



Vernon Township Master Plan 2024-2040



Vernon Township
Master Plan

Vernon Township, Shiawassee County, Michigan

DRAFT · July 26, 2023

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VERNON TOWNSHIP MASTER PLAN
DRAFT – AUGUST 7, 2023



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Introduction

The Vernon Township Master Plan is the culmination of efforts of the Township Planning Commission, Township Board of Trustees, and residents of Vernon Township. They joined together to update the previous Master Plan for the community's growth and development and make informed decisions regarding the Vernon Township Zoning Ordinance.

The Vernon Township Master Plan has been developed to serve as a set of general policies to guide decision-makers within the community and direct the future growth and development of the Township over the next ten to fifteen years. The Master Plan is intended to provide a suitable development pattern for the Township that will promote future economic stability and quality of life for residents of Vernon Township.

In accordance with this objective, the Master Plan defines issues that are most important to the community. Resident and community input was encouraged through online engagement, a paper survey available to all residents, Planning Commission meetings, and a public hearing. An analysis of the existing features of the Township was conducted to illustrate some of its defining characteristics. The analysis includes a survey of the existing land uses in the Township; population, economic, and housing statistics; and a description of the physical constraints, natural resources, and circulation patterns within the community.

Based on all gathered information and input from citizens, goals and objectives were developed which outline the growth and development patterns for the community over the next 10 to 15 years. This plan and the goals and objectives contained within it should be the guide for all significant land use decisions made by the Township. As conditions change over time, the Township may find that the Master Plan needs to change as well. Amendments are likely as it is impossible to perfectly predict exactly what will happen in the near future. Keeping the Master Plan up to date will ensure that it stays relevant and useful and will keep it from simply collecting dust on a shelf.

Purpose and Intent

This document is intended to fulfill the requirements and provide the functions of a Master Plan. The Township Master Plan is a crucial planning document for a community as it not only provides important information about the current conditions and trends in the community but also presents a vision for the future of the Township with a plan for accomplishing that vision.

A Master Plan is used for a variety of purposes. At the most basic level, a Master Plan is the basis for a community's zoning ordinance. One of the legal tests of validity for a zoning ordinance is that the ordinance must be based on a comprehensive plan for the development of the jurisdiction. The Michigan Zoning Enabling Act (P.A. 110 of 2006, as amended) requires that zoning ordinances are based on a plan.

A fundamental part of the master planning process is the public involvement that identifies the community's desires for its future and its long-term vision for growth and development. The goals and objectives are the heart of the Master Plan and present the vision and the manner in which it will be achieved.

Public Participation

As a part of this Master Plan effort, a public survey was launched which received 49 responses. The survey was advertised using social media, print fliers, and yard signs in strategic locations throughout the Township. Although the results are not statistically valid, the survey was still useful in highlighting the main challenges facing the community today. In addition to the survey, staff held interviews with the City of Durand and Shiawassee County Road Commission to discuss economic development and transportation projects. Lastly, the public was welcome to attend the 6 Planning Commission and Board Meetings that were held as a part of the project.

Document Contents

The Vernon Township Master Plan is organized into several chapters describing existing conditions, trends, projections, and their implications; the Township's vision, goals and objectives; master planned future land use, transportation, recreation, and community development; and proposed actions for making the Plans into reality.

- **Community Profile** is an analysis of Vernon Township with regard to its population and other demographic characteristics. Based on numerical data, this section gives an overview of the trends in the Township and projections for the future.
- **Existing Conditions** presents the existing land uses, transportation, public facilities, wetlands, floodplain, prime farmland and soils, and other physical characteristics of Vernon Township, including maps, pictures, and text. Its purpose is to present the Township as it exists today.
- **Goals, Objectives, and Development Guidelines** outline the path that the Township intends to follow, including the vision for the economic, social, and physical future of the community.
- **The Future Land Use Plan** combines the information, analysis, and input from the above chapters into a coherent plan for Vernon Township's future. This chapter is related to the goals and objectives, Township enhancements, sustainability considerations, and future land use and transportation recommendations.
- **Action Plan** answers the "how" of the Master Plan. With specific programs, ideas, and regulations, it provides guidance for officials to shape the Township's future. The chapter includes specific action-oriented implementation steps, as well as for economic development, land use and zoning regulations, and capital improvements.



