

## **Chapter 6 – Goals and Objectives**

The purpose of this chapter is to establish the goals and objectives that will guide future growth and development in a manner that will reflect the natural characteristics of the land and the planned provision of public utilities and services; strive to preserve scenic beauty; encourage the stewardship of natural resources; protect environmentally sensitive areas; conserve productive forest lands; and enhance the rural, scenic character of the Township. In developing community goals and objectives, it is important to analyze existing community characteristics such as social and economic conditions, services and facilities, environmental conditions, and existing land use. Preceding chapters of this master plan have documented the above characteristics.

An equally important step in developing goals is community input. A public input workshop was held for the South Branch Township Master Plan development. An article was published in the Crawford County Avalanche, flyers were distributed, and phone calls were made to invite people to the public input session. The workshop was held at the South Branch Township Fire Hall on June 2, 2005 at 7:00 p.m. Twenty people attended and participated in the workshop. The group identified assets to protect and problems to address. In addition, the participants were asked to develop a vision of the community 20 years into the future. A full listing of the workshop comments is included in **Appendix A**.

### **South Branch Township Assets to Preserve**

Participants in the workshop noted the community is blessed with an abundance of high quality natural resources. Resources include forests, wetlands, open space, lakes, rivers, wildlife and fish. The resource center piece of the Township is the Au Sable River system. This is the Township where the three branches join into one majestic river. The Mason Tract provides exceptional opportunities for calm and unruffled enjoyment of hiking, nature studies, fishing and paddle sports in a wilderness setting. Fresh air, clean surface and groundwater and extensive forests equate into a healthy and safe environment. Reasonable public access to the water and other resources is an important community feature.

The rural character of forest lands, public lands and low density residential development create a landscape with considerable open space. Whether along the stream banks, within neighborhoods or nestled in forests, it is a safe, quiet, and clean place to live. It is a community that pulls together to work towards a common good, where people take pride in the area and have hard working ethics. The absence of “Big-Box” stores is considered an asset. Community facilities, services, and parks all add to the quality of life in the Township. A list of assets to preserve is presented in Appendix A.

### **South Branch Township Problems to Address**

Based on comments from participants of the workshop, it is clear that problems do exist in South Branch Township. These problems include extensive clear-cutting, limited employment opportunities, limited tax base, lack of infrastructure, blight and inconsistent zoning enforcement. Limited employment opportunities make it difficult to attract and keep young families in the area. There is a concern about extensive clear-cutting on public lands and inconsistent reforestation programs on private lands. Community is not involved in resource

management decisions on public lands. Roads need to be better maintained and safety issues addressed. There is a concern for safety, public health and blight related to people living in travel trailers and substandard structures on a seasonal basis. Residential development continues in jack pine forests without consideration of “Fire Wise” practices.

An increasing demand for community services is putting a strain on local governments’ limited budgets. There is a need for better enforcement of the “Natural Rivers” zoning regulations along the Au Sable River. The zoning ordinance and blight ordinance are not being adequately enforced in the Township. The lack of standards for private road development and driveways cause problems with access of emergency vehicles. Issues related to public access are maintaining existing sites, providing swimming areas, and regulating uses and activities. A complete listing of comments can be found in Appendix A.

### **South Branch Township in the Year 2025**

**Visioning** is a process to help community members imagine, describe and attain a preferred future for their community. Participants were asked to respond to the following visioning exercise. To encourage a free flow of ideas, answers were not constrained by present situations. All participants had opportunities to present their ideas in an open, informal setting. *Think about the changes that have occurred over the last 20 years or even the last 10 years. Now think what could happen over the next 25 years. “Imagine you have friends or relatives visiting in the year 2025. You decide to take them for a tour to show off the wonderful community in which you live. You take a drive through countryside; admire the beauty of the landscape and marvel at the development; you stop at a park for a picnic. Much of what you see and hear pleases you, and some activities surprise you. Describe the 2025 future that you envision. Consider the physical environment (residential, commercial and industrial development); the natural resources (forests, water, open space and farmlands); and community facilities and services.*

South Branch Township will be known for its abundance of natural resources. The Au Sable Rivers and Mason Tract are still the center piece of the Township. Forests are an important part of the landscape. The Kirtland’s warbler migrates to the jack pine forests and draws people from afar to hear it’s beautiful calls. There are large tracts of undeveloped lands, though most of these are in public ownership. The waters of streams and creeks, as well as groundwater, have not been compromised by development and growth. Residents and vacationers are able to enjoy top quality hunting, fishing, bird watching and numerous other outdoor activities.

People can enjoy museums, library, parks, community centers, nice restaurants, shops and a nature center, either within the Township or in adjacent communities. The community has welcomed current trends and by partnering with agencies and businesses, have developed facilities, such as senior centers, affordable housing, senior housing, public transportation, community health centers and safe pedestrian facilities, for retired residents. Neighborhoods are neat and safe. An active “Fire Wise” program has reduced the potential for losses from wildfires. Neighbors helping neighbors is still an everyday occurrence.

