excellent medical facilities and services. Overall, the community will be a good place to raise and educate children and will contain the qualities necessary to retain its youth.

GOALS and POLICIES

Community Character

Goal:

New development in the City will generally reflect our small town character, and offer a variety of uses suitable for the needs of local residents.

Community Character Policies

- Property maintenance and code enforcement will be a top priority in order to preserve the character and quality of existing and future neighborhoods. In addition, the upkeep and improvement of infrastructure, such as street lighting, sidewalks and curbs will be enhanced to strengthen neighborhoods.
- The encroachment of commercial and industrial uses into residential areas will be discouraged

by using appropriate land use patterns and zoning practices, such as landscape and screen buffers.

- Site plan review standards and zoning regulations will be adopted to preserve and protect environmentally sensitive areas.
- The development of assisted living facilities will be promoted.

Residential Development Policies

Residential Development Goal:

Encourage development which reflects, and preserves, the community values and character by supporting existing neighborhoods and promoting a variety of new residential development in locations that support the Community Vision.

- Promote a mix of housing choices to satisfy the varying needs and incomes of the residents of the area.
 - Identify appropriate areas for affordable rental living opportunities.
 - Encourage housing sizes appropriate for families and that integrate recreational amenities.
 - Encourage new housing development that can be integrated with and is compatible with existing neighborhood development.
- Encourage safe non-motorized linkages between City facilities and residential neighborhoods.
 - Support the integrity of existing neighborhoods will be supported by upgrading neighborhood infrastructure, such as lighting, signs, sidewalks, and streets to enhance visual appeal as well as property values.
 - Separate dissimilar land uses through adequate landscaping, and other means to limit conflicts between uses. The encroachment of industrial and commercial uses in residential areas will be discouraged.

Downtown Development Policies

- Carson City will encourage uniform design elements such as street lighting, sidewalks, and landscaping within the downtown. The City will encourage the preservation of the historic and unique architectural character of buildings within the downtown.

Downtown Development Goal:

The Downtown of Carson City will continue to be the commercial "heart" of the community. While it is recognized that not every business will be able to locate in a downtown setting, efforts will be made to provide a vital, active downtown.

- Explore the possibility of expanding the downtown commercial district along the M-57 corridor.
- Research and identify grant funding opportunities to enhance the downtown.
- Develop procedures and guidelines to redevelop and rehabilitate downtown buildings.
- Encourage a greater variety of businesses such as comparison shopping opportunities within the Downtown.
- Encourage City activities, such as community concerts, small fairs, and other similar activities within the downtown to emphasize the area as a central gathering place for the community.
- Encourage the creation of a Downtown Development Authority to assist in revitalizing the downtown.

Business and Industry Policies

Business and Industry Goal:

Businesses locating in commercial areas of the community will be of a scale appropriate to the small town and rural character desired by our residents. Industrial uses will be located in areas that provide sufficient infrastructure and where they do not infringe on existing or planned residential areas.

- Encourage new businesses that will provide additional employment opportunities and economic stability.
 - Coordinate industrial recruitment efforts with the Montcalm Alliance to promote the Renaissance Zone.
 - Assist businesses and industry with educational and financing needs.
-
- Utilize access management techniques to minimize traffic congestion and hazards for new commercial and industrial uses along major roadways.
 - Encourage businesses to locate in existing buildings and appropriately zoned locations whenever possible. Where this is not feasible, new construction will be consistent with the character of the area and will not encroach upon residential uses.
 - Actively promote the industrial development opportunities made available by the expanded City/Township lands north of the railroad tracks.

*Community Services and
Coordination Goal:*

Update and manage facilities and services in an economically efficient manner that closely associates development needs with infrastructure capacity and capability. This shall include ensuring the education, health, and welfare of the community by providing support for local services and industry on an on-going basis.

Community Services and Coordination Policies

- The City will review on a case by case basis, the need to expand City infrastructure beyond the current service area, provided a land transfer contract is developed prior to utility expansion.
 - Transportation considerations will be of primary importance during site plan review, particularly the use of access management techniques to limit the number and placement of drives along M-57.
 - Coordination will be sought with community schools, service organizations, and other organizations to ensure that the social needs of the residents of the area are being satisfied, or can be improved.
- Future development shall be required to provide public streets consistent in design with City Street Standards and adjacent streets.