Vernon Township Today

Regional Context

Vernon Township is located in Shiawassee County, Michigan, approximately 10 miles southwest of Flint, Michigan. Within the County, Vernon is approximately 5 miles southeast of Corunna, the county seat. The area of Vernon Township is roughly 32.4 square miles in size.

Located in the northwestern corner of the Township is Interstate 69, a major interstate highway that runs from the Canadian border in Port Huron, Michigan to Indianapolis, Indiana. Interstate 69 provides the Township with access to Lansing, the state capital, which is only 25 miles southwest of the Township. The US-23 and I-75 intersection is approximately 13 miles east of the Township, providing the community with convenient regional access to the Detroit metropolitan area located to the southeast and the vast recreational opportunities of Michigan's northern areas.

Vernon Township encompasses the two municipalities of the Village of Vernon and the City of Durand. The Village of Vernon and the City of Durand enjoy the mid-western, small-town character influenced by the surrounding agricultural and railroad industries.

Map 1: Regional Location



Location and Context

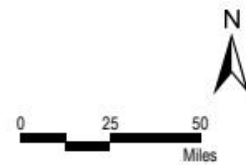
Vernon Township



July 28, 2022

LEGEND

- Major Cities
- Vernon
- State Highways
- Lakes and Rivers



Basemap Source: Michigan Center for Geographic Information, v. 17a. Data Source: County or Local Community Source. McKenna 2020.

Demographic Profile

The purpose of a demographic profile is to understand the past, present, and future population and demographic characteristics of Vernon Township and to analyze housing options and stock. Population, demographics, education, and housing characteristics are compared with Shiawassee County and surrounding Townships, and in some instances the State of Michigan, to gain a regional perspective. The following paragraphs and tables will give the reader insight into the composition of the Township.

POPULATION

The population of Vernon Township was 3,535 persons, based on data provided by the United States Census Bureau via the 2020 Census. Shiawassee County had a total population of 68,094 people based on the 2020 Census. Therefore, Vernon Township accounts for an estimated 5.2% of the entire county in terms of population. Vernon Township’s population has been declining by several hundred residents each decade, while Shiawassee County’s total population has been declining by approximately one thousand residents each decade. This loss of population reflects the general trend of young people moving to large cities, which is a struggle being faced by rural communities across the United States, as shown in the “Age Structure” table on the next page.

	Vernon Twp	Perry Twp	Venice Twp	Gaines Twp	Burns Twp
<i>Population</i>	3,535	4,141	2,422	6,664	3,280

RACE & ETHNICITY

The population of Vernon Township is relatively homogenous in terms of race and ethnicity. In 2020, 94.5% of the total population reported being White, while a combined 1.2% reported either being Black or African American, American Indian and Alaska Native, Asian, or native Hawaiian and other Pacific islander. Additionally, 0.47% reported being “some other race.” The below table shows the race breakdown within the Township. It is also noted that 182 residents reported being of a mixed race – two or more race compositions.

The following information is provided by the United States Census Bureau, 2020 DEC Redistricting Data.

Total Population	4,273
Population of one race:	4,091 95.74%
White alone	4,038 94.50%
Black or African American alone	4 0.09%
American Indian and Alaska Native alone	20 0.47%
Asian alone	6 0.14%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone	3 0.07%
Some Other Race alone	20 0.47%
Population of two or more races:	182 4.26%
Population of two races:	173 4.05%
White; Black or African American	12 0.28%
White; American Indian and Alaska Native	79 1.85%
White; Asian	6 0.14%
White; Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	1 0.02%
White; Some Other Race	75 1.76%
Black or African American; American Indian and Alaska Native	0 0.00%
Black or African American; Asian	0 0.00%

Black or African American; Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	0	0.00%
Black or African American; Some Other Race	0	0.00%
American Indian and Alaska Native; Asian	0	0.00%
American Indian and Alaska Native; Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	0	0.00%
American Indian and Alaska Native; Some Other Race	0	0.00%
Asian; Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	0	0.00%
Asian; Some Other Race	0	0.00%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander; Some Other Race	0	0.00%

AGE STRUCTURE

As of the 2020 Census, the median age of Township residents was 52.4 years old, compared to Shiawassee County, which has a median age of 43.3 years old. This higher median age is representative of an aging population. The below table shows the population percentage based on the census age range.