There are more businesses to serve residents and visitors. Shops, restaurants, grocery stores, service businesses are located in commercial nodes within the Township or in adjacent communities. The community has been able to accommodate home based businesses, which are a benefit to the local economy. Recreation based businesses still thrive, bringing tourism dollars into the community and providing employment opportunities for residents. Through land

use planning and zoning regulations, businesses and light industries are located in non-sensitive areas and while benefiting the Township, they have not negatively impacted the resource base. Bike trails connect residential areas to community centers and parks. Roads are better and there are less seasonal roads.

### **Community Goals and Objectives**

After reviewing the community input and considering the existing conditions background information, the planning commission established goals and objectives. These goals and objectives will provide guidance to the South Branch Township planning commission and board.

#### Planning and Community Development

Goal: Guide future development in a manner that will protect existing development; preserve rural community character; and conserve natural resources and environment, yet meets the long-term needs of the community.

#### Objectives:

- Implement the South Branch Township master plan through establishment of a township zoning ordinance.
- Control the location of new development by designating appropriate areas for new residential, commercial, industrial and resort/recreational land uses.
- Establish landscape requirements for new development, such as appropriate setbacks, retention of green space, buffer zones between differing land uses, screened parking areas, and roadside landscaping.
- Develop open space residential and commercial development design standards to preserve scenic views, rural character, farmland, meadows, woodlands, steep slopes and wetlands with a target of preserving 50 percent of the land within a development.
- Improve regulations and standards to protect the community against high noise levels and exterior lighting glare.
- Implement access management standards for commercial development along the primary corridors which include M-72 and M-18.
- Evaluate the establishment of a waterfront overlay district along designated waterways that will set forth consistent special requirements and standards for development in these sensitive areas.
- Establish/update standards that regulate the placement and size of cellular, communication and transmission towers.
- Consistently enforce blight ordinance to work towards improving the quality of housing and protecting property values.

- Enforce all ordinances in a consistent and fair manner.
- Promote walkable communities by developing trails, sidewalks and safe pedestrian crosswalks in developed areas of the Township.
- Increase safety and reduce the visual impact of on-site and off site signs and billboards, by controlling their size, number, illumination, and configuration.
- Establish a Community “Fire Wise” education program to protect existing and new development from wildfires.
- Require use of “Fire Wise” strategies for new subdivisions, condominium developments, and multi-family residential complexes, and any development requiring site plan review.

### Residential Land Uses

*Goal: Allow for suitable housing opportunities for all income levels and age groups, including year-round residents and seasonal residents.*

#### Objectives:

- Designate areas appropriate for all types of residential development including single family, multi-family, elderly housing, condominium, low to moderate income housing, and extended care facilities.
- To preserve open space and vital natural resources, encourage the development option of clustered housing in buildable portions of the Township.
- Encourage new residential development to be sited in a manner that protects the rural character and scenic views by maintaining proper setbacks and providing landscaping screening as appropriate.
- Require large scale development to document the need and demand for such development.
- Encourage existing housing stock and neighborhoods to be kept in good repair, appearance, usefulness and safety.
- Require adequate buffers and transition areas between residential and non residential uses to maintain property values and visual attractiveness.
- Preserve the integrity of existing residential neighborhoods by protecting them from intrusion of incompatible uses.

### Commercial Areas and Activities

*Goal: Promote a varied business environment, and encourage the development and expansion of businesses to meet the needs of residents and tourists, while preserving the natural environment and rural character of the community.*

#### Objectives:

- Guide commercial development into commercial nodes through the master plan and zoning ordinances; while discouraging linear strip development along primary county roads and state highways.
- Develop and utilize innovative planning and zoning techniques, such as clustering, shared parking, access management, and landscaping to regulate commercial development along primary county roads and state highways.
- Make parking (public and private) needs a consideration for all expansions and new development.
- Require landscape buffers where commercial uses are adjacent to residential uses.
- Regulate home occupations and home based businesses to assure compatibility with existing residential areas.
- Work with county and regional organizations to develop strategies for marketing the area as a tourism destination with recreational, cultural and historic components.

### Industrial Land Uses

*Goal: Encourage the establishment of new light industries to diversify the local economy and to create more stability and self-sufficiency for the community.*

#### Objectives:

- Ensure that industrial uses are developed in an environmentally sensitive manner, are harmonious with the existing community and are located near access to state trunklines.
- Encourage light industries and high tech industries that do not pollute the air, soil, or water nor offend because of noise, odor, or visual impact, to locate in zoned industrial areas within the Township. Due to the lack of public water and sewer, these industries should not require high water usage or generate large amounts of septage.
- Require landscape buffers where industrial uses are adjacent to other land uses.
- Develop guidelines to ensure that extractive development takes place in an environmentally sensitive manner.
- Require landscape buffers around extractive uses to screen adjacent properties and public roadways.

- Establish criteria and require reclamation extractive areas after the operation is complete.

