

Valley Township

# Master Plan

Adopted 12.3.25

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# Chapter 1: Overview

## Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the Valley Township Master Plan and the Plan's role, importance, preparation process and principal policies. It presents the framework for what follows by defining what the Plan is and what it is intended to accomplish. Understanding the fundamentals of the Plan will enable township residents and officials to appreciate the role it plays in ensuring the future welfare of the community, its residents and its resources. Embracing this Plan as a vital tool in preserving and enhancing the public health, safety and welfare of the township is essential if this Plan is to be effective. This Plan is intended to serve all Valley Township residents, landowners and visitors, including seasonal and year-round residents. This Plan is intended to ensure the continuation of Valley Township as a community rich in natural beauty, recreation and peacefulness and one in which persons and families flourish.

## What is the Master Plan?

Just as individuals and families plan for their future well being, so must municipalities. Just as individuals may open savings accounts to save for an addition to their house for a growing family, Valley Township must look to the future and take specific actions to address current and future needs. Such actions may involve improvements to the roadway network, improvements to the level of emergency services, and the rehabilitation of deteriorating buildings.

This Master Plan is a policy document that identifies how Valley Township is to guide growth and associated land development to enhance its future welfare. The following key words and phrases can generally describe the Plan:

**Future-Oriented:** The plan concerns itself with long-range planning to guide and manage future growth and development. The plan is a picture of Valley Township today and a guide to how the community should evolve over the next ten to twenty years in response to growth and community aspirations.

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**General:** The plan establishes broad principles and policies to address future land use.

**Comprehensive:** The plan is comprehensive in that it addresses all principal types of land use and the practical geographic boundaries of each.

**A Plan:** The plan is a specific tangible document that consists of both text and maps, a key portion of which presents and illustrates Valley Township's policies regarding its planned future land use pattern.

**Dynamic:** The plan is intended to be continually evolving in light of the aspirations of local residents, changing conditions in the township and new strategies to manage growth.

The Valley Township Planning Commission, under the authority of the Michigan Planning Enabling Act, Act 33 of 2008, prepared this Master Plan. The Act provides for the development of plans by a Planning Commission for the purposes of, in part:

*A local unit of government may adopt, amend, and implement a master plan as provided in this act. 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 and provide for safe and efficient movement of people and goods by motor vehicles, bicycles, pedestrians, and other legal users.*

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*(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.*

*(ix) A range of housing types, costs, affordability, attainability, ages, and other characteristics, including single- and multiple-family dwellings, to serve the housing demands of a diverse population.*

This Master Plan is not a law or regulatory document, but a “policy plan” to be implemented through, in part, zoning and other regulatory tools. For example, though the Master Plan is not a zoning ordinance, the plans’ recommendations and policies serve as a basis for updating the current Valley Township Zoning Ordinance. In fact, the Michigan Zoning Enabling Act, which provides Michigan communities with the statutory authority to adopt zoning regulations, stipulates that a municipality’s land development regulations “...shall be based upon a plan...” This Master Plan addresses this statutory requirement and ensures a strong legal foundation for the township’s zoning regulations and decisions.

## **Elements of a Master Plan**

This Master Plan consists of the following key components:

1. **Chapter One – Overview** presents the purpose and role of the plan, the process followed in its preparation, key planning policies, and a summary of township conditions.

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2. **Chapter Two – Planning Issues, Goals and Objectives** presents a discussion of important planning issues facing the township today and associated goals and objectives that address these issues.
  3. **Chapter Three – Master Plan Strategy** presents policies addressing the planned future land use pattern for the township and coordinated public services. Chapter Three includes the Future Land Use Map.
  4. **Chapter Four – Public Facilities and Services Strategy** presents implementation measures to effectuate the policies of the plan with regard to recreation, sewage and emergency services.
  5. **Chapter Five – Implementation and Maintenance** discusses community involvement, land and capital improvement strategies along with suggestions for maintaining a current Master Plan.
  6. **The Appendices** present an overview of existing conditions and trends in the township, addressing cultural features such as roads, land use, and public services; natural features such as soils, topography, and water resources; and demographic features such as population, housing, and income.

## **Importance and Application of a Master Plan**

The importance and application of the Valley Township Master Plan are demonstrated in:

1. the long-term interests of the township; and
2. the day to day administration of the township’s planning and zoning program.

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## Long Term Interests

There are several interests shared by residents and officials that can be expected to continue for years to come and be similarly shared by future residents and new officials. Some of these important interests include:

- Protecting the township's rural and recreation-based atmosphere
- Protecting the quality of life
- Protecting the township's natural resources, including Lake Allegan, the Allegan State Game Area and other woodlands, wetlands and wildlife areas
- Minimizing tax burdens
- Ensuring appropriate land use and adequate services to protect the public health, safety and welfare of residents and visitors
- Ensuring compatibility with the use and development of neighboring properties
- Promoting the use of renewable energy sources

The Master Plan supports these long-term interests by providing a future-oriented strategy that seeks to further these interests. Chapter Two establishes goals and objectives; Chapter Three establishes future land use and public services strategies to secure these and other long term interests.

## Day to Day Administration of Planning and Zoning

In addition to furthering the long-term interests of the township, the plan also plays an important role in the day to day planning and zoning efforts of the township. These roles include:

**Advisory Policies:** The plan is an official advisory policy statement that should be readily shared with existing and prospective landowners and developers. The plan informs them of the long term intentions of the township regarding land use and encourages development proposals more closely integrated with the policies of the plan. The plan should be readily available at the Township Hall.

**Regulatory Programs:** The plan establishes a practical basis for the township to revise, update or otherwise prepare regulatory programs including zoning and land division regulations intended to ensure that the policies of the plan are implemented.

**Review of Land Development Proposals:** Chapter Two includes a list of township goals and objectives which 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. Equally, important, Chapter Three provides policies regarding the planned future land use pattern in the township – valuable reference points upon which land use proposals should be evaluated.

**Future Public Services Improvements:** The identification of a planned future land use pattern enables the township to pinpoint areas that may be in need of current or future public services improvements. The identification also enables the township to better

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determine areas of future need rather than playing “catch up” while the township’s health, safety and welfare may be at risk.

**Intergovernmental Coordination:** This plan provides the basis for township officials to communicate effectively with nearby communities regarding both the impact of planning and zoning actions and opportunities for mutual gain through coordinated efforts in the areas of land use and public services.

**Factual Reference:** The plan includes a factual overview of relevant trends and conditions in Valley Township. This factual profile can educate local officials and residents and aid in the review of development proposals, encourage constructive discussion of planning issues and policies and serve as a baseline for future studies.

## How the Plan was Prepared

Valley Township adopted a land use plan in 1990. The township undertook revision of the 1990 Future Land Use Plan in 2005 as part of its commitment to guiding the evolution of the community and maintaining responsive and effective land use and preservation policies.

In 2024, the Valley Township began the process to review the Master Plan and hire a consultant to assist with the update and involvement of the residents. The update process included updating demographics consistent with the 2020 US Census, distributing a township-wide land use and development survey with 236 responses, hosting a community open house, and holding all required public meetings and an adoption hearing. This 2025 update did not modify all of the Appendices and maps, except for Appendix B, Demographics and Appendix D Map 22, Future Land Use.

## Community Survey Results and Analysis

### Background

As part of the master plan update process, Valley Township conducted a comprehensive community survey to gather resident input on key planning issues. The survey was distributed to all township households and received 236 responses, providing valuable insights into community priorities, concerns, and preferences for future development.

### Who Responded

The survey drew responses from residents with varying lengths of residence in the township. Nearly a quarter have called Valley Township home for more than 25 years. This establishes a strong foundation of long-term community members who have witnessed the township's evolution over time. The respondent pool included residents across all age

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groups, though there was notable participation from residents aged 50 and older, reflecting the township's demographic profile.

Most respondents are property owners, with the majority living in single-family homes throughout the township, including lakefront properties. Employment status varied, with 46% currently employed and 34.6% retired, indicating a mix of working families and retirees who have chosen Valley Township for their quality of life.

## **Community Priorities for the Next Decade**

When asked about the most important issues facing Valley Township over the next ten years, residents expressed clear priorities. Protecting groundwater quality emerged as the overwhelming top concern. This reflects the township's reliance on private wells and the understanding that clean water is fundamental to the community's health and sustainability.

Preserving rural character ranked as the second highest priority, with 80% of residents considering this very important. This finding underscores the community's commitment to maintaining the qualities that originally attracted residents to Valley Township - open spaces, low development density, and a peaceful, countryside atmosphere.

Road improvements received significant attention, with nearly 70% of respondents rating this as very important. Given the township's rural road network and increasing development pressures, residents clearly see infrastructure maintenance and improvement as essential to their daily lives and property values.

Managing development along the M-40/M-89 corridor also registered as a significant concern, with over half of respondents rating this as very important. This suggests residents recognize this area as the township's primary growth corridor and want thoughtful planning to guide future development there.

## **Areas of Community Concern**

Several issues emerged as particular concerns for residents. Water quality in lakes and rivers topped the list, with 86% expressing concern or high concern. This aligns with the groundwater protection priority and reflects the community's strong connection to Lake Allegan and other water resources.

Traffic safety and increased traffic volumes concerned 80% of respondents. As development continues and more residents commute through the township, residents see traffic management as an emerging challenge that needs attention.

Illegal dumping on public lands drew concern from 85% of respondents, indicating this is a visible problem affecting community aesthetics and environmental quality.

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Residents showed moderate concern about increasing costs for county road maintenance and communication between township government and citizens, suggesting opportunities for improvement in these areas.

### **Attitudes Toward Growth and Development**

The survey revealed nuanced attitudes toward growth and development. The largest group of respondents (90 people) endorsed a balanced approach: allowing development provided that adequate utilities, roads, schools, and public services are available to support it. This conditional support for growth reflects a pragmatic understanding that some development will occur, but it should not burden existing residents or compromise service levels.

A second significant group (53 respondents) preferred minimal government interference in growth decisions, favoring market-driven development patterns. Smaller groups expressed satisfaction with current growth patterns, support for actively encouraging growth, or preference for slowing development.

Notably, very few respondents wanted to stop all development entirely, suggesting the community understands that some growth is inevitable and potentially beneficial when properly managed.

### **Conditional Support for Specific Development Types**

Residents showed varying levels of support for different types of development, depending on the proposed use. Public trails for year-round recreation received the strongest support, with 153 respondents endorsing this type of development. This reflects the community's outdoor recreation values and desire for amenities that enhance quality of life without compromising rural character.

Home-based businesses garnered support from 113 respondents, indicating recognition that rural residents may need flexible work arrangements and that small-scale commercial activities can coexist with residential uses.

Medical services received backing from 95 respondents, suggesting recognition of the community's aging demographics and the practical need for accessible healthcare.

New employers offering more than 20 jobs found support among 81 respondents, indicating some openness to economic development that provides local employment opportunities.

Recreation facilities like campgrounds appealed to 77 respondents, while alternative energy projects (wind/solar) received support from 62 respondents.

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## Motivations for Living in Valley Township

Understanding why residents chose Valley Township provides insight into the community's core values. Rural surroundings and fewer neighbors motivated 77% of residents, clearly establishing the appeal of low-density, countryside living.

Natural features including the state game area, woodlands, and open spaces attracted 79% of residents, highlighting the importance of environmental amenities in location decisions.

Access to rivers and lakes influenced 67% of residents, demonstrating the significant role water resources play in the community's appeal.

Family connections brought 38% of residents to the area, while housing affordability influenced 59% of location decisions.

## Recommendations for Land Use Policy

Based on these survey findings, several policy directions emerge for the updated master plan:

**Growth Management Framework** The township should develop policies that tie development approval to infrastructure capacity. Since respondents specifically endorsed development contingent on adequate public services, the master plan should establish clear standards for when and where development can occur based on road capacity, utility availability, and service provision capabilities.

**Rural Character Preservation** With 80% of residents prioritizing rural character preservation, the township should strengthen policies that maintain low development densities, preserve open spaces, and protect the visual landscape that defines the community. This might include design standards for new development, conservation incentives, and clustered development options that preserve larger open areas.

**Environmental Protection Enhancement** The near-universal concern about groundwater protection and strong concern about water quality demands robust environmental protection policies. The master plan should include strengthened wellhead protection areas, enhanced septic system regulations, and comprehensive water quality protection measures for lakes and rivers.

**Transportation Infrastructure Planning** The high priority placed on road improvements should translate into a systematic approach to transportation planning. This includes prioritizing road maintenance and improvement projects, coordinating with the county road commission, and ensuring new development contributes appropriately to transportation infrastructure costs.

**M-40/M-89 Corridor Management** Given the significant concern about managing development along this corridor, the master plan should provide detailed guidance for this area. This should include design standards, access management requirements, and land

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use policies that balance development opportunities with community character preservation.

**Recreation and Trail Development** The overwhelming support for public trails suggests the township should prioritize recreation planning. This includes identifying potential trail corridors, partnering with neighboring communities and the state for regional connections, and incorporating trail requirements into new development projects. Trails would ideally be located off of the roadway, and not paved shoulders. A separated non-motorized trail would be recommended.

**Economic Development Parameters** Support for home-based businesses and medical services indicates the community is open to certain types of economic development. The master plan should provide frameworks for these uses while ensuring they remain compatible with residential neighborhoods and rural character.

**Communication and Engagement** Moderate concern about government communication suggests the township should enhance its public engagement efforts. This includes regular community updates, accessible meeting formats, and proactive communication about planning decisions and development proposals.

## **Implementation Priorities**

The survey results point toward several immediate implementation priorities. First, the township should update its zoning ordinance to reflect infrastructure-based development standards, ensuring new development does not outpace service capacity.

Second, environmental protection measures warrant immediate attention, particularly given the universal concern about water quality. This includes reviewing and strengthening existing environmental regulations and considering new protective measures.

Third, the township should work with the county road commission to develop a systematic road improvement program that addresses resident priorities while managing costs effectively.

Finally, the township should begin planning for the public trail system that residents clearly want, identifying potential routes and partnership opportunities.

These survey findings provide a clear mandate for balanced growth management that preserves the rural character and environmental quality that residents value while allowing for appropriate development that enhances rather than burdens the community.