Seventeen percent of the residents within the Township are between the ages of 45 to 54 years old. The next largest age group, 65 to 74 years, is at 15.2%. The third largest age group, 55 to 59 years, accounts for 13.1% of the residential population. The age makeup of the Township indicates that 61.4% of the total population is 45 years of age or older.

The following information is provided by the United States Census Bureau, 2020 DEC Redistricting Data.

Total Population	4,273	% in 2020	% in 2010
Under 5 years	76	1.7%	5.2%
5 to 9 years	228	5.3%	6.0%
10 to 14 years	180	4.2%	6.5%
15 to 19 years	204	4.8%	6.8%
20 to 24 years	232	5.4%	5.4%
25 to 34 years	307	7.2%	9.1%
35 to 44 years	391	9.2%	9.8%
45 to 54 years	726	17.0%	18.2%
55 to 59 years	560	13.1%	9.7%
60 to 64 years	345	8.1%	8.5%
65 to 74 years	649	15.2%	8.3%
75 to 84 years	269	6.3%	4.8%
85 years and over	72	1.7%	1.8%

The next table provides a comparison of age demographics between Township residents and Shiawassee County as a whole. It should be noted that the county demographics have additional age ranges that are not displayed within the Township analysis.

Vernon Township		Shiawassee County	
Total population	4,273	Total population	67,877
Under 5 years	76	Under 5 years	3,610
5 to 9 years	228	5 to 9 years	4,023
10 to 14 years	180	10 to 14 years	4,053
15 to 19 years	204	15 to 19 years	4,113
20 to 24 years	232	20 to 24 years	3,786

25 to 34 years	307	25 to 29 years	4,144
35 to 44 years	391	30 to 34 years	4,245
45 to 54 years	726	35 to 39 years	3,629
55 to 59 years	560	40 to 44 years	3,969
60 to 64 years	345	45 to 49 years	3,769
65 to 74 years	649	50 to 54 years	4,919
75 to 84 years	269	55 to 59 years	4,771
85 years and over	72	60 to 64 years	5,675
Median age (years)	52.4	65 to 69 years	4,154
		70 to 74 years	3,953
		75 to 79 years	2,414
		80 to 84 years	1,326
		85 years and over	1,324
		Median Age (years)	43.3

Given these age trends, the Township recognizes the need to consider and plan for an aging population. Home retrofits will likely become increasingly popular over the coming decades, and local codes should reflect these needs.

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

The educational attainment of persons 25 years and older within Vernon Township is depicted in the table below. Within the Township, an estimated 93.9% of residents have a high school degree or higher. 25.6% of residents have completed some college but did not receive a degree. 12.6% of Township residents have earned an associate's degree. 8.3% of Township residents have earned a bachelor's degree, while only 3.6% have earned a graduate or professional degree.

For comparison, Shiawassee County has 18.9% of county residents with a bachelor's degree or higher. Regarding regional comparisons, the State of Michigan's educational attainment for persons 25 years and older is 31.9% for a bachelor's degree, while the national estimate is 35.1% for a bachelor's degree.

Educational Attainment	Percent Population
High School or equivalent	43.80%
Some college, no degree	25.60%
Associate's degree	12.60%
Bachelor's degree	8.30%
Graduate or professional	3.60%

Additionally, the surrounding community's educational attainment with a bachelor's degree or higher is listed in the following table. As stated previously, the State of Michigan's educational attainment for a bachelor's degree is at 31.9%. Vernon Township and the surrounding communities fall below the state median.