### Infrastructure and Community Facilities

*Goal: Improve the Township's transportation systems, community facilities, and public utilities to accommodate the needs of residents and visitors.*

#### Objectives:

- Work with the Crawford County Road Commission to plan for upgrading of roads, maintenance of existing roads, and vehicular and pedestrian safety at intersections and on roadways.
- Develop a capital improvements plan to address the long term needs for road improvements, township hall maintenance, fire protection and emergency services, and community recreation.
- Direct development to areas with existing infrastructure and where infrastructure is not adequate require developers to fund the upgrading of infrastructure to support proposed new development.
- Seek grants through federal, state and other funding sources for infrastructure improvements, community facility and service improvements and economic development projects.
- Develop standards for private roads and shared road access.
- Continue to maintain and, when necessary, expand South Branch Township Cemeteries.
- Support the continuation and expansion of public transit to better serve the needs of senior citizens and other transit dependent Township residents.

### Recreation and Public Lands

*Goal: Preserve and improve access to public lands and water, establish recreational trails and improve public parks for the enjoyment of residents, visitors and future generations.*

#### Objectives:

- Develop a Township Recreation Plan that identifies and prioritizes needed community recreation facilities.
- Pursue grants and funding sources to supplement maintenance, improvements and expansions of community parks.
- Retain and improve public water access sites for residents, seasonal residents and visitors.
- Facilitate the designation of snowmobile routes through the Township to connect community

centers to regional trail systems. Work with the Crawford County Road Commission, Crawford County Sheriff Department and the Michigan Department of Natural Resources to accomplish this objective.

- Encourage the expansion and creation of non-motorized recreation trails such as x-country ski trails, bike trails and horse riding trails on both public and private lands.
- Connect parks, community centers and residential areas with bicycle and walking trails.
- Through zoning and review procedures, proposed subdivisions, site condominiums, planned unit developments, commercial and industrial developments should be encouraged to provide or participate in the development of neighborhood parks and open space.

### Government

*Goal: Provide services in an efficient, environmentally responsible and caring manner to meet the needs of the residents, property owners, business people and visitors.*

Objectives:

- Ensure a responsible fiscal policy and budget process to finance the Township government.
- Promote intergovernmental and regional cooperation on issues of mutual concern.
- Continue to work with Crawford County to provide emergency services to Township residents.
- Maintain communication with the Department of Natural Resources and US Forest Service to provide input into the usage and management of the public lands within the Township.
- Promote the involvement of volunteers in the government process.

### Natural Environment

*Goal: Protect and preserve the natural environment by protecting groundwater, surface water, environmentally sensitive areas, highly erosive areas, woodlands, wetlands, open space, fish and wildlife.*

Objectives:

- Encourage a land use pattern that is oriented to the natural features and water resources of the area by evaluating: type and density of proposed developments based on soil suitability; slope of land; potential for ground water and surface water degradation and contamination; compatibility with adjacent land uses; and impacts to sensitive natural areas like wetlands, greenways and wildlife corridors.
- Support enforcement of regulations set forth in the Au Sable River Natural Rivers Plan for the Main Branch, North Branch and South Branch of the Au Sable and its designated

tributaries.

- Limit and control the density and type of residential and commercial development adjacent to lakes, ponds, streams, and wetlands.
- Promote greenbelt areas adjacent to lakes, ponds, streams, and wetlands through development of a greenbelt section in the community's zoning ordinance.
- Implement groundwater protection and stormwater management regulations in the community's zoning ordinance, while encouraging the continued natural use of wetlands as groundwater recharge, stormwater filtering and stormwater holding areas.
- Limit development on steeply sloped areas. Require erosion control measures where construction is permitted. Require slope stabilization and revegetation on disturbed slopes or in extraction areas.
- Preserve topography such as slopes, valleys and hills by limiting the amount of cut and fill during site development.
- Encourage the integration of wetlands, woodlands and meadows into site development as aesthetic and functional features.
- Encourage the retention of agricultural lands, forest lands and ecological corridors through available mechanisms such as open space and farmland agreements, forest stewardship programs, and conservation easements, as well as zoning incentives.
- Encourage the use of native plant species and naturalized landscape designs, where appropriate, to enhance the community's existing character.
- In recognizing the importance of trees in the suburban environment, encourage the retention of existing native trees and the establishment of street and shade trees in residential neighborhoods and commercial developments.

### Forest Lands

*Goal: Support the retention of the forestry land base as a viable resource and to insure that forestry is a component of the economic diversity of the Township.*

Objectives:

- Maintain and provide for the preservation of woodlands where feasible, including tree farming and specialty crop farms.
- Support science based forest and wildlife management activities on public and private lands in the township.
- Participate in the U.S. Forest Service and Michigan Department of Natural Resources Forestry Planning activities for lands within the Township.



- Discourage the conversion of forestland into other more intensive uses. Recognize forestland as contributing to the scenic, rural character and economy of the Township.
- Due to negative impact to groundwater and surface water resources, discourage the establishment of industrial feedlots.