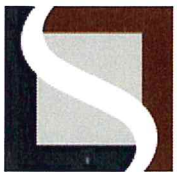


Almena Township Master Plan

February, 2006
Amended: November, 2011



LSL Planning,

Community Planning

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ASSOCIATES

Almena Township Master Plan

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Executive Summary

This Plan was adopted pursuant to the authority of the Township Rural Planning Act, PA 168 of 1959, as amended. The Act provides for the preparation and periodic review of a "basic plan" to promote community health, safety, and welfare through provisions for the use of land and resources and the assurance of adequate public facilities and services. The Planning Act spells out the process for developing, adopting, and amending a plan to ensure a certain level of public participation.

The Almena Township Master Plan is such a "basic plan". It is prepared as a foundation for the Township's zoning ordinance, subdivision regulations, and capital improvement program, and depends primarily upon these documents for its implementation. Although this Plan includes specific land use policies and proposes specific land use arrangements, it has no regulatory power. It provides the basis and impetus, however, for future regulations.

This Plan is the product of a lengthy process that relied heavily upon community input made via printed surveys and discussion at focus group and other public meetings. It is also an extension of the previous Master Plan effort of 1995. This Plan differs somewhat from the previous Plan due to changes in not only the township landscape but also community attitudes. For example, Almena Township has experienced significant population increases and development pressure since its last planning cycle and Township officials and residents alike have become more concerned about what land divisions and new construction are doing to community character. A once predominantly rural area, the Township is experiencing development density levels (in some areas) that are more suburban than rural in nature. Key issues which emerged from the Township-wide attitude survey and public forums were "the division of farmlands and large parcels of land for development" and "the township looking like the suburbs." These and other concerns highlighted the community's desire to retain the rural character of the Township.

Other strong policy statements that emerged from the Master Plan revision process included:

- The Township need not promote industrial development since more urbanized areas to the east have ample land and infrastructure already devoted to such land uses.
- The Township should provide an appropriate amount of land for future commercial development that is adequately sized to meet the shopping needs of current and future Township residents. Such development should be sited in concentrated and appropriate locations along State Highways M-40 and M-43 as opposed to an indiscriminate pattern of disconnected strip development along road frontages.
- An appropriate mix of commercial and other "village-center"-type development should be provided in and around the Almena settlement area.
- For this planning period promotion of a suburban level of services (e.g., public water, sewer and road paving) is inappropriate especially since providing such services would promote additional development pressure.

- Protection of open space and natural amenities like wetlands, woodlots, and wildlife habitat is increasingly of interest. The majority of survey responses reinforced this concept in that residents supported open space preservation even if it “meant more regulations.”
- A strong desire exists to promote residential cluster developments focusing on designs that preserve the natural landscape rather than traditional subdivisions that tend to redefine the landscape.
- Recognition and protection of existing agricultural areas is important.

This Plan is designed to be more concise than the previous version in order that it will be more widely used as a resource by both decision makers as well the public. If the principles outlined herein form the basis for each land use and development decision, Almena Township will realize its vision for the future.

In 2011, the Plan was amended. As part of the required five-year review of the Plan, the Township Planning Commission made some changes to the Plan to reflect shifts in the Township vision and character since the Plan was developed and new information that has been collected as well as to bring the Plan into conformance with the Michigan Planning Enabling Act (PA 33 of 2008, as amended).

Chapter 1: Introduction

Almena is a growing rural township on the eastern edge of Van Buren County in southwest Michigan. Only six miles outside the City of Kalamazoo, it is experiencing growth pressure from the urban area as people move into the country for a quieter way of life. State Highway M-40 forms the Township's western border and M-43 traverses Almena, making the Township accessible for commuters (see Base map, pg. 8).

The primary challenge facing Almena is to balance the reality of a growing community with the desire to preserve the very things that draw people to the Township: natural features and a quiet lifestyle.

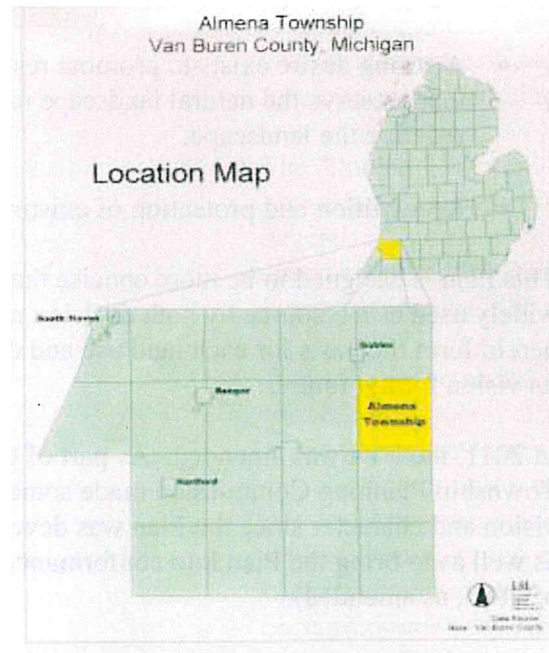
This Master Plan for Almena Township is a vision for how the Township will grow and develop over the next twenty years. It is a document developed through investigation of demographic and land use trends and the vision local citizens have for the Township. The basic purpose of the Plan is to manage the intensity and configuration of land use in a manner that supports economically viable, environmentally sound, and visually pleasing growth.

The Master Plan will help ensure that Almena Township remains a highly desirable community by enabling residents, business owners and developers to make investments with a reasonable expectation of the future. In essence, the Plan balances the sometimes competing interests of environmental protection and individual land ownership to achieve overall community interests.

Plan Elements

This Master Plan consists of several components, including:

- Public input, which is an essential part of the Master Plan process. It is critical to have an understanding of what Township residents and landowners think of the issues.
- Background research regarding housing, population and other current conditions within the Township.
- A survey of existing land use which summarizes the current land use trends within the Township.
- Development of goals, objectives and strategies that define how the Township will address identified concerns and trends.



- The Land Use section that describes which types of development would be most appropriate within the community and suitable locations for that development.
- The Future Land Use map that is an illustration of the long-range land use pattern proposed for the Township.
- Implementation strategies that should be evaluated on an annual basis.

When the above components are combined, a picture is created that will serve as a guide for the Township as it faces important decisions now and years from now. These decisions may include policy changes, budget allocations and the more day-to-day issues such as site plan reviews, special land use approvals, and rezoning requests.

Planning Framework

Overall, the Master Plan is based upon a number of Township characteristics, each of which must be considered by the Planning Commission and Township Board as the Plan is implemented and updated. These characteristics include:

Community Character: The community character desired by residents and landowners determines the Plan's goals. A strong emphasis placed on maintaining rural character, for example, would be reflected in the Future Land Use goals and any subsequent design standards enacted in the zoning ordinance.

Capability of Land: Environmental constraints must also be considered. Is the land itself able to accommodate planned uses? Where public utilities are not available are the soils capable of accommodating the density of planned development?

Community Needs: What types of land use are needed in the community? If a shortage of affordable housing were determined to be a community concern, the provision of suitable land uses in desirable locations would be an appropriate response. If a small shopping area seems appropriate for the community, a location should be selected and planned based on the ability of that location to accommodate such a use.

Available Services: Through issue and goal identification, as well as data collection, information is obtained about the status of community services. Are existing services capable of handling planned development? What kind of strain will new residential development place on the ability to provide adequate fire protection? What road improvements may be required?

Existing Development: How will the planned land uses affect existing uses? Are there some areas that are currently residential that the Township would like to see become commercial in the future? How will planned uses affect nearby existing uses?

Regional Planning: The Township does not exist in a vacuum. There are other regional issues such as transportation, environmental protection, and utility plans that must be considered as well. Sharing copies of the Plan and communicating about it with neighboring township, county

and regional planners as well as other appropriate entities will facilitate regional planning and coordination efforts.

Implementation

The Planning Commission and Township Board should continuously strive to ensure effective use of this document. Although the tie between decision-making and land use policy is not always abundantly clear, most land use and design decisions can be guided by the goals, objectives and strategies provided in this Plan. In the most general terms, if the Township's vision drives all decisions, community leaders will be implementing the Plan. What follows are additional practices that will ensure Plan implementation:

Refer To the Master Plan in All Zoning Decisions

One of the principal benefits of having an adopted Master Plan is the foundation it provides for sound zoning decisions. Just as the Plan is the policy guide for land use, zoning is the principal legal enforcement tool. The two should work together to provide adequate justification for land use decisions.

Encourage Other Decision Making Bodies to Use the Master Plan

The Master Plan should help guide everyday decisions, from the capacity of improved roads to new schools. Working together with the Van Buren County Road Commission, school districts, and adjacent communities as well as other parties that can impact land use patterns within the Township, can help Almena Township in the implementation of the Master Plan.

Keep the Plan Current

The vision outlined in the Plan will not occur overnight. The Master Plan is an outline for the future that guides day-to-day decisions. However, even with this in mind, the Plan should not be applied or used rigidly since changing conditions that can affect the original intentions of the Master Plan should be acknowledged and the Plan amended, if necessary.

Township decisions can be weakened by an outdated Plan or one that is not in constant use as a reference. The Planning Commission should conduct an annual review of the Plan to ensure that the Plan is kept current. The Township Planning Act requires that the Master Plan be reviewed every five years. While this does not mandate that the Plan be changed, it at least encourages a thorough review to determine if the directions set forward are still valid. Any amendments to the Plan can be done at that time to keep it up to date and consistent with Township philosophies.

On the other hand, while the Plan needs to be a flexible instrument, its recommendations should not be taken lightly. Adjustments should be made only as necessary, and justified based upon changing conditions or shifts in community philosophy.

The Master Plan & Zoning Ordinance

The relationship of the Master Plan and Zoning Ordinance is often misunderstood. Stated concisely, the Master Plan is a *guide* for land use for the future; the Zoning Ordinance regulates the use of land in the present. The Master Plan is not a binding legal document; the Zoning Ordinance is a law that must be followed by the Township and its residents. However, the Master Plan is the foundation upon which the regulations are built.

Adopting or changing a Master Plan does not directly affect the zoning for any property. However, future changes to the zoning map are intended to be reflective of the planned uses shown by the Master Plan.

Evaluation of Land Use Changes

Changing the land use or zoning designation for any property can have far-reaching consequences, physically, environmentally, financially, and legally. Therefore, a careful evaluation of proposed rezonings is essential. As with any land use decision, the use of standards is essential to reaching fair and consistent decisions. The following evaluation measures are included in the Plan to permit their use by the Township when rezonings or Future Land Use changes are contemplated. The zoning district intents and rezoning criteria provided in the zoning ordinance must also be considered during the evaluation process.

Standard 1 - Consistency with the Community Vision and Plan Strategies

If conditions (such as economic factors, demographic shifts, new utility lines, changing traffic conditions) upon which the Master Plan was developed have changed significantly since the Plan was adopted, the Planning Commission and Township Board should incorporate these factors into their deliberations to ensure that the Plan is current. Particular attention should be paid to the vision and goals to ensure that they remain valid, and that the proposed rezoning or land use change does not impair their intent.

Standard 2 - Compatibility with adjacent uses and districts.

All of the uses allowed in a proposed district should be compatible with the conditions present on the site and in the immediate vicinity of the site especially in terms of density, character, traffic, aesthetics, and property values. The Plan provides several guidelines, as noted above, which should be considered when determining whether the proposed district is compatible with the neighborhood and the Township as a whole.

Standard 3 - Capability of being used as already zoned.

It is the right of every property owner to receive a reasonable return on the investment placed on property. This does not mean that zoning is a slave to the "highest and best use," (which is not a zoning, but rather a real estate term). It does mean that there should be a reasonable use available within the zone district. But if the property is capable of being used as zoned, there

should be a compelling reason to change the zoning. Such reasons may be related to the first two standards of consistency and compatibility.

Site plans will not be considered as part of a rezoning request. The Planning Commission and/or Township Board will not be swayed by what is proposed by the petitioner. Instead, the Township will make a specific finding that ALL of the uses permitted in the proposed district are appropriate for the site and area, not just the one shown on a proposed site plan.

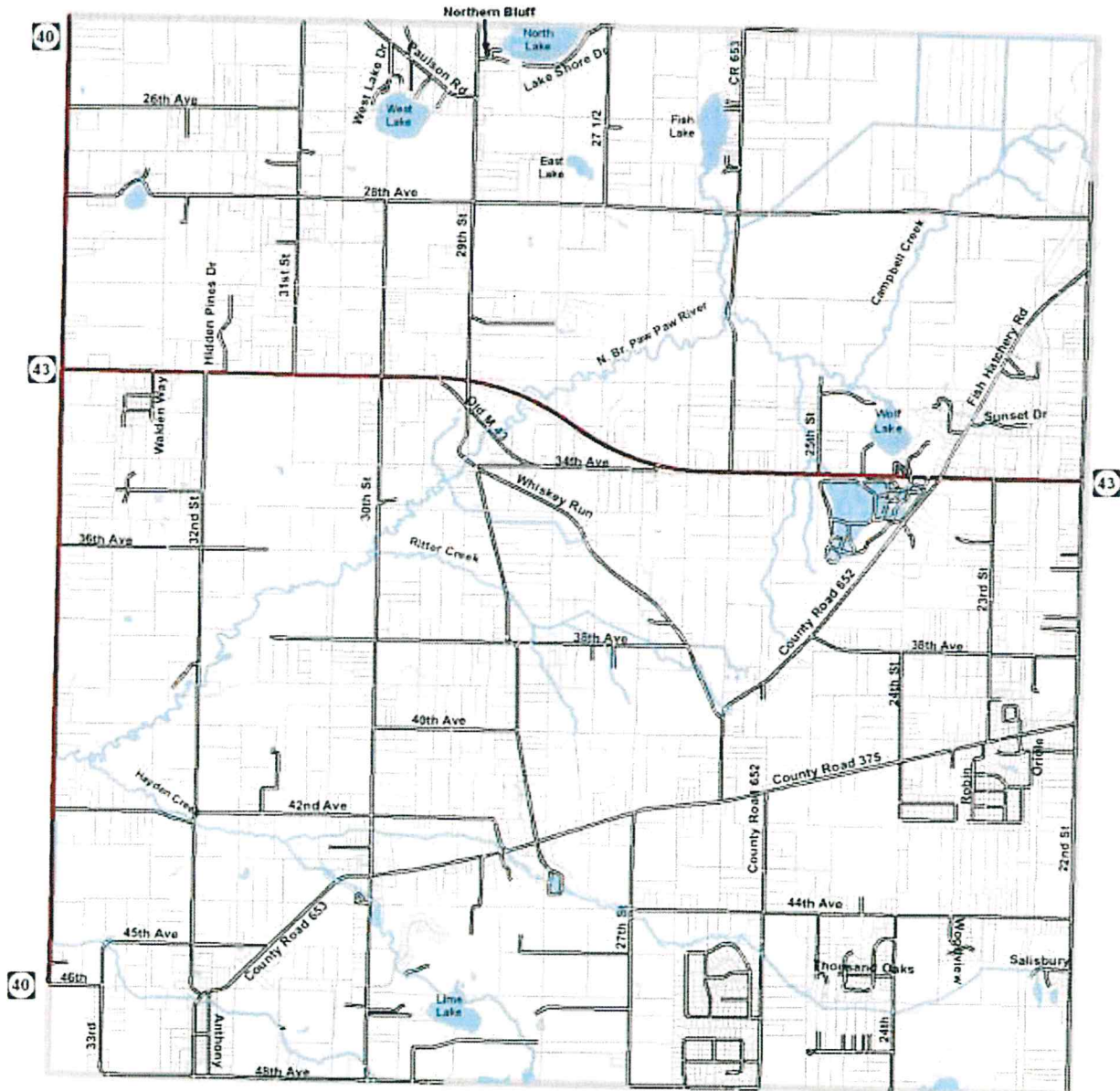
Standard 4 - It is critical that the Master Plan be read in its entirety.

Rather than attempting to isolate individual statements that may appear to support one position or another regarding the Future Land Use for the Township, the Planning Commission must consider the intent of the Plan as a whole. This requires a careful reading of the Plan to ensure that all of the Plan's considerations are included in the evaluation of any change.

2011 Amendment

In 2011, the Township Planning Commission completed several amendments to the Master Plan after completing the required five-year review of the Master Plan. These amendments bring the document into consistency with the Township's current vision for the future and update new information that has been collected. Other amendments address information that was missing from the Master Plan in order to make proper decisions in the community and to bring the Plan into compliance with the Michigan Planning Enabling Act – MPEA (PA 33 of 2008, as amended). These amendments were reviewed and approved consistent with the procedures of the MPEA.

Almena Township Van Buren County, Michigan



Base Map

-  State Trunkline
-  Local Roads
-  Parcel Lines
-  Drains
-  Rivers, Streams, and Creeks
-  Lakes
-  Township Boundary



Data Source:
Base - Van Buren County

Chapter 2: Demographic Analysis

In order to adequately plan for its future, a community needs to understand trends occurring in its population. Questions regarding the sources of development pressures, the types of households in the Township, and the kinds of housing in demand are relevant to officials making community service decisions. For example, a young family in a single-family home has different needs than a single senior citizen in an apartment. This chapter provides an overview of basic descriptive statistics (including housing, employment and income levels) to provide Township decision-makers with a frame of reference regarding area demographics. Note that most of the data in this section was derived from the 2000 Federal Census with updates as available from the 2010 Census.

