

Chapter 3

GENERAL VISION AND PLANNING FRAMEWORK

INTRODUCTION

This Chapter presents a general vision statement, a planning framework and key planning concepts to guide future land use change and infrastructure investment in DeWitt Charter Township. Definitions of key terms follow.

Vision Statement: The vision statement is an attempt to capture in words, what the Township will be like in 2025 if the goals of this Plan are achieved and the policies are implemented. The vision statement is a general overall description of the Township and is not intended to provide a description by functional categories or for specific geographic sub-areas of the Township like the goals, policies and strategies do.

Planning Framework: A set of practical local and regional considerations guiding the development of this Plan. The term can also refer to a variety of, or set of planning concepts.

Planning Concepts: Well-established ideas for different aspects of community development, that are based on sound planning principals and are often combined to achieve a set of interrelated objectives, or aspects of a community vision. A “compact settlement pattern,” “new urbanism” and “sustainable development” are all examples of planning concepts. During the period that a concept becomes widespread in its application, it can also be known as a movement.

GENERAL VISION STATEMENT

Following is a vision statement that describes DeWitt Township as residents in 2005 want it to be in the year 2025. The vision is organized into topic areas that separately focus on key elements of the Township and the process of planning for and managing its future. Following the vision statement are goals and policies to chart a path for achieving the vision. These provide a clear direction for future decisions, both short and long term, to achieve the vision.

When reading this vision, it is necessary to mentally “transport” yourself into the future. Thus, there are references “back” to the early 2000’s. This approach is intended to give the reader a clearer sense of the desired future. This statement was prepared based on two Visioning Town Meetings conducted in 2004 and refined following subsequent Planning Commission, Township Board and public input.

Proactive Planning and Sustainability

DeWitt Township has moved into the third decade of the 21st century as one of the most desirable places to live within Mid-Michigan. Residents and businesses in DeWitt Township enjoy a rich quality of life and are reaping the benefits of proactive planning and commitments started in the 1990’s and refined in the early part of this new century.

DeWitt Township has become a true reflection of sustainability. Sustainability means meeting the needs of all the people of the present generation, in all parts of the Township, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Neighborhoods, parks, businesses, local government and natural resources are healthy and self-sustaining in 2025. Reaching sustainability required the community to look beyond short-term gains in order to plan for a better life for their children and grandchildren.

A cooperative spirit resides in DeWitt Township that has led to increased joint efforts of the Township and DeWitt City. This includes cooperation of police and fire protection, recreation facilities and programs and joint land use planning and zoning.

DeWitt Township has been able to maintain its borders and land area over the past two decades, stemming the tide of annexations to neighboring jurisdictions.

Growth in DeWitt Township has been characterized by a mix of land uses, that have helped balance the tax base, with commercial and industrial growth helping to support services desired for both businesses and the residential population. Some of the retail stores and commercial services that DeWitt residents had to drive a considerable distance to reach have now located in DeWitt Township.

As the airport and related industrial development expanded, adequate buffers were put in place to minimize impacts on adjoining residences. New residential development was discouraged where it would be impacted.

Residential neighborhoods are clearly defined, linked by open spaces, both natural and recreational, with convenient access to local neighborhood commercial services. Residential neighborhoods uniformly appear to be well maintained. New development and rehabilitation use quality material, pleasing architecture and good construction.

Quality of Life: Impressions, Standards and Visual Character

When asked about DeWitt Township, residents use descriptive terms like “nature,” “farms,” “open space,” “rural,” “modern public facilities,” “good schools,” “easy access,” “great recreation,” and “nice neighborhoods.” Despite a large amount of new development, large-scale changes to the landscape have been minimized by the consensus decision of community leaders to permit only growth that meets standards of sustainability, maintenance of the natural resource base and visual character.

The major corridors within DeWitt Township have an attractive, cohesive visual character. Well-designed and well-kept businesses, signs, street trees and other landscaping present a positive image of the community. Open space corridors connect natural open spaces to active community spaces, such as parks and play grounds. The center spine of the system consists of rivers, trails, street rights-of-way, and utility corridors.

Special efforts to improve areas of decline have paid off with a turn-around in those neighborhoods and business areas. This is especially true along south US-27BR and the neighborhoods that intersect with it on the south side of the Township. The former outlet mall has been revitalized and expanded with new retail uses.

Quality of Life: Close to the City but Retaining Rural Qualities

The most common landscape view when driving into DeWitt from the north, east or west is of trees, fields and open space. Neighborhoods and commercial areas are tucked behind vegetation, retaining nature as an important feature of the Township as it grows. Active farms remain in large blocks.

The vegetated landscape does more than simply provide scenery, as the benefits of nature to citizen mental well-being are recognized as very important. Farming continues as a viable economic sector for those landowners interested in continuing in agriculture. Woods and fields help with water infiltration, maintain biological diversity and provide habitat for wildlife. Property owners have coordinated the retention of natural areas, forming connections to create ecological corridors, enhance recreation and provide a more continuous natural scenic view along transportation corridors. Streams, wetlands and ponds have buffer plantings that help protect water quality.