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## **OPEN HOUSE**

On September 30, 2025, the Township Planning Commission held a community open house. Approximately 30 people attended and reviewed the draft plan, Future Land Use Plan and discussed areas of importance. Following the open house, the Planning Commission held a meeting to discuss the comments from attendees. Areas of interest for participants included: maintaining rural character in the face of development pressure for residential or campgrounds, environmental protection and maintaining natural beauty, and mitigating impacts of development through access management, lot sizes and buffers.

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## Valley Township Overview

The following is a brief overview of Valley Township. A more detailed review of the township's trends and conditions can be found in Appendix B.

Valley Township is a quiet rural community of approximately 2,200 people located in the southwest central region of Allegan County in southwest Michigan. The township's border is approximately 1.5 miles west of the City of Allegan (approximately 5,180 population) and 15 miles east of Lake Michigan. Principal access to the community is afforded by M-40/89, which travels across the northeast corner of the community. Aside from the scattered small urban centers in the 20-mile radius of Valley Township, the regional landscape is dominated by agriculture, woodlands, wetlands and other open spaces along with scattered residential development.



One of the most striking aspects of Valley Township is the presence of the Allegan State Game Area, comprising approximately two-thirds of the township's area. The Game Area is almost entirely woodlands and wetlands. The Game Area is dominant in all areas of the township except the northeast quarter where the vast majority of residents live. The northeast quarter includes two other striking features of the community, the approximately 1000 acre Lake Allegan and the Kalamazoo River into which it empties.

The 2020 Census recorded 1010 dwellings in the township, all but approximately 2% of which were single family detached dwellings. One third of the 765 were mobile homes. Residential development in Valley Township can be divided into two principal categories – subdivision lots and land division parcels of typically less than two acres along the Lake Allegan shoreline and randomly scattered home sites of varying acreage (typically 2 – 10 acres) beyond the Lake Allegan shoreline including many dispersed within the boundaries of the Allegan State Game Area. Commercial development in Valley Township is limited to several comparatively small retail facilities along M-40.

A five member Township Board governs Valley Township. Township offices are located in the Township Hall along M-40 near 121st Street. The Hall includes a large meeting room along with the offices of township officials and staff. Valley Township provides fire protection to area residents through agreements with surrounding communities. Police protection is provided by the Allegan County Sheriff's Department and State Police. There is no public sewer or water service in the township.

This plan presents a coordinated strategy that addresses growth, development and preservation. With the presence of Lake Allegan and the Allegan State Game Area, outdoor recreation and living is a fundamental part of Valley Township. The plan supports the continuation of Valley Township as a rural and recreation based community characterized predominately by both seasonal and year-round residences and abundant resource-based

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recreational opportunities including Lake Allegan, the Allegan State Game Area and the Kalamazoo River.

The plan supports single family residences as the predominant character of future housing. The plan provides opportunities for limited urban living arrangements (including small lot subdivisions, apartments, townhouses, manufactured housing, and retirement centers) along the M-40/M-89 Corridor as part of a mixed use residential, commercial and industrial corridor. The plan supports the protection of Lake Allegan and the subdivision development along its shoreline. More rural development densities (approximately one dwelling per two acres) are proposed throughout the balance and vast majority of the township including private holdings located within the boundaries of the Allegan State Game Area.

All future commercial and industrial development is intended to be of such scale and character to reflect the quiet and rural character of the community. The plan recognizes Valley Township as being characterized by abundant forests, wetland and water resources that embody a strong preservation theme. Consistent with the survey results, the Township anticipates neighborhood commercial along the M-40/M-89 Corridor.



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# Chapter 2: Planning Issues, Goals, and Objectives

## Introduction

The primary goal of this Plan is to establish a basis for future land use. Through the development of this plan, the township is choosing to be actively involved in guiding and shaping future growth and development in the community rather than allowing the community to evolve merely by chance. To effectively plan for the township's well being with regard to future land use, it is necessary to identify important planning issues facing the community and clarify its long term goals and objectives. Following is a presentation of these planning issues and related goals and objectives.

## Planning Issue, Goals, and Objectives

A number of key planning issues face Valley Township. These issues vary in scope and are interrelated. The future quality of life and character of the township will be largely shaped by the township's strategy in dealing with these issues. Each issue presented in this Chapter is followed by a set of goal and objective statements. Planning goals are statements that express the township's long range desires. Each goal has accompanying objectives that are general strategies to attain the specified goal. For example, a goal of one family may be to open a "bed and breakfast" in Valley Township, while two of the family's objectives may be to seek a loan and meet with a real estate agent to look at properties.

The goals and objectives are important for several reasons such as:

- Providing current and future residents with an overview of the intended future character of the community.
- Identifying and outlining the basic parameters that should be used to guide land use and public services policies.
- Referencing upon which future rezoning and land development decisions can be evaluated.

The planning issues and associated goals and objectives are divided into the following major categories:

- Growth Management and Public Services
- Commercial Services
- Community Character
- Industrial Development
- Natural Resources and the Environment
- Circulation
- Housing
- Regional Coordination

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**Policies** identify strategies for future land use.

**Goals and objectives** shape the plan's policies. Goals are Valley Township's long range desires whereas objectives are clear steps Valley Township can take to reach a goal.

The planning issues presented in the following pages are not intended to be all inclusive. Rather, they are presented as the primary issues that the community must address as it establishes a future for itself. These issues will evolve over time and should be reexamined periodically and the appropriate modifications made.

The objectives listed on the following pages should not be interpreted as limitations on the township's efforts to reach its goals. The township's commitment to the following objectives does not preclude it pursuing other objectives that it determines are beneficial. In addition, the objectives listed are not time specific. The township may choose to act on certain objectives within a shorter time frame than others.

### **Growth Management and Public Services**

Valley Township is a very desirable place to live with its abundant natural resources, open spaces and land and water-based recreational opportunities; easy access to highways and employment centers; an overall rural character; and nearby retail and other urban services. It is reasonable to expect the township's high growth during the past 30 years will continue. The character and quality of life will be impacted by the way the township chooses to manage future growth and development. Managed growth can minimize unnecessary loss or degradation of natural resources including woodlands and water resources, preserve the township's existing character and environmental integrity, encourage orderly land development including compatibility between neighboring uses, assure adequate public services and wise expenditures of township funds, and limit traffic hazards and nuisances.

Tax revenues dictate, in part, the extent and quality of public services. Although development will increase the township's tax base, the same development will place additional demands on public services. Contrary to traditional planning, recent research has shown that development does not necessarily "pay its way," particularly as it applies to traditional single family residential development. Commercial and industrial development has been shown to typically have a more positive impact upon the economic stability of a community. However, economic development interests should not jeopardize a healthy natural environment. Maintaining the current quality of public services, let alone the pursuit of improvements, can be very difficult in the face of unmanaged growth and development.

Compact development patterns typically minimize new public costs, but such a form of development is dependent upon a number of factors including increased levels of public services (such as sewer service) and public support.

**Goal:** Guide future development in a manner that assures land use patterns compatible with public facilities and services and the cost-effective use of tax dollars, preserves the township's natural resources and rural character and minimizes conflicts between differing land uses.

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## Objectives

1. Maintain contemporary land use management tools to effectively manage future development including a land use plan, zoning ordinance, platted subdivision and condominium regulations, and related tools.
2. Prohibit unplanned and haphazard growth, and development that is not in coordination with this Master Plan and its implementation tools including zoning regulations.
3. Identify locations in the township by sound planning and zoning that are appropriate for residential and non-residential use, taking into account the constraints and opportunities presented by the township's natural features and the availability of public facilities and services, including road infrastructure.
4. Encourage forms of growth and development that minimize public service costs and adverse impacts to the community's natural resources, including compact forms of development that adhere to reasonable limitations on the intensity of development.
5. Preserve the township's natural resources through a coordinated future land use strategy and related implementation tools that permit reasonable use of land while discouraging unnecessary destruction or loss of natural resources, including woodlands, wetlands and water resources.
6. When considering a site condominium or platted development, ensure they are located on a State Trunk Line, County Primary or Paved County Local Roadways, not County Local Seasonal or County Local Unpaved roads.
7. Apply effective land use and development review regulations uniformly to ensure development is compatible with the policies, goals and objectives of this Plan.
8. Separate incompatible land uses by distance, natural features, or man-made landscape buffers that adequately screen or mitigate adverse impacts.
9. Guide development into areas where public facilities and services have adequate capacity to accommodate the growth and increased development intensities, and where the provision or expansion of public facilities is cost effective.
10. Discourage growth and development that requires levels of public facilities and services not available, including removing the industrial zoning due to lack of adequate municipal underground infrastructure.
11. Discourage public services improvements that will encourage development beyond the township's ability to ensure adequate public health, safety, and welfare, or encourage development in areas of the township not designated for such growth.
12. Wherever legally permissible, local regulations should require new developments to pay to the township for the direct and indirect public services costs associated with

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that development. These costs should not be imposed on existing residents, except where public interests and benefits may be at stake.

13. Evaluate rezoning petitions, site plans, and other development decisions according to the policies, goals and objectives of this plan, and ensure that residents are notified within a half-mile to mile radius and including all adjacent property owners.
14. Update zoning and other regulatory tools to implement the Plan's policies, goals and objectives, as needed.
15. Seek economic stability in a manner that balances economic development with the preservation of the township's natural resources.

### **Community Character**

The character of Valley Township can be described on many levels. The visual character is defined, in part, by Lake Allegan, abundant state forest lands, Rural Estate areas and more suburban lakeshore development. Lake Allegan and the state forest lands provide a "resort recreational" atmosphere for many. The township is defined by its sense of peacefulness and leisure in the midst of nature's beautiful treasures. It is a community that serves as a place of nourishment for young persons and families as well as a place senior citizens can call home. It is a community of year-round residents, and visitors and residents who make the community their home for only weeks or months at a time. The protection of the township's character is very important to the residents of Valley Township.

Most of the township is very rural in character. "*Rural character*" is typically associated with an overall perception of limited development, and extensive open spaces. Recognition of the more suburban/urban areas of the community, such as the subdivisions along Lake Allegan, is equally important. Though these areas occupy a comparatively small portion of the community, they significantly contribute to the overall fabric of the township and its character.

Residents support the existing character of the community including its visual features and natural resources, atmosphere, and way of life. The preservation of community character is dependent on the type and location of new development, and the site development practices exercised on each development site.

**Goal:** Maintain Valley Township as a beautiful and quiet rural community, dominated by abundant natural resources and recreation opportunities, and which appeals to all age groups and family cycles.

### **Objectives**

1. Encourage land development designed in scale with existing developed areas and the dominant rural character of the community, through reasonable standards addressing density, lot width, building size, height, signage, and any other development features.

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2. Scale new non-residential development to the community by limiting the size of non-residential uses to 10,000 square feet along the M-89/M-40 corridor.
  3. Support land development which actively strives to preserve natural open spaces (woodlands, wetlands, and fields) as part of a development project.
  4. Encourage the maintenance of historically significant structures and a structurally sound housing stock, and the rehabilitation or removal of blighted structures and yard areas.
  5. Preserve Lake Allegan and the state forest lands as dominant defining features of Valley Township, including their visual character, environmental integrity, and recreation value.
  6. Update zoning and other regulatory tools to implement the “Community Character” goal and objectives, as needed.

See also “Natural Resources and the Environment” below for additional objectives addressing community character.

### **Natural Resources and the Environment**

One cannot speak of community character preservation in Valley Township without acknowledging the tremendous impact its natural resources play in defining the community’s character. These resources include Lake Allegan, abundant state forest lands that include upland and lowland ecosystems, wetlands including lengthy wetland corridors, the Kalamazoo River and lesser streams. These elements are important in shaping the character of Valley Township but also provide vital environmental roles including wildlife habitats, flood control, water purification, groundwater recharge, and air quality enhancement. These same resources play a fundamental role in recreation in the community. Increased environmental knowledge, awareness, and education, when incorporated into a comprehensive planning strategy, can minimize the potential for environmental degradation.

**Goal:** Preserve the integrity of the township’s natural resources including Lake Allegan and its other water resources, wetlands, woodlands, other open spaces, and groundwater.

### **Objectives**

1. Maintain land development which shall preserve natural open spaces (woodlands, wetlands, and fields) as part of the development plan.
2. Ensure that the quantity and quality of new development does not create increases in air, noise, land, and water pollution, or the degradation of land and water resource environments including groundwater.

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3. Recognize the special environmental role of Lake Allegan, Kalamazoo River, and the abundant state forest lands, and prohibit development that will disrupt their natural character, environmental integrity, and recreational value.
  4. Encourage the improvement of the water quality of Lake Allegan and the Kalamazoo River to enhance its recreational value.
  5. Encourage development plans that recognize the importance of preserving environmental corridors across multiple parcels and the community as a whole.
  6. Maintain regular communication and cooperative efforts with the state to encourage the preservation of the integrity and long-term presence of the state forest lands in the community.
  7. Limit development intensities in environmentally sensitive areas including within the State Game Area and along the shores of Lake Allegan and the Kalamazoo River.
  8. All development must comply with applicable local, county, state, and federal environmental regulations.
  9. Discourage the expansion of public utilities into areas dedicated to conservation and resource protection.
  10. Review proposed development in light of its potential impact upon Lake Allegan, state forest lands, wetlands, and other natural resource areas.
  11. Continue to provide residents with recycling options for solid waste and hazardous materials, and ensure the safe, efficient and effective disposal of waste.
  12. Update zoning and other regulatory tools to implement the “Natural Resources and the Environment” goal and objectives, as needed.
  13. Limit the effects of underground extraction of minerals, gases, and oil on residents and property through careful evaluation and strict enforcement of process.

## **Housing**

Residential development will likely be the major land use change in the coming ten to twenty years. Valley Township is a very attractive place to live for many prospective residents.

The township is interested in providing reasonable options for additional and varied housing opportunities. Opportunities for rural and suburban residential lifestyles are plentiful and will continue to be so. Soil conditions do not typically preclude home sites of approximately one acre or more in size. The lack of municipal sewer and water significantly limits opportunities for more varied and affordable housing. However, recent changes in the EGLE’s rules and regulations facilitate the development of community sewer systems

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that serve individual subdivision developments. Thus, it is important to recognize the feasibility of higher-density development options in the township.

The identification of appropriate areas for non-rural development patterns is an important part of the township's efforts to provide varied housing opportunities for current and future residents, and limit the extent of residential encroachment into less prudent areas such as near state forest lands and wetlands. In addition, public studies during the past 10 years have consistently documented that as residential densities increase, so does the likelihood that the development will generate more municipal revenue.