	Vernon Twp	Perry Twp	Venice Twp	Gaines Twp	Burns Twp
<i>Bachelor's degree or higher</i>	11.90%	20.30%	15.20%	25.60%	17.30%



Housing Profile

The quality, affordability, and availability of a community’s housing stock have a significant impact on the overall community vitality.

The following review of Census Data relating to the number of housing units, age of housing units, amount of owner-occupied and rental units, monthly rent, and mortgage values helps evaluate the health of the Township’s housing stock.

Below is a comparison of surrounding townships related to households and housing units. Vernon Township had the second-highest number of housing units and households. Gaines Township had the highest number of housing units and households with a total of 2,642 and 2,559, respectively.

	Vernon Twp	Perry Twp	Venice Twp	Gaines Twp	Burns Twp
<i>Housing Units</i>	2,379	1,642	1,027	2,642	1,347
<i>Households</i>	1,804	1,555	966	2,559	1,269

VACANCY

As of the 2020 Census, Vernon Township had an approximate total of 2,379 housing units. Of these, 1,803 (75.8%) were occupied, with 576 (24.2%) being classified as vacant.

However, the high rate of vacancy estimated by the Census does not reflect the number of vacant homes in the Township. To avoid recording people twice, the Census Bureau requires that citizens complete the Census using only their current location at the time they receive the survey. In most cases, people complete the survey at their year-round residence. Although this requirement ensures that population totals are accurate, it has a flip

side – vacation homes are often recorded as vacant. Vacation homes are maintained, cared for, and occupied for part of the year, making them very different from truly vacant homes.

Holliday Shores and Leisure Lake account for nearly one thousand vacation homes in the Township. Additionally, Holiday Shores does not have a comprehensive mailbox system – residents can request a mailbox, but only a small percentage have one. This means that most of the homes in Holiday Shores did not receive a Census survey, and those that did were probably discarded (since the residents would have completed the Census survey at their year-round homes and cannot complete it twice). Given that the remainder of the Township has a vacancy rate of 5%, and the tract with Holiday Shores has a rate of 27%, we estimate that 407 vacation homes were likely misclassified as vacant at Holiday Shores, which has a total of 615 homes.

AGE OF HOUSING

The age of the housing stock can provide important insights for a community, as the conditions of the housing stock may be related to its age. Older housing stock can also provide a sense of character to the community. Traditionally, major repairs or rehabilitation are needed when housing reaches an age of 30 years. Communities in which a substantial proportion of the housing stock is more than 30 years old typically initiate programs to encourage reinvestment in the home and property itself. Furthermore, beginning in the 1960s, the desire and requirement from homeowners for more energy-efficient houses and additional amenities increased. Older homes tend to lack the requested features that support barrier-free access and may be unsuitable for aging in place without enhanced retrofits or other significant reinvestments.

As shown in the below table, 91% of the housing stock within Vernon Township was constructed before the turn of the century (2000). Only 1.2% of the housing stock within the Township has been constructed within the past 8 years, based on accessible data via the U.S. Census. Due to the significant number of housing units having been constructed prior to 2000, the Township should encourage reinvestment in the older housing stock to preserve the historical character of the community. The past eight years does encompass ongoing recovery from the Great Recession and the continued effects of the COVID-19 Global Pandemic.

Year Structure Was Built	Number of Housing Units	Percentage
2014 or later	29	1.2%
2010 to 2013	20	0.8%
2000 to 2009	162	6.8%
1980 to 1999	468	19.7%
1960 to 1979	945	39.8%
1940 to 1959	411	17.3%
1939 or earlier	344	14.5%
Estimated Total	2,379	

HOUSING COSTS

Monthly housing costs in Vernon Township are one measure of community quality of life and the overall health of the economy. The median gross rent for occupied housing units within the Township was \$610 per month per the 2019 American Community Survey data. By comparison, Shiawassee County had a median monthly gross rent of \$742. The table below provides further visualization of monthly rental housing costs within the Township.