Population

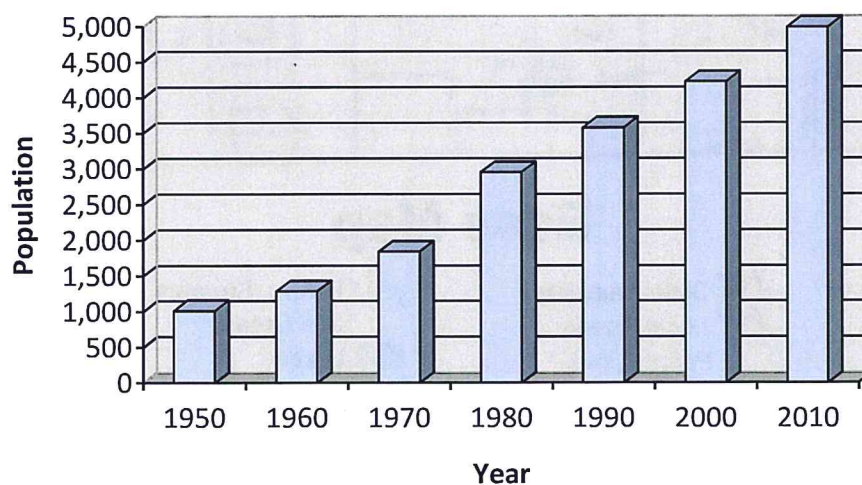
Almena's population has grown steadily since the 1950's (see Table I). Between 1970 and the year 2010 (see Figure I) the population has almost tripled, increasing by over 270%. By comparison, Van Buren County's population increased by about 35% (see Table II) and Michigan's increased by just over 11% in the same time period.

Table I
Almena Township Total Population by Decade

1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010
1,014	1,288	1,845	2,956	3,581	4,226	4,992

Source: U.S. Census

Figure I Total Township Population by Decade



**Table II
Total County Population by Decade**

1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010
39,184	48,395	56,173	66,814	70,060	76,263	76,258

Source: U.S. Census

Compared to its surrounding communities and the County, the Township had a sizable increase in its population between 1990 and 2010, increasing by 18% between both 1990 and 2000 and between 2000 and 2010 (see Table III). Oshtemo and Texas Townships, located between the City of Kalamazoo and Almena, increased by about 28% and 35%, respectively between 2000 and 2010. These figures are significant considering the State population decreased by 0.6% (the only state to have a decreasing population) and the County population also decreased. In fact, Almena Township had the highest percentage increase in population of all municipalities in Van Buren County, as was also the case in 2000. Similar to 2000, it is likely that a large portion of Almena's population increase is a result of spillover from development expanding beyond Kalamazoo and its neighboring Townships of Oshtemo and Texas.

Table III Area Population Changes

Unit of Government	2000 Population	2010 Population	Percent Change
Van Buren County	76,263	76,258	-0.0%
Almena Twp.	4,226	4,992	18.1%
Antwerp Twp.	10,813	12,182	12.7%
Paw Paw Twp.	7,091	7,041	-0.7%
Waverly Twp.	2,467	2,554	3.5%
Bloomingtondale Twp.	3,364	3,103	-7.8%
Pine Grove Twp.	2,773	2,949	6.3%
Alamo Twp. (Kalamazoo Co.)	3,320	3,762	-1.5%
Oshtemo Twp. (Kalamazoo Co.)	17,003	21,705	27.7%
Texas Twp. (Kalamazoo Co.)	10,919	14,697	34.6%

Source: U.S. Census

Housing Trends and Density

Although suburbanizing, Almena still has relatively low population density overall. As of the year 2000, Almena had approximately 123 persons and 47.4 housing units per square mile. For comparative purposes, Antwerp Township had about 310 persons and 114 houses per square mile. The largest concentration of population in Almena is in the subdivisions located in the easternmost sections of the Township (again, nearer Kalamazoo). These subdivisions have larger lots than would be found in most traditional suburban settings. Development outside of the subdivisions is on larger parcels (e.g., two-, five-, ten-, and twenty-acre parcels). While this type of large-lot development keeps density lower, it consumes land faster and is more difficult to service. Provisioning such lower density, scattered development with buses, emergency services, water, and sewer lines ultimately costs local governments more time and money.

Households

In 1990, Almena Township had 1,204 households. By the year 2000, the number of households had increased by 29%, to 1,553 households. The increase in number of households was much larger than the increase in population. This is likely a reflection of national trends of smaller households and more single-person households. In many ways the increase in the number of households is more significant than the increase in population because it is the household unit that consumes land and requires services.

The majority of Almena households are married-couples (70%) reflecting a higher percentage than County and State averages (see Table IV). A higher-than-average number of married couple households are common for suburbanizing areas because the more affluent two-income households drive the large-lot single-family market. Not surprisingly, the presence of children in the Township's households is higher than County and State averages. About 40% of all households have school-aged children (individuals 18 or under). The number of households with a senior citizen is lower than County and State averages in that about 17% of all households in the Township have a senior in them while the County and State averages are about 23%.

The number of single-parent households (6.4%) in the Township is not far from County and State averages. Non-family households consist of single persons or unrelated persons living together. Almena's portion of non-family households is smaller than that of the County and State. About 20% of the Township's households are non-family while nearly one-third of the State's households are non-family. About 5% of the Township's non-family households are senior citizens living alone. When considering Township services, non-family and single parent households need to be kept in mind in that they are less able to bear the cost of increased services. The average household size in the Township is 2.72 persons per household, slightly higher than the State and County averages of 2.56 and 2.66 persons, respectively.

Table IV Household Types

	Almena Twp.	Van Buren Co.	Michigan
Married-couple families	70%	56.7%	51.4%
Single-parent families	6.4%	7.0%	7.5%
Non-family households	19.8%	27.4%	32%
Households with individuals under 18 years of age	39.5%	38.3%	35.6%
Households with individuals 65 years and over	16.9%	23.2%	22.8%

Source: U.S. Census

Age

The percentage of school-aged children (eighteen years and under) in the Township is a little higher than that of the State, but lower than the County average (see Table V). Almena has a higher median age than both the County and the State but it also has fewer people sixty-five years and over than the County and State. Further, well over one-third of Almena's population is between thirty-five and fifty-four years of age. These facts suggest a predominance of older families (with children in upper grade levels) and "empty-nesters" (couples whose children are raised and out of the house).

Table V Age Ranges

	Almena Twp.	Van Buren Co.	Michigan
Percent of the population under 18 years of age	26.9%	28.1%	26.1%
Percent of the population 65 years or older	8.8%	12.3%	12.3%
Median Age	38.3 yrs.	36.6 yrs.	35.6 yrs.

Source: U.S. Census

Housing

In the year 2000, the Township had a total of 1,631 housing units. Over half of those units were built within a span of nineteen years. Between 1980 and March of 2000, 830 housing units were built in Almena. The housing stock of the Township is almost exclusively single-family (98.2%). Only twenty-nine multi-family units were recorded in the 2000 Census, and they were all two-family units. Mobile homes are considered single-family units and accounted for about 11% of all housing units in the Township. Mobile homes are scattered throughout the Township on individual parcels, in a mixed mobile home subdivision, and in a mobile home park. Single-family homes are found in both large-lot subdivisions as well as on scattered, large-lot parcels. Single-family homes on smaller lots are primarily along the Township's lakeshores. The value of Almena homes is much higher than the state average of \$94,200. The median home value of owner-occupied homes in Almena as of the year 2000 was \$118,500. In 1980 the median value of the Township's housing was \$46,400. In twenty years median housing value has gone up 250%. (Update: in 2010, there were 1,945 housing units in the Township.)

Income and Educational Attainment

The Census measures income in three ways: 1) median household, which is representative of all households (non-family and family); 2) median family, which is representative of all family households, including those with single parents; and 3) per capita income, which averages all incomes among the entire population, including non-workers such as children. In all scenarios the Township's income levels are higher than those of the County and the State (see Table VI). Given the higher income levels of the Township, it's not surprising that there is a high level of educational attainment. As of the year 2000, over 87% of the population had a high school education and about 24% had a Bachelor's degree or higher.

Only 1.4% of the Township's population was on public assistance at the time of the 2000 Census, yet 5.3% of the population (or 222 individuals) had income below poverty level. Of greater concern are the income levels of female-headed households in the Township. About 27% of all female-headed household incomes were below the poverty level. For female-headed households with children under 18 years of age and children under five years of age, the poverty rates jumped to 43% and 69%, respectively.

Table VI Income Levels

	<u>Almena Twp.</u>	<u>Van Buren Co.</u>	<u>Michigan</u>
Median household	\$51,027	\$39,365	\$31,020
Median family	\$56,653	\$45,824	\$36,652
Per capita	\$20,733	\$17,878	\$14,154

Source: U.S. Census

Employment

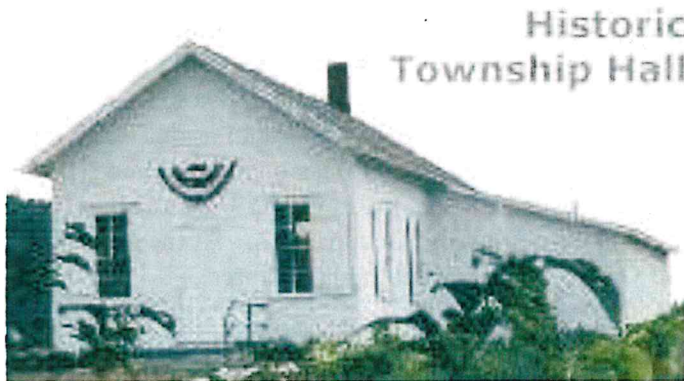
As is suggested by the mean reported travel time to work of about twenty-five minutes, most workers in the Township commute out of the area for employment. Workers are primarily employed in “manufacturing,” (23.5% of all workers), and “education, health and social services,” (19% of all workers). About 10% of those employed worked in “retail trade.” The top two occupations that Almena workers reported were “management, professional and related occupations,” (34.2%), and “sales and office occupations,” (23.6%). Another 19.3% of all workers were in “production, transportation and material moving” occupations. At the time of the Census, 63% of all women sixteen or more years of age were in the labor force.

Summary

Over the last several decades Almena Township has grown substantially and evolved from a predominantly rural area to a community of people who want to live in the “country” yet work in other areas. Because of a general lack of industry and commercial services, this development pattern is typically called a “bedroom community” where the principal type of development is single-family homes. Older homes in the Township are more modest while newer homes reflect a much higher level of wealth coming into the community. There is a notable dichotomy in some of the developments in that a mobile home/modular home subdivision can be located across the street from homes that are several thousand square feet in size and several hundred thousand dollars in value.

Most of the population growth can be attributed to in-migration from other more populous areas. Households are dominated by married-couple families, many of them in later family stages (i.e., children in upper grade levels) or “empty nesters” (i.e., the children are grown and out of the house). Many of the households are two-income commuting families but there are senior households and single parent households to keep in mind as well.

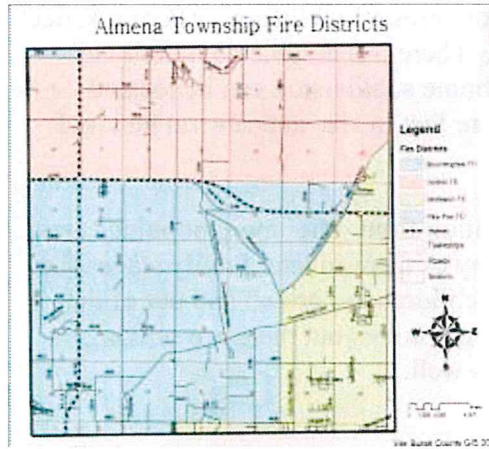
Chapter 3: Community Services



Historically Almena has been a rural township with a relatively small population such that it has not needed to directly provide many community services to its citizens. Instead, the Township has relied upon agreements with outside providers to cover service needs (e.g., police and fire service). There has been no need or demand for public water and sewer systems and, until recently, recreational needs have been

met with facilities in other communities. With substantial population growth and development, however, the township may eventually need to reconsider how it provides service to its citizens.

Public Safety

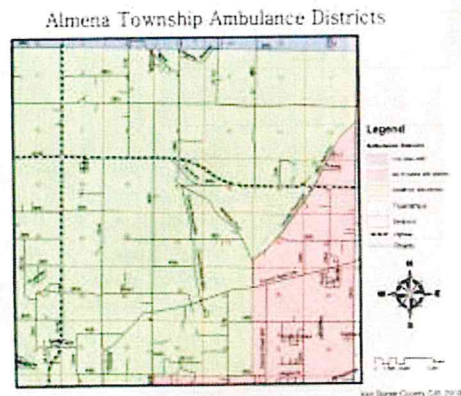


The Van Buren County Sheriff Department and the Michigan State Police provide principal police protection with emergency response aid from the Paw Paw and Mattawan Police Departments. Emergency service is somewhat fragmented in that three fire departments and two ambulance services cover the Township (see accompanying maps). The three volunteer fire departments that cover the Township are:

- Sections 1-12, Gobles/Pine Grove Fire Department.
- East of County Road 652, Mattawan Fire Department.
- Remaining areas of the Township, Paw Paw Fire Department.

The two ambulance services which cover the Township are:

- East of County Road 652, Mattawan Quick Response.
- Remaining areas, Van Buren Emergency Medical Response (VBEMS).



All in all, six public safety entities service the Township. Since all calls for service are efficiently dispatched via the County's "911" system. The concern, however, is that each service entity is located well outside the Township borders, which slows

response times and can put citizens and property in jeopardy. As density in the Township increases, this issue may be exacerbated and the Township may need to develop its own public safety system.

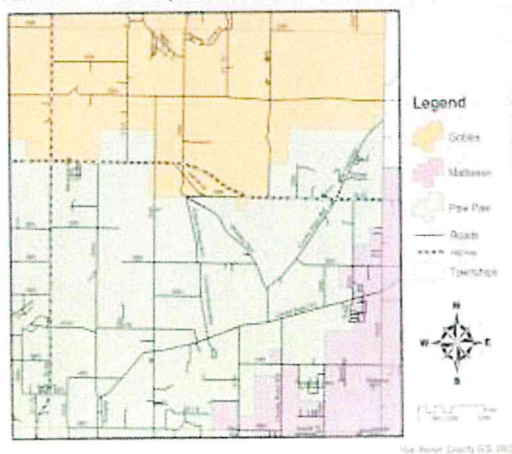
Water and Waste Water Disposal

The entire Township relies on private wells and septic systems for potable water and waste disposal. In addition to hundreds of traditional septic fields within the Township, “raised mound” beds are emerging as a wastewater disposal solution in areas with high water tables. As density increases and septic systems age, it is important to keep in mind the potential need, and expense, of public water and sewer systems. Failing septic systems can pollute drinking water and surface waters. In fact, run-off from failing septic systems and yard chemicals is often associated with inland lakes becoming weed-choked and polluted. Smaller lake lots can compound the problem because they have limited areas for reserve septic fields.

Septic systems have a design life of fifteen to twenty years if they are well maintained. Improper maintenance of such systems can greatly reduce their effectiveness and lifespan. Unfortunately septic systems tend to be “out of site, out of mind” and often do not receive proper maintenance (e.g., regular pumping). The State Public Health Code mandates a reserve area for backup systems, but if there is not a documented deed restriction or other measures to protect the backup area, sheds, swimming pools and other accessory structures often end up being developed on these sites.

School Systems and Parks

Almena Township Intermediate School Districts



Gobles, Mattawan and Paw Paw Public Schools serve the township, however no school facilities are located within it (see map left). Since schools often provide recreational fields and open space, their absence from Almena is unfortunate. However, the recreational area adjacent to the Township Hall and historic Township Hall should help fill part of the gap in recreational facilities.

The desirability of a particular school system can impact the development demand on the surrounding area because there is more development pressure in an area with a school system where people want to send their children.

Further, since schools are such an important fixture in communities it is important to coordinate with them when planning for recreational facilities or major residential developments.

Other recreational facilities in Almena Township include the Wolf Lake State Fish Hatchery, the Heritage Glen Golf Club and the Southern Michigan Gun Club. The Fish Hatchery is operated by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, and its visitor center, trails and open space

are available year round for public enjoyment. While the nearby Kal-Haven Trail is not located within Almena, it remains an impressive recreational asset. Given that Van Buren County does not have a County park system; the public parks nearest to Almena residents are located in the City of Gobles, Antwerp Township, and the Village of Paw Paw.

Summary

While the Township’s population remains small, relying upon outside entities for public services will likely continue to meet its needs. As densities and population increase, however, the Township should begin to explore other options for service provision such as creation of special assessment districts for water and sewer lines or group septic maintenance, and special millages for capital improvement funds to help finance public safety equipment and services.