Citizens, well-versed in land and water protection approaches, have been deeply involved in making decisions about preservation. Key parcels have been preserved by working with conservancies, developers, Clinton County and the State Purchase of Development Rights Program. Many approaches have been used over the past two decades, including donations, conservation easements and development rights purchases from willing landowners. As a result, wetlands, forests, farmland and green spaces that comprise the scenic character and ecosystem of the Township have been permanently protected while protecting the property rights of affected landowners.

Photo 3-1

The Most Common View is of Woods and Open Spaces



Photograph by Mike Nolen

Quality of Life: Neighborhoods

DeWitt Township residential neighborhoods are well-kept and provide a variety of housing choices, especially with the expansion of opportunities for seniors over the past two decades. Neighborhoods that had once suffered deterioration of homes and businesses have been significantly improved.

Quality of Life: Access to Opportunities

Commercial, office, and industrial employment centers have expanded in DeWitt Township in carefully planned locations that are easily accessed from the freeway and county road system. These jobs provide new opportunities for some residents to live close to work.

Quality of Life: Recreation

The Township has long held recreational opportunity as an important aspect of quality of life. Township/City parks have been maintained and expanded. Recreation for all ages, especially for seniors has expanded in the past two decades. The DeWitt Area Recreation Authority (DARA) has continued to work effectively.

DeWitt Township is known as a walkable and bikable community, providing safe connections for recreation, enjoying nature and for a transportation alternative to driving. These connections are part of a Township-wide greenspace system that includes greenway trails and undeveloped open spaces. There are also links to greenways with trails that extend beyond DeWitt Township into other communities throughout the region.

Quality of Life: Urban Infrastructure

Beginning in the early 2000s, the Township carefully planned for the extension of utilities and the expansion of roads in order to foster incremental growth while preserving uncongested travel and using designs that protect community character. Good quality County primary roads help move people around and through the Township and access management has helped preserve the public investment in roads. However, in order to keep a rural character many roads in the rural parts of the Township have been maintained as they were in the early 2000s. Capacity improvements to Herbison, Airport, DeWitt and Clark Roads have helped accommodate increased traffic volumes. Parkway designs have been used to preserve a pleasing aesthetic character as these roadways where improved. Intersection improvements have made driving through the Township safer.

Photo 3-2
Some Roads Should be Maintained as they were in the Early 2000s to Protect Rural Character



Photograph by Stephen Gobbo

PLANNING FRAMEWORK

To implement the General Vision Statement, DeWitt Township is engaged in an ongoing comprehensive planning and growth management process, to influence the rate, type, location, and timing of growth and development in order to achieve a logical, efficient, and balanced pattern of development that takes into consideration the natural developmental limitations of the area and minimizes disturbances to the natural environment, while creating a more diversified tax base capable of supporting community facility and infrastructure needs.

It is recognized that DeWitt Charter Township is an integral part of the Lansing Metropolitan area. Many interrelationships exist and these, most importantly, include land use, transportation (including the freeway system and major highways), recreation and employment centers. Past and future development of the Township has been and will continue to be greatly influenced by these various relationships. The Township therefore realizes that it cannot plan for its future development in complete isolation of the needs and growth trends of the balance of the area. Within this general framework, however, the Township also realizes that it is a separate community obligated to plan for its future in accordance with needs and desires of the local residents.

The following statements represent a specific framework for developing goals and policies for the major functional components of the community. These statements are based on recognition of both the Township's area wide responsibilities and responsibilities to the residents and land owners within the Township.

- While the Township recognizes the need to accommodate future growth and development, growth will be planned for, timed to match the Township's capacity to handle that growth, and designed to contribute to the sustainability of the Township. The public cost of growth will be minimized by "pay as you grow" policies that require each new private increment of growth to pay its own way.
- The Township recognizes that the loss of such attributes as neighborhood integrity, and farmland and open space to development, are irreversible losses to local residents and in the case of farmland, the region, state, nation, and to future generations. It is therefore the intent of DeWitt Township to guard against land use conflicts, to promote the preservation of farmland for as long as feasible, and the conservation of important open space areas such as floodplains and wetlands.
- All development, existing and proposed, should be assessed based on its intensity and the availability of the services and facilities necessary to assure the continued protection of the environment and the health, safety, and welfare of the community.
- Future development shall be assessed on its economic impacts, its ability to promote efficiency of service, and its ability to maintain or improve the value of adjacent properties.
- When necessary, the Township will use innovative planning and zoning techniques to encourage the use of land in accordance with its character and adaptability and to provide substantial benefit to present and future residents.
- The support and involvement of Township residents will be enlisted to achieve community goals and educate the public regarding the benefits of growth management and the variety of Township governmental issues.