Monthly Gross Rent	Number of Households
Less than \$300	0
\$300 to \$499	63
\$500 to \$799	100
\$800 to \$999	44
\$1,000 to \$1,499	19
\$1,500 to \$1,999	0
\$2,000 to \$2,499	0
\$2,500 to \$2,999	0
\$3,000 or more	0
No cash rent	0
Median (dollars)	\$ 610.00

HISTORIC HOMES

There are numerous centennial farms and historic homes located throughout Vernon Township. These homes tend to be clustered around Newburgh Road but can be found in every corner of the community. Many of these homes and farms have been altered since their construction, and as such many have lost their historic character. However, some remain as architectural testaments to past life in Vernon Township. The following homes are the most architecturally notable houses in Vernon Township and have remained largely unaltered since their construction.

10720 Newburg Rd

The property located at 10720 Newburg Rd is currently a working farm, owned and operated by Davenport Farms. This property includes both a historic home and barracks, which is used as an outbuilding.



6810 Newburg Rd

The Williams-Cole House is a two-story, wood-framed gable-roofed home that was constructed in 1854 by the Williams Family (founders of Owosso). The property was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1986 and is notable for its Greek Revival and Carpenter Gothic architecture.



Community Facilities

A primary purpose of municipal government is the delivery of services designed for the health, safety, and welfare of the local population. The responsibility for providing public services to the residents of Vernon Township is shared by several public entities, including the Township itself, Shiawassee County, and other agencies.

PUBLIC SCHOOL FACILITIES

Vernon Township is primarily served by Durand Area Schools. The school system is composed of two elementary schools, Bertha Neal and Robert Kerr, Durand Middle School, and Durand High School. The Durand Area School system serves an estimated 1,258 students, based on data provided by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES).

PUBLIC RECREATIONAL FACILITIES

There are no publicly maintained parks owned by Vernon Township. However, the City of Durand does offer parks and recreation amenities, such as playground equipment, basketball courts, baseball diamonds, picnic tables, pathways, pavilions, and public restrooms. Additionally, the Village of Vernon provides further recreational amenities to region residents: canoe/kayak launch on the Shiawassee River, playground equipment, and various sports fields. Lastly, Shiawassee County maintains a small amount of parkland in the southwest corner of the Township: Geeck Road County Park.

PUBLIC UTILITIES

Like many rural Townships, Vernon Township does not provide public water and/or sewer service to all of its residents. Therefore, Township residents are served by residential wells and septic facilities.

The Shiawassee County Road Department is responsible for the repairs and maintenance of Township roads. The City of Durand has its own Department of Public Works that maintains city streets. The Village of Vernon also has its own Department of Public Works that maintains municipal streets.

Consumers Energy provides electrical and gas services for Township residents.

EMERGENCY SERVICE FACILITIES

The Vernon Township Fire Department provides fire emergency services with the support of paid, on-call firefighters. Police protection is under the jurisdiction of the Shiawassee County Sheriff. The City of Durand has its own police and fire protection service. The Village of Vernon has its own police presence.

The Vernon Township Fire Department building is located within the Village of Vernon at 316 E Main Street. This building doubles as Voting Precinct #2 for the Township.

Ambulance service is provided by the Southwest Shiawassee Emergency Services Alliance (SSESA), based out of Perry, MI.





TOWNSHIP HALL

Vernon Township Hall is located at 6801 S. Durand Road, Durand Michigan. The Township Hall also serves as a polling location for Precinct 1 of the Township. The Township Hall also hosts the Township Fire Department equipment and apparatus.

TOWNSHIP CEMETERIES

Love Joy Cemetery (aka South Vernon Cemetery) - 8000 East Prior Road

Located along East Prior Road, the cemetery was originally deeded in 1856. On the west front side of the cemetery, there is a large monument which reads: "In memory of the unknown dead who lost their lives in the railroad wreck of the great Wallace Shows, Aug 06, 1903." Small markers surround the monument with names of E. J., Joe, George, John, Allen, and Thomas, unclaimed bodies from the wreck.

Greenwood Cemetery - 224 E. Washington Street

Located in the Village of Vernon, the cemetery was established in the early 1800s. The cemetery is known for the large, white, stone mausoleum which stands in the center. This cultural feature is currently undergoing restoration to ensure it can be preserved with adequate care.