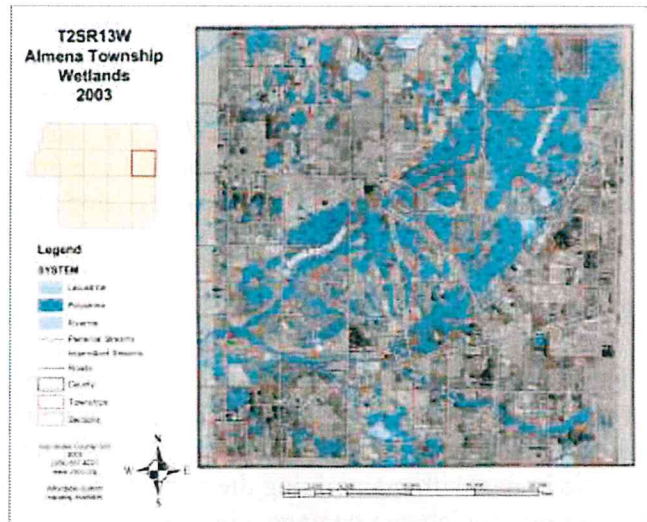


Public access at fish hatchery

Chapter 4: Natural Features

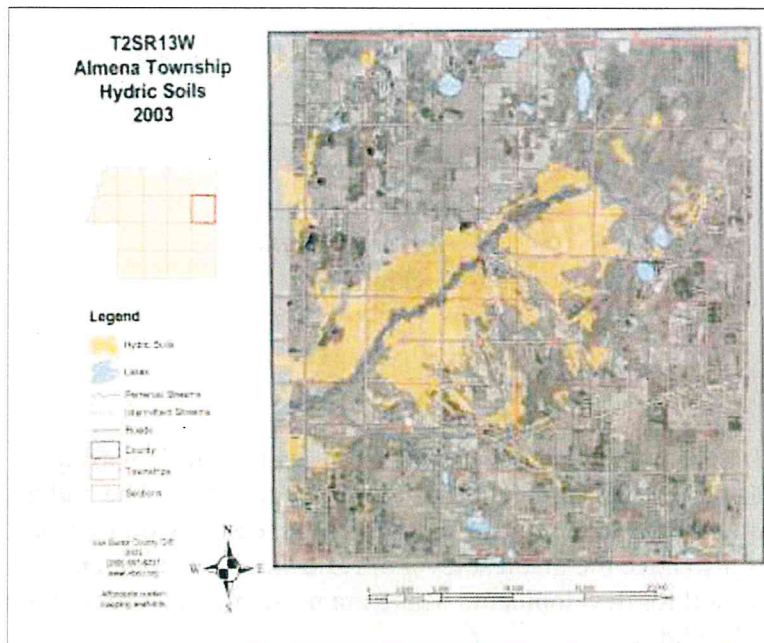
Water Features and Wetland Systems

The most prominent natural feature in the Township is the system of streams and wetlands that feed the north branch of the Paw Paw River (see also Natural Features Map pg. 21). The Paw Paw River Watershed encompasses 446 square miles across parts of Kalamazoo, Van Buren, and Berrien Counties, including 150 miles of significant river and tributary streams and 5,800 acres of lakes and ponds. This watershed has been identified by Michigan Department of Natural Resources as one of the most ecologically diverse areas in all of southern Michigan, and the headwater wetland stream complexes located in Almena Township have a significant influence on the overall quality of the entire Paw Paw River system.



Campbell, Ritter and Hayden Creeks and their associated wetlands systems have substantial woodland and thicket cover that dominate the Township’s landscape.

As can be seen on the Topography map (pg. 22), this creek and wetland system occupies



lowlands that essentially bisect the Township on a diagonal northeast to southwest. Not surprisingly, much of this area has a high water table and soils that are very poorly drained (see Hydric Soils graphic below), which make it unsuitable for septic systems and significant development. Soils in the low creek and wetland area of the Township are in the Gilford soil association that the County soil survey describes as “nearly level, very poorly drained, loamy soils on outwash plains” while the rest of the Township in higher elevations is generally the Coloma-Spinks-Oshtemo

soil association described as “nearly level to hilly, somewhat excessively drained and well drained, sandy and loamy soils on outwash plains and moraines.”

Several small inland lakes, most in the northern half of the Township, also pepper the landscape including Lime, Wolf, Fish, North, East and West Lakes. Of these, North Lake, partially in Pine Grove Township, is the largest lake with a total surface area of 133 acres. Residential lots line much of North Lake. A smaller number of residential lots are on Fish Lake, which is 32 acres in area. Wolf Lake (24.5 acres) and West Lake (28 acres) have some large-lot residential development around them, but wetlands have prevented building directly on the waterfront. Lime Lake (80 acres) is essentially undeveloped and the only lake in the Township south of 38th Avenue.

County Drains

There are numerous county drains in the Township, which are maintained by the Van Buren County Drain Commissioner (see County Drain map, pg. 23). The primary purposes of county drains are to expedite drainage for agricultural production or to alleviate flooding problems. One of the issues with maintaining the formal drainage system is drain cleaning (i.e. digging and dredging), which can damage wildlife habitat and look unsightly. Another common issue surrounding drain maintenance is the expense of special assessment districts to pay for drain maintenance. Homeowners with large lots and county drains running across them can be caught by a sizable assessment to clean out what they thought was a natural creek on their property. To compound the situation, while they may not want the disruption of a drain cleaning operation on their property an upstream farmer may be relying on their section to be cleaned. There are several miles of county drains in nineteen formal drains within the Township, including:

- Brandywine Lake
- Covey Hill
- Todd
- Old Todd
- Overacker
- Watkins & Whiskey Run
- Olson
- Hudson and Slack
- Hipp & Brown
- Shaefer
- O’Roark & Lewis
- Stevens
- Paw Paw & Allegan Road
- Dyer
- Markley
- Brand
- Ritter
- Armstrong Hymns
- Lockman

Topography

Higher points of elevation are found in the northwest and southeast portions of the Township. Gently rolling hills in these areas add to the character and beauty of the countryside. The highest points in the Township topographically are between 38th and 44th Avenues, east of County Road 652. These higher topographic areas also have the greatest level of residential development, likely because of the suitability of the soil for development. There are no significant areas in the Township with steep slopes (over 12% grade).

Soils



Wolf Lake

A relatively small portion of the Township's soils are considered prime for agriculture (see the Prime Farmland 2004 map, pg. 24). Most of these soils are located in sections 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, and 10 generally north and west of the north branch of the Paw Paw River. It was emphasized by the Soil Conservation District that soils in the Township are highly variable, in that there can be literally dozens of soil types in a forty-acre parcel. This is the case because glacial activity in the area mixed and deposited a large variety of materials that influenced soil types (sand, silt gravel or any combination thereof).

Wildlife



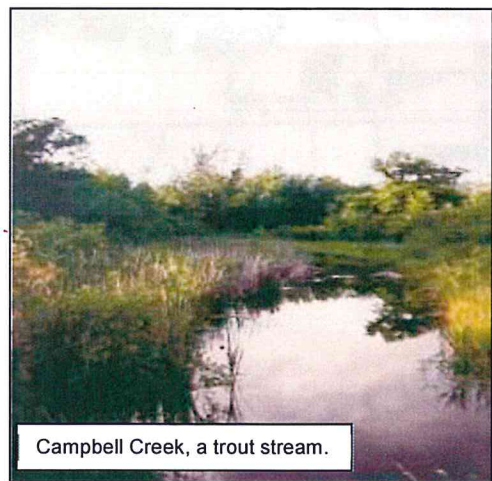
Fish Lake

The unique system of wetlands and creeks in the Township, in conjunction with the thick vegetative cover associated with them, provide important wildlife and fisheries habitats of regional significance. In fact, the north branch of the Paw Paw River and all of its tributaries are designated by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources as trout streams. In order to sustain a trout population, the water must be clean, cold and un-choked by sediment and pollution. The river, stream and wetland systems also support species of special concern including spotted gar and black redhorse fish-minnow species that are an important food source for other fish. A substantial and environmentally significant system of lakes, streams, and wetlands traverses Almena Township.

Summary

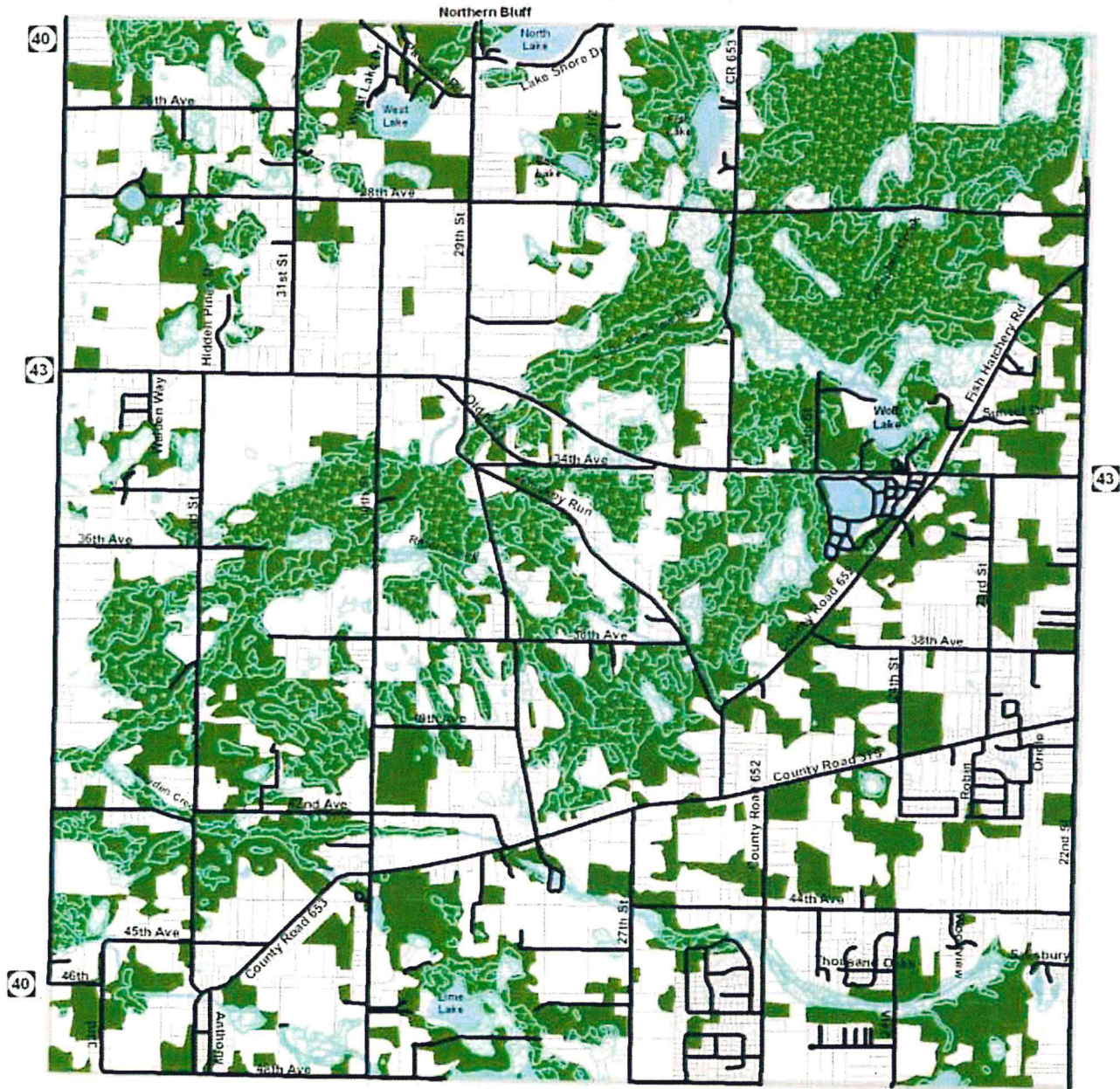
A complex system of wetlands and streams dominate the character of Almena Township. Rolling hills and woodlands also are seen in the landscape. These important elements of rural character provide critical habitat for fish and wildlife populations in the region.

As the Township makes development decisions it will be important to consider these components of the landscape, not only to retain rural character and protect wildlife habitat, but to protect surface and groundwater quality as well. Monitoring the placement and design of development is one of the most important factors in protecting natural amenities.



Campbell Creek, a trout stream.

Almena Township Van Buren County, Michigan



Natural Features

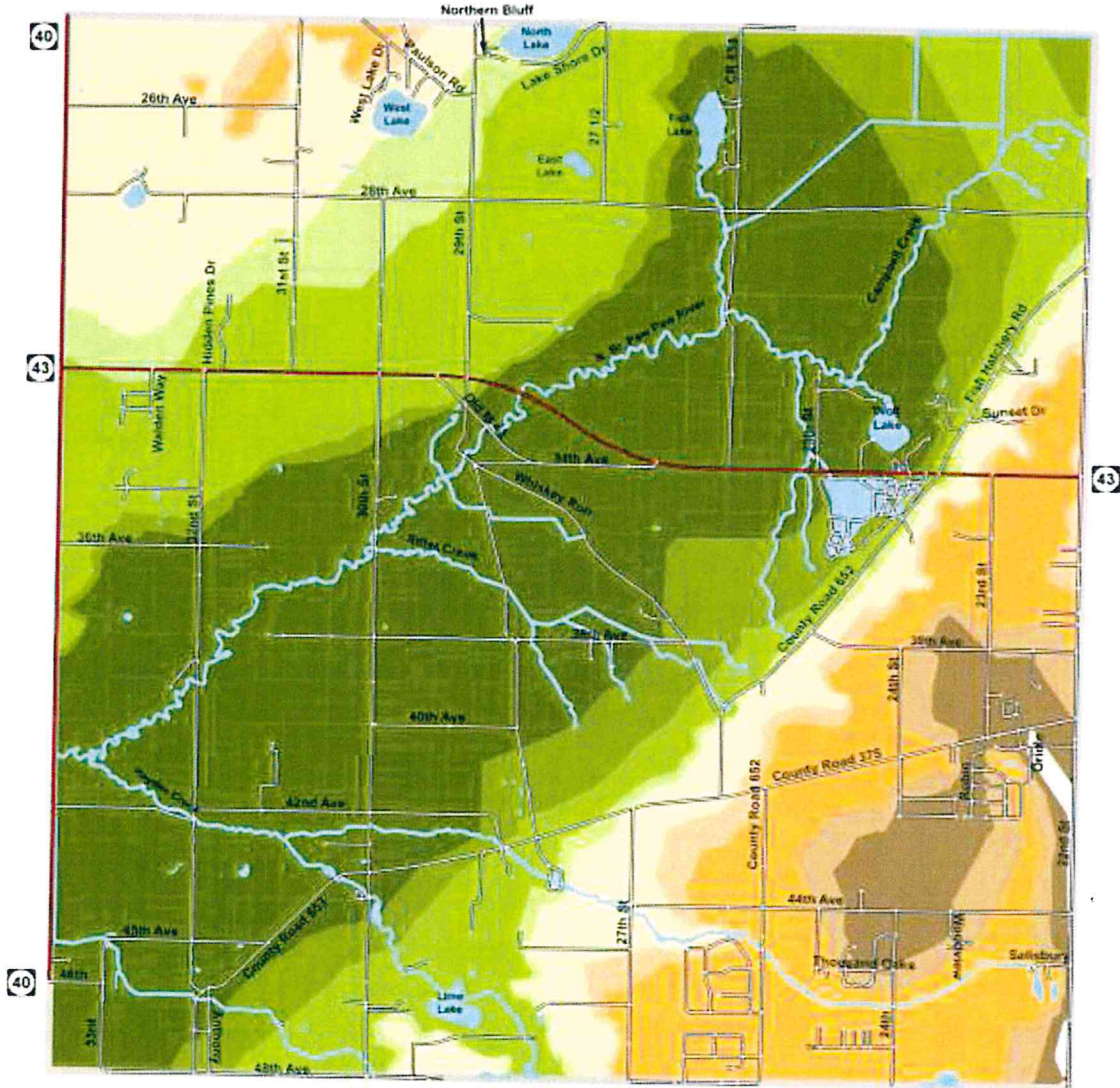
- Forests
- Wetlands
- Lakes
- Drains
- Rivers and Streams
- Roads
- Parcel Lines
- Township Boundary



LSL
Landscape Systems
Landscape Architecture Inc.

Data Source:
Base - Van Buren County

Almena Township Van Buren County, Michigan



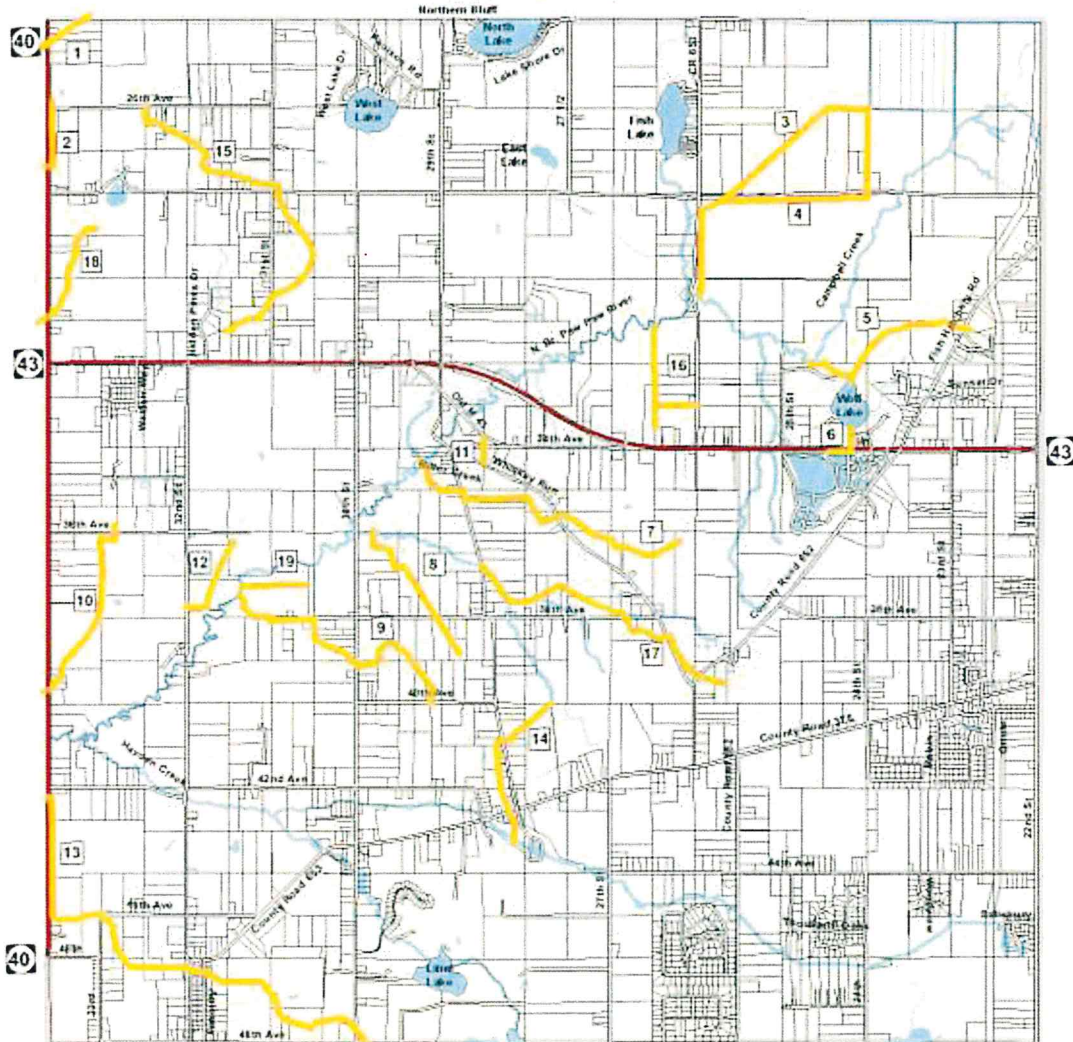
Topography



LSI
Landscape Systems, Inc.
10000 E. Grand Ave.
Suite 100
Grand Rapids, MI 49506

Data Source:
Base - Van Buren County
Topo - MIGDL

Almena Township Van Buren County, Michigan Drainage Map



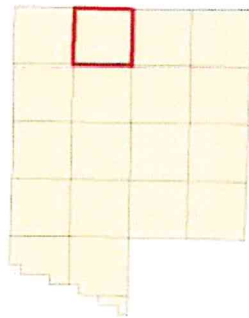
County Drains in Almena Township

- | | |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1 - Brandywine Lake | 11 - O'Roark & Lewis |
| 2 - Covey Hill | 12 - Stevens |
| 3 - Todd | 13 - Paw Paw & Allegan Road |
| 4 - Old Todd | 14 - Dyer |
| 5 - Overacker | 15 - Markley |
| 6 - Watkins & Whiskey Run | 16 - Brand |
| 7 - Olson | 17 - Ritter |
| 8 - Hudson & Slack | 18 - Armstrong Hymns |
| 9 - Hipp & Brown | 19 - Lockman |
| 10 - Shaefer | |