While residential growth is commonly viewed as a more positive feature than commercial or industrial expansion, it too should be based on sound planning principles. It will be the future residential development that will have the greatest long-term impact on the township's natural resources, demand for public services, and overall community character. In addition, the proper placement and design of residential development of a more urban character, including multiple family dwellings, is critical if such development is to have limited impact upon the character of existing residential areas, the community's dominant rural character, and the cost-effective delivery of public services.

***GOAL:*** *Provide a healthy residential environment in which persons and families can grow and flourish, and which responds to the opportunities and constraints of the township's public services and natural features, and preserves the overall rural and single family housing character of the community.*

**Objectives:**

1. Encourage the continued dominance of rural and suburban single family housing as the principal housing option.
2. While maintaining rural and suburban single family housing as the primary housing option, provide opportunities for alternative housing to meet the varying preferences of current and future residents, including small lot single family dwellings and multiple family housing, as well as explore zoning to allow for accessory dwelling units under certain circumstances that include: inability to separate the lot with the ADU, requiring common well and septic, maximum size standards, limiting address to the main house only, and only allowing for a rental on the main house or ADU but not both.
3. Identify limited areas in the township where higher density residential development, including multiple family development, can be adequately accommodated. Priority should be given to locations that have greater access to improved thoroughfares and necessary public services, and within walking distance of business districts.
4. Correlate permissible land uses and development intensities with the presence, or lack thereof, of important environmental features.
5. Limit development densities in environmentally sensitive areas.

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6. Discourage strip residential development along primary roads to minimize traffic safety hazards and congestion and preserve the existing rural character of the roads.
  7. Encourage innovative residential development that incorporates in the site planning process the preservation of natural resource systems and open spaces, and the preservation of the township's rural character. Such innovation may include cluster development which does not increase density, instead unit counts remain but homes may be on smaller lots in exchange for permanently preserved open space.
  8. Encourage opportunities for special housing for senior citizens to enable their continued stay in the township, including apartments, assisted living arrangements, retirement centers, and nursing homes.
  9. Encourage a housing stock that ensures affordable housing to all, including starter homes and multiple family dwellings, while also ensuring all dwellings are of appropriate design and scale to complement nearby conditions and the community as a whole.
  10. Discourage uses and structures in residential areas that undermine the residential character and peacefulness of such areas, or increases conflicts between landowners such as accessory buildings of excessive size or inappropriate location.
  11. Enforce local ordinances aimed at rehabilitation of blighted homes and residential properties.
  12. Update zoning and other regulatory tools to implement the "Housing" goal and objectives, as needed.

### **Commercial Services**

Commercial development in Valley Township is limited, comprised of several retail facilities along M-40 in addition to various home-based occupations. Addressing future commercial development should include consideration of need, location and character.

With a population of approximately 2,200 in 2020, Valley Township does not have the population base to support substantial commercial development and local public sentiment similarly discourages the same. The smallest of neighborhood shopping centers typically requires a base population of 3,000 – 4,000 persons and abundant commercial services are available in nearby Allegan. Anticipated growth over the next 10 – 20 years does not suggest a significant change in local demand for such services.

However, the presence of M-40 does provide opportunities for commercial services that address both the local population and the highway traveler. It must also be recognized that Valley Township is home to a major state recreation facility. Many visitors to the township bring consumer needs as well. In addition, if the township desires to more aggressively pursue the long-term economic stability of the community, some commercial expansion may be advantageous.

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The viability of future commercial development within a community is directly linked, in part, to access, visibility, and improved levels of public services such as road, sewer and water infrastructure. Locating future commercial development with recognition of these factors will improve its long term viability, minimize additional public costs, and avoid inefficient development patterns. To this end, and to the extent additional commercial development is accommodated in the community, special attention should be directed toward the M-40 corridor.

To the extent that new commercial development is introduced in Valley Township, local public sentiment and the township's limited public services support development that is modest in scale and in character with the rural and resource-rich character of the community.

**Goal:** Provide for a range of commercial services that cater to the needs of local residents and visitors in a manner that supports the predominant rural character of the community, minimizes new public service costs, and protects the desirability of the Township's residential and recreational areas.

### **Objectives**

1. Recognize the significance of the M-40 corridor as an opportunity for accommodating commercial development; however, commercial would be of a scale consistent with rural character and have a with maximum footprint of 10,000 square feet.
2. Ensure new commercial development is in character and scale with surrounding land uses, considering such features as building size and height, architectural design, setbacks, signage, landscaping and screening, and open spaces.
3. Provide opportunities for a mix of commercial uses that predominantly target local day-to-day consumer needs, and discourage "big box" and other large scale retailers that cater to a more regional population.
4. Require landscaping and screening to insure commercial development is sensitive to the dominant rural character of the community and minimizes adverse impacts on the normal use and enjoyment of adjoining land.
5. The intensity of commercial development shall be coordinated with available public facilities and services.
6. Regulate home-based occupations within dwellings to preserve the surrounding residential character, appearance, and quality of life.
7. Update zoning and other regulatory tools to implement the "Commercial Development" goal and objectives, as needed.

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## Industrial Development

Through 2006, industrial development in Valley Township has not occurred. The absence of assembling, manufacturing, and other industrial activities is not surprising. The township lacks some of the key conditions that support such development including public sewer and water. In addition, other nearby urban centers present more appealing opportunities, and public sentiment in the community does not support industrial expansion. However, it is recognized that not all industries require heightened levels of public services, infrastructure, and access. In addition, industrial development can improve the community's overall economic stability and provide additional local employment opportunities. As the intensity of industrial development increases, so typically does its reliance on public infrastructure including water, sewer, and roads. Locating future industrial development in recognition of these factors will minimize additional public costs.

Industrial development can vary from low to high-intensity, and its impacts upon adjoining and near-by land uses can similarly vary. As its intensity increases, greater distance from residential areas is favored. Existing conditions in the township suggest any future industrial development be of a comparatively limited and light character. Additionally, the community survey indicated that residents desire rural character, the preservation of natural features and residential/commercial development as opposed to new industrial uses.

**Goal:** Discourage new industrial uses and development due to the limitation of underground utilities and the predominance of natural areas and sensitive environmental characteristics in the Township.

### Objectives

1. Recognize M-40 as a potential opportunity for the location of new commercial development, and limit industrial uses.
2. Update zoning and other regulatory tools to remove the "Industrial Development" zoning district since it does not appear in the existing nor proposed future land use map.

### Circulation

As new residential and non-residential land uses are introduced into the township, demands on the roadway network will increase. Even low density residential development can significantly increase local traffic levels. This increased traffic may lessen the level of service along some of the township's roads. Conversely, it must be recognized that road improvements may attract new development which, in turn, will place additional demands on the roadway network. Increased traffic demands can be minimized through adequate road maintenance and the coordination of road improvements with the planned future land use pattern and designated growth and development areas.

Opportunities are presented by the township's improved thoroughfares and appropriate land use management can maximize their potential and minimize adverse impacts to other

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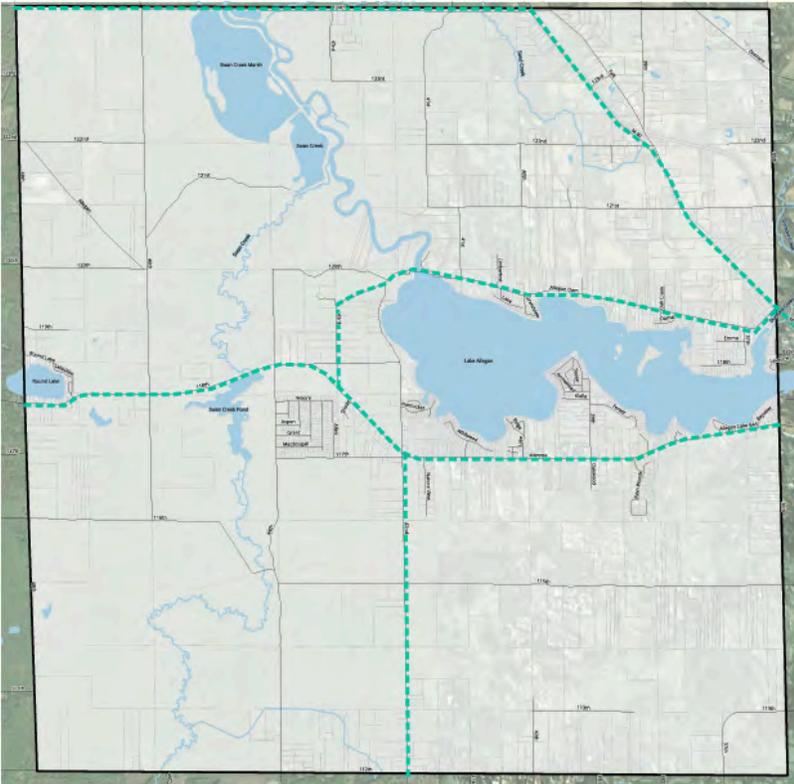
road segments. The extent to which higher density and intensity land uses, including commercial and industrial land uses, are in comparatively close proximity to M-40 will minimize future maintenance costs and traffic levels along the township's other roads. At the same time, care must be exercised to assure the safety and functional level of the highway and other township roads is not sacrificed by excessive or inappropriately located or designed driveways.

Community travel extends beyond the road network. Providing bicycle and pedestrian access within and between communities has long been identified nationally as an important goal in improving quality of life. The past 20 years have witnessed an unprecedented surge in interest in trail systems on the local, state, and federal level as their value gains greater understanding. These trails can limit the reliance on the automobile, improve the health of local residents, and improve the quality of leisure time.

**Goal:** Provide a transportation network throughout the township that encourages efficient and safe travel for all modes of transportation, consistent with the rural character of the community and coordinated with the planned future land use pattern.

### **Objectives**

1. Identify priority road segments for systematic maintenance and improvement, based upon the planned future land use pattern and existing and projected traffic patterns.
2. Coordinate with MDOT, adjacent municipalities, and the Allegan County Road Commission to share the non-motorized transportation vision in this Master Plan and begin conversations to implement the vision.
3. Limit high-traffic generating land uses and development patterns along the township's secondary roads.
4. Pursue access management measures to minimize the potential for traffic congestion and safety hazards along adjacent roadways, including limitations on the number, size, and shape of new land divisions; the discouragement of "strip" development; and limitations on curb cuts.
5. Encourage the inclusion of pedestrian/bicycle/equestrian paths in association with new residential subdivisions and non-residential development to facilitate safe and convenient non-motorized movement.
6. Encourage the linking of residential and commercial centers through pedestrian, bike, equestrian and snowmobile trails.
7. Maintain communication and cooperative efforts with the Allegan County Road Commission to improve opportunities for safe non-motorized travel.
8. Maintain communication and cooperative efforts with the Department of Natural Resources to improve opportunities for equestrian trails.



## Regional Coordination

Valley Township exists within a regional network of communities, none of which are islands unto themselves. Valley Township abuts the townships of Heath, Allegan, Cheshire, and Clyde, and the City of Allegan is 1.5 miles east. Valley Township and nearby municipalities can greatly benefit by cooperatively pursuing common goals in the areas of land use and public services. Planned land uses, public services and preservation efforts should take into consideration conditions in these abutting communities. Land use planning efforts should seek to establish a land use pattern compatible with surrounding conditions provided the goals of the township are not undermined.

**Goal:** Guide future development and public services in a manner that recognizes the position of Valley Township within the larger region and the mutual impacts of local planning efforts.

## Objectives

1. Where practical, identify a planned future land use pattern that seeks to ensure compatibility among land uses along municipal borders.
2. Maintain a meaningful communication program with area municipalities and county agencies to discuss local and area-wide public facilities and services needs, land use conditions and trends, preservation goals and objectives, contemporary planning issues, and other mutually beneficial strategies to address short and long-term needs.

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# Chapter 3: Future Land Use Strategy

## Introduction

Valley Township's principal planning components are contained in the Future Land Use Strategy, as discussed in this Chapter Three. The Future Land Use Strategy identifies the desired pattern and policies of land use, development and preservation throughout the township. Implementation of these policies rests with the regulatory tools of the township – most importantly the Valley Township Zoning Ordinance. The Zoning Ordinance generally regulates the type, location, bulk, and intensity of land development. The township may also adopt other supporting regulatory tools to further the implementation of the policies of this Plan. Chapter Four discusses implementation strategies in more detail.

The goals and objectives in Chapter Two are the foundation on which the Future Land Use Strategy is rooted. These include the desire to guide future development in a manner that ensures land use patterns compatible with public facilities and services, the cost-effective use of tax dollars, the preservation of natural resources and the rural/recreational character of the community, and compact development where it is of a higher intensity. The Future Land Use Strategy is based upon an analysis of the township's natural and cultural features such as community attitudes, existing road network, existing and nearby public infrastructure, and environmentally sensitive areas. The opportunities and constraints presented by these characteristics were evaluated in the context of the goals and objectives in Chapter Two to arrive at a planned future land use pattern.

## Land Use Areas

The Future Land Use Strategy divides the township into “areas” and identifies the predominant land use pattern planned for each. These areas collectively formulate the planned land use pattern. These areas are as follows:

- Conservation Area
- Rural Estate Area
- Low Density Residential Area
- Neighborhood Commercial
- General Commercial
- Government

It is not the intent of this Plan to identify the specific land uses that should be permitted in each of these areas. This plan presents broad-based policies regarding the dominant land use(s) to be accommodated in each. Specific permitted land uses will be determined by the zoning provisions of the township based upon considerations of compatibility. There may be certain existing land uses that do not “fit” with the planned future land use pattern. This should not be necessarily interpreted as a lack of township support for the continuation of such uses. Zoning regulations will clarify this matter.

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The approximate borders of these areas are illustrated on the Future Land Use Map at the end of this chapter. The map depicts the boundaries in more detail than the explanatory text in this chapter. The boundaries are described as approximate, and the commercial corridor is envisioned as the first 100' on either side of the M-89/M-40 right-of-way.