Chalker Cemetery – No Address (Section 4 of Vernon Township near the intersection of Durand Rd and Goodall Rd)

Located on Durand Road, the cemetery is home to many historic headstones. The cemetery is occasionally mowed, but no new burials have occurred since the mid-1900s and the site remains largely un-improved.



Natural Features and Resources

A thorough community plan requires that the condition of the environment be considered in decisions regarding future land use and stewardship of the land and water within the Township.

Federal environmental legislation enacted in the 1970s raised public awareness of the importance of environmental protection. Although many states, including Michigan, strengthened federal environmental laws with state laws and programs designed to correct environmental problems and prevent future contamination of air, land, and water, trends during the 1980s reduced enforcement of these laws to a low priority. During the 1990s and early 2000s, environmental protection has resurfaced as a serious concern.

The natural features of Vernon Township, such as the topography, river floodplain, wetlands, groundwater, and soils are important features of the community. Although Vernon Township is predominately rural in character, concern for the environment is just as critical as it is for urban communities that deal with brownfields and air pollution. Most Vernon Township residents use water wells and septic systems which are reliant on clean and suitable environments for their continued use. In dense developments with many systems, this further adds to the stress on the natural environment and the concern for its protection. The Shiawassee County Health Department further reviews permit applications for the installation of on-site sewer and water wells.

Several natural features in Vernon Township are examined in this chapter.

TOPOGRAPHY

As with much of the State of Michigan, Vernon Township is characterized by relatively flat land, which is best suited for farming and agricultural activities. A majority of the flat land in the Township is at low levels in basins known geographically as “outwash plains,” which were created as a result of glacial melt.

SURFACE WATERS

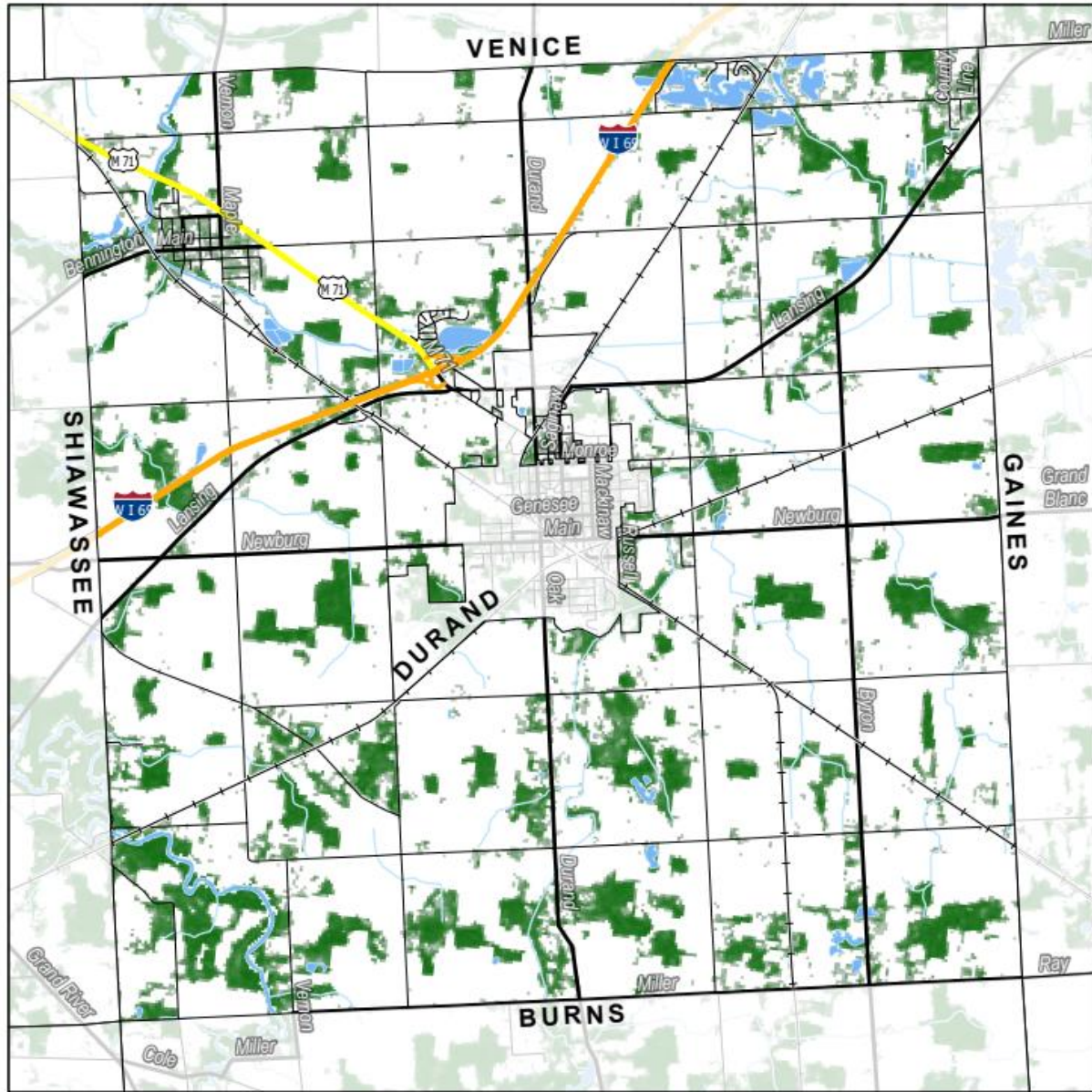
Vernon Township includes several bodies of surface water. Leisure Lake is the largest body of water in the Township, located east of I-69 and north of Goodall Road. The Shiawassee River also meanders through the Township along the western portion. The Shiawassee River is considered a warm water river ecosystem, with slower-moving currents. For more information on the river and its many amenities, readers of this plan are encouraged to visit www.michiganwatertrails.org.