LSL
LAND SURVEYING
INCORPORATED
1982

T2SR13W Almena Township Prime Farmland 2003



Legend

- Lakes
- PerennialStreams
- IntermittentStreams
- County
- Townships
- Sections
- Roads

Prime Farmland

Soil Series

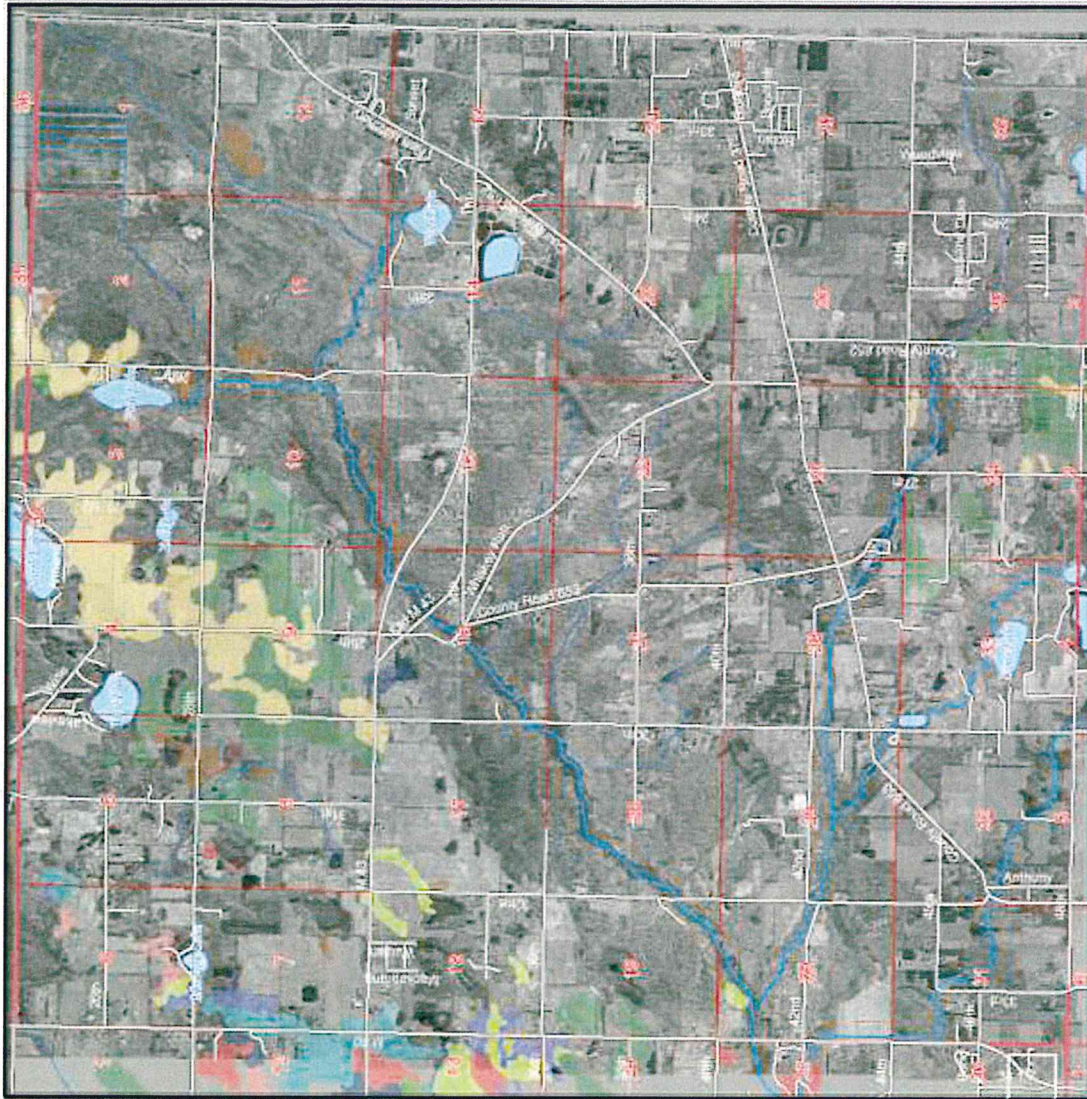
- Belleville
- Blount
- Bronson
- Carac
- Colwood
- Kalamazoo
- Maitland
- Marika
- Oshema
- Pewamo
- Ridgely
- Selfridge
- Tuscola

N
W E S

March 2006

Van Buren County GIS
2003
(268) 657-8221
www.vbco.org

Affordable custom mapping available.

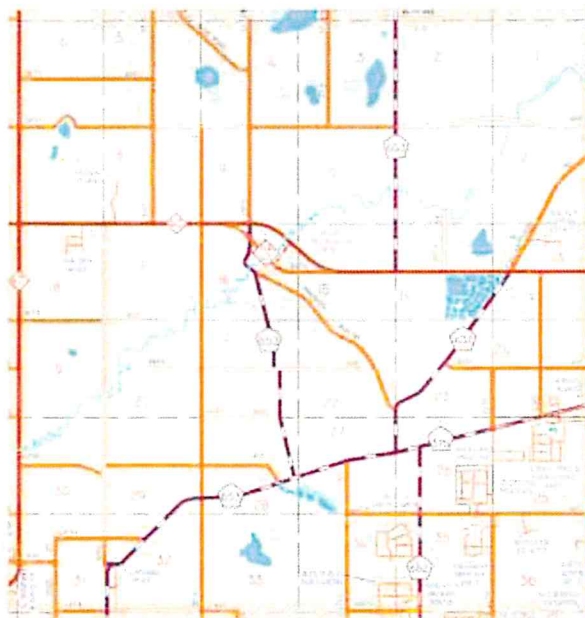


Chapter 5: Transportation

Almena’s road system is a broken grid in many areas because of the extensive creek and wetland systems in the township. Many roads that would otherwise run the entire length of the Township, end near creeks or lakes, including; 22nd Street, 25th Street, County Road 653, and 38th Avenue (see Transportation Map, pg. 28). Additionally, several roads that run diagonally through the Township were likely engineered to avoid creek systems (i.e. County Roads 375 and 652 and Whiskey Run).

The primary east/west routes through the Township are State Highway M-43, 28th Avenue, and, indirectly, County Roads 375 and 653. State Highway M-43 connects Almena west to Bangor and eventually to South Haven, serving as a major route to Lake Michigan, twenty-five miles west of the Township. The City of Kalamazoo and access to U.S. Interstate-131 is approximately six miles east of Almena’s eastern border via M-43. New Almena residents are likely migrating from suburban areas in the greater Kalamazoo area although a few may be coming from the Paw Paw and Mattawan areas.

The most direct north/south route through the Township is State Highway M-40, on the Township’s western border, and 30th Street, which stops at 28th Avenue. M-40 takes travelers north to Allegan (thirteen miles away) and eventually to Holland, or south to Paw Paw (about one mile away from the southern Township border). Interstate-94 can be accessed either via M-40 in the Village of Paw Paw, or via 24th Street in the Village of Mattawan. Red Arrow Highway is somewhat south of Almena’s southern border and can be accessed via County Roads 652 and 653, as well as 33rd, 30th, 27th, and 24th Streets. Red Arrow Highway runs almost parallel to Interstate-94. County Roads 375, 652 and 653 are classified as County primary routes.

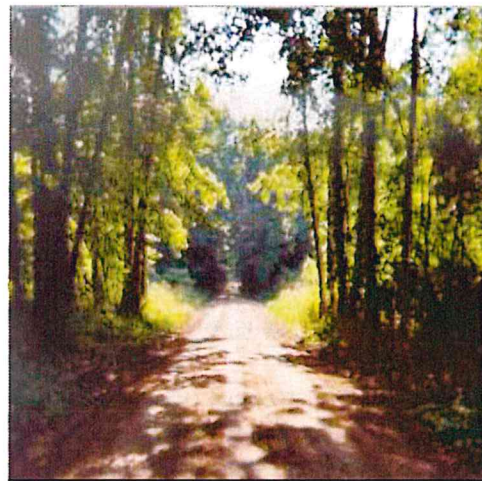


County Road Classification Map



As can be seen on the Van Buren County Road Commission map insert, most of the Township's road system is improved (paved). M-40 and M-43 are State trunk lines and designed to move the most traffic as efficiently as possible. This is why access management standards are important for any new development fronting these routes. Too many drives and poorly-designed development can choke travel routes and increase hazards to the public. Land use policies for these areas should consider such factors and discourage commercial development in strips along these corridors. Instead, well designed, consolidated areas (nodes) of development should be required to promote public safety, reduce congestion, and preserve the corridors' function as a travel route.

Traffic counts for both State Highway M-40 and M-43 have been on the rise. In the last five years the average daily traffic counts on M-40, near the M-43 intersection increased by about 15%. In 1995 the average traffic count for north and south of M-43 was about 5,900 vehicles per day. By 2002, the average for the same area was about 6,800 vehicles per day. Traffic counts are also substantially higher to the east of the Township as development densities increase on M-43 nearer Kalamazoo.



28th Avenue, a corridor that exudes rural character.

State Highway M-43 has more traffic than M-40. The average daily traffic count on M-43 for 2002 was 9,700 vehicles per day, an increase of 18.3% since 1995, when the average daily count was 8,200 vehicles per day. For County Roads, the most recent traffic counts available are from 1998. At that time, the busiest County Roads included the portions of 653 and 375 east of 30th Street, where average daily traffic was around 2,500 vehicles per day. North of M-43 both County Road 653 and 29th Street averaged around 1,200 vehicles per day. County Roads 652 and 653 averaged around 500 vehicles per day. It will be useful to monitor traffic counts into the future to track traffic trends in the Township.

After portions of County Roads 652 and 653 have been improved, the only road improvement in Almena Township scheduled by the County Road Commission is the portion of County Road 375 east of 653, to be done in the year 2006.

A major issue with any township road system is the fact that country roads, which originally served a small rural population, may not be well equipped to handle the larger traffic volumes and higher speeds that come with suburbanization. Also of particular concern in Almena are several small, substandard private roads located within the Township. Most of them are dead-end, have no turn-around area, and are of substandard design. These roads pose problems for emergency access. Several of these roads are sandy and narrow and cannot support heavy emergency vehicles or two-way traffic. Not only would an ambulance or fire truck have trouble negotiating these roads, but also they would have trouble finding a particular property because these roads are not marked and addresses are not well displayed. Further, multiple dead-end roads with no accommodations for future cross-connections will be a problem if water and sewer lines must be provided at some point in the future.

As in many rural townships, road maintenance (grading, dust control, sealing and paving) is one of the largest Township budget expenditures. Residents want washboard-free gravel and smooth, safe pavement to travel on. Ironically, paved, wide roads and cleared right-of ways built to be key commuting routes are counter to preserving rural character. For example, narrow, tree-lined gravel roads are an important element of rural character. Paving them not only irreversibly changes the face of the Township, but also spurs additional development. Continued growth will increase the demand for road improvements so development should be carefully placed and designed so as not to prematurely require road upgrades.



27 ½ Street, a rural roadside

Non-motorized Transportation

There are no on-road or off-road bicycle lanes or pathways in Almena Township, nor are there any planned in the immediate future. The Southwest Michigan Planning Commission is working with the nine counties in southwestern Michigan to develop a plan for non-motorized transportation throughout the region.

The Kal-Haven Trail, which runs from South Haven to Kalamazoo, is located just north of the Township and provides recreational opportunities for walkers, runners, cyclists, and horseback riders along certain segments. Antwerp Township to the south would like to develop access for residents to the Kal-Haven Trail. By working with Antwerp Township, Almena Township can provide access to this amenity in an efficient manner for its residents as well.

Due to the rural nature of the Township, there are no public sidewalks in the Township. Subdivisions and neighborhoods in the Township may install sidewalks as they develop.

Public Transit

Public transit service in the Township is provided by Van Buren Public Transit (VBPT). VBPT is a public, not-for-profit transportation agency providing curb-to-curb, wheelchair accessible transportation to individuals who cannot access or afford other transportation alternatives. VBPT services reflect a commitment to meeting the mobility needs of the least able as well as to promoting mobility options for all.

VBPT offers county-wide reservation service in Almena Township, and it offers dial-a-ride service in Paw Paw and South Haven.

Access to commercial bus service – Indian Trails and Greyhound – is available in Paw Paw and Kalamazoo.

Air

The Kalamazoo / Battle Creek International Airport, located in Kalamazoo, is the nearest commercial airport for residents in Almena Township. The airport has three major scheduled airlines: Delta Airlines, American Eagle, and DirectAir. Charter flights and commuter airline flights are also available from the airport.

The Township is also served by the Almena Airport, a small, public airport in the southwest portion of the Township off of 30th Street. The airport includes one turf runway and a hangar building with storage for planes and airport uses. Additional, specific information about the airport is available online in the Michigan Airport Directory from the Michigan Department of Transportation Aeronautics Commission. The location of the Almena Airport is identified on the Transportation Network Map on the following page.

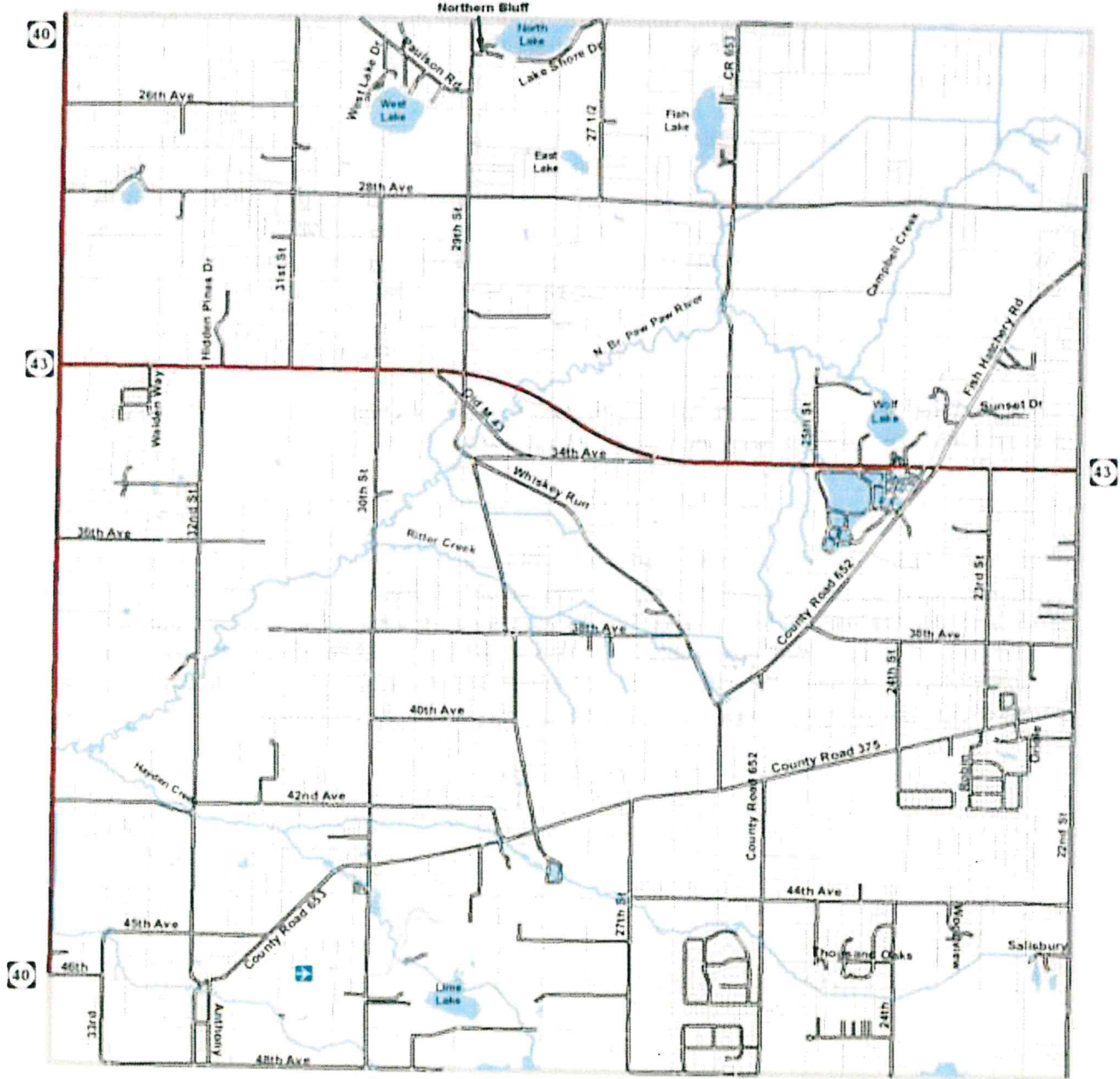
Rail

There is no rail service present in Almena Township. Amtrak commercial rail service can be accessed in Kalamazoo with service east to Detroit and west to Chicago.