There is frequently room for discretion at the exact interface between the boundaries of two planning areas and appropriate uses at these points of interface. However, the approximate boundaries presented in this plan have been considered carefully and the overall land use vision is for Rural Estate land use. Significant departures are strongly discouraged except for unique circumstances and only when the public health, safety and welfare will not be undermined. It is also important to understand that neither the Future Land Use Map nor the explanatory text is intended to stand on its own. Both the policy discussions and map are inseparable and must be viewed as one.

### **Conservation Area**

The Conservation Area comprises the majority of the township not otherwise located in the northeast corner of the township or in close proximity to Allegan Lake. The Conservation Area is comprised predominantly of the Allegan State Game Area and its abundant wetlands and woodlands, and dispersed residences on acreage also frequently characterized by woodlands and wetlands. All of the Conservation Area is located within the legal boundaries of the game area and the dispersed residences are on privately-owned parcels. The majority of the land in this Area is more distant from the principal thoroughfares of the community.

The Area is intended to encourage the preservation of the abundant woodland and wetland environments of the township; provide opportunities for low-density residential development that encourages the preservation of the community's overall rural/recreational character, natural resources, and open spaces; and protect the integrity of the state game area including its economic and recreational attributes.

The Conservation Area recognizes that the state game area has played an important role in the history and character of Valley Township, contributes to the economic stability of the township, supports important environmental habitats and wildlife, and contributes to the resource-rich and outdoor recreational feel of the community and the desirable atmosphere within which to live and enjoy one's leisure time.

Development densities in the Conservation Area are to be comparatively low. Low development densities in the Conservation Area are supported by a number of factors including: 1) the lack of public sewer and water in this Area; 2) the township's interest in minimizing land use conflicts between the state game area operations and residences, and the loss of useable state recreation lands due to residential encroachment; 3) the township's commitment to managing growth, providing cost effective public services, and limiting urban development densities to specific and compact portions of the community; and 4) the township's commitment to protecting its natural resources.

This plan recognizes the existence of Aspen Acres in the Conservation Area. The plan recognizes the viability and desirability of this settlement area which was platted many years

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ago and is based on lot sizes that are not feasible for non-sewered building sites unless multiple lots are combined. Aspen Acres is surrounded by the Allegan State Game Area except on its east side and is afforded access by non-paved roads.. The inclusion of Aspen Acres in the Conservation Area is based on the premise that future development in Aspen Acres will follow the same policies that apply to the privately-owned parcels in the Conservation Area, which emphasize overall low development densities. In recognition of the existing status of Aspen Acres, somewhat less stringent development standards may be reasonable.

Valley Township supports DNR management efforts in the existing Allegan State Game Area that aim to preserve the natural amenities and environmental features and provide recreational opportunities. The township also supports DNR acquisitions of private parcels within the State Game Area that are not a part of established neighborhoods in an effort to improve the integrity of the facility and avoid or otherwise resolve potential land use conflicts.

Potential new residents in this Area should recognize that hunting, shooting and outdoor recreational activities associated with the state game area are a primary component of the Conservation Area and will continue on a long term basis. The township supports the long term continuation and protection of the Game Area and associated recreational opportunities. Local developers and real estate agents should disclose this information to prospective buyers of land.

In addition to the above, key policies of the Conservation Area are:

1. The primary use of land shall be limited to the Allegan State Game Area, similar public conservation-based land uses, and single family residences.
2. Secondary uses shall be limited to those that are uniquely compatible with the environmental and/or rural character of the Area such as, but not necessarily limited to, kennels, stables, and campgrounds. However, all secondary uses shall be subject to a comprehensive review to determine if the proposed use is appropriate on the subject site (based on, in part, compatibility with surrounding land uses, road infrastructure, and public services).
3. All land uses that will unreasonably impact natural habitats, wetlands, woodlands, and native flora and fauna associated with the Allegan State Game Area shall be discouraged. Such uses include, but are not necessarily limited to, mineral extraction operations, golf courses, and landfills.
4. Maximum development densities shall generally not exceed approximately one dwelling per twenty acres as per the zoning ordinance. Densities in Aspen Acres may be somewhat higher in recognition of its existing platted status. In no case shall development be authorized on a site on which the site's area, soils, or other characteristics do not support the issuance of public health permits for potable water and sewage disposal.

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5. The reliance on private “community sewer systems”, established as part of and to only serve a new subdivision (or similar development), shall not serve as a basis for development patterns and densities contrary to the density policies presented in (4) above, but in no case shall they be smaller than 5 acres for density calculations.

## **Rural Estate Area**

The Rural Estate Area comprises the northeast corner of the township except for the M-40 corridor. The Rural Estate Area consists predominantly of vacant land, farmland, and low density residential development. The Rural Estate Area is intended to provide opportunities for farming and low-density residential development that encourages the preservation of the community's overall rural character, natural resources, and open spaces. The presence of farming in the township has remained unchanged since 2007. This Plan encourages farming in the community and provides reasonable opportunities for new farming residences as an alternative land use.

It is intended that development densities in the Rural Estate Area be comparatively low. Low densities are supported by a number of factors including: 1) the lack of public sewer and water in this Area; 2) the township's commitment to managing growth, providing cost effective public services, and limiting urban development densities to specific and compact portions of the community; 3) the township's commitment to protecting its natural resources and rural character; and 4) the presence of a market for low-density rural home sites.

Potential new residents in this Area should recognize that the traditional noises, odors and other features often associated with responsible farm operations may occur periodically or frequently on a long term basis. Valley Township does not consider such activities and operations as nuisances. Rather, the township supports the long term continuation of responsible farming operations. Local developers and real estate agents should disclose this information to prospective buyers of land.

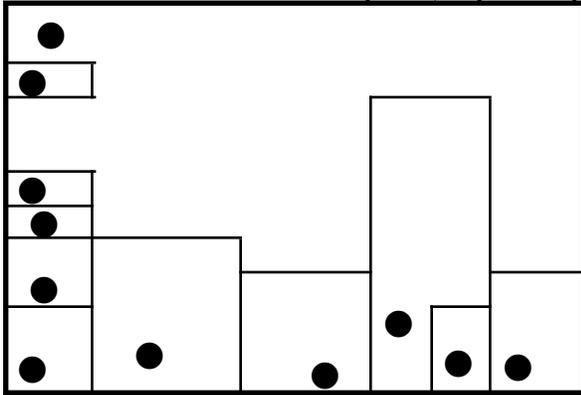
**Open Space Developments:** Residential development of appropriate density and design in the Rural Estate Area can facilitate the opportunity for rural lifestyles that minimize the loss of the township's rural/recreational character and important environmental resources and habitats. Residential development patterns that incorporate the preservation of natural resources, open spaces, rural character, and traffic safety are strongly encouraged. To this end, the Rural Estate Area supports opportunities for what is frequently referred to as “clustering” or “open space developments.” This form of development provides for the clustering of smaller lots than what is normally required, on only a portion of the development parcel, so that the balance of the parcel can be retained as permanent open space and for the preservation of important environmental resources. These “open space” areas can be reserved by the use of conservation easements, deed restrictions, or similar tools. A critical component of clustering shall be the inclusion of new interior roads to serve the new lots, rather than stripping new dwellings along existing road frontages.

More traditional strip residential development along the township's major roads is illustrated in Example A. This is the easiest form of development but it impacts public safety due to the many driveways directly accessing the road and it can significantly undermine

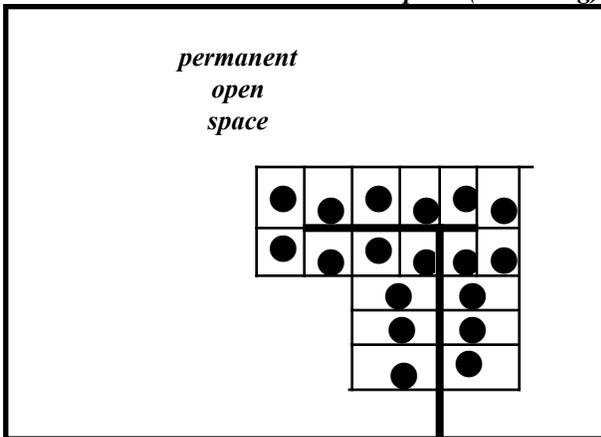
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the rural character of the township. Example B, illustrating the use of clustering, improves public safety along the road, and more effectively preserves the existing character of the community, and its open spaces and environmental resources and habitats.

*Example A (Strip Development)*



*Example B (Clustering)*



In addition to the above, key policies of the Rural Estate Area are:

1. The primary uses of land shall generally be limited to single family residences and farming.
2. Secondary uses shall be limited to those that directly support and enhance residential areas such as schools, religious institutions, and recreation facilities, or uses that are compatible with the rural character of the Area such as kennels, and stables. However, all secondary uses shall be subject to a comprehensive review to determine if the proposed use is appropriate on the subject site based on, in part, compatibility with surrounding land uses, road infrastructure, and public services.
3. Maximum development densities shall generally not exceed approximately one dwelling per two acres. Modest density bonuses may be an important tool to encourage developments that incorporate substantive measures to protect

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important open spaces and environmental areas, and minimize traffic hazards and congestion along existing public roads, through “open space developments”. In no case shall residential development be authorized on a site on which the site’s area, soils, or other characteristics do not support the issuance of public health permits for potable water and sewage disposal.

4. The reliance on private “community sewer systems”, established as part of and to only serve a new subdivision (or similar development), shall not serve as a basis for development patterns and densities contrary to the density policies presented in (3) above.
5. Uses such as campgrounds should be analyzed for compatibility, and the special land use standards and processes modified in the zoning ordinance to include objective standards such as: minimum lot area, access on a paved road, maximum unit county, licensing at the state level, and required quiet hours.
6. The zoning ordinance should be reviewed to modify the dimensional standards of the AG and R-1 district to include lot width to 165’, increase lot area (consider 2.5 acres or greater), require that the 4:1 length to width ratio be maintained regardless of lot area, and to require that developments of certain size have more than one means of ingress/egress and be located on a State Trunk Line, County Primary (paved) or County Local (paved) roadway.
7. Review the zoning requirements for developments with impacts to roadways and natural resources to require Traffic Impact Studies, Natural Feature Inventories, or other third-party reviews to ensure that traffic, safety, and the rural and natural resources are not compromised.

### **Low Density Residential Area**

The Low Density Residential Area generally extends along Lake Allegan, north to Allegan Dam Road and south to Monroe Road, but excluding existing properties in the Allegan State Game Area under public ownership. The Low Density Residential Area also encircles Round Lake. The Low Density Residential Area is established in recognition of the existing lake-area residential development that has occurred along and near these lakes, and the township’s interest in protecting the character, stability and property values of these residential areas. Lake Allegan is the defining feature of Valley Township and the majority of residential development in the community is located around the lake. However, the Plan recognizes the extremely fragile environment of its lake resources, the environmental, recreational, and aesthetic role the lakes play, and the particular challenges the lake presents for land use management. Past and future development along the lake will continue to place pressure on Lake Allegan. It is widely recognized that development along the shores of a lake increase the potential for degradation of its character and water quality due to shoreline erosion, septic field leaching (where sanitary sewer is not available), sediment discharge, and excess use of surface waters by water craft. While the Low Density Residential Area is largely built-out, Lake Allegan is still vulnerable to infill and redevelopment efforts and continued disturbances to its environmental character and integrity.

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In addition to the above, key policies of the Low Density Residential Area are:

1. The primary use of land shall generally be limited to seasonal and year-round single family residences.
2. Secondary uses shall be limited to those that directly support and enhance desirable residential areas such as schools, religious institutions, and recreation facilities. However, all secondary uses shall be subject to a comprehensive review to determine if the proposed use is appropriate on the subject site based on, in part, compatibility with surrounding land uses, road infrastructure, and public services.
3. Maximum development densities shall not exceed approximately one dwelling per acre, and in no case shall residential development be authorized on a site on which the site's area, soils, or other characteristics do not support the issuance of public health permits for potable water and sewage disposal. It should be noted that the current zoning allows 15,000 sf. lot sizes in this land use area and should be revisited.
4. The development of any remaining vacant land for subdivision or similar development forms will be based upon a plan that encourages compatibility with surrounding properties and development patterns.
5. All new development and redevelopment shall incorporate measures that protect the environmental integrity of Lake Allegan and Round Lake including, but not limited to, lake setbacks, preservation of native shoreline vegetation, proper yard waste disposal (leaves, grass cuttings, etc.), effective and well maintained septic systems, and effective management of storm water to minimize pollutants and debris entering the lake.
6. The use of a waterfront lot as common open space for waterfront access for dwelling units located away from the waterfront, and commonly referred to as keyhole or funnel development, will be discouraged. Such development shall be subject to comprehensive review procedures and standards to minimize disturbances to neighboring land uses and the overuse of any portions of Lake Allegan and Round Lake.
7. Land and water activities at the end of local roads which terminate at Lake Allegan should be monitored so as not to undermine public health, including water safety.

### **Neighborhood and General Commercial Area**

This area extends the length of the M-40/M-89 Corridor. Commercial development typically requires an increased level of road infrastructure, access, public services and visibility. These factors directly impact the identification of future commercial/industrial areas along with other concerns including minimizing conflicts between existing and proposed land uses and encouraging compact development.

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This corridor is considered most appropriate for accommodating such development for the above reasons in addition to the presence of several existing commercial uses. No commercial development shall occur unless public sewer and water are available, or adequate measures are provided for on-site sewage disposal and potable water.

In recognition that market conditions and/or other factors may not support commercial development presently or in the near future, residential development within the Corridor is considered a reasonable alternative land use. However, prospective residents should be aware that future development in the Corridor, and adjacent to dwelling sites, may be of a commercial character. Again, local developers and real estate agents should disclose this information to prospective buyers of land. To the extent that residential development may occur in this Corridor, the policies of the Suburban Residential Area shall prevail.

In light of the potential commercial development of the M-40-M-89 highway, special care must be exercised during all phases of the review and approval of specific development proposals. This will ensure that the arrangement of such uses and the interface between them enhances their compatibility and the viability of each. Amending the zoning ordinance to have maximum size of 10,000 square feet for commercial development is encouraged. This size would include all areas under roof, in outdoor storage areas, and parking surfaces.