Future Land Use

The Plan is more than a final document. The words, tables, and maps that fill these pages are representations of the concerns, philosophies, and visions of the community through its Planning Commission. A great deal of effort went into the formulation of this Master Plan. Many meetings were held. Dozens of interested citizens gave their time to the process.

It may be tempting to pronounce the Plan to be completed and move on to other things. If this happens, the long, involved process of planning will have been no more than a time-consuming exercise. Now the work really begins. The City Planning Commission and City Council, along with the many public officials responsible in one way or another for the day-to-day development activities in Carson City, must consciously adhere to the goals and recommendations outlined in this Plan document.

The purpose of the Plan is to serve as a guide for short-term land use decisions, as well as long-range community strategies. Before such decisions are made, the Plan should be consulted and carefully evaluated to ensure those decisions will be consistent with the intent and spirit of the Plan.

Some lands that are not yet part of the City have been included on the future land use map. As a result of the recent cooperative agreement between the City and Township, much of this area may eventually become part of the City. Under the "425" agreement, Carson City and Bloomer Township have agreed that the properties will become part of the City and receive full City services at such time as one of the following occurs:

- sale of a parcel to a new owner other than a family member of the current owner;
- development of the parcel; or
- a change in the use of the parcel.

The land use categories used in the Plan and the accompanying Future Land Use Map are described below. It is important to note that these do not correspond to zoning districts.

- *Low density residential*

Density refers to the suggested number of units per acre, not the type of residential unit. Low density residential areas can be developed at densities of up to 3 units per acre. Because of the relatively low number of units per acre, such areas typically contain only single family detached homes. The open lands south of the City are recommended for this type of development.

- *Medium density residential*

The recommended density in these areas is 3.1 to 5 units per acre. This increase in allowable units may make it feasible to develop two family dwellings, town houses, condominiums, or manufactured housing communities in addition to conventional single family homes. Because of existing residential lot sizes, the medium density designation is applied to most of the developed areas of single family housing throughout the City.

- *High density residential*

A range of 5.1 to 12 units per acre is recommended for this category. This area is best suited to multiple family housing, but other forms could be allowed as well. High density is located in areas where transition or buffering is needed between lower density residential areas and non-residential areas, as well as in the location where multi-family residential currently exists.

- *Commercial*

The commercial designation is intended to encompass all commercial within the City. While a distinction is often made between central business, neighborhood, and general commercial, those lines are fairly indistinct in Carson City. Almost all commercial now, and in the future, is and will be found along the M-57 corridor. The central business district is a relatively small segment of this commercial strip. Therefore, the Plan includes all commercial activity within this single category.

- *Industry*












This category includes manufacturing, processing, assembly, distribution, and warehousing activities. Much of the land in the northern end of the City, along the railroad tracks, is proposed as industrial, generally reflecting existing land use patterns. In addition, a much larger area (approximately 500 acres) north of the current City limits is identified as a future industrial area. This land is the subject of a cooperative agreement between the City and Bloomer Township, and also includes adjacent land in North Shade Township (Griatiot County).