Summary

While considering future growth the Township will want to keep several issues in mind. Residential development lined along public roads should be discouraged to prevent safety hazards associated with multiple drives directly accessing a County road. Access management should be strictly employed along State Highways M-40 and M-43 and along County primary roads. Private road standards and a schedule to mark and upgrade such roads should also be considered by Township leaders to prevent emergency assistance tragedies.

Almena Township Van Buren County, Michigan



Transportation Network

-  State Trunkline
-  Local Roads
-  Airport



10/31/2011



I.S.L.
 Infrastructure Solutions Limited
 10000 E. Van Buren St.
 Van Buren, MI 49881-1414

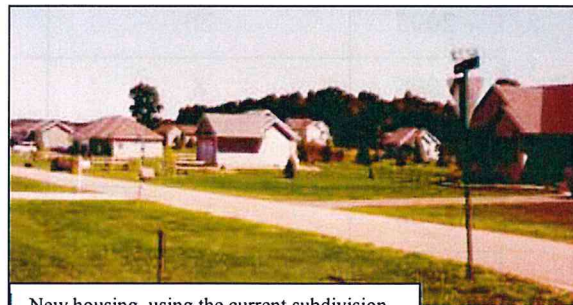
Data Source:
 Base - Van Buren County

Chapter 6: Land Use

The predominant land use in Almena Township is large unplatted lot residential development much of which is dispersed along County roadways in the form of “strip” development (see Land Use map pg. 33). Several subdivisions are located generally southeast of County Road 652 with a more located off of State Highway M-43, near M-40. Two more subdivisions are found in the southwest quadrant of the Township, one off County Road 653 and the other off 30th Street in the Heritage Glen Golf Course. The 30th Street subdivision is not a traditional large lot subdivision design in that the lots are smaller and surrounded by a golf course. The concept with this form of development is that homeowners are happy with smaller lots because they are surrounded with open space they know won’t be developed with additional homes.



New housing on smaller lots with common open space and landscaping that soften the appearance of the development.



New housing, using the current subdivision requirements with no common open space and minimal landscaping.

North Lake and Fish Lake have single-family residential development along the shoreline. Wolf and West Lakes have large lot development abutting them, but the homes are set off the waterfront because of adjacent wetlands. North Lake has the highest density development, while Lime Lake has very low-density development surrounding it. Another trend that merits monitoring is the removal of relatively small homes on smaller lakefront properties to build much larger homes. Pollution from failing or inadequate septic systems in these areas can be particularly damaging to surface waters.

Mobile homes are concentrated in two parks and one subdivision, although they occur throughout the Township on individual lots. One mobile home community is off 30th Street near County Road 653 and the other is located off State Highway M-43 near County Road 652. A mixed mobile home/modular home subdivision is located off County Road 375 at 23rd Street.

Residential development is and will likely continue to be the biggest land consumer in the Township. Between the years 2001 and 2010 a total of 306 conventional new homes and 31 manufactured homes were developed in the Township (see Table 7). In 2001 and 2002 alone, 182 single-family units were built, over 59% of the ten year total. This not only shows the impact of the housing crunch and economic downturn towards the end of that decade, but the number of permits was falling even before this time showing that growth and new development was already tapering off prior to economic pressures influencing such action.

Table 7

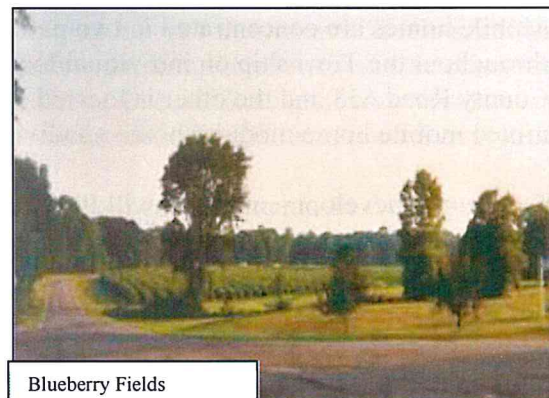
Year	Single Family Residence	Duplex	Manufactured Home
2001	93	0	3
2002	89	0	6
2003	32	0	5
2004	24	0	5
2005	20	0	5
2006	8	0	3
2007	14	0	1
2008	11	0	3
2009	5	0	0
2010	10	0	0
Total	306	0	31

Source: AGS, 2011.

The primary industry in the Township is agricultural operations. The highest concentration of agricultural uses is located in the northwest quadrant of the Township although other agricultural land uses are scattered throughout the community. Agricultural operations include several specialty operations (e.g. blueberries and greenhouses) and some dairy farms (see prime farmlands map, pg. 24).



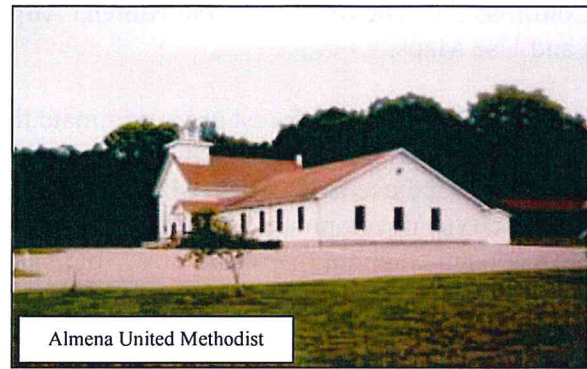
Area greenhouse



Blueberry Fields



Almena Farmers' Market

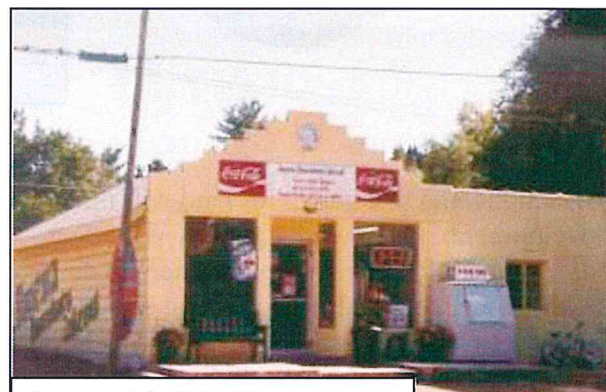


Almena United Methodist

The current commercial land use within the Township is comprised of a small number of businesses scattered along State Highway M-40 and M-43. Another small concentration of businesses is located within the Almena settlement area west of the Township Hall on County Road 653. With future population growth, additional demand for the location of commercial land uses will be directed toward these locations as environmentally appropriate. The Township is in a good position to adequately control development along State Highway M-43 since it is still relatively undeveloped. Choosing a couple of small commercial nodes within the Township will be a more efficient (and safer) land use pattern than permitting strip commercial development along M-40 or M-43. Other than the historic Township Hall, associated recreational area, and Farmers' Market, institutional land uses are limited to churches and cemeteries.



Store on M43 near M40



Downtown Take Out in Almena

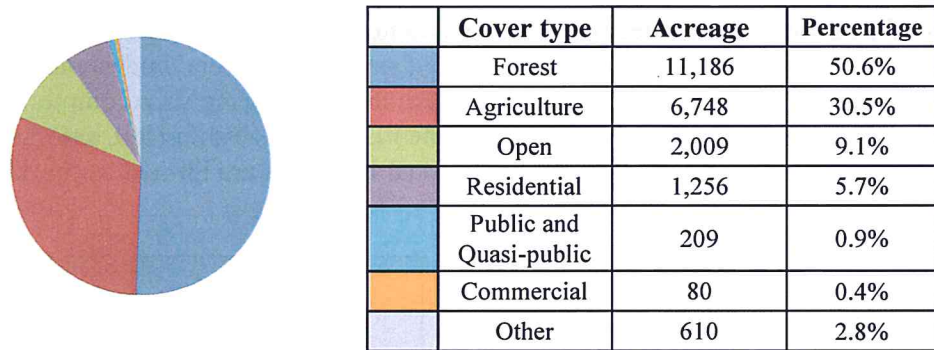
The Wolf Lake State Fish Hatchery is a sizable development located on State Highway M-43 at County Road 652, with rearing ponds that cover over 22 acres. It is also a recreational attraction. The Mary Mott Nature Preserve is located on 44th Avenue and 24th Street. Wolf and Fish Lakes both have small boat launches that provide public access. Almena Woods is not formally developed, but it is a large natural area occupying nearly one-quarter of Section 11 of the Township.

The Almena Airport, a small, public airport, is located along 30th Street south of County Road 653. The airport includes one turf runway and a hangar building with storage for planes and airport uses. Additional, specific information about the airport is available online in the Michigan Airport Directory from the Michigan Department of Transportation Aeronautics

Commission. The location of the Almena Airport is identified on both the Existing and Future Land Use Maps.

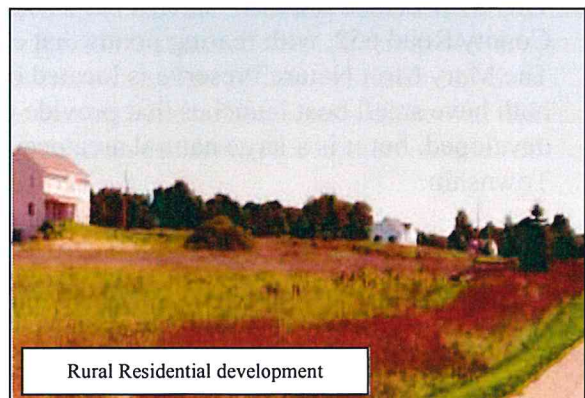
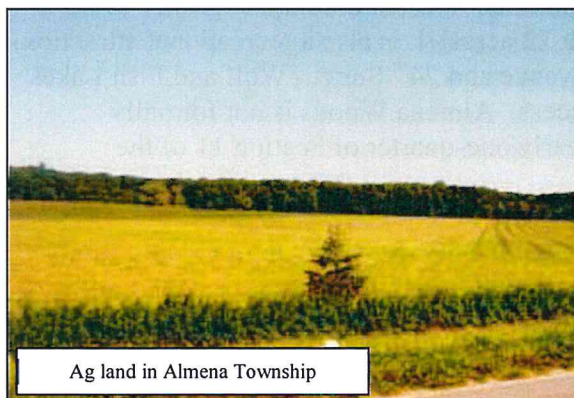
In terms of land cover, forest areas dominate the Township landscape, covering over half of its land area (see Table 8). Agriculture and open fields account for approximately 40% of Township land use/land cover. Many of the forested and open areas have housing built on them in estate-type development. Subdivisions or higher density single-family home developments have consumed about 6% of the Township’s area (about 1,256 acres). Commercial development has consumed about 80 acres, or less than one-half percent of the land base, but it is important to acknowledge that even though that is a relatively small amount of land, it can have a substantial impact on the appearance of the Township. It will be the responsibility of the Township Board and Planning Commission to assure that all future commercial development is properly located, designed and developed to minimize adverse impacts and assure the safety and function of major travel routes (i.e. State Highways M-40 and M-43).

Table 8 - 2003 Land Use and Cover



SUMMARY

The single largest demand for land will likely continue to be for single-family residential development. Commercial growth along State Highways M-40 and M-43 should be consolidated to prevent strip commercial development. Because of larger commercial development near Kalamazoo to the east, it is unlikely that the Township will need to allocate large portions of land to commercial development. Likewise, industrial development will be accommodated (and should be directed to) urbanized areas near Kalamazoo that can provide water, sewer and full-time police and fire protection.

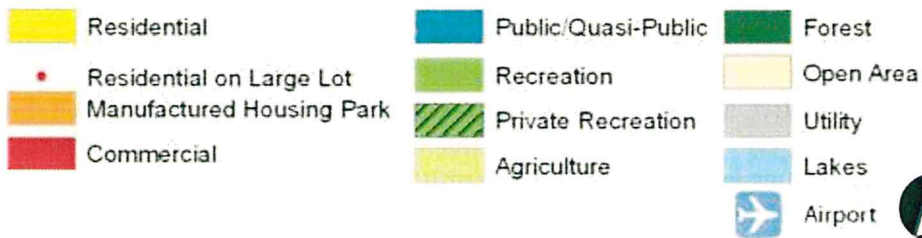


Almena Township Van Buren County, Michigan

Northern Bluff



Existing Land Use



LSI
Landscape
Solutions
Integrating
Ecology &
Infrastructure

Data Source:
Base - Van Buren County
10/31/2011

LAND USE ALTERNATIVES

Michigan townships faced with future development pressure (as is Almena) have essentially three alternatives from which they can choose. They can let development scatter across the landscape without cohesion or control. They can set strict limits on development in order to preserve farmland and natural areas. Or, they can allow for efficient and appropriate development while protecting critical and important resources in the community.

In 2006, the Township developed future land use alternatives based on each of these scenarios in an effort to determine the appropriate final future land use plan for the community. At the conclusion of this analysis, it was determined that the third scenario was the most desirable pattern for the Township. Therefore the final Future Land Use Plan and the goals and objectives were developed based on this alternative.

Five years later, the 2011 amendments to the Master Plan result in minor adjustments to the Future Land Use Plan. While these changes are not contrary to the chosen alternative, the resulting map appears different from the alternative map that resulted from the analysis. Therefore, the three alternative maps that were included in the Plan in 2006 have been removed. This will eliminate confusion as the Future Land Use Map continues to evolve through precise amendments.

TOWNSHIP LAND USE POLICY

Based on the previous analysis, assessment of surrounding community plans, and the community-wide survey, the following general land use policies were crafted to help guide future development in the Township:

Industrial development is not accommodated in the Future Land Use map of the Township at the present time due to inadequate provision of municipal water and wastewater systems proximate to the logical area for such development. Industrial development within Almena Township shall be reexamined in future updates of this Plan.

Commercial uses will be a clustered node of activity near the intersection of State Highways M-40 and M-43. Access management and design guidelines will promote an integrated area with minimum driveway access points to the State Highways. Parallel access drives, shared parking and pedestrian interconnections will mesh this commercial area together in a coherent design.

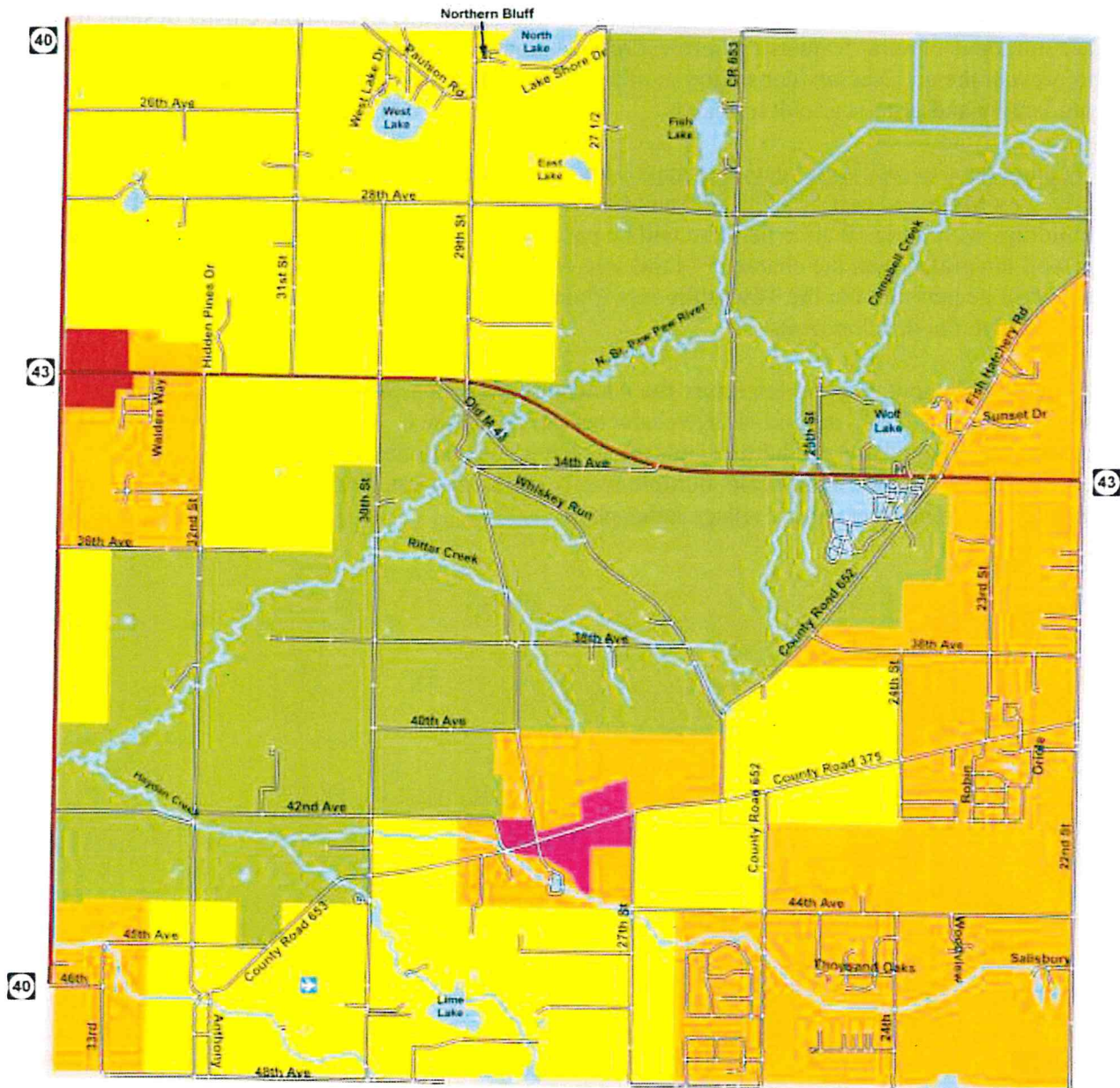
Productive and prime agricultural lands (fewer than 9 units per 40 acres) will be protected from encroachment of residential uses by promoting cluster development which is consolidated and isolated from productive agricultural areas. Rural features will also be protected through design standards and zoning criteria that prevent inefficient land splits and a land use pattern that unnecessarily consumes land. Splits will be permitted to offer some income flexibility for farmers, but splits will be directed to isolated areas and less productive soils.