WOODLANDS AND WETLANDS

The majority of trees and vegetation that existed in Vernon prior to European settlement were cut and cleared to make way for farming. Scattered throughout the Township are stands of trees both along the roadways and along property lines. These stands range in size from a few acres to more than 40 acres in area. These woodlands add to the rural character of the community and provide recreational opportunities for Township residents. Woodlands add to the rural character of Vernon Township and their preservation helps protect the unique character of the Township.

Located along the drains and small creeks of the Township are wetlands which also add to the natural character. In addition to being a natural habitat for some fish and wildlife, wetlands control flood and stormwater, remove pollutants from water, control erosion, and can act as groundwater recharge areas. Wetlands greater than five acres in area or which are contiguous with a water body are protected by state law. However, wetlands of less than five acres in area are still a fundamental part of the ecological system within Vernon Township. The protection of wetlands can help ensure that the rural character of Vernon is not lost.

Map 2: Vegetation



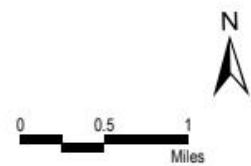
Vegetation

Vernon Township

July 28, 2022

LEGEND

- Freeways
- State Highways
- Railroads
- Major Streets
- Minor Streets
- Lakes and Rivers
- Streams and Drains
- Areas of High Vegetation Concentrations



Basemap Source: Michigan Center for Geographic Information, v. 17a. Data Source: County or Local Community Source: McKenna 2020.

GROUNDWATER

Vernon Township depends heavily on groundwater as its source of water for residential and agricultural use. Therefore, in Vernon Township, it is vital to plan appropriately for development in order to protect the natural resource from possible contamination. Contamination of this resource can happen:

- Through non-point sources of pollution from chemicals and efforts associated with commerce, industry, and farming;
- Through chemicals filtering into groundwater from septic fields, oil tanks, and waste disposal sites;
- Through everyday residential activities. In many instances, these pollutants reach lakes and streams through groundwater supplies. Pollutants may also affect well water located near septic fields.

Groundwater protection must also address the operational features of land uses. Groundwater contamination is most frequently the result of leaking septic systems, improper floor drains, improper storage of hazardous substances, leaking underground storage tanks, above-ground spills, overfilling of tanks, condensation from air emissions, and improper waste disposal. Many of these avenues of contamination can be addressed in site plan review.

SOILS