In addition to the above, key policies of the M-40 Mixed-Use Commercial Corridor are:

1. The primary uses of land shall generally be:
  - a. Commercial services that address day-to-day needs of the local population, seasonal visitors to the township, and the highway traveler. Large commercial developments or facilities that rely on more regional markets shall be discouraged. Maximum size of a commercial development (including all impervious surfaces would be 10,000 square feet).
2. Secondary uses shall be limited to uses that provide important consumer or other commercial services benefits but which may not address day-to-day needs and/or may undermine the overall intended character of these commercial areas if not reviewed before hand to determine if a particular proposal is appropriate on the specific lot. Such uses may include, but not necessarily be limited to, auto repair, mini-storage, and drive-through establishments. Criteria for such uses shall include, in part, compatibility with surrounding land uses, road infrastructure, and public services.
3. Site layout, principal buildings and accessory facilities shall be of a character and design that encourages compatibility with adjacent and nearby land uses and the desired rural character of the area. Such compatibility shall be based on, in part, appropriate signage; building height, size, and bulk; and landscaping/screening.
4. New commercial uses that are to be adjacent to residential property shall be permitted only when adequate buffer yards and screening are provided to minimize negative impacts.

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| <b>Future Land Use Category</b> | <b>Compatible Zoning District</b> |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Conservation                    | Agricultural                      |
| Rural Estate                    | Agricultural/ R-1                 |
| Low Density Residential         | R-2                               |
| Neighborhood Commercial         | C-1 or R-2 or AG or R-1           |
| General Commercial              | C-2                               |
| Government                      | C-1 or R-2 or AG or R-1           |

5. Residential uses are also permitted and acceptable along this corridor. Densities would be similar to the Low Density Residential area.

## **Zoning Plan**

Valley Township should use the future land use map and the zoning plan when considering a rezoning request. The zoning plan is a regulatory tool to manage land use and development. It is a key component of the overall land use planning process and is typically implemented through local zoning ordinances.

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## Conservation of Natural Resources

Valley Township is characterized by large areas that require a strong conservation effort. These include abundant forests and wetlands, the Kalamazoo River, and Lake Allegan. These resources can present severe limitations to development and provide important environmental benefits including habitats for wildlife, flood control, groundwater recharge and discharge, and surface water purification. In addition, they provide special opportunities for recreation and contribute to the township's overall rural character.

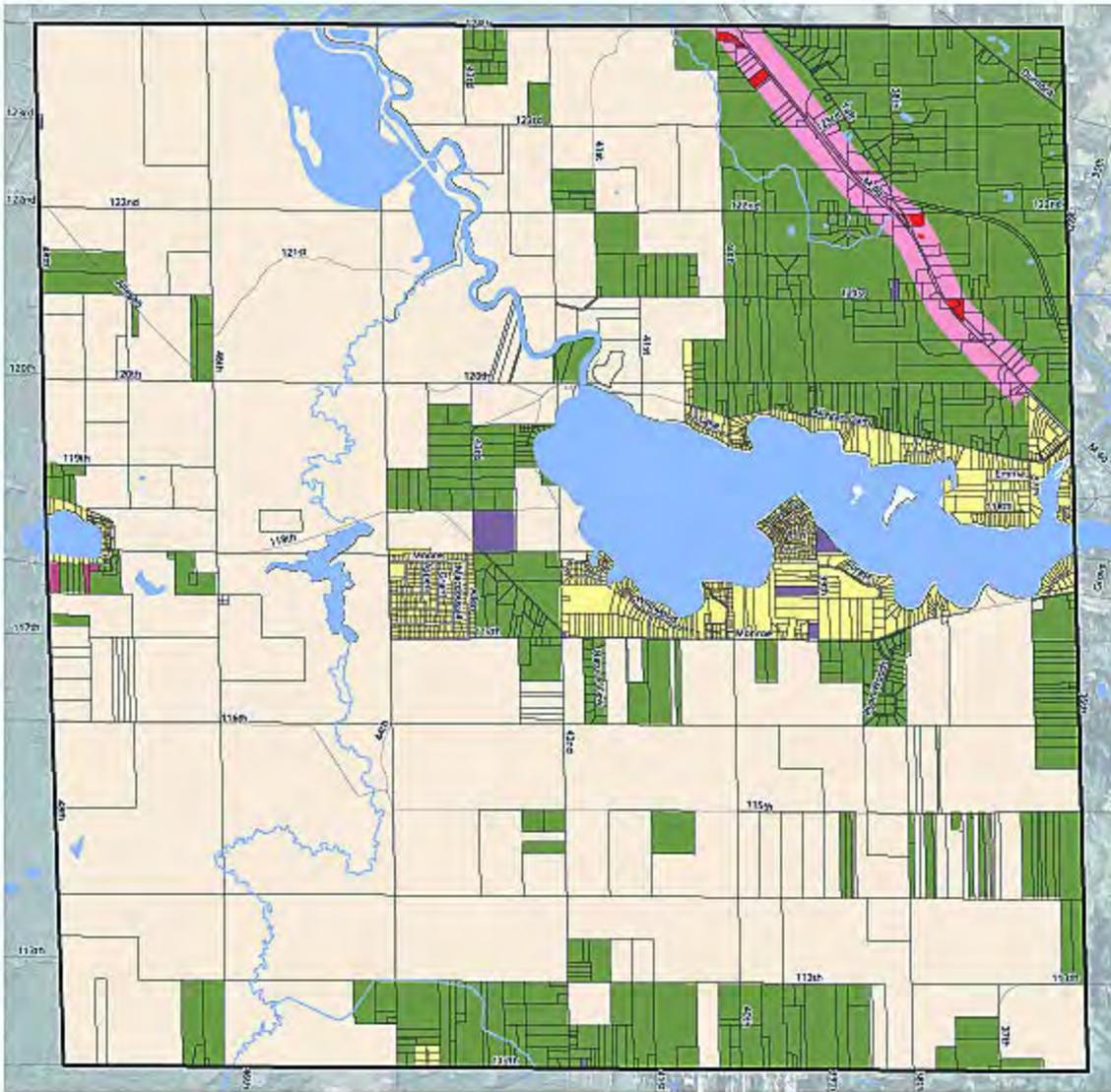
In light of the significance of these resources, the Plan strongly supports their protection. Preservation shall take precedence over the unnecessary disturbance and/or destruction of these resources by residential, commercial, or industrial development. The presence of such resources in areas designated for development shall be recognized in industrial development. The presence of such resources in areas designated for development shall be recognized in the deliberation of rezoning, site plan, and similar zoning requests. Land uses requiring state and/or federal permits (especially for wetland or flood plain alterations) shall not receive final township approval until satisfactory evidence has been submitted verifying the acquisition of all necessary permits. Where a portion of a parcel contains environmentally sensitive areas, development shall be directed elsewhere on the site where practical.

## Phased Zoning

Valley Township is characterized by large areas that require a strong conservation effort. These include abundant forests and wetlands, the Kalamazoo River, and Lake Allegan. These resources can present severe limitations to development and provide important environmental benefits including habitats for wildlife, flood control, groundwater recharge and discharge, and this plan recommends the rezoning of land to a more intensive zoning district be done in a phased or incremental manner. For example, while the plan may identify township locations that are appropriate to accommodate commercial or suburban residential development, the plan does not recommend “across the board” or immediate rezoning of such land. The plan recommends that rezoning to more intensive districts occur incrementally over time to ensure the township is capable of:

1. Meeting the increased public service demands
2. Managing township-wide growth and development
3. Adequately reviewing rezoning requests as they apply to the specific subject property
4. Insuring rezoning is in response to a demonstrated need and
5. Minimizing unnecessary hardships upon landowners as a result of property assessments and/or resulting nonconforming uses and structures.

# FUTURE LAND USE MAP



## Future Land Use

Valley Township,  
Allegan County, Michigan

FINAL  
December 3, 2025

### Legend

- Township Boundary
- MDOT Roads
- Lakes
- Rivers
- Valley Twp Parcels 2023

### Future Land Use

- Conservation
- Estate Residential
- Low Density Residential
- Neighborhood Commercial
- Commercial
- Government



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# Chapter 4: Public Facilities and Services Strategy

## Introduction

Special attention should be directed to the manner in which public facility and service improvements occur in the Township. A key principle of the Future Land Use Strategy is that no new development should occur in the Township unless public services are adequate to meet the needs of that new development, and it is important that future public facility and service improvements be coordinated with the planned pattern of future land use. At the same time, it is important that reasonable levels of public facilities and services be provided to enhance the quality of life. Valley Township is a quiet rural community and the land use policies of this Plan do not suggest substantial growth. Current conditions and this Plan's policies do not suggest the need for substantial improvements to public facilities and services. Still, sound community planning supports foresight not only in the area of land use, but associated public facilities and services as well.

## Roads

### Access Management

Access management to any state or county road is defined as "a process that provides or manages access to land development, while simultaneously preserving the flow of traffic on the surrounding road system in terms of safety, capacity, and speed". The goal of access management is to achieve a safe and efficient flow of traffic along a roadway while preserving reasonable access to abutting properties.

Basic principles used to achieve the benefits of access management are:

1. Limit the number of conflict points.
2. Separate conflict points.
3. Separate turning volumes from through movements.
4. Locate traffic signals to facilitate traffic movement.
5. Maintain a hierarchy of roadways by function.
6. Limit direct access on higher speed roads.

Practicing good access management can:

- 
1. Reduce potential accidents
  2. Preserve roadway capacity and the useful life of roads.
  3. Decrease travel time and congestion.
  4. Improve access to properties.
  5. Coordinate land use and transportation decisions.
  6. Improve air quality
  7. Maintain travel efficiency and related economic prosperity.

## **Recreation**

Valley Township officials recognize that the well being of its residents is affected by the availability of recreational opportunities. The Township further recognizes that the type and availability of nearby recreational facilities are important. While demands for recreational opportunities increase with population growth, available land for recreational purposes decreases as the resulting growth consumes more of what was open space and potential outdoor recreation land.

The high and escalating prices of energy are putting the pressure on all of us to find ways to enjoy our leisure time locally. More and more vacationers will opt to stay in the area or to cut their travel distance substantially. Recreational opportunities are abundant in Valley Township, the Allegan State Game Area and nearby Allegan County parks. There are an abundance of natural resources in our Township that residents and visitors can use for their enjoyment. They do not have to leave the Township in order to find places to go target shooting, hunting, camping, have a picnic, go swimming, boating, fishing, hiking, snowmobiling, bicycling or horseback riding. They can do it all right here. And more out-of-towners, who used to travel to points north for their weekends will find they can do the same kinds of activities here in Valley Township. We as planners need only make sure that such facilities are created and properly maintained so that they can be used by all in a safe and enjoyable manner.

The township's future recreation planning efforts should be guided by the following:

1. Periodic assessment of resident satisfaction with recreational opportunities and, as financial resources become available, undertake improvements that target identified needs.
2. Incentives to encourage the setting aside of open space and recreation areas within future development projects.

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3. Explore options for community recreation opportunities along Lake Allegan for residents and tourists. One option is the acquisition of State-owned land, such as the following:
    - a. Echo Point (across from the Gun Range). This area could be developed as a family park that would provide space for daytime camping, picnicking and ball playing.
    - b. A triangle west of 43rd Street and Monroe that is all woods but isolated from the rest of the DNR's holdings. Such an area could be developed to provide light commercial services restricted to those needed to support our tourist activities.
    - c. Land on Lake Allegan's west side that could be redeveloped as a family park, providing swimming and boating activities, and perhaps rustic camping areas.
    - d. Similar land on Lake Allegan's west side that was used as a WWII Prisoner of War camp.
    - e. Land on Lake Allegan's north side that could be developed into boat launching facilities.

A second option is a park site south of Lake Allegan and east of the Indian Shores residential subdivision. The land is currently owned by Valley Township. The site is located in Section 14, at the end of 39th Street. The proximity of Lake Allegan and surrounding residential neighborhoods would make this 10 acre open space a perfect location for a playground and picnic area. This land may also have potential for water based activities, such as, swimming and possibly for a boat launch or fishing pier.

## **Sewage Disposal**

Township residents rely on septic systems for sewage disposal. Improperly operating septic systems can contaminate potable groundwater resources, lakes and streams. This poses a public health threat. As land development densities increase, so do sewage disposal and potable water demands, and industrial and commercial uses frequently have greater sewage disposal and potable water needs than can often be met by traditional on-site facilities. This condition highlights the critical relationship between land use, development intensities, and on-site sewage disposal and potable water. The overall planned land use pattern does not suggest the need for public sewer other than to better facilitate comparably higher development densities in the planned M-40/M-89 Mixed Use Corridor. The introduction of public sewer or water does not appear to be a priority issue in Valley Township given, in part, its limited benefit. It is unlikely this condition will dramatically change in the near future unless Lake Allegan begins to show signs of degradation from septic systems.

All on-site sewage disposal and potable water facilities should be constructed and maintained in accordance with the requirements and standards of the Allegan County Public Health Department and other applicable local, county, state or federal agencies. Any future decision by the Township to provide sewer and/or water service should be based on an in-depth analysis of all available options, including services provided by

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cooperative agreements with neighboring municipalities. Introducing public sewer service into Low Density Residential, Rural Estate and Conservation Areas for reasons other than to address a serious health risk is not considered prudent.

## **Emergency Services**

As community growth and land development increases, so does the demand for emergency services. Commonly referenced standards regarding fire protection suggest a maximum service radius from a fire station in low density residential areas of approximately 3 miles, and approximately 3/4 to 2 mile service radius in commercial, industrial, and high density residential areas. The more outlying areas of the Township are not within these recommended ranges. The Township should require fire protection infrastructure (wells, water lines, etc.) for all new developments which are of such size and density that on-site infrastructure is considered critical.

Commonly accepted standards for police protection levels do not exist and are frequently measured as a function of public satisfaction. The Township should continually monitor police and fire protection needs and service to prevent emergency services deficiencies and explore improving service levels. Considerations for expansion of services should include the benefits of expansion of joint services with neighboring municipalities.

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# Chapter 5: Implementation and Maintenance

## Introduction

This Master Plan establishes a strategy for growth, development and preservation in Valley Township. The plan is comprised of graphic and narrative policies intended to provide basic guidelines for making reasonable, realistic community decisions. It establishes policies and recommendations for the proper use of land and the provision of public services and facilities. The plan is intended to be used by local officials, by those considering private sector developments, and by all residents interested in the future of the township. The plan is a policy document. As a policy document, the plan's effectiveness is directly tied to the implementation of its policies through specific tools and actions.