Low density residential development (10-20 units per 40 acres or 2.5-5 acre minimum lot size) will be permitted in cluster developments in the remaining areas of the Township under a sliding scale concept. Design standards and incentives will be provided to promote cluster designs that accommodate natural features and protect rural character. Smaller building sites will be required to prevent the unnecessary consumption of land. Standards will be provided that protect productive and prime agricultural lands.

Medium density residential development (1 unit per acre) will be permitted south of State Highway M-43 and east of 27th Street and County Road 652. Small-scale multi-family (2-4 unit) buildings with up to 10 units per acre will be permitted in the Almena settlement area provided it is well integrated with the character of the area. Higher density development of over 10 units per acre will be permitted in the Township only if public water and sewer can be immediately extended to the development.

Almena settlement area: In the future the Almena settlement area will permit appropriately-scaled mixed uses of a unified village character and appearance. Design will be compact, pedestrian-oriented and aesthetically pleasing. Civic, recreational, neighborhood-based commercial and other small-scale multiple family and mixed-use developments will be encouraged to integrate into a village atmosphere.

Almena Township Van Buren County, Michigan



Future Land Use

- | | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agriculture/Very Low Density Residential Agriculture/Low Density Residential Agriculture/Medium Density Residential | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Commercial Node Settlement Commercial Airport |
|--|--|

10/31/2011



LSL
Landscape Services
Landscape Architecture

Chapter 7: Farmland and Open Space Preservation

INTRODUCTION

Almena Township has traditionally been defined as a rural and agricultural community. Including a variety of fertile agricultural areas, the headwaters of the Paw Paw River, and significant woodlands and wetlands, substantial natural features and farmland worthy of preservation exist in the Township. Residential development pressure has increased in recent years as growth has expanded from the Kalamazoo and Paw Paw areas. The Township's rural character along with its proximity to these employment centers have made it attractive for rural residential living. One of the goals of the Master Plan is the protection and preservation of the natural areas and resources as well as the active agricultural operations in the Township. Therefore, it is critical to include as a component of this Plan a method of protecting and preserving agricultural and open space lands.

This issue is not unique to Almena Township; many of the Townships in Van Buren County are experiencing similar threats and issues as farmers grapple with a challenging economy and residents discover the beauty of the area. To assist the communities throughout the County in addressing this, Van Buren County has enacted a Purchase of Development Rights program. Through this program, lands designated as appropriate for agricultural and open space preservation would be eligible to apply for the Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) Program from the State of Michigan. This section fulfills the requirements of Van Buren County and the State of Michigan. It explains why farmland and open space should be protected, what means will be used to protect it, and how the areas to be protected were selected. The areas to be protected are displayed on the Future Land Use Map.

DEFINITIONS – AGRICULTURAL AND OPEN SPACE LANDS

The Michigan Zoning Enabling Act, P.A. 110 of 2006, as amended, and the Farmland and Open Space Preservation Act, P.A. 116 of 1974, as amended by P.A. 262 of 2000, define *agriculture lands* as:

“ . . .substantially undeveloped land devoted to the production of plants and animals useful to humans, including, but not limited to, forage and sod crops, grains, feed crops, field crops, dairy products, poultry and poultry products, livestock, herbs, flowers, seeds, grasses, nursery stock, fruits, vegetables, Christmas trees, and other similar uses and activities.”

Open Space defined by the Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act, P.A. 451 of 1994, as amended by P.A. 262 of 2000, is land that meets at least one of the following definitions:

- Any undeveloped site included in a national registry of historic places or designated as a historic site pursuant to state or federal law,

- Riverfront ownership subject to designation under part 305, (P.A. 451 of 1994) to the extent that full legal descriptions may be declared open space under the meaning of this part, if the undeveloped parcel or government lot parcel or portions of the undeveloped parcel or government lot parcel as assessed and owned is affected by that part and lies within 1/4 mile of the river,
- Undeveloped lands designated as environmental areas under part 323, including unregulated portions of those lands,
- Any other area approved by the local governing body, the preservation of which area in its present condition would conserve natural or scenic resources, including the promotion of the conservation of soils, wetlands, and beaches; the enhancement of recreation opportunities; the preservation of historic sites; and idle potential farmland of not less than 40 acres that is substantially undeveloped and because of its soil, terrain, and location is capable of being devoted to agricultural uses as identified by the department of agriculture. ”

To a large extent, it is the Township’s responsibility to designate the specific parcels of land that meet these definitions. This has typically been based on the land that is remaining unbuildable or currently used as farmland.

FARMLAND AND OPEN SPACE PRESERVATION IN ALMENA TOWNSHIP

The concept of preserving farmland and open spaces has gained momentum in Almena Township in recent years. Prior to recent development expansion and growth, there was little need for the Township to take active measures to protect such spaces.

With increased residential growth occurring throughout Almena Township, viable agricultural land and natural areas have started to be removed. Moreover, as more residents moved to the Township, more people become concerned and interested about the natural features in the community. This increased overall knowledge base and information available about the resources and increased the importance of protecting them for the future.

Despite growth pressures, the Township has maintained a firm line that utility services such as water and wastewater are to remain private (e.g. wells and septic systems). The lack of public water or sewer infrastructure limits the potential for and density of future development.

In 2006, the Township completed a substantial review and update of the Township Master Plan. Through this process, Almena Township defined goals and objectives integral to the Township’s desired future. Farmland and open space preservation was a critical component of those goals. The Planning Commission undertook a process in 2011 to review and amend the Master Plan. Understanding the importance of the Township’s natural resources and desiring the ability to provide local farmers with economic incentives to continue to farm, the Township pursued amendments to the Plan to make the Township eligible for participation in the County program.

CREATING A FARMLAND AND OPEN SPACE PRESERVATION POLICY

During this Master Plan process, the Planning Commission has confirmed that farmland and open space preservation is an important element of future planning in Almena Township.

- **Community Vision.** The Master Plan sets forth a vision statement that identifies the desired future vision for the Township as presented through the public input process. The importance of farmland and open space to the Township is clear in this statement. The complete vision statement is the following:

Almena Township should remain an uncongested, slow-paced, rural community where residents are surrounded by peaceful elements of the natural environment. Future development should blend with the character of the natural environment rather than overpower it. Agricultural land uses should remain economically viable because they are accommodated in development design, and not overtaken by it. Intensive commercial and industrial development are not elements of Almena's future character since many neighboring communities have the facilities and services to accommodate these forms of land use. A few well-defined and conveniently located commercial nodes will provide local commercial needs for Township residents. Strip commercial development along major roads is strictly controlled. Large complexes of multi-family developments are not appropriate for the Township but rather small-scale multiple family housing will be integrated with civic and recreational development in the Almena settlement area. Major suburban infrastructure is neither needed nor anticipated in this planning cycle, but it is recognized that at some point in the next several decades, water and sewer services may be required in areas planned for residential growth.

- **Goals and Objectives.** The Goals and Objectives incorporate farmland and open space preservation as an integral element of the Township's Master Plan and, therefore, as a recognized component of the Township's desired future.
- **Public Input Process.** A comprehensive public input process completed in 2006 for the master Plan including a survey and public meetings, reflected that Almena residents and landowners place a great deal of value on the rural nature of the Township. For example, when asked what the most important issue facing the Township was, the top-ranked response was "*division of farmland and large parcels for development.*" Survey results and public forums indicated that the protection of rural character, open space and natural amenities were also very strong priorities.

REASONS TO PRESERVE TOWNSHIP FARMLAND AND OPEN SPACE

Rural Character

It has already been established that the farmland and open space in Almena Township contributes to the aesthetic appeal and character of the area. This rural character attracts people to the Township, creating demand for development, increasing property values, and benefiting the community. However, if left unchecked, uncontrolled growth and development will erode the rural character and appeal of the Township. This threat is one reason for including farmland and open space preservation as an integral component of the Township's Master Plan.

Van Buren County Agricultural Economy

Open space and agriculture remain important land uses and economic activities in Almena Township. In fact, forest lands, agricultural lands, and open space are the three most prevalent existing land uses in the Township making up over 90% of its land coverage. The US Census does not provide information documenting the value of agricultural production on a township basis. However, the amount of land dedicated to agriculture relative to other uses (i.e. commercial and industrial uses) underscores its economic importance in the community.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture, National Agriculture Statistics Service (USDA-NASS) prepares a census of agricultural statistics every five years for counties. The most recent agricultural census in Van Buren County was completed in 2007.

In 2007, there were 1,232 farms in Van Buren County, a 6% increase from 2002. Those farms covered 185,343 acres, with an average of 150 acres per farm. The market value of all products sold in 2007 was \$173,472,000, an average of \$140,805 per farm. This was the 9th highest total of all counties in the State. The County had the 4th highest total value of crops alone (not including livestock). In Van Buren County, 82% of the sales is from crops and 18% is from livestock sales.

While there has been an increase in the value of the products sold, there has been a similarly significant decrease in government payments received. (Government payments include subsidies and direct payments; payments authorized by programs such as the Conservation Reserve Program, Wetlands Reserve Program, and Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program; loan deficiency payments; disaster payments; and all other federal farm programs under which payments were made directly to farm operators.) Farmers in the County received a total of \$1,436,000 in government payments in 2007, or \$5,319 per farm. This is a 31% decrease from 2002 when County farmers received \$2,092,000.

Upon reviewing these numbers, two important trends emerge. First, the most significant statistic is the increase in farms and the significant increase in the value of products sold. Although these figures have not been adjusted for inflation, the average value of products sold per farm has increased from \$83,382 in 2002 to \$140,805 in 2007 or 69%. This far exceeds the rate of inflation during that period showing that agriculture has been a growth industry in that time and has likely driven the increase in farming in the County. Second, Van Buren County is a leading

producer of fruits, tree nuts, and berries. It is the top County in the state in terms of the value of these crops and 47th leading County in the nation. It also has the most land in berries in the State (acres) and 7th most in the nation. Considering the number of blueberry farms and fields in the Township, it would appear that current land use in the Township is consistent with that shown in the overall County results.

Recognizing the value of this land and the importance of agriculture to the County economy, Van Buren County established the Purchase of Development Rights program to provide local communities with a mechanism for the protection of these lands and this critical resource. Almena Township, as a function of its Master Plan process, agrees with the County's intent and the importance of this land while acknowledging the variety of economic challenges faced by Township farmers. Participation in the County's Purchase of Development Rights program can help Almena Township farmers manage these challenges.

Township Recognizes Importance of Agriculture

Although these statistics are for the entire County, they include and are representative of Almena Township. As a part of Van Buren County and in affirmation of the Van Buren County Purchase of Development Rights Program, the Township acknowledges the importance of agriculture in the economic and social fabric of the community. The Township's agricultural products contribute not only to the local economy but also to the agricultural related tourism industries and to the character of the Township.

Farmland, with rich soils built up over years of planting and use, are a natural resource not to be wasted or permanently lost to development. The County's Purchase of Development Rights program is beginning to address the need to protect and preserve County farmlands. This Master Plan, in conjunction with the County Purchase of Development Rights program, as well as other applicable private, state and federal programs, is seen as a significant tool in the protection of this essential community reserve.

Provides Public Benefit

Establishing a Farmland and Open Space Preservation Plan and protecting these lands will provide specific public benefits to the residents of Almena Township.

1. Retention of large blocks of farmland suitable for economically viable agricultural production purposes;
2. Retention of large blocks of open space including woodlands, wetlands, and wildlife habitat to protect the natural environment of the Township including the protection of rivers, streams, and underground aquifers;
3. Encouraging the most appropriate use of land throughout the Township;
4. Retention of the historic, rural character of the Township;

5. Lessening scattered urban sprawl development, which will lead to increased efficiencies in the provision of governmental services;
6. Increasing opportunities and incentives for young farmers to carry on the agricultural legacy important to the Township
7. Providing economic incentives to farmers to encourage continued agricultural use of their land as opposed to conversion to another use; and
8. Maintaining quality hunting, fishing, and other recreational activities.

FARMLAND AND OPEN SPACE PRESERVATION ELIGIBLE AREAS

The Master Plan designates three land use areas on the Future Land Use Map for residential development. However, considering the prevalence and importance of agricultural uses in the Township, each of these areas has been given an agricultural designation as well to reflect that agricultural uses are existing and envisioned throughout these areas. Specifics about each of these areas are included in the Land Use Chapter of this Plan. Selection of lands to be included within the eligible areas were based on the results of the Planning Commission's review and discussions on the issue, public input provided throughout the Master Planning process as well as at Planning Commission meetings, population projections, existing land use data, natural resources (including wetlands), parcel sizes and the location of prime agricultural soils.

In order to determine which lands would be eligible for the program, a considerable amount of information was utilized. The Planning Commission considered the location of ongoing agricultural operations, parcels already designated for preservation, location of prime agricultural soils, parcel sizes in agricultural areas, adjacency of large parcels in agricultural areas, natural resources including wetlands and hydric soils, existing land uses, and proximity to transportation networks and public infrastructure.

When reviewing agricultural parcels for agricultural preservation, the Planning Commission's primary goal was to protect prime, active farmland. The Planning Commission also wanted to provide a tool that could protect the Township's open space, rural character, and critical natural features. Achieving these goals within the three designated agricultural future land use areas resulted in the vast majority of these areas being established as eligible. Therefore, the Planning Commission determined that the entirety of these three agricultural land use designations (Agriculture/Very Low Density Residential, Agriculture/Low Density Residential, and Agriculture/Medium Density Residential), as depicted on the Future Land Use Map, shall be designated as appropriate for farmland preservation.

However, even though these areas may be designated as appropriate for farmland and open space preservation in the Township's Master Plan, this does not necessarily mean that an application for funding from a landowner in these areas will be approved for funding by the State. There are specific requirements for the County's Purchase of Development Rights program. Likewise, there are specific criteria associated with other government or private grant sources. Each

program's application standards and review criteria should be examined separately. The Township's prioritization of these areas for farmland and open space preservation, through the inclusion of this information in its Master Plan, however, endorses the importance of this issue in Almena Township.

The three Agricultural land use designations will also incorporate additional strategies to protect the farmland and open space resources in the Township. These will include lower densities than in other parts of the Township, cluster/open space development, infrastructure limits, and the County's PDR program. This program allows property owners within the Agricultural areas to be eligible to sell their development rights to the County using the State funds set aside for this purpose. This option makes it more economically feasible for many agricultural landowners to continue farming.

The three Agricultural areas, and therefore the areas eligible for inclusion in the Farmland and Open Space Preservation program, are shown on the Future Land Use Map.

Chapter 8: Goals, Strategies and Implementation Measures

In order for the Master Plan to be implemented successfully it must be guided by specific goals, objectives and strategies. In basic terms, community goals represent a sort of “wish list” and take the form of broad directives, which are carried out through the realization of more specific strategies. The development of goals and strategies is an interpretive process that is designed to take stated community desires and distill them into a program of action which is recorded in this Plan. The Plan must point to attainable implementation measures if the stated goals are to have a realistic expectation of being accomplished. The goals and strategies presented in this section of the Plan establish the guiding principles and priorities that will allow community decision makers to achieve Almena Township’s community vision.

Goals: overall aims, desired end situations or ideals for achievement. A goal is typically broad and long-range.

Objectives: specific targets intended to achieve the Plan’s goals and ultimately the community vision over the Master Plan’s planning horizon.

Strategies: task-oriented steps to address objectives.

COMMUNITY VISION

Public meetings (visioning), work sessions and the community-wide survey reflected that Almena residents and landowners place a great deal of value on the rural nature of the Township. For example, when asked what the most important issue facing the Township was, the top-ranked response was “*division of farmland and large parcels for development.*” Survey results and public forums indicated that the protection of rural character, open space and natural amenities were also very strong priorities. The following vision is a synthesis of the messages planners heard from community input efforts:

Almena Township should remain an uncongested, slow-paced, rural community where residents are surrounded by peaceful elements of the natural environment. Future development should blend with the character of the natural environment rather than overpower it. Agricultural land uses should remain economically viable because they are accommodated in development design, and not overtaken by it. Intensive commercial and industrial development are not elements of Almena’s future character since many neighboring communities have the facilities and services to accommodate these forms of land use. A few well-defined and conveniently located commercial nodes will provide local commercial needs for Township residents. Strip commercial development along major roads is strictly controlled. Large complexes of multi-family developments are not appropriate for the Township but rather small-scale multiple family housing will be integrated with civic and recreational development in the Almena settlement area. Major suburban infrastructure is neither needed nor anticipated in this planning cycle, but it is recognized that at some point in the next several decades, water and sewer services may be required in areas planned for residential growth.

