

Chapter 1 - Introduction

Purpose and Planning Process

The purpose of the South Branch Township Land Use Master Plan is to provide guidelines for future development within the community, while protecting the natural resources and rural township character. The Township Planning Act 168 of 1959 authorizes townships to develop comprehensive or master plans. As stated in the enabling legislation : The purpose of plans prepared pursuant to this act shall be to promote public health, safety and general welfare; to encourage the use of resources in accordance with their character and adaptability; to avoid the overcrowding of land by buildings or people; to lessen congestion on public roads and streets; to facilitate provision for a system of transportation, sewage disposal, safe and adequate water supply, recreation and other public improvements; and to consider the character of each township and its suitability for particular uses judged in terms of such factors as the trend in land and population development.

This plan presents background information on social and economic data, natural resources, existing community services and facilities, and existing land uses. The background information is used to identify important characteristics, changes and trends in South Branch Township. A special community workshop was held to gather input from residents and landowners. Based on information gathered at this workshop and the background data, the Township Planning Commission developed goals and objectives. These goals and objectives, along with a series of maps including soils, ownership, existing land use, and zoning, provide the basis for the Future Land Use Map. The future land use map recommends locations for various types of future development within the Township.

The Land Use Master Plan was developed by the South Branch Township Planning Commission with the assistance from the Northeast Michigan Council of Governments (NEMCOG). This plan looks at a twenty year planning horizon, with suggested revisits every five years or sooner if needed. A series of planning workshops were held over the two year period. All workshops were open meetings with public welcomed and encouraged to comment on the plan.

Location and Regional Setting

South Branch Township is located in the southern part of Crawford County. The County is located in the northeastern lower peninsula of Michigan. Figure 1.1 shows the location of the Township and County. Roscommon County borders South Branch Township to the south, and Oscoda County to the east, Beaver Creek Township to the west and Grayling and Lovells Townships to the north, which are all in Crawford County. The Township geographic area covers nearly 105.4 square miles. Figure 1.1 shows a base map of South Branch Township that depicts roads, ownership, state lands and water features.

Brief History

The history of South Branch Township shows a chronological progression from pre-settlement virgin pine and hardwood forests to fairly intense lumbering followed by limited farming; and today a quite rural community with a mix of year round and seasonal residences that provides an abundance of outdoor recreational opportunities. The rural character is accentuated by the fact that a village center has never developed within South Branch Township. Instead development has continued to be low density and dispersed. Residents of the Township

typically work in Gaylord, Grayling and Roscommon. The seasonal residents are either retirees who spend the summer months in the area or persons who own recreational properties "up north" and may spend weekends and vacations in the area.

The Status of Planning and Zoning

South Branch Township is one of two townships in Crawford County that are under county zoning established and administered by Crawford County. The county is authorized to plan and zone for unincorporated communities under the County Planning Act (Act 282 of 1945) and the County Zoning Act (Act 183 of 1943). The Crawford County Board enacted a zoning ordinance regulating land use activities in the early 1970's. Major revisions were completed in April of 1990 and August of 2001. The current County Master Plan was adopted in 1976 and has not been updated since that time.

Crawford County has requested South Branch Township adopt and administer it's own zoning ordinance. The first step towards administering it's own zoning ordinance was to form a planning commission. South Branch Township created a township planning commission in 2004. Next, the Township initiated development of a master plan. After the master plan has been completed, South Branch Township will then develop a zoning ordinance. The master plan will provide a legal foundation for the Township Zoning Ordinance and help to manage for anticipated growth within the Township. By documenting existing conditions such as environment, social-economic, community services, transportation, recreation, and land use within a master plan, the Township will be able to formulate appropriate land use goals and policies to guide development, and serve as the basis for enforceable zoning.

Figure 1.1
Base Map