The completion of the plan is one part of the planning process. Realization or implementation of the goals, objectives and policies of the plan can only be achieved by specific actions, over an extended period of time, and through the cooperative efforts of both the public and private sectors.

Implementation of the plan may be realized by actively:

1. Ensuring knowledge, understanding, and support of the plan by township residents, and the continued communication with and involvement of the citizenry.
2. Regulating the use and manner of development through up-to-date reasonable zoning controls, subdivision regulations, and building and housing codes, and other regulatory tools.
3. Providing a program of capital improvements and adequate, economical public facilities and services to accommodate desirable land development and redevelopment.

The purpose of this Chapter is to identify implementation tools and where applicable, specific actions to be pursued.

## Public Support, Communication, and Community Involvement

Citizen participation and understanding of the general planning process and the specific goals, objectives and policies of the plan are critical to the success of the township's planning program. Understanding and support of the plan by local citizens can greatly enhance its implementation. This enhancement may be found in citizen support for bond proposals, special assessments, zoning decisions, and development proposals.

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In order to organize public support most effectively, the township must emphasize the necessity of, and reasons for long-range planning and the development of the Master Plan. The Township must encourage citizen participation in on-going community planning efforts. Specific actions to be undertaken to encourage public understanding and support of the township's planning program, and the continued communication with and involvement of the citizenry, are as follows.

1. Ensure that copies of this plan are readily available for viewing or purchase at the Township Hall, and post the Master Plan Map of the plan in the Township Hall where it is clearly visible.
2. Post a copy of the plan on the township's web site.
3. Post a regularly updated listing of current events pertaining to planning and zoning matters in the township.
4. Through public notices, a newsletter, Township Hall postings, and other means, apprise residents of meetings that will address development proposals as the projects move through each stage of review and deliberation.
5. Periodically hold special meetings for the specific purpose of discussing the township's planning efforts and providing residents with the opportunity to share concerns and suggestions.
6. Include in a township newsletter, articles that discuss the township's planning efforts and land use decisions currently under deliberation.
7. Post the township newsletter at the Township Hall for public viewing.
8. Encourage Neighborhood Watch programs in each neighborhood to promote cooperation and communication.

## **Land Development Codes**

### **Zoning Ordinance**

A zoning ordinance is the primary tool for implementing a Master Plan. A zoning ordinance regulates the use of land by dividing a community into districts and identifying the land uses permitted in each District and the District's site development standards such as minimum lot area, lot width, and building setbacks.

Zoning regulations for Michigan communities are adopted under the authority of the Michigan Zoning Enabling Act, P.A. 110 of 2006. The purpose of zoning, according to the Act, is to (in part):

*"...regulate the use of land and structures; to meet the needs of the state's citizens for food, fiber,*

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*energy, and other natural resources, places of residence, recreation, industry, trade, service, and other uses of land; to insure that use of the land shall be situated in appropriate locations and relationships; to limit the overcrowding of land and congestion of population, transportation systems, and other public facilities...”*

An important zoning tool regarding authorized uses in each district is the differentiation between “uses permitted” and “special land uses”:

**Uses Permitted:** Uses permitted are the primary uses and structures specified for which a particular district has been established. An example may be a dwelling in a residential district.

**Special Land Uses:** Special land uses are uses and structures that have been generally accepted as reasonably compatible with the primary uses and structures within a district. However, because of their character, they may present potential injurious effects upon the primary uses and structures within the district or are otherwise unique in character. As a result, these uses require special consideration in relation to the welfare of adjacent properties and to the township as a whole. An example may be a school in a residential district.

Special land uses require a heightened level of scrutiny in their review and officials are afforded greater discretion in determining whether a particular special land use is appropriate on a particular site.

Another important tool is the requirement for the submittal of a site plan illustrating proposed alterations and improvements to a parcel. Such a plan assists local officials to determine if the development complies with all standards of the Zoning Ordinance and if it is designed to encourage compatibility with surrounding land uses.

Adoption of zoning regulations by the Township Board provides the legal basis for enforcement of zoning provisions. The ultimate effectiveness of the various ordinance requirements, however, is dependent upon the overall quality of ordinance administration and enforcement. If administrative procedures are lax, or if enforcement is handled in an inconsistent, sporadic manner, the result will be unsatisfactory. The Planning Commission, Township Board, and staff are responsible for carrying out zoning/development related functions including the review of development plans and site inspections, community/developer liaison, and other functions. Each of these functions can require a substantial investment of time. Adequate staff levels and/or consulting assistance are necessary to ensure that these essential day-to-day functions are met and appropriate development is facilitated.

Valley Township has had zoning in place for nearly 35 years, and has periodically updated its zoning provisions to address changing conditions and policies. With the adoption of this plan, the township's zoning ordinance should again be carefully reviewed to identify amendments that may be beneficial to provide the township with additional authority to regulate land uses in a more comprehensive manner; correct errors, omissions, and other inadequacies; implement the policies of the plan; and facilitate efficient day-to-day zoning administration. The following are minimum recommendations:

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1. Review and update important terms and definitions.
  2. Expand and clarify the provisions of the Zoning Ordinance pertaining to site plan approval including clear step-by-step procedures, approval standards, and application submittal requirements.
  3. Expand and clarify the provisions of the Zoning Ordinance pertaining to special land uses including clear step-by-step procedures, approval standards, and application submittal requirements.
  4. Expand the provisions addressing the ordinance amendments to provide clear step-by-step procedures and criteria for evaluating amendment petitions.
  5. Expand the provisions addressing the Zoning Board of Appeals to provide clear step-by-step procedures regarding variances, administrative appeals and interpretations, and associated review and approval standards.
  6. Review and update district regulations to ensure coordination with the Master Plan as they pertain to, at a minimum, land uses permitted in each district by right and by special use, and development densities. As part of this review, consideration should be directed to:
    - a. advantages and disadvantages of establishing a separate district for the Allegan State Game Area;
    - b. incorporating provisions in the district regulations to ensure that non-residential development is of a scale and character that is sensitive to the predominant rural character of the community;
    - c. strengthening the purpose statements of each district to portray a clearer picture of the intent of each district thereby assisting in the evaluation of rezoning petitions, site plans, and related reviews and minimizing variable interpretations;
    - d. reviewing and, where applicable, revising site development standards of each district such as increasing the R-2 District's minimum 15,000 square foot lot area requirement in the absence of sewer;
    - e. reviewing the necessity to continue the AG District and/or the District's stringent regulations
    - f. remove the industrial district since it does not correspond to a future land use category
    - g. add notification requirements of one half to one mile radius to ensure that neighbors have notification of zoning decisions (such as posting signs, applicant holding advance neighborhood meetings, or social media)
    - h. include a maximum size for commercial buildings and sites
    - i. explore adding accessory dwelling units within certain zoning districts with development standards
    - j. review home based business standards (such as custom cabinetry, grooming, or deer processing)
    - k. review fee schedule to ensure all costs are covered
  7. Introduce regulations pertaining to condominium subdivisions to clarify review procedures, standards such as lot area and setbacks, and pertinent definitions.
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8. Introduce new and/or expanded Chapters or Sections to address the following in a comprehensive and well organized manner:
    - a. landscaping and screening for commercial, industrial, and other non-residential uses
    - b. environmental standards addressing noise, grading, storm water management, etc.
    - c. off-street parking requirements including circulation design and required number of spaces.
    - d. access management along thoroughfares, including the establishment of special lot width and/or driveway spacing requirements along key thoroughfares such as M-40, to encourage the efficient and safe flow of traffic
    - e. sidewalks or pathway requirements consistent with the non-motorized trail vision
    - f. standards applicable to all single family dwellings to ensure compatibility among dwellings while still allowing reasonable flexibility.
  
  9. Review the entire Zoning Ordinance to ensure compliance with the Michigan Zoning Enabling Act.

### **Subdivision Ordinance**

When a developer proposes to subdivide land, the developer is, in effect, planning a portion of the township. To ensure that such a development is in harmony with the Master Plan, the subdivision or resubdivision of residential and nonresidential land must be adequately reviewed. A subdivision ordinance establishes requirements and design standards for the development of plats including streets, blocks, lots, curbs, sidewalks, open spaces, easements, public utilities, and other associated subdivision improvements. The Land Division Act, P.A. 288 of 1967, as amended, provides the authority for municipalities to adopt local ordinances to administer the provisions of the Land Division Act including the platting of subdivisions.

With the implementation of a subdivision ordinance, there is added assurance that development will occur in an orderly manner and the public health, safety and welfare will be maintained. For example, subdivision regulations can help ensure developments are provided with adequate utilities and streets, and appropriately sized and shaped lots. Adopting a local ordinance addressing the creation of subdivisions encourage a more orderly and comprehensive manner for review and approval of subdivision plats.

Of equal importance is the adoption of a "land division ordinance." While a subdivision ordinance addresses unified residential developments of multiple units (plats), most of the residential development in Valley Township has been incremental land divisions for the purpose of establishing a single home site. A land division ordinance assures that incremental divisions meet certain minimum zoning ordinance standards such as lot area and width. The Land Division Act referenced above also provides municipalities with the authority to adopt a land division ordinance. Such an ordinance can ensure consistency in review and approval practices.

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## **Other Special Purpose Ordinances**

While zoning and subdivision regulations are the most frequently used tools for the regulation of land use and development, the control of land use activities can extend beyond their respective scopes. Special purpose rules and regulations can complement zoning and subdivision regulations and further the implementation of the Master Plan. Such ordinances may address matters pertaining to noise, public nuisances, outdoor assemblies, junk, and many other activities. Township officials should evaluate its current special purpose ordinances and determine what new ordinances, and/or amendments made to current ordinances, may be beneficial to further implement the plan.

## **Capital Improvements Programming**

The orderly programming of public improvements should be accomplished in conjunction with the Master Plan. The use of capital improvements programming can be an effective tool for implementing the plan. In its basic form, a Capital Improvements Program (CIP) is a complete list of all proposed public improvements planned for a six year period (the time span may vary), including costs, sources of funding, location, and priority. It is a schedule for implementing public capital improvements that acknowledges current and anticipated demands, and recognizes present and potential financial resources available to the community. The CIP is not intended to encourage the spending of additional public monies, but is simply a means by which an impartial evaluation of needs may be made.

The CIP outlines the projects that will replace or improve existing facilities, or that will be necessary to serve current and projected land use within a community. Advanced planning for public through the use of a CIP ensures more effective and economical capital expenditures, as well as the provision of public works in a timely manner. Few communities are fortunate enough to have available at any given time sufficient revenues to satisfy all demands for new or improved public facilities and services. Consequently, most are faced with the necessity of determining the relative priority of specific projects and establishing a program schedule for their initiation and completion.

This plan does not recommend significant increases in public services or infrastructure at this time, and includes no recommendations for the introduction of public sewer or water. However, as the township grows and increased demands for public services and infrastructure improvements surface, including recreation facilities and emergency services, the benefit of capital improvement programming may be particularly applicable in Valley Township.

## **Maintaining a Master Plan**

Successful implementation of desired policies requires the maintenance of the Master Plan. The plan should be updated periodically. The plan must be responsive to community changes if it is to be an effective community tool and relied upon for guidance. Periodic review of the plan should be undertaken by the Planning Commission, Township Board, and other officials to determine whether the plan continues to be sensitive to the needs of

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the community and continues to chart a realistic and desirable future. Community changes that may suggest amendments to the plan include, but need not be limited to, changing conditions involving available infrastructure and public services, growth trends, unanticipated and large-scale development, and changing community aspirations. The importance of maintaining a current plan is reflected in the Township Planning Act, requiring a Planning Commission to review its Master Plan at intervals not greater than five years to determine whether amendments or a wholly new plan is necessary. Important questions that should be asked during a review of the plan should include, at a minimum:

1. Does the plan present valid and current inventory data (Appendices)?
2. Does the discussion of planning issues and goals/objectives (Chapter Two) continue to be appropriate for the township today and, if not, what additions, deletions or other revisions should be considered.
3. Does the Future Land Use and Public Services Strategies (Chapters Three and Four) continue to reflect preferred strategies to address development, preservation and public services and, if not, what revisions should be considered.

Amendments to the plan, or the preparation of a wholly new plan, should follow the minimum procedures delineated in the Township Planning Act in addition to measures the township believes will enhance the planning process.

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# Appendix A: Cultural Features

## History of Valley Township

The area known today as Valley Township was first surveyed in 1831, and the first known settlers arrived in approximately 1837. In 1850, the area was organized as Pine Plains and originally included the territories that are now known as Clyde and Lee Townships. Clyde and Lee were separated from Pine Plains in 1859, and the portion lying northwest of the Kalamazoo River was annexed to Pine Plains from Heath Township in 1871, giving Valley Township its present confines. The name of the township was changed from Pine Plains to Valley beginning January 1, 1898, as the name Pine Plains was suggestive of sandy soil and therefore, created little demand for sale of farmland. Two hundred and fifty years ago the first residents of what is now Valley Township were the Ottawa and Pottawatomie Indians. During that same period of time, wolves and bears roamed the area. The first “white” man to settle in this area was a man by the name of Bushon. He opened a trading post on the shore of the Kalamazoo River where Lake Allegan is now. As a result of this trading post, settlers came to this area via boats, horses and later by train.

The Pere Marquette Railroad went through Valley Township and there was a train station in Millgrove. There was a second railroad (a narrow gauge) that ran from Allegan to Mill Pond at Swan Creek. It serviced the lumber industry that helped rebuild Chicago after the “Great Fire” of 1871. A high percentage of the lumber that was used to rebuild Chicago came from the Allegan area. The Allegan Dam backed up the Kalamazoo River and eventually formed the current 1,600 acre Lake Allegan. The dam was originally built to produce electricity for this area. Construction of the dam began in 1928, but it did not start to produce electricity until 1935. This dam is still in use today.

Lake Allegan has become a major recreational area and a very desirable lake to build and remodel homes on. It has helped Valley Township to grow at a controlled rate. On the West shoreline of Lake Allegan, there are still foundations of buildings that once made up a P.O.W. camp that housed German prisoners during World War II. This camp was in use until the end of the war. It is interesting to note that the prisoners thought the camp was located on Lake Michigan and that they could escape by swimming to Chicago.

