

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

The Larkin Township Master Plan is the product of a comprehensive community planning process. The Plan will set forth for the Township a detailed set of guidelines on which it can base future land use and policy decisions. The Plan is intended to serve as a working document, to be reviewed and amended as needed, and to provide to elected and appointed officials, involved citizens, and the development community a clear set of statements that will drive and inform development and redevelopment efforts. From the goals and objectives set forth by the community, the following non-negotiable principles were established by the Master Plan Steering Committee:

1. Maintain a high quality of life for both present and future Township residents;
2. Preserve the physical, social, and environmental character of the Township;
3. Meet the land use needs of the community by guiding new development in a manner that protects established development, conserves natural features, and does not sacrifice long-term well-being for short-term gain.
4. Balance the rate of land development with the availability of public facilities and services such as roads and utilities. Encourage development where infrastructure currently exists; and,
5. Cautiously expand housing, employment, consumer, recreational, educational, and cultural opportunities for Larkin Township residents.

The completion of the Township Master Plan is the first, most integral achievement of the community planning process; however, a number of steps must be taken to translate what has been conceived in the Plan into actual projects and decisions. The goal of the planning process is not to develop a written document, but to inspire community development.

Through active cooperation between the citizenry, the development community and the elected and appointed officials of the Township, the plan can become a reality. The following section will lend a series of recommendations through which the goals and objectives of this Plan may be realized. Four primary efforts should be considered to this end:

- Developing public support for the Plan by educating potential users of the document of its existence, importance, and function;
- Strengthening existing zoning legislation and classifications;
- Developing a capital improvements program; and,
- Establishing and completing a regular Planning Commission Work Plan.

PUBLIC SUPPORT OF THE LONG-RANGE PLAN

Citizen participation and understanding of the general planning process and policies of the Plan are critical to the success of the Master Plan. The Township should develop a methodology that makes its citizens more aware of the planning process, and the day-to-day decision making which affects implementation of the Plan. Lack of citizen understanding and support could well have serious implications for the eventual implementation of planning proposals. Failure of the public to back needed bond issues, and continuing dissatisfaction concerning taxation, special assessments, zoning decisions, and development proposals are some of the results of public misunderstanding and rejection of long-range plans. Ongoing programs of discussion, education, and participation will therefore facilitate the Township's efforts with regard to Plan implementation.

Toward this end, the Township must again emphasize the necessity of and reasons for adopting a Master Plan. The Township has taken exceptional measures to make the residents of the community aware of their opportunity to participate in the Master Plan process with a postcard mailing and regular advertisement. The Township may wish to prepare a plan summary brochure for public distribution upon its adoption.

The validity of the Plan, as well as the right of the Planning Commission to review various development proposals to assure their compatibility with the Township's expressed policies, requires that the Commission officially adopt the Plan. It is also desirable that the Township Board adopts a resolution stating their concurrence with the Master Plan.

THE ZONING ORDINANCE

Zoning is the legal means of implementing the Master Plan on private property in order to achieve the orderly land use relationships envisioned on the Future Land Use Map. In addition to its use as tool for plan implementation, zoning protects homes and investments against the potential harmful intrusion of business and industry into residential neighborhoods; requires the spacing of buildings far enough apart to assure adequate light and air; prevents the overcrowding of land; facilitates the economical provision of essential public facilities; and aids in preservation of the Township's rural atmosphere.

There are a variety of zoning approaches and techniques that may be employed to help assure that the Township remains an attractive community within which to work and live. These procedures involve the enforcement of the provisions of the Larkin Township Zoning Ordinance. Two key tools available to Township officials seeking to assure quality development are special approval use procedures and performance guarantee provisions. These tools are currently in place within the Zoning Ordinance, however, their roles and use could expand to allow for greater control over key sites and land uses.

Some land uses are of such a nature that permission to locate them in a given district should not be granted outright but should only be approved after assurances that the use will meet certain specified conditions. These types of land uses are called special approval, conditional, or special exception uses. The Township currently uses this flexible zoning process to permit uses of land by following special procedures, holding a public hearing and conducting a site plan review. This technique is based upon discretionary review and approval of special land uses. The site development requirements and standards upon which these decisions are made are specified in the Ordinance as required by State law. However, additional reasonable conditions may be attached in conjunction with the approval of a special land use.