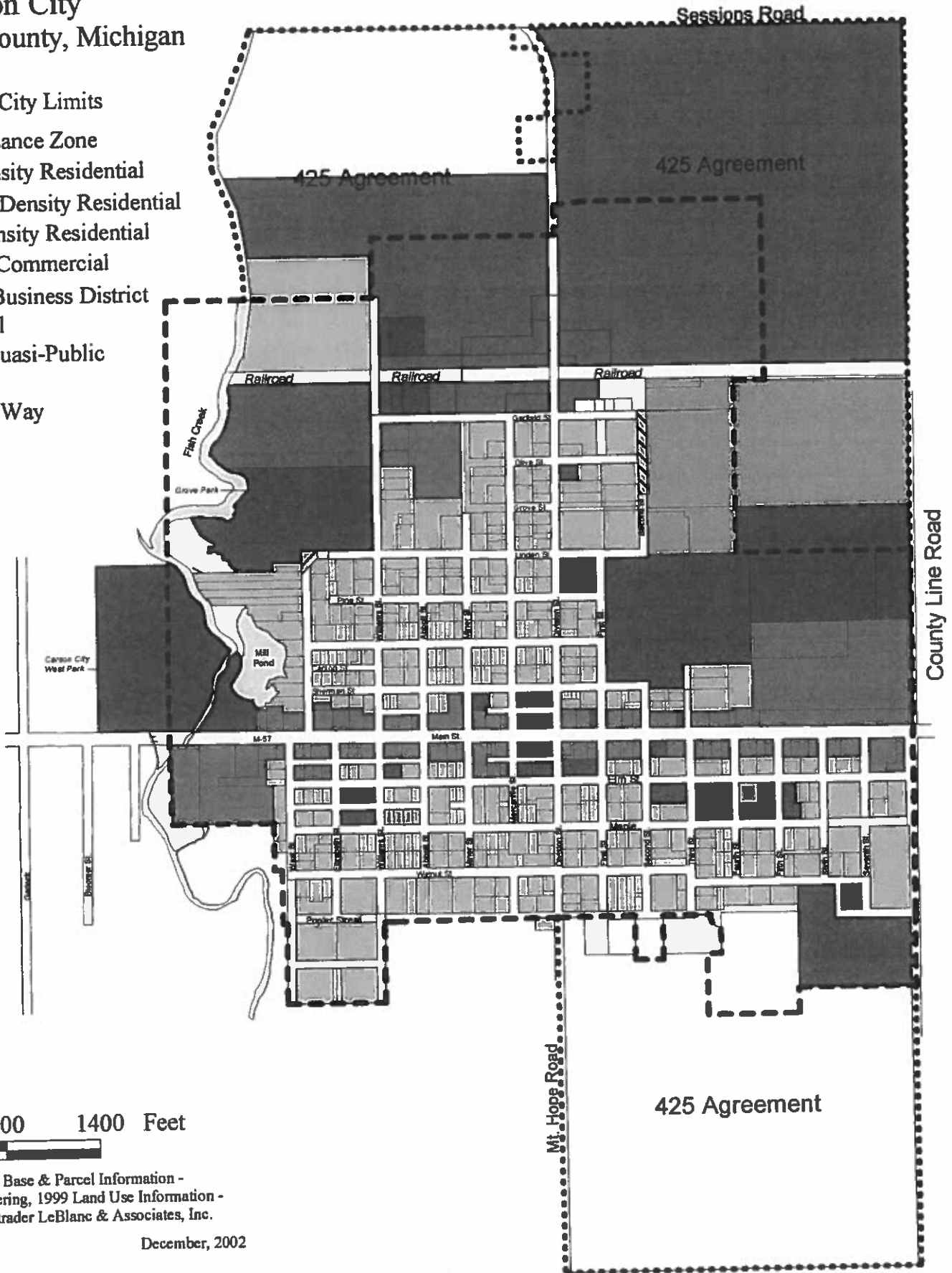
- *Public/Quasi-public*

Lands and facilities devoted to public or quasi-public use are included in this category and include: public buildings, parks, cemetery, schools, and churches. Those lands currently occupied by such uses carry this designation in the Plan.

Future Land Use

Carson City
Montcalm County, Michigan

-  Carson City Limits
-  Renaissance Zone
-  Low Density Residential
-  Medium Density Residential
-  High Density Residential
-  General Commercial
-  Central Business District
-  Industrial
-  Public/Quasi-Public
-  Vacant
-  Right of Way



0 700 1400 Feet



Data Sources: Base & Parcel Information -
OMM Engineering, 1999 Land Use Information -
Langworthy Strader LeBlanc & Associates, Inc.