GOAL CATEGORIES

The following goal categories were developed to help foster and implement Almena's vision:

1. Agricultural / Open Space Preservation
2. Natural Features and the Environment
3. Residential Growth and Development
4. Commercial and Industrial Growth and Development
5. Almena Settlement Area
6. Transportation
7. State Highway M-40 and M-43 Corridors
8. Parks and Recreation

1. Agricultural/Open Space Preservation

Goal: Help protect agricultural land, open spaces and natural features from encroachment and the negative affects of development.

Objectives and Strategies:

- a. Separate higher density development and consumptive land uses from agricultural land and sensitive natural areas.
 - Create a hierarchy of residential zoning districts which have alternative density limits.
 - Create an agricultural preservation district.
 - Devise design guidelines that create buffers to protect agricultural lands and natural features from encroachment.
- b. Promote clustering of development, design flexibility and innovation that protects natural amenities and open space.
 - Develop zoning incentives to promote rural clustering and creative design in residential developments. Bonus densities should be provided for such things as additional open space, private recreational opportunities, or providing connections to adjacent greenways.
 - Provide zoning options for land divisions that allow smaller lot splits in exchange for preserving larger tracts of parent parcels for agriculture and open space preservation.
 - Streamline the approval process for cluster developments to make them an attractive option to developers.

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- Implement zoning techniques that prevent a proliferation of subdivisions in areas ill-suited for suburban densities.
 - Consider developing a sliding scale zoning district in areas that still have active farming and in existing rural areas with low densities to prevent the development of subdivisions in areas ill-suited for them.
- c. Support the desires of large acreage property owners who wish to keep their land in agricultural production or as natural areas.
- Support programs that promote and facilitate the transfer or donation of development rights.
 - Provide buffer areas around active agricultural operations to prevent conflicts with surrounding land uses and minimize the development of conflicting land uses in adjoining areas.
- d. Permit use flexibility for active farms to help keep them economically viable.
- Provide zoning options for land divisions that allow smaller lot splits in exchange for preserving larger tracts of parent parcels for agriculture and open space preservation.
 - Advocate and continue participation in a County-based “purchase of development rights” (PDR) program.
 - Proactively work with property owners to help educate them about development alternatives so they are aware of preferred development choices should they contemplate development.
 - Institute zoning regulations that permit farm-based tourism (markets, processing, etc.) and home-based occupations to help keep farms economically viable.
- e. Promote a Township-wide network of greenways, non-motorized trails and open space areas.
- Work with area conservation groups to educate large property owners about non-regulatory incentives for preserving wildlife habitat and open spaces (including conservation easements).
 - Help develop greenways throughout the Township by coordinating the interconnection of open spaces between parcels in development reviews.
 - Inventory in more detail the natural features, prime agricultural lands and public lands within the Township for reference by property owners and developers.

- f. Inventory and recognize productive or prime agricultural lands and natural features as a first step in any development.
 - Amend the zoning ordinance to require a natural features inventory as part of the site plan review process.

2. Natural Features and the Environment

Goal: Protect and preserve sensitive natural resources and the natural features that are important components of the Township's rural character.

Objectives and Strategies:

- a. Protect surface and groundwater quality in the Township.
 - Amend the subdivision control ordinance to include innovative design standards that protect natural features and site amenities.
 - Encourage the re-establishment of wetlands as opportunities arise.
 - Adopt groundwater protection standards to implement via the site plan review process.
- b. Promote special consideration of natural features such as flood plains, wetlands, slopes, wood lots, water features, in development proposals.
 - Inventory the Township's natural resource features.
 - Enact zoning ordinance regulations that prohibit the clearing or grading of land without proper zoning approvals.
 - Augment site plan review, planned unit development, and other design review criteria of the zoning ordinance to specifically address the protection of natural features such as woodlands, landmark trees, rolling topography, wetlands, etc.
 - Amend and update the subdivision control ordinance to include design standards that protect natural features and site amenities.
- c. Identify and regulate land uses and development practices that have the potential to contaminate surface water and groundwater.
 - Enact stormwater management standards that prevent direct discharge of storm or melt water into surface water.
 - Limit the amount of impermeable surface in new developments by:

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- Placing limits on the amount of a site that can be covered by impermeable surfaces.
 - Providing buffers between paved areas and wetlands or surface waters.
 - Permitting deferred parking.
 - Instituting maximum parking standards.
 - Encouraging the use of alternative parking lot surfaces.
- Enact anti-keyholing or funneling regulations along water bodies.
 - Require the establishment of water and sewer special assessment districts as part of any new development.
 - Investigate septic maintenance standards (e.g., point of sale inspections).
 - Promote the use of non-phosphorus fertilizers for waterfront properties.
- d. Decrease development densities to levels consistent with the loading capabilities of area soils.
- Designate areas with a high water table and poor permeability for low density, low intensity development.
- e. Require development designs that recognize and complement rural character.
- Augment site plan review, planned unit development, and other design review criteria of the zoning ordinance to specifically address the protection of natural features like woodlands, landmark trees, rolling topography, wetlands, etc.
 - Amend and update the subdivision control ordinance to include design standards which protect natural features and site amenities.
- f. Help identify and protect sensitive wildlife habitat.
- Create buffer areas adjacent to Township streams in which physical disruptions are limited.
 - Encourage the re-establishment of wetlands as opportunities arise.
 - Consider wildlife travel corridors while evaluating development proposals.
 - Develop beautification routes along Township roads.
 - Map sensitive wetland areas with more specificity and develop an overlay zoning district that provides additional protective measures for these areas (e.g., increased setbacks to buffer such areas).

3. Residential Growth and Development

Goal: Guide and direct residential development to appropriate locations within the Township at appropriate densities and using design considerations that preserve rural character and agricultural lands.

Objectives and Strategies:

- a. Determine optimal locations for future residential development giving special consideration to agricultural preservation, environmental protection, and open space preservation.
 - Start a capital improvement investment fund for future infrastructure needs.
 - Proactively educate and provide technical support to large acreage property owners to educate them with respect to preferred development designs.
 - Restrict higher density residential development (over ten units per acre) to areas likely to eventually have sewer service.
 - Institute zoning regulations that promote rural clustering, open space developments and conservation easements that help preserve large tracts of open space or active agricultural lands.
- b. Provide for residential districts with variable densities to prevent subdivisions in areas not well suited for them.
 - Provide zoning districts with variable lot sizes.
 - Consider maximum lot sizes in various areas of the Township to prevent the consumption of land marked for higher levels of development.
 - Limit higher density residential development (over 2 units per acre) to areas adjacent to similar developments already in the Township or encourage it outside the Township where infrastructure already exists to support it.
 - Promote mixed land uses in the Almena settlement area by permitting second floor apartments in small-scale commercial and service buildings.
 - Maintain an understanding of emerging septic system technology and group-system technology that could impact the placement and maintenance of development on sites with limited soil suitability for traditional septic fields.
- c. Encourage residential development that is of a scale and design that blends well with adjacent land use and existing natural features.

- Consider a maximum lot size in areas where agricultural and open space preservation is most critical.
- Institute zoning regulations that encourage rural clustering, open space developments and conservation easements which help preserve large tracts of open space or active agricultural land.
- Promote limited multi-family development (2-4 unit residential dwellings or apartments over small storefronts) in or immediately adjacent to the Almena settlement area.
- Prevent inefficient land divisions that can preempt thoughtful design or limit future development options with specific ordinance standard and public education.

4. Commercial and Industrial Growth and Development

Goal: Consider commercial development at appropriate locations within the Township. For the term of this plan direct the location of industrial land use demand to existing areas of industrial growth in surrounding communities that have the necessary infrastructure to support it.

Objectives and Strategies:

- a. Utilize the “node location concept” to provide appropriate land for commercial development and to consolidate existing commercial development along State Highways M-40 and M-43.
 - Direct commercial land uses toward planned commercial nodes near the intersection of M-40 and M-43 to avoid strip-commercial sprawl along Township corridors.
 - Rezone commercial properties along M-43 in total or in part when such properties are determined to contain wetland or floodplain areas in order to protect environmentally sensitive areas contained on such properties (e.g., rezone to an agricultural or wetland overlay district).
- b. Permit an appropriate amount of commercial land use deemed necessary to support the current and projected population within the immediate Almena settlement area.
 - Promote mixed land uses by permitting appropriately sized commercial development and the location for other public and private neighborhood service providers.
- c. Establish design standards for new commercial developments that address elements of rural character.

- Require new commercial development design to reflect the rural character of the Township. Provide for:
 - buildings and parking areas of limited size
 - parking at the rear of sites,
 - “build to” lines for building front setbacks.
 - limited signage and controlled lighting.

- d. In the near term encourage the location of industrial development outside the Township where adequate public infrastructure, utilities and close proximity to major transportation routes (US-131 and I-94) are provided.
 - In order to evaluate inclusion of specific industrial zoning districts within the Township as part of the next Master Plan update, begin the study of public infrastructure that would be necessary to support them.
 - Enact design standards that address signs, lighting, parking and loading, access management, screening and landscaping.
 - Ensure that commercial uses in consolidated nodes are properly buffered from adjacent residential uses.
 - Incorporate performance guarantees into zoning approvals to ensure development meets design standards.

5. Almena Settlement Area

Goal: Promote the historic Almena settlement area as an important part of the Township’s identity.

Objectives and Strategies:

- a. Permit a small urban complex that presents a unique character of rural scale and origin.
 - Adopt design standards for the Almena settlement area that promote a rural community character.
 - Devise an overlay or settlement district which permits mixed uses in a Village setting that would allow residential options, small service- and retail-oriented businesses, and rural-based cultural and recreational activities.

- b. Develop the Almena settlement as a focal point within the Township.
 - Develop facilities that promote the area as a place to gather.
 - Provide programming for recreational activities.

- Make the Township Hall, Historic Town Hall and associated recreational area a place for civic and social activities.
- c. Preserve the area's vitality and function as the Township's historical center.
- Develop facilities that promote the area as a place to gather.
 - Develop design standards for structures and the streetscape to promote the Village design concept.
- d. Promote the functional integration of the Almena settlement area with surrounding land uses and existing street networks.
- Develop facilities that promote the area as a place to gather.
 - Promote pedestrian access throughout the settlement area to functionally connect development.
 - Provide traffic-calming designs to promote non-vehicular travel in the settlement area including reduced traffic speeds, cross walks and streetscape guidelines.

6. Transportation

Goal: Control access, land use options, and development densities along corridors to prevent congested strip development that undermines the traffic-carrying function of the Township's roadways.

Objectives and Strategies:

- a. Provide convenient neighborhood commercial nodes of up to fifteen acres per node that serve the needs of the Township but do not serve a regional population.
- Develop a gateway concept to define commercial areas in the Township.
 - Ensure compatibility between intensities of land use and ability of the individual thoroughfares to support anticipated traffic flows and access patterns.
- b. Work with the County Road Commission to develop a street improvement plan to coordinate projects with the existing street system and ensure that road improvements and access management efforts are coordinated.
- c. Promote cross connections among commercial and mixed-use properties along Township roads to prevent traffic congestion and preserve the function of the township roadways.
- Identify areas where traffic calming mechanisms should be employed, including policies not to pave existing gravel roads.

- Limit curb cuts along the Almena settlement area to control vehicular access.
- d. Re-evaluate private road standards to prevent future problems with providing public services and connecting street networks.
- Require connections between properties to prevent a series of dead-end roads that cause circulation problems, public service issues, and public safety concerns.

7. State Highway M-40 and M-43 Corridors

Goal: Create attractive and uncongested corridors that maintain their primary function of efficiently and safely moving relatively large amounts of traffic.

- a. Prohibit “strip” commercial development. Strip commercial development is lined along a street. Properties are not connected to neighboring businesses and each has its own separate driveway onto a busy road. This development pattern is associated with congested and inconvenient development.
- Enact access management regulations that address such issues as drive spacing, shared parking, and parallel- or rear-access drives.
 - Predetermine appropriate curb cut areas for shared driveways and require that access be shared among properties.
 - Increase setback requirements for properties fronting M-40 and M-43 to allow for the development of parallel access drives in order to prevent having to enter the major roadway to patronize a neighboring business.
- b. Re-evaluate commercial zoning along the central area of M-43. This area is not well suited for commercial uses because of a high water table and woodlot areas.
- c. Enhance the aesthetics of both corridors by protecting woodlots, natural topography and views.
- d. Require substantial landscaping and buffer areas along the roadway to prevent the development of a suburban character.
- e. Increase the setbacks along these corridors to provide adequate areas for parallel access drives and landscape buffers.
- f. Accentuate township entry points along M-40 and M-43 as community gateways.

8. Parks and Recreation

Goal: Plan for and develop active and passive outdoor recreational facilities to meet the needs of existing and future Township residents.

Objectives and Strategies:

- a. Maintain the *Parks and Recreation Plan* to provide an organizational structure, planning and funding framework for appropriate recreational amenities in the township and to continue to identify township resources and recreational needs.
 - Incorporate a trail and greenways scheme (with map) that connects designated open space and public lands or recreational facilities.
 - Identify township resources and recreational needs.
- b. Work with residential developers to set aside suitable portions of land for neighborhood parks and road easements for pedestrian/bicycle paths as development occurs.
 - Amend the zoning ordinance and land subdivision ordinance to enable set-aside requirements for residential development proposals.
 - Work with property owners to obtain easements for greenway development (some for wildlife and some for non-motorized trails).
- c. Augment open spaces and trail ways with appropriate public amenities.
 - Develop a system of historic and natural interpretive plaques throughout public lands and greenways.
- d. Maintain the Almena Township land at 28th Ave., known as Almena Woods, as a wildlife and public recreation area.

ZONING PLAN

This section outlines the zoning plan for the Township. It includes a brief explanation of the relationship between the Master Plan and the Zoning Ordinance. The zoning districts in the Township are described and their relationship to the Master Plan discussed along with recommended changes to the Zoning Ordinance to integrate new land use designations.

What is a Zoning Plan?

A “zoning plan” is required by the Michigan Planning and Zoning Enabling Acts. Section 33(d) of the Michigan Planning Enabling Act, PA 33 of 2008, as amended, requires that the plan prepared under this act, serve as the basis for the zoning plan. The Michigan Zoning Enabling Act, PA 106 of 2006, as amended, requires a zoning plan be prepared as the basis for the zoning ordinance. It must be based on an inventory of conditions pertinent to zoning in the municipality and the purposes for which zoning may be adopted (as described in Section 201 of the Michigan Zoning Enabling Act). The zoning plan identifies the zoning districts and their purposes, as well as the basic standards proposed to control the height, area, bulk, location, and use of buildings and premises in the Township. These matters are regulated by the specific terms in the zoning ordinance.

Relationship to the Master Plan

The Master Plan sets forth the vision, goals, objectives and policies for growth and development in the Township for approximately the next twenty years. It includes guidelines and strategies for managing growth and change in land uses and infrastructure over this period, and, as required by statute, will be periodically reviewed and updated at least once each five years. This section is intended to guide the implementation of this Plan through future changes to the Township Zoning Ordinance.

Districts and Dimensional Standards

The following table describes each of the zoning districts, its purpose, and each district’s relationship to a Master Plan designation. The zoning plan is followed by the dimensional requirements from the zoning ordinance. In each case, only a summary of the text and standards from the ordinance is provided, and this should not be considered a substitute for the ordinance language. Greater detail and the official standards are provided in the ordinance. Also, see the Township Zoning Ordinance for the official Township Zoning Map.