PLAN CONCEPTS

The summary of existing conditions and trends related to the Township's physical, social and economic makeup presented in Chapter 2, the general vision statement and the planning framework presented above led to the formulation of eight broad concepts that were used in the development of this Plan. Most of the first four of these were also the basis for the 1991 Plan. These include:

1. Staging of Growth: Growth trends and population projections indicate that there will not be sufficient pressure during the foreseeable future to warrant full development of the Township. It is therefore appropriate to determine development priorities for the various lands within the community. The staging of development will promote more orderly and concentrated development versus expensive sprawl development. The Township will use an annually updated capital improvements program to help stage its investment in public utilities and road improvements, and expects the private sector to pay all the direct costs of infrastructure extension or expansion that occurs before public facilities are immediately available to a site. The Township will not approve any intensive development until all the public infrastructure and services are adequate to accommodate the impacts of the proposed development. This concept is explained in more detail in Chapter 6.
2. Balanced Residential Character: Varying income levels and life styles of newcomers and residents, the availability or unavailability of utilities and physical limitations of the Township, require that a variety of housing types and densities be provided for. In addition, older neighborhoods showing signs of neglect need to be rehabilitated to improve quality of life for those residents and preserve an important supply of affordable housing in the Township.
3. Diversify the Tax Base by Providing for a Variety of Commercial, Office, and Industrial Types: Given the Township's accessibility to regional transportation arteries as well as the employment and shopping needs of local residents, a range of both locally and regionally oriented types of commercial, office, and industrial developments should be provided for. To accomplish this, various types of economic development must be encouraged to locate in the areas best suited to meet business needs. The deliberate and objective allocation of different types of economic development in specific locations will also help to avoid or minimize future land use and traffic conflicts while over time, broadening the community's tax base. However, premature commercial, office, or industrial development can hurt the appropriate long-term development of an area as the Township has already experienced in some places. As a result, every effort will be made to limit premature or undersized development. Similarly, a significant effort must be made to rehabilitate, restore and or reuse older commercial and industrial sites that show signs of neglect, or have documented pollution of the land or groundwater. Creative use of brownfield redevelopment and downtown development authority legislation should be explored to help meet this need.
4. Protect Environmental Resources: DeWitt Township has a variety of environmental resources. These natural features should be protected and incorporated into development projects. The Township should promote the preservation of wetlands and groundwater quality by working with the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality and other agencies with regulations that address these resources.

5. Smart Growth Tenets: In the pursuit of the general vision of this Plan, the Township is guided in part by the “10 Tenets of Smart Growth” popularized in Michigan by the state Land Use Leadership Council. These tenets are listed below.
- Create a range of housing opportunities and choices;
 - Create walkable neighborhoods;
 - Encourage community and stakeholder collaboration;
 - Foster distinctive, attractive communities with a strong sense of place;
 - Make development decisions predictable, fair, and cost-effective;
 - Mix land uses;
 - Preserve open space, farmland, natural beauty and critical environmental areas;
 - Promote a variety of transportation choices;
 - Strengthen and direct development towards existing communities;
 - Take advantage of compact development design.
6. Traditional Neighborhood Development: TND is an old form of community design that was popular in the early decades of the last century. It was characterized by higher density than is common today, and also by development on small lots, narrower streets and common public open spaces. It was often built around a 3-4 story “downtown” commercial area (with residences on the upper stories) with a mix of housing types in residential areas. TND evidences all the smart growth tenets. As of 2004, there are two significant examples of new TND’s in Michigan. The first is Cherry Hill Village in Canton Township, and the second is Howell Town Commons in Howell. This Plan identifies one subarea as being especially well-suited for this type of development. It is east of north US-27BR and north of Webb Road and is described in Chapter 6.

Photo 3-3
Examples of TND from Cherry Hill Village, Canton Township



Photograph by Mark Wyckoff

7. **Green Development:** Green development is the integration of social and environmental goals with financial considerations in real estate projects of every scale and type. It is the pursuit of environmental excellence that produces fundamentally better buildings and communities—more comfortable, more efficient, more appealing and ultimately, more profitable. Most on-the-ground examples in Michigan are both highly energy efficient and low impact on the environment (such as the new Ford Motor Company Rogue Plant, Dearborn; the new Herman Miller facility, Zeeland; and the new East Grand Rapids Public Safety Building). National and international standards called LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) have been developed to certify buildings that meet LEED standards. It is expected that mid-Michigan will soon begin to host a number of new LEED buildings. DeWitt Township encourages such efforts by the private sector and will do all it can to encourage new green development in the Township.

Photo 3-4
A Lansing Area Green Roof



Photograph by Anne Woiwode

8. **Sustainable Development:** The implementation of the above seven planning concepts will go a long way to helping the Township be a living example of sustainable development. This is development which meets the needs of existing residents while not reducing the ability of future generations to meet their needs.

Based on the above planning concepts, this Comprehensive Development Plan attempts to strike a balance between the need and desire to promote and preserve certain elements of rural character with the need and responsibility to accommodate a wide variety of new urban and suburban growth and development in an efficient cost-effective manner.