December, 2002



Using the Plan

To conclude, some explanation is appropriate regarding how the Master Plan should be used. First, it is essential to understand that the Plan is a **policy guide**. It is not an ordinance and does not replace zoning. The Plan is supposed to work hand-in-hand with zoning and other City development tools. A few important things to know about the Plan are:

Let It Be Your Land Use Guide

Remember that the Master Plan is a guide for **future** land use. The Plan Map may not look like the zoning map or the existing land use map. It really shouldn't. The Plan Map is an illustration of the long-range land use pattern of the City, based on the goals and strategies adopted as part of the Master Plan.

The Plan is land use policy. City decisions, as well as those of the private sector, should follow the Plan. New streets, parks, public improvements, etc. should be consistent with the land use policies adopted as part of the Master Plan.

Refer To It In All Zoning Decisions

One of the principal benefits of having an adopted Master Plan is the foundation it provides for zoning decisions. Just as the Master Plan is the policy guide for land use, zoning is the principal legal enforcement tool. The two should work in conjunction with one another.

As the Planning Commission and City Council are faced with making zoning and land development decisions — rezoning, site plan review, special use permit, planned unit development, plat reviews, etc. — the relationship of those requests to the Master Plan recommendations should be a primary consideration. A request to construct a commercial use in an area planned for residential development, for example, would be contrary to the Plan and should not be approved, unless the Plan is determined to be in error for that particular location.

In some cases, it may be appropriate to initiate a change to existing zoning boundaries so they more closely conform to the Plan recommendations. This could help avoid conflicts at a later date.

Be Flexible

As important as it is to use the Plan as a guide, it is equally important to recognize that the Plan must be flexible. Changing circumstances, unanticipated opportunities, and unforeseen problems can require a shift in direction. Such mid-course adjustments are not unusual, though they should

not be a frequent nor an easy occurrence.

However, because a deviation from the Plan may be appropriate in a specific instance, doesn't mean that the Plan is no longer relevant and should be ignored from that point on. When these conflicts arise, the Plan should be amended to reflect the change. That way it will remain an up-to-date policy guide over time.

Another practice the Planning Commission is encouraged to adopt is to conduct a regularly scheduled (typically annual) review of the Plan. Even if no changes have been warranted during the course of the prior year, it is wise to take time to consider the continued relevance of the Master Plan. This is a good time to make amendments to keep the Plan current and consistent with City philosophies.

Keep It Current

The most often heard reasons for not following a Plan are that it is out of date or is no longer relevant. It seems many communities undertake a master planning effort with the idea that once the plan is completed the job is done for twenty years until it's time to do a new plan. With this philosophy, the community's plan will become obsolete very quickly.

As noted previously in this document, it is essential to keep the Master Plan current. On an annual basis, the Planning Commission should set aside one meeting just for the purpose of reflecting on the past year and considering possible amendments to the Plan.

It is unrealistic to expect the Plan to remain unchanged for its 20 year life. Neither the Planning Commission nor its professional advisors can predict the future. While the Plan provides a broad framework for land use decisions, site-specific issues may arise that were unanticipated and deserve close scrutiny. Where uses are approved contrary to the Plan, the plan should be amended to reflect the change. By routinely following this procedure, the Plan will continue to be an up-to-date, reliable planning tool.

Use It As A Management Tool

"No street, square, park, or other public way, ground, or open space, or public building or structure, shall be constructed or authorized in the township... until the location, character, and extent thereof shall have been submitted to and approved by the planning commission..." This provision, taken from Section 9 of the Municipal Planning Act, requires the Planning Commission to review all public improvements for conformance to the Master Plan prior to their final authorization. In the event the Planning Commission disapproves such a project, a 2/3 vote of the City Council is required to override that action. If the Planning Commission does not act in 60 days, approval is

automatic.

This provision is not intended to give the Planning Commission veto authority over public improvements, but to ensure that formal consideration is given to the relationship of such improvements to the City's Master Plan. In evaluating that relationship, the Planning Commission should look at consistency with land use, as well as the impact of the proposed improvement on other Plan recommendations.

Along the same lines, the Planning Commission may also participate in the preparation of a Capital Improvements Program (CIP). This is an annual process conducted in many communities to prepare a continuing list of needed improvements, identify funding sources, and set priorities. The CIP can be an invaluable tool for implementing the direction set by the Master Plan.