The Allegan State Game Area covers approximately 64% of the landmass in Valley Township. The open land that eventually became Valley Township was a result of the massive lumbering industry that helped to supply the lumber to rebuild Chicago. The Kalamazoo River supplied the power for this vast industry. Along with this large industrial base came the jobs that fueled the growth of Valley Township. Unfortunately, with all the jobs and growth came the chemicals and other pollutants that caused the Kalamazoo River and Lake Allegan to become polluted. Other industries up stream, along the Kalamazoo River caused most of the problems by uncontrolled dumping. Over the past several years, uncontrolled dumping was ended and massive cleanups have helped to clean up the river and lake. Future plans are in place to allow more people to use the waterway for recreational purposes.

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The history of Valley Township has shown it has much to offer its residents and visitors. It offers vacationers and residents the opportunity to use Valley Township year round. Whether it is hunting, hiking, cross country skiing, fishing, boating, etc., it is available here.

## **Land Use Overview**

Existing land use patterns are one of the essential components in determining the directions of future growth and development for a community. Where existing patterns of development and land use are appropriate, growth of the same type of use should be encouraged. Where existing land use is incompatible, such as single family residential land use adjacent to heavy industry, the conflict needs to be settled by adhering to The Master Plan and the future land use decisions should discourage the creation of or increase in any undesirable use.

### **1. Residential**

Rural estate and low density residential land use in Valley Township is 1,327 acres of land scattered throughout the Township, including single family homes, farm and large lot homes, mobile homes and other housing forms, and open space. However, most of the residential development is concentrated around Round and Allegan Lakes and the northeast quarter of the Township. This represents the need and desire for persons to live near transportation routes and near lakes. The densest areas of residential development are found around the eastern two-thirds of Lake Allegan, where several new plats and homes have been developed in the past several years. It is anticipated that these areas will continue to be developed, primarily with low density residential uses. There are not many dilapidated residential dwellings within the Township. There are a few older mobile homes on separate lots and older single family dwellings which are deteriorated, but they account for less than 10% of the overall housing stock. The recent construction of new residential dwellings in the Township, particularly those which are being concentrated around Lake Allegan, has resulted in an improvement in housing supply and conditions.

### **2. Agriculture**

Agricultural land being cultivated to raise crops and to raise farm animals accounts for slightly more than 3% of the land use in Valley Township. This use is predominant in portions of the northeast quarter of the Township and is found in other scattered locations. Some lands in the Township are best suited to agricultural production and are considered prime farmlands (see Map 12). In some areas, residential development has overtaken agricultural land. Single family and farm homes and wood lots are scattered throughout the agricultural areas. It is not anticipated that agricultural land use will substantially increase in the future in the Township, as the demand for new residential development is growing.

### **3. Commercial And Industrial**

Commercial and industrial uses are less than one percent of Township land. There is a small concentration of commercial uses in the 121st Avenue and highway M-40/M-89 areas, and a few others scattered in other portions of the Township. In addition, there are only a

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few industrial land uses, including some temporary sand and gravel mining operations. The City of Allegan is only two miles away, with a full complement of commercial and industrial uses. Valley Township has

no public sewer or water, fire department, police department, or adequate tax revenues to provide these services, nor adequate future room for residential development sufficient to support commercial development. The existing commercial uses in the Township do not provide services primarily to Township residents; instead they are oriented to M-40/M-89 corridor and have a history of marginal uses.

## **Land Use And Adjoining Jurisdictions**

### **1. Existing, Zoned and Planned**

Intergovernmental coordination is important when determining individual community growth strategies. Many of Valley Township's residents work outside of the Township in surrounding cities and counties, and nearly all of their shopping is done elsewhere. Consequently, the growth and development patterns of an individual community can easily and directly impact the growth and development of adjoining and nearby communities. As a result of this pattern of living, a community does not exist unto itself but is intrinsically linked with the activities adjacent communities and others farther away. This dictates the need for communities to cooperate and coordinate community planning and public service endeavors if improvements to quality of life are to be realized.

### **2. Comparison of Zoning in Adjoining Townships**

Valley Township is bordered by Heath Township to the North, Allegan Township to the East, Cheshire Township to the South, and Clyde Township to the West. The Allegan State Game Area expands across Valley Township's borders into both Clyde and Heath Township, with a small portion extending into Allegan Township. Zoning designations at the borders of these townships are fairly consistent and do not create conflicts. This is evident on Map 14, which shows composite zoning districts for Valley Township and surrounding communities. The dark green area recognizes the Allegan State Game Area as a separate district.

Though more than half of Clyde Township is within the Allegan State Game Area, this land is zoned residential. However, residential units can not be constructed on the State owned land making this classification misleading. All other abutting jurisdictions have density requirements ranging from 12,000 square feet to 40 acres, primarily consisting of low density residential, rural estates and agricultural. See Appendix B for a general analysis of the zoning ordinances in Valley Township and surrounding communities and the primary uses within each district.

## **Public Facilities**

Adequate public facilities and physical services are essential in meeting the needs of Valley Township residents. As the Township matures and grows, public facilities must also grow to meet emerging needs. Facilities located in the Township include: the Valley Township Hall, located at 2054 North M-40; the Department of Natural Resources Waterways

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Construction Division Office at 4120 Allegan Dam Road; and the DNR Allegan State Game Area Headquarters at 4590 118th Avenue. Additional departments and services are located throughout the county.

### **Fire Protection**

Allegan County Central Dispatch is centrally located in Allegan County, where all 911 emergency calls are received. Valley Township is serviced by Hamilton Fire Department to the north, Clyde Township Fire Department in the center of the Township and Lee Township Fire Department in the southern portion on the Township. The Township has two dry well hydrants. One is located in Indian Shores subdivision; the other at the east end of the bridge on Allegan Dam Road. A third location at Echo Point is approved for a hydrant. In addition to the dry well hydrants a deep well hydrant is in the process of being developed at 118th Ave. and 43rd Street. Additional dry wells and/or a fire substation would help with fire coverage.

### **Police Protection**

Police protection in Valley Township is served by the Allegan County Sheriff's Department, located in the City of Allegan. Additionally there are two State of Michigan police posts located in Allegan County that serve the County residents. These posts are located in the cities of South Haven and Wayland.

### **Emergency Medical Services**

Valley Township is serviced by Allegan Emergency Medical Services.

### **Allegan State Game Area**

The Allegan State Game Area was created by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources in 1964 by combining the Allegan State Forest, Swan Creek Wildlife Experiment Station, and the Fennville State Game Area into one unit. It is administered by the Department of Natural Resources Wildlife Division.

The Allegan State Game Area is the dominant land use in the Township, currently covering 62.5% of the Township and totaling over 14,400 acres. This land use is present throughout much of the Township, with the exception of the northeast quarter. The Game Area consists of primarily formerly cleared land that has been reforested. The land is used for camping, boating, canoeing, hunting, fishing, and other recreational activities. It is also used for wildlife and nature studies, and preservation. If recent acquisition trends of purchasing in holdings continue, this area will total 14,800 acres in the near future. It is developed and maintained by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources and represents the primary recreational resource for the Township. The State Game Area has expanded by approximately 200 acres in the past decade from the Department of Natural Resources actively acquiring lands encircled by already existing state land. The Allegan State Game Area is the primary publicly owned recreational facility within Allegan County

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(see Map 5a). The DNR Wildlife Division has identified the Allegan State Game Area as a priority Game Area.

### **Parks And Recreation Facilities**

The Allegan County park system consists of five parks totaling about 467 acres and ranging in size from four acres to 320 acres. All of the parks are located on water, one on Lake Michigan, one on a creek, and three on inland lakes. The parks include: Littlejohn Lake Park in Allegan Township, Gun

Lake Park in Wayland Township, Silver Creek Park in Heath Township, and West Side Park in Ganges Township.

Other parks and recreational facilities in the County include Saugatuck Dunes State Park, Allegan State Game Area, several local parks and facilities, and a number of public fishing and boat launching sites. Recreational activities within the County consist of golfing, camping, skiing, snowmobiling, bicycling, horseback riding, canoeing, hiking, nature study, and trails for off road vehicles.

Local recreational facilities include:

1. Hiking Trails (see map #17)
2. Cross-Country Ski Trails (see map #18)
3. Bike Trails (see map #18)
4. Snowmobile Trails
5. Horse Riding Trails (see map #19)
6. Hunting
7. Fishing
8. Boating
9. Gun Range
10. Camping

Allegan County has established a Heritage Trail that has an important presence in Valley Township. One of the Trail's features is an information stop at the site of the World War II Prisoner-of-War Camp on the west end of Lake Allegan. Valley Township is now a sponsor for the sign at Echo Point. This gesture will hopefully serve to open the door for future improvements by the County and DNR that aid tourism in our Township.

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## **Schools**

There are no school buildings currently in existence within Valley Township. Most students living in the Township attend Allegan Public Schools. Students that live west of 44th Street and neighborhoods surrounding Round Lake attend Fennville Public Schools.

## **Recycling And Hazardous Waste Removal**

Valley Township contracts with a one hauler waste disposal provider who picks up waste and recycling curbside. In addition, the provider will pick up hazardous waste and large items with prior notification. Besides the curbside service, two days per year provide residents with "clean up" days where large items can be taken for disposal. In addition to these efforts, the County operates monitored depots where residents can deliver appliances, tires, household batteries, polystyrene, box board, cardboard, junk mail, magazines and phone books. Valley Township residents should contact the Township office for current disposal information.

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# Appendix B: Demographics and Residential Development Trends

## Historical Population Growth Trends

Historic population growth trends were analyzed for Valley Township and five other surrounding communities, including the county, from the years 2000 to 2020. Comparisons of population changes were made between these communities and the Township since they are each affected by many of the same regional economic and social trends, which impact population characteristics, such as unemployment levels and household size. In addition, many Valley Township residents are employed in these communities and others throughout the region. Several interesting trends were discovered during the analysis, some of which are indicative of situations that have been experienced throughout the state and the nation.

The historic population information for the communities was obtained from the U.S. Bureau of the Census and is presented in Table B-1. Valley Township and its surrounding communities generally experienced a steady growth in population since 1980 with Valley Township experiencing 145% growth between 1980 and 2020. Overall Township trend toward growth demonstrates economic resilience throughout nation-wide economic impacts such as the dot com bubble in 1990s, 2008 recession, and technological advances.

Poverty trends in the Township have stayed consistent with the national average since 1990, with the 2020 poverty rate of the township being 24%.

## Population Growth Projections

Table B-1 provides population data for Valley Township, surrounding communities, the City of Allegan, and the County through the year 2020.

**Table B-1**  
**Population For Valley Township & Surrounding Communities**  
*1990-2020 U.S. Census Bureau*

| JURISDICTION                    | 2000    | 2010    | 2020    | Total Change 2010-2020 | % Change 2010-2020 | % Change 2000-2020 |
|---------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Valley Township                 | 1,831   | 2,018   | 2,221   | 203                    | 10.1%              | 21.3%              |
| Allegan Township                | 4,054   | 4,389   | 4,689   | 300                    | 6.8%               | 15.7%              |
| Cheshire Township               | 2,285   | 2,199   | 2,211   | 12                     | 0.5%               | -3.2%              |
| Clyde Township                  | 2,126   | 2,084   | 2,060   | -24                    | -1.2%              | -3.1%              |
| Heath Township                  | 3,063   | 3,317   | 3,937   | 620                    | 18.7%              | 28.5%              |
| City of Allegan                 | 4,838   | 4,998   | 5,222   | 224                    | 4.5%               | 7.9%               |
| County of Allegan               | 105,665 | 111,408 | 120,502 | 9,094                  | 8.2%               | 14.0%              |
| <i>Source: US Census Bureau</i> |         |         |         |                        |                    |                    |

Data reported in Table B-1 indicate that all of the analyzed communities enjoyed moderate, positive population growth for the entire period analyzed, except Cheshire and Clyde Townships which experienced slight declines in 2010 and 2010-2020, respectively.

Growth over the next 20 years will be heavily impacted by ramifications of the 2020 pandemic. As working from home and hybrid positions become more widespread, the demand for different types of housing and work environments could emerge. 2020 Census data shows a decrease in the number of people working from home in Valley Township, but this data was conducted in the beginning of the year, so it will not offer a full picture on how many employees work from home following the pandemic. This change in workplaces could have impacts on where families choose to live as well as overall family sizes. Much of the population has aged from 2010 to 2020, although there is an increase in children under 5 years old as well as young adults, ages 20-34. As of 2020, Valley Township had an average of 2.7 persons per household, a decrease from 2.9 in 2000.

High school and college graduation rates have dramatically increased within the Township in the past 25 years, with nearly 30% increase in college graduation rates. This increase in education could lead to a decrease in population if there are no jobs reflecting jobs for graduates within the region.

### **Building Trends**

The 2020 Census shows consistent population growth over the last 45 years but shows a decrease in housing units across all housing types. A decrease in housing options is consistent with the national housing shortage, particularly for middle and low income families. Housing data from 2010 and 2020 is provided on Table B-2. Total housing units declined by 27% in the Township, while median monthly rental payments stayed the same

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and median home values saw an increase of about 20%. This increase in home values is likely due to the shortage of housing stock nation-wide.

Future development should anticipate amenities, including “third spaces” for young families with and without children, as well as aging populations. Third spaces could include public parks and play areas, libraries, athletic fields, and accessible hiking trails. Other types of amenities to consider are medical care, transportation, and small business services. Communities without these types of spaces nearby could see a decrease in population, particularly in younger demographics. These changing needs are best met by coordinating services and facilities with abutting jurisdictions and the County, due to the small population, tax base and services provided by Valley Township.

If the population continues to increase in Valley Township following the Covid-19 pandemic, the demand for jobs, day cares, schools, medical services, recreational opportunities, fresh food, retail, and other business services will increase as well as a variety of housing options. It will be important to make careful decisions about whether the land uses associated with services and businesses should best be provided for in Valley Township, or whether a location in a nearby community is more in the public interest.

### **Analysis of Housing Data**

Within the last 20 years there has been an increased national interest in adding additional buildings, or accessory dwelling units (ADUs) to residential properties. With a steady increase in population in Valley Township, adjusting zoning code to allow additional housing density would allow accessible options for residents to build income, while giving renters more affordable housing options. Many communities also utilize second homes on their property for aging family-members, an affordable option for balancing privacy and proximity with loved ones.