To ensure compliance with a zoning ordinance, and any conditions imposed under the ordinance, a community may require that a performance guarantee, cash deposit, certified check, irrevocable bank letter of credit, or surety bond. This guarantee should be of sufficient means to cover estimated costs of improvements proposed. A performance guarantee protects the Township by assuring the faithful completion of the improvements. The community must establish procedures under which rebate of cash deposits will be made, in reasonable proportion to the ratio of work completed on the required improvements, as work progresses.

A stable, knowledgeable Planning Commission is also critical to the success of zoning. The Commission's responsibilities include long-range plan formulation and the drafting of appropriate, reasonable zoning ordinance regulations designed to implement goals and objectives. Adoption of a zoning ordinance by the legislative body then provides the legal basis for enforcement of land use regulations. The ultimate effectiveness of the various ordinance requirements, however, is dependent upon the overall quality of ordinance administration and enforcement. If administrative procedures are lax, or if enforcement of regulations is handled in an inconsistent, sporadic manner, the result will be unsatisfactory at best.

CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS

The term "capital improvements" is generally intended to embrace large-scale projects of a fixed nature, the implementation of which results in new or expanded public facilities and services. Such items as public building construction, park development, sewer installation, waterworks improvements, street construction, and land acquisition, are generally included in a capital improvements plan.

Few communities are fortunate enough to have available at any given time sufficient revenues to satisfy all demands for new or improved public facilities and services. Consequently, most are faced with the necessity of determining the relative priority of specific projects and establishing a program schedule for their initiation and completion. The orderly programming of public improvements should be accomplished in conjunction with a master plan.

In essence, a capital improvements plan is simply a schedule for implementing public capital improvements that acknowledges current and anticipated demands, and that recognizes present and potential financial resources available to the community. A capital improvements program is a major planning tool for assuring that public improvements proceed to completion in an efficient manner. It is not intended to encourage the spending of additional public monies, but is simply a means by which an impartial evaluation of needs may be made. This plan is a schedule established to expedite the implementation of authorized or contemplated projects.

Long-range programming of public improvements is based upon three fundamental considerations.

1. The proposed projects must be selected on the basis of community need;
2. The plan must be developed within the community's financial constraints and must be based upon a sound financial plan; and,
3. Program flexibility must be maintained through the annual review and approval of the capital budget.

The strict observance of these conditions requires periodic analysis of various community development factors, as well as a thorough and continuing evaluation of all proposed improvements and related expenditures. It is essential that, in the development process of the capital improvements plan, the Planning Commission be assigned a role in reviewing project proposals to assure conformity with the Master Plan and to make recommendations regarding priority projects and appropriate methods of financing.

PLANNING COMMISSION WORK PROGRAM

The Planning Commission should prepare a work program in January of each year. This work program would set forth the tasks or goals that the Planning Commission determines to accomplish for the upcoming year. The process will enable the Commission to stay focused on important tasks and help to implement the goals and objectives of the Master Plan.

PLAN UPDATES, COORDINATION, AND CONSISTENCY

As evidenced during the public forums and workshops with the community, creation and coordination of other community planning documents, such as a regularly updated Recreation Master Plan, are needed as part of the ongoing recommendations for implementation of the Master Plan. It is critical that all the relevant plans be reviewed when making zoning and land use decisions, and that all plans be considered when updating the Master Plan. The overlap and need for consistency from one plan to the next is critical to avoiding conflicts in implementation.

PLANNING EDUCATION

Planning Commissioners should be encouraged to attend planning and zoning seminars to keep themselves informed of the planning issues and learn how to better carry out their duties and responsibilities as a Planning Commissioner. These seminars are regularly sponsored by the Michigan Society of Planning and the Michigan Township Association and are valuable resources to the Planning Commissions in the State.

REVISIONS TO THE PLAN

The plan should be updated periodically. Any extension, addition, revision, or other amendment to a basic plan shall be adopted under the same procedure as a plan or a successive part of a plan under the procedures stated in Michigan Public Act 263 (2001).

At least every 5 years after adoption of the plan, the Planning Commission must review the Plan and determine whether to commence the procedure to amend the Plan or adopt a new Plan. These reviews are necessary in order to be responsive to changes in growth trends and current community attitudes on growth and development within the Township.