Zoning District	Purpose	Future Land Use Plan Designation
AG - Agricultural	The intent of this district is to implement “Township Land Use Policy” expressed in the Almena Township Master Plan specifically to protect productive and prime farmland “from encroachment of residential uses by promoting cluster development which is consolidated and isolated from productive agricultural areas. Rural features will also be protected through design standards and zoning criteria that prevent insufficient land splits and a land use pattern that unnecessarily consumes land. Splits will be permitted to offer some flexibility for farmers, but splits will be directed to isolated areas and less productive soils”.	Agriculture / Very Low Density Residential

Zoning District	Purpose	Future Land Use Plan Designation
	<p>This district is applicable to those areas of the Township which are designated on the Almena Township Master Plan Future Land Use Map for farmland protection and preservation through either self-imposed development limitation action by the property owner; a Federal, State, County, or Township program; or through volunteer land owner dedication to an eligible not-for-profit land conservancy.</p> <p>The AG Agricultural District is primarily composed of large tracks of productive and temporarily fallow farmland and ancillary open land areas and wooded lands. The regulations are intended to retain, insofar as is practicable and desirable, the agricultural use and open character of this land. It is also the purpose of this district to permit those uses customarily considered agricultural operations provided such agricultural uses are compliant with Michigan Department of Agriculture approved Generally Accepted Agricultural Management Practices (GAAMPS) and minimize the impact upon the natural resources of the Township.</p> <p><i>Permitted Principal Uses:</i> general and specialized farming, livestock production facilities (less than 50 units), single-family dwellings, public and private stables, farm related activities, stands for retail sales of fruits and vegetables, accessory buildings and uses, minor home occupations, outdoor swimming pools, outdoor kennels, essential services, adult foster care family care home, family child day care home, foster family home and foster family group home</p> <p><i>Special Land Uses:</i> freestanding towers associated with farms, farm related businesses, livestock production facilities (more than 50 units), utility and public service buildings, accessory buildings and uses, major home occupations, air plane landing strips, public and private recreation and conservation areas, mobile home for aged and infirmed, mineral removal, and group child day care home</p>	
<p>AGLD – Agricultural Low Density</p>	<p>The intent of the Agricultural Low Density District is to provide an area in the Township where single-family homes and farming operations can be located. The purpose of this district is to implement “Township Land Use Policy” expressed in the Almena Township Master Plan specifically to permit low density residential development “permitted in cluster developments in the remaining areas of the Township under a sliding scale concept. Design standards and incentives will be provided to promote cluster designs that accommodate natural features and protect rural character. Smaller building sites will be required to prevent the unnecessary consumption of land. Standards will be provided that protect productive and prime agricultural lands.” (See Master Plan page 39).</p> <p>This district includes mini-farms where the agricultural use of the land coincides with the use of the land for a single-family homes and related uses.</p> <p>The regulations are intended to retain, insofar as is practicable and desirable, the agricultural and open character of this district. It is also the purpose of this district to permit those uses customarily considered</p>	<p>Agriculture / Low Density Residential</p>

Zoning District	Purpose	Future Land Use Plan Designation
	<p>agricultural operations provided such agricultural uses are compliant with Michigan Department of Agriculture approved Generally Accepted Agricultural Management Practices (GAAMPS) and minimize the impact upon the natural resources of the Township.</p> <p><i>Permitted Uses:</i> single-family dwellings, PUD, farms, stands for retail sale of fruits and vegetables, accessory buildings and uses, minor home occupations, swimming pools, kennels for dogs, essential services, adult foster care family homes, family child day care homes, foster family homes, foster family group homes</p> <p><i>Special Land Uses:</i> Utility and public service buildings, major home occupations, houses of worship, cemeteries, golf courses, livestock production facilities (less than 50 units), group child day care homes, mobile home as accessory use for aged and infirmed, and mineral removal</p>	
<p>AGMD – Agricultural Medium Density</p>	<p>The intent of the Agricultural Medium Density District is to provide an area in the Township where small scale farming activities can continue and also allow for higher density single-family residential homes (those on smaller lots), two-family duplex dwelling units and other multi-family types of dwelling unit configurations.</p> <p>This district includes mini-farms where the agricultural use of the land is coordinated with the use of the land for a single and multi-family homes and related uses.</p> <p>The purpose of this district is to implement “Township Land Use Policy” expressed in the Almena Township Master Plan specifically to permit medium density residential development “south of State Highway M-43 and east of 27th Street and County Road 652.”</p> <p><i>Permitted Uses:</i> single-family dwellings, two-family dwellings, PUD (which may include multi-family dwellings), farms, farm stands for retail sales of fruits and vegetables, accessory buildings and uses, minor home occupations, swimming pools, kennels for dogs, essential services, adult foster care family homes, family child day care homes, foster family homes, and foster family group homes.</p> <p><i>Special Land Uses:</i> utility and public service buildings, major home occupations, livestock production facilities (no more than 50 animal units), group child day care home, adult foster care small group & large group homes, mobile home as accessory use for the aged and infirmed, and mobile home parks</p>	<p>Agriculture / Medium Density Residential</p>
<p>AS – Almena Settlement District</p>	<p>The purpose of the AS Almena Settlement Zoning District is to provide residential and certain types of commercial land uses for the area which historically served as the commercial center of the Township and which over time will continue to develop with a mixture of commercial, single-family and mixed-use commercial and residential development. This area is defined in the Township Master Land Use Plan and is shown on the Zoning Map. Because of the current pattern of small parcel sizes, the</p>	<p>Almena Settlement</p>

Zoning District	Purpose	Future Land Use Plan Designation
	<p>minimum size and lot frontage of future lots and parcels will be determined so that they can sustain healthful and sanitary on-site wastewater disposal or potentially support a shared water supply and/or sanitary sewer and wastewater disposal system as well as remain compatible with adjacent and nearby existing buildings and structures.</p> <p>The purpose of this district is to implement “Township Land Use Policy” expressed in the Almena Township Master Plan specifically to permit medium density residential development in the Almena settlement area provided it is well integrated with the character of the area. In the future, the Almena settlement area will permit appropriately scaled mixed uses of a unified village character and appearance. Design will be compact, pedestrian-orientated and aesthetically pleasing. Civic, recreational, neighborhood-based commercial and other small-scale multiple family and mixed-use developments will be encouraged to integrate into the village atmosphere.” (See Master Plan page 39).</p> <p>The general goals of this district are to encourage commercial and residential land uses of the size and intensity of development that will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Retain the historic character and identity of future development in this area by encouraging new development to have a similar architectural style of existing buildings and structures. B. Encourage mixed-use developments that allow for commercial enterprises to be housed with dwelling units, in a single structure especially where the business owner is the occupant of the dwelling unit. C. Limit the size of the commercial building space to reduce the amount of vehicular traffic, need for off-site parking and on-site stormwater storage. D. Encourage use of private, community water, wastewater and stormwater systems including joint use of off-site parking when more than one (1) parcel of land is developed by an individual or multiple developers or property owners. E. Encourage a higher level of site amenities for new development, including sidewalks or pathways interconnecting businesses, landscaping, uniform signage, on-site lighting, street furniture and other features designed for customer convenience and use. F. Require site plan approval for all new development including review of architectural facade plans by the Planning Commission and Township Board to assure the continuation of the goals of this zoning district. <p><i>Permitted Uses:</i> Single family detached dwellings, two-family attached dwellings, PUD, commercial businesses and services less than 5,000 square feet in size, swimming pools, kennels for dogs, minor home occupations, accessory buildings and uses, adult foster care family home,</p>	

Zoning District	Purpose	Future Land Use Plan Designation
	<p>family child day care home, foster family home, and foster family group home.</p> <p><i>Special Land Uses:</i> Utility and public service buildings, major home occupations, houses of worship, cemeteries, group child day care home, mobile home as an accessory use for the aged and infirmed</p>	
C – Commercial	<p>The intent of the C-1, C-2 and C-3 Commercial Districts is designed to provide designated areas within the Township for servicing the needs of Township residents and includes single use buildings, shopping centers, offices and related buildings developed on a single site or on multiple parcels. The location of these districts may encompass one (1) or more individual properties and will typically be located at nodes of traffic and activity in the Township, as identified in the Township Master Plan. At times, these areas may include feeder roads to move traffic from the state or county collector to internal parking areas of individual business establishments. In the Commercial Districts, site design standards are to be observed that assure protection of adjacent properties in other zones from adverse influences of traffic, outdoor delivery areas serving individual businesses and on-site illumination, either parking/driveway lighting or from on-site signage.</p> <p>The purpose of this district is to implement “Township Land Use Policy” expressed in the Almena Township Master Plan specifically to promote commercial uses that “will be a clustered node of activity near the intersection of State Highway M-40 and M-43. Access management and design guidelines will promote an integrated area with minimum driveway access points to the State Highways. Parallel access drives, shared parking and pedestrian interconnections will mesh this commercial area together in a coherent design.” (See Master Plan page 39).</p> <p>The general goals of this district include, among others, the following specific purposes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. To promote the most desirable use of land in accordance with a well-considered plan of development and to take advantage of major highways, roads and utilities. B. To protect the character and established patterns of adjacent development. C. To conserve the value of land and buildings and other structures, and to protect the Township’s tax revenue. D. To provide sufficient space, in appropriate locations, to meet the needs of the Township’s expected future commercial/retail economy, including multi-tenant shopping centers, housing, retail, service, office and related businesses. E. To protect abutting non-commercial districts by separating them from commercial and retail activities. 	Commercial Node

Zoning District	Purpose	Future Land Use Plan Designation
	<p><i>Permitted Uses:</i> C-1 – retail businesses, medical and dental offices, artisan studios, post office and governmental office buildings, farms; C-2 – uses in C-1, large multi-good retail establishments, manufacture and assembly of products in combination with retail sales; C-3 – uses in C-1 and C-2, hotels and lodging, restaurants; off-street parking, PUD, additions, accessory structures and uses, other similar uses</p> <p><i>Special Land Uses:</i> compatible special use, new single family detached dwelling unit, mixed use development, temporary and permanent outdoor flea market, livestock production facilities (less than 50 units), adult foster care family home, family child day care home, foster family home, foster family group home, group child day care home, child day care center</p>	

Zoning District	Maximum Density (acres per unit)	Min. Lot Area (acres / sq. ft.)	Min. Frontage (ft.)	Max. Lot Coverage (%)	Min. Yard and Setback Requirements (ft.)			Max. Height (ft.)	Min. Building Size (sq. ft.)
					Front Yard	Side Yards	Rear Yard		
AG	5	2	165	20	83	20	25	35	1,000
AGLD	3	1.5	145	30	83	20	25	35	1,000
AGMD	2	1	125	30	83	20	25	35	800
WR	---	0.75	125	40	83	5-20	100 or 25	35	800
AS	---	14,000 sf	90	80	53	10	10	35	800
C1	---	1	165	50	83	20	25	35	5,000 (max)
C2	---	1	165	50	83	20	25	35	10,000 (max)
C3	---	1	165	50	83	20	25	35	10,000 (min)
I	---	2	165		83	20	25		
CR	See Article XIII – Corridor Overlay Zoning District								
AP	See Article XIV – Airport Overlay District								
PUD	See Article XV – Planned Unit Development Overlay District								

***Please see Zoning Ordinance and specifically Article XI for more detailed information and additional requirements including footnotes that provide exceptions or additional requirements for certain districts. This is just a summary of requirements and not a complete list of all of the requirements.

There are a few Zoning Districts that were not designated on the charts above. These districts are discussed here:

ZONING DISTRICTS

- **Waterfront Residential** – The Waterfront Residential zoning district is provided in the Zoning Ordinance and on the Zoning Map in areas of existing high density development along several lakes in the Township. The intent of the district is to provide for the use and development of the existing parcels while protecting the adjacent natural resources. The Master Plan may be amended in the future to include these parcels to demonstrate areas along waterfront for development as desired.
- **Industrial** – The Zoning Ordinance provides for an industrial district. However, the industrial district does not appear on the zoning map or the future land use map. At this time, it is not envisioned that further industrial development will occur in the Township in the future. However, should market or infrastructure conditions change, the zoning is in place to accommodate the industrial uses.
- **Corridor Overlay** – The Corridor Overlay District exists to meet the future needs for safe and efficient traffic flow along M-40 and M-43. It applies to all lots with frontage along those roadways. It incorporates primarily access management standards to allow for reasonable development along these highways yet ensure traffic flow is maintained and safety is ensured.
- **Airport Overlay** – The Airport Overlay Zoning District is an additional set of zoning regulations governing development permitted in the underlying zoning district in proximity of the Almena Airport. The intent is to prevent the location of potential hazards to aviation by restricting the height of buildings and structures in proximity to the airport. The location and standards of the district shall be based on the maps and standards of the Michigan Department of Transportation.
- **PUD** – Planned Unit Developments are created through rezoning. As a result, they can occur anywhere in the Township. The use of the development tool does not correspond to any future land use designation or current zoning district, therefore, it was not included in the above chart.

SPECIAL LAND USE PERMITS

In the past, the Township previously granted “special land use permits” for a variety of uses throughout the community that did not conform to the uses that were permitted in a particular district. (While this practice occurred in the past and the permits stand, the practice is no longer permitted today.) Many of these were for non-residential uses in the agricultural and residential districts of the Township and included limitations on the ability to expand or transfer the use. Over time, many of these have lapsed or the uses are no longer in operation. However, several

are still in effect. In most instances, these uses remain in conflict with the current zoning of the parcel. It may be in conflict with the future land use designation as well, although in some instances, while the use description may not fit with the designation, the operation and character of the use may fit with the intent of the designation for the parcel.

Over time, changes may occur that would require modifications to the special land use permit that are no longer able to be accommodated. Other zoning and regulatory tools are available to work with the use without using the special land use permit. The Township may utilize these tools provided the use is fitting with the intent of the Master Plan and the character of the community at its location.

INCORPORATION OF THE ZONING PLAN

This Zoning Plan is added to the Almena Township Master Plan as a part of the 2011 Review and Amendment process. The Plan has also recently been updated to reflect the current vision of the Township and changes in the Township since the current Plan was adopted. Therefore, it is recommended that the Zoning Ordinance and Zoning Map be reviewed and updated as necessary to reflect the changes to the Plan and continue to be a useful tool and policy document consistent with the vision of the community.

Information Sources

Almena Township Recreation Plan, 1998.

Inland Trout and Salmon Guide, Michigan Department of Natural Resources, 2003

M-43 Corridor Plan

Master Plan for Land Use, Almena Township, 1995.

St. Joseph River Assessment, Fisheries Division Special Report, September 1999.

U.S. Census, 2000 & 2010.

Van Buren County General Development Plan, 2000.

Phone conversations with the County Drain Commissioner's office, Environmental Health, County Planning and the County Road Commission's office.

Waverly, Paw Paw, Pine Grove, Oshtemo, Decatur, Bloomingdale and Antwerp Township Master Plans and Zoning Ordinances

Master Plan Adopting Resolution Almena Township Planning Commission

WHEREAS, Act 33, Public Acts of Michigan, 2008, as amended, provides for a Municipal Planning Commission to prepare and adopt a Master Plan for the physical development of the community; and,

WHEREAS, the Township of Almena Planning Commission has prepared a physical development plan for the Township in compliance with said Act 33, including relevant charts, maps and text; and,

WHEREAS, the Township of Almena Planning Commission has provided opportunity for public input into the Master Planning process; and,

WHEREAS, the Township of Almena Board of Trustees approved and subsequently distributed a draft copy of the Master Plan to all of the bodies required by said Act 33 for review and comment; and,

WHEREAS, no person or entity submitted comments indicating that the proposed Almena Township Master Plan is substantially inconsistent with the Master Plan of any adjacent community; and,

WHEREAS, The Township of Almena Planning Commission held a formal public hearing on the draft Master Plan on March 5, 2012 in order to provide additional opportunity for public comment; and,

WHEREAS, the citizens of the Township of Almena were afforded the opportunity to provide oral and written comments on the draft plan, which comments have been carefully considered by the Planning Commission; and,

WHEREAS, based on the consideration of public comments the Township of Almena Planning Commission is satisfied that the Master Plan is ready for adoption; and,

WHEREAS, the Township of Almena Board of Trustees approved an Ordinance confirming the establishment of the Planning Commission and granting the Almena Township Planning Commission the power to formally adopt the master plan, in whole or in part; and,

NOW, THEREFORE, LET IT BE RESOLVED, that the Township of Almena Planning Commission does hereby adopt the Almena Township Master Plan, said plan to be dated as adopted this day of March 5, 2012; and,

FURTHER, LET IT BE RESOLVED, that the Township of Almena Planning Commission does hereby direct the Commission Chair and Commission Secretary to sign this Resolution signifying the adoption of the Township of Almena Master Plan, and to file attested copies of the Plan with the Township Clerk.

CERTIFICATE OF ADOPTION:

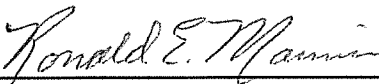
Offered by Commissioner Van Tassel Supported by Commissioner Flick

Yeas: Flick, Roman, Moulds, Marvin, Rumsey, Consolatti, Van Tassel

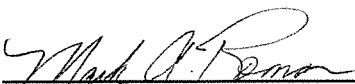
Nays: None

Absent: None

RESOLUTION DECLARED ADOPTED BY:



Planning Commission Chair



Planning Commission Secretary

Date of Adoption: March 5, 2012

**Master Plan Endorsement Resolution
Almena Township Board of Trustees**

WHEREAS, Act 33, Public Acts of Michigan, 2008, as amended, provides for a Municipal Planning Commission to prepare and adopt a Master Plan for the physical development of the community; and,

WHEREAS, the Township of Almena Planning Commission has prepared a physical development plan for the Township in compliance with said Act 33, including relevant charts, maps and text; and,

WHEREAS, the Township of Almena Planning Commission has provided opportunity for public input into the Master Planning process; and,

WHEREAS, the Township of Almena Board of Trustees approved and subsequently distributed a draft copy of the Master Plan to all of the bodies required by said Act 33 for review and comment; and,

WHEREAS, no person or entity submitted comments indicating that the proposed Almena Township Master Plan is substantially inconsistent with the Master Plan of any adjacent community; and,

WHEREAS, The Township of Almena Planning Commission held a formal public hearing on the draft Master Plan on March 5, 2012 in order to provide additional opportunity for public comment; and,

WHEREAS, the citizens of the Township of Almena were afforded the opportunity to provide oral and written comments on the draft plan, which comments have been carefully considered by the Planning Commission; and,

WHEREAS, the Township of Almena Board of Trustees has been kept informed of the preparation of the Master Plan and participated in the preparation of the Master Plan; and,

WHEREAS, following the consideration of public comments, the Township of Almena Planning Commission was satisfied that the Master Plan is ready for adoption and duly adopted the Plan on March 5, 2012; and,

NOW, THEREFORE, LET IT BE RESOLVED, that the Almena Township Board of Trustees does hereby endorse the Almena Township Master Plan this day of March 14, 2012 as prepared, approved, and adopted by the Almena Township Planning Commission to encourage and guide future growth and development in Almena Township; and,

FURTHER, LET IT BE RESOLVED, that the Almena Township Board of Trustees does hereby direct the Township Clerk to sign this Resolution signifying the adoption of the Almena Township Master Plan, and to file attested copies of the Plan with the Township Clerk.

CERTIFICATE OF ADOPTION:

Offered by: Jerry Lentz, supported by: Diane Triquet

Yeas: Diane Triquet, Jerry lentz, Jim Manning, Jim Rickli, Sandra Rickli,
Doug Stiles

Nays: _____
Absent: marv Flick

RESOLUTION DECLARED ADOPTED BY:

Sandra B. Rickli
Township Clerk

Date of Adoption: March 14, 2012