Population trends for Valley Township show an aging population, with a spike in young children and young adults, although the data suggests less families with children overall. More and more young families (Gen Z and Millennials) are giving up the urban lifestyle in search of opportunities for rural areas, especially after Covid-19 pandemic. This population also experiences many challenges affording their first home, further driving them from urban centers. A comparison of 2000, 2010, and 2020 US Census Housing Unit Data are represented in Table B-2.

**Table B-2**  
**Housing Trends For Valley Township**  
*2010 & 2020 U.S. Census Bureau*

| <b>UNITS</b>                             | <b>2000</b> | <b>2010</b> | <b>2020</b> |
|--|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Total Housing Units                      | 776         | 969         | 1010        |
|  |             |             |             |
| 1 Unit Detached                          | 487         | 818         | 765         |
| 1 Unit Attached                          | 5           | 16          | 0           |
| 2 Units                                  | 12          | 0           | 0           |
| Mobile Homes (Or Other Types of Housing) | 173         | 161         | 138         |
| Median Number of Rooms/Home              | 5.7         | 6           | 6-7         |
| Units Lacking Plumbing                   | 3           | 3           | 6           |
| Occupied Housing Units                   | 679         | 767         | 844         |
| Specified Owner Occupied Units           | 368         | 707         | 626         |
| Vacant Units                             | 97          | 202         | 116         |
| Median Rental Payments Monthly           | \$588       | \$650       | \$794       |
| Number of Units Without Phone Service    | 30          | 28          | 7           |
| Median Value                             | \$116,400   | \$153,500   | \$154,200   |
| <i>Source: US Census Bureau</i>          |             |             |             |

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# Appendix C: Natural Features

## **Topography Of The Region**

Much of the topography within Valley Township and the surrounding communities were formed by glacial activity occurring about one million years ago. Elevations range from 775 feet above sea level in the northeast corner to 625 feet along the Kalamazoo River (see Map 3). The entire region has a rolling landscape with flat or gently rolling plains, wetlands and open waters. Hilly sections are interspersed across the Kalamazoo River valley. Erosion and the effects of human activity have modified the landscape over the last ten thousand years since the end of the glacial period.

## **Drains Within Allegan County**

All of Valley Township lies within the Kalamazoo River Basin and all watercourses in the Township drain directly into the Kalamazoo River, including Lake Allegan and Swan Creek. A network of County drains exists in the northeast corner of the Township to facilitate the removal of runoff from flat areas with poorly drained soils. The County drains within Valley Township are shown in Map 4.

## **Woodlands**

The forests and wooded areas of Valley Township are largely contained within the Allegan State Game Area with some scattered woodlands in the northeast corner of the Township (see Map 6). Woodlands in the Township consist of mature oak and pine forests as well as southern floodplain forests. The types of trees associated with these types of forests range from black and white oak, white pine, maple, flowering dogwood, sassafras, and mixed hardwoods. Mature trees represent a valuable resource in maintaining the aesthetic and unique character of Valley Township in addition to their importance to wildlife and the natural environment.

## **Water Resources**

Valley Township has an abundance of unique water resources including Lake Allegan, the Kalamazoo River, Round Lake, Swan Creek Pond, and the entire network of marshes, creeks, and wetlands. These resources are valuable for the overall environment and quality of life within Valley Township.

## **Wetlands**

The wetlands in Valley Township lie within the Kalamazoo River watershed where they maintain floodwaters, recharge the groundwater, and also remove sediment and other pollutants (see Map 7). Wetlands also provide habitat for a wide array of plants and animals. Development should be prohibited within wetland areas to avoid destruction of sensitive ecological systems and should be limited in intensity and density in adjacent areas with a buffer of at least 100 feet in width. The Natural Resources and Environmental

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Protection Act, PA 451 of 1994, as amended, defines wetlands as areas that have evidence of the presence of water in the soils or on the surface for a significant period each year. This includes vegetation typical of wetlands and hydric soils. The presence of organic or hydric soils is sometimes useful in locating wetlands or other areas that present special planning considerations.

### **Lake Shorelines**

Much of the shoreline along Lake Allegan and Round Lake has been developed for residential and recreational purposes. Dense development patterns occurring around lakes tend to promote erosion, sedimentation and septic leaching. Therefore, remaining open lands along those bodies of water should be managed and protected to ensure water quality. Proper environmental planning and regulations (such as adequate setbacks, increased minimum lot sizes, proper lakeside landscaping and septic system maintenance) will decrease the likelihood of environmental decline.

### **Floodplains**

Floodplains are those areas, usually along a river or lakeshore that become inundated with water following spring snowmelt and rains, or other times of the year when there is excessive rainfall. New construction should generally not be permitted within these areas and the land should remain or become permanent open space, park or recreational uses with very few structures. A permit is required from the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) before building within a 100 year floodplain. New structures within these designated areas are usually required by lending institutions to have flood insurance.

### **Ground Water Vulnerability**

Groundwater is an unseen resource and is vulnerable to contamination and mismanagement, especially where surface soils are sandy or porous, as they are in most of Valley Township. Some of the most common forms of groundwater contamination are agricultural and household chemicals in the forms of fertilizers, additives and pesticides. Animal waste from feedlots also contributes to contamination. Household and commercial septic systems sometimes contaminate groundwater supplies due to inappropriate placement in soils which are sandy-textured with limited filtering abilities. The Allegan County Health Department has established standards for septic systems and permits for septic systems may not be granted if certain site characteristics are not met. Other common forms of groundwater contamination include improper disposal of industrial waste, landfills and use of salt to de-ice roadways. Over 90% of the soils in Valley Township are highly permeable (see Map 8) which allow poorly filtered contaminants to travel more quickly into the groundwater. With water and sewer connections currently unavailable in Valley Township, groundwater is the primary source of potable water. Proper management of potential contaminants is crucial for Valley Township to have an unpolluted drinking water supply.

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## **The Kalamazoo Watershed**

The Kalamazoo River Watershed contains 2,020 square miles of land 1.3 million acres. Approximately 400,000 people live in the watershed, with the most concentrated in the metropolitan areas of Kalamazoo and Battle Creek. Population centers within Allegan County include (1990 Census figures in parentheses): Allegan City (4,547), Otsego (3,937), Plainwell (4,057), and Douglas/Saugatuck (1,040). Valley Township completely lies within the Kalamazoo Watershed, see Map 9. A watershed is more than a boundary drawn on a map. It is defined as a ridge or stretch of high land dividing an area drained by different rivers or river systems. A watershed is the water resource (such as a stream, river, lake, or aquifer) and all the land encompassing the resource. To protect these resources, it is important to address the land areas within the watershed because as water drains off the land or leaches down into the groundwater, it carries with it the effects of human activities throughout the watershed.

### **Concerns Of The Kalamazoo River Watershed**

Some concerns for the Kalamazoo River Watershed include habitat loss and degradation, non point source pollution, and PCB contamination. Habitat loss and degradation has occurred partially from erosion of the river causing sedimentation and different sources of pollution. Non point source pollution is largely the runoff of contaminants to lakes, streams, rivers, and wetlands when it rains or when snow melts. Common non point sources of pollution are livestock operations, farm fields, urban and suburban streets, lawns, parking lots, industrial, commercial, construction and household activities. Water quality in the Kalamazoo River is significantly affected by runoff from all of these sources.

Major pollutants of the Kalamazoo River are polychlorinated biphenyls or PCB's. These pollutants are a class of man-made chemicals that were widely used in industrial processes earlier in this century. The sources of these pollutants no longer exist upstream. Due to large amounts of contaminants in the Kalamazoo River, the river was designated a "Superfund" in 1990. The site known as the Allied Paper, Inc. /Portage Creek/Kalamazoo River Superfund Site is the largest in the state of Michigan and one of the largest sites in the country. Cleanup has begun upstream in several locations (including Kalamazoo's Bryant Mill Pond, one of the most contaminated areas) by the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

Much of the Kalamazoo River is a remarkably wild and natural river. Its many assets should be enjoyed and respected. All pollutants have significant impacts on lakes and streams. Cooperative efforts between residents, businesses, local, county, and state governments are needed to protect water resources within the Township and Allegan County for future generations.

### **Calkins Bridge Dam**

The Calkins Bridge Dam, locally known as Allegan Dam, is located northwest of Lake Allegan on the Kalamazoo River. The dam was constructed between 1929 and 1931 and put into service in 1936. Calkins Bridge Dam is currently owned by Consumers Energy. The dam is licensed through the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission until 2010. The structural

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height of the dam is thirty feet covering approximately 1,600 acres of surface area (both land and water). Concrete improvements have been made to rehabilitate the emergency spillway and new spill gates were installed to increase the structural safety of the dam. The dam has over 1,550 square miles of drainage area. Calkins Bridge Dam is Consumers Energy's smallest hydroelectric generating unit in Michigan, producing 2,550 kilowatts.

The Calkins Bridge Dam is also used for recreational purposes. Fish congregate in the tail waters below the dam attracting Steelhead, Brown Trout, Salmon, Walleye, Bass and Catfish. Area residents and visitors use the dam as a river access for fishing. Dams prevent flooding but allow vegetation to clog river backwaters. This may adversely affect fish that live in those areas. Chemicals or oils mixing with the water running through the turbines may also affect animals downstream. The Calkins Bridge Dam is a "run of river project" meaning the dam operates with the natural hydrology of the river; therefore, the pond fluctuates only two-tenths of a foot or less.

## **Soils**

Each soil type has unique characteristics which can present either opportunities or limitations for development. A soils map was created using the aerial photographs in the Soil Survey of Allegan County, Michigan, produced in 1987 by the United States Department of Agriculture, Soil Conservation Service. These soil categories were established based on how well suited the soils are for

building-site development and sanitary facilities. The slope and filtering capacity are also major factors for determining the suitability of soils in Valley Township.

Soils analysis does not take into account the land within the Allegan State game Area since that land can not be developed. The best soils for building site development within Valley Township are in the areas surrounding Allegan and Round Lakes and in portions of the northeast quarter of the Township. The worst soils are in portions of Sections 1, 2, 3, 11, 33, and 35. In much of the Township, existing development is consistent with the quality of the soils. Care should be taken when developing land in areas that have been identified as having poor soils due to slope or wetness, which may not be sufficiently improved to accommodate the development.

## **Hydric Soils**

Hydric soils create limitations for development. These types of soils are very poorly drained, saturate easily and retain large quantities of water. When hydric soils are artificially drained, they are often suitable for farmland use. Most hydric soils are found near waterways and correspond to present or former wetlands. Hydric soils exist in Valley Township along the Kalamazoo River to the north of Lake Allegan. Concentrations are also located in the northeast corner in Sections 1, 2, 3, 11, 12, and along the southern border in Sections 31, 35, and 36 (see Map 11). Residential, commercial and industrial development in areas containing hydric soils should be carefully scrutinized.

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# Appendix D: Maps

The following maps are on file at the Township:

1. Valley Township Location within the County and State
2. Lot Line Base Map
3. Contour Topography
4. Drains, Rivers, Lakes
5. Allegan State Game Areas
  - a. Allegan State Game Area
  - b. Allegan State Game Area & County and Township Parks
6. Woodlands
7. Wetlands
8. Groundwater Vulnerability and Sensitivity
9. Kalamazoo River Watershed
10. Soil Based Development Suitability
11. Hydric Soils
12. Prime Farm Land
13. Road Classifications
14. Composite Zoning Districts
15. 1978 Land Use Land Use/Land Cover
16. 1996 Land Use Land Use/Land Cover
17. Allegan State Game Area Foot Trails and Campgrounds
18. Cross Country Ski Trails in State Game Area
19. State Game Area Horse Trails
20. Valley Township Base Map
21. Public Facilities Located Within Valley Township

**TOWNSHIP OF VALLEY**  
**COUNTY OF ALLEGAN, MICHIGAN**

Minutes of a regular meeting of the Township Planning Commission of Valley Township, Allegan County, Michigan, held at the Valley Township Hall on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day of December 2025, at 7:00 p.m.

PRESENT: Craig van Nulle, Mike Jensen, Erin Wright, Jammy Taylor  
ABSENT: Rose Ann Wendt

The following preamble and resolution were offered by Member \_\_\_\_\_ and supported by Member Craig van Nulle \_\_\_\_\_ Jammy Taylor

**RESOLUTION NO. 2026-210**

**RESOLUTION RECOMMENDING APPROVAL OF THE MASTER PLAN AMENDMENT AND FUTURE LAND USE PLAN**

WHEREAS the Michigan Planning Enabling Act provides for the preparation and adoption of Master Plans and amendments therein for the use, development, and preservation of lands in the Township;

WHEREAS the Michigan Planning Enabling Act provides for the preparation and adoption of Master Plans and amendments therein for the use, development, and preservation of lands in the Township;

WHEREAS, the Township Planning Commission has prepared an amendment to the Township Master Plan of 2005 that updates demographics, goals, objectives, implementation and future land use;

WHEREAS, on September 30, 2025 the Planning Commission approved the tentative text of the Master Plan amendment and requested that the Township Board authorize distribution of the draft to the contiguous municipalities and other relevant planning and governing entities, and following public notices required by law;

WHEREAS, On October 14, 2025 the Township Board approved distribution of the amendment;

WHEREAS, On December 3, 2025 the Planning Commission held a public hearing and recommended approval by a unanimous vote, after posting all required notices and having the plan out for public comment for the required 42 days.

IT IS, THEREFORE, RESOLVED AS FOLLOWS:

AYES: Members: Craig vanMelle, Mike Jensen, Erin Wright, Tammy Taylor

NAYS: Members: \_\_\_\_\_

RESOLUTION DECLARED ADOPTED.

Brandee Ellis  
Valley Township Clerk,  
Brandee Ellis

I hereby certify that the foregoing is a true and complete copy of a resolution adopted by the Township Board of Valley Township at a regular meeting thereof held on the date first stated above, and I further certify that public notice of such meeting was given as provided by law.

Brandee Ellis  
Brandee Ellis, Township Clerk

Tammy Lambert Taylor  
Tammy Lambert, Planning Commission Secretary

# Future Land Use

Valley Township,  
Allegan County, Michigan

December 4, 2025

## Legend

-  Township Boundary
-  MDOT Roads
-  Lakes
-  Rivers
-  Valley Twp Parcels 2023

## Future Land Use

-  Conservation
-  Rural Residential
-  Low Density Residential
-  Neighborhood Commercial
-  Commercial
-  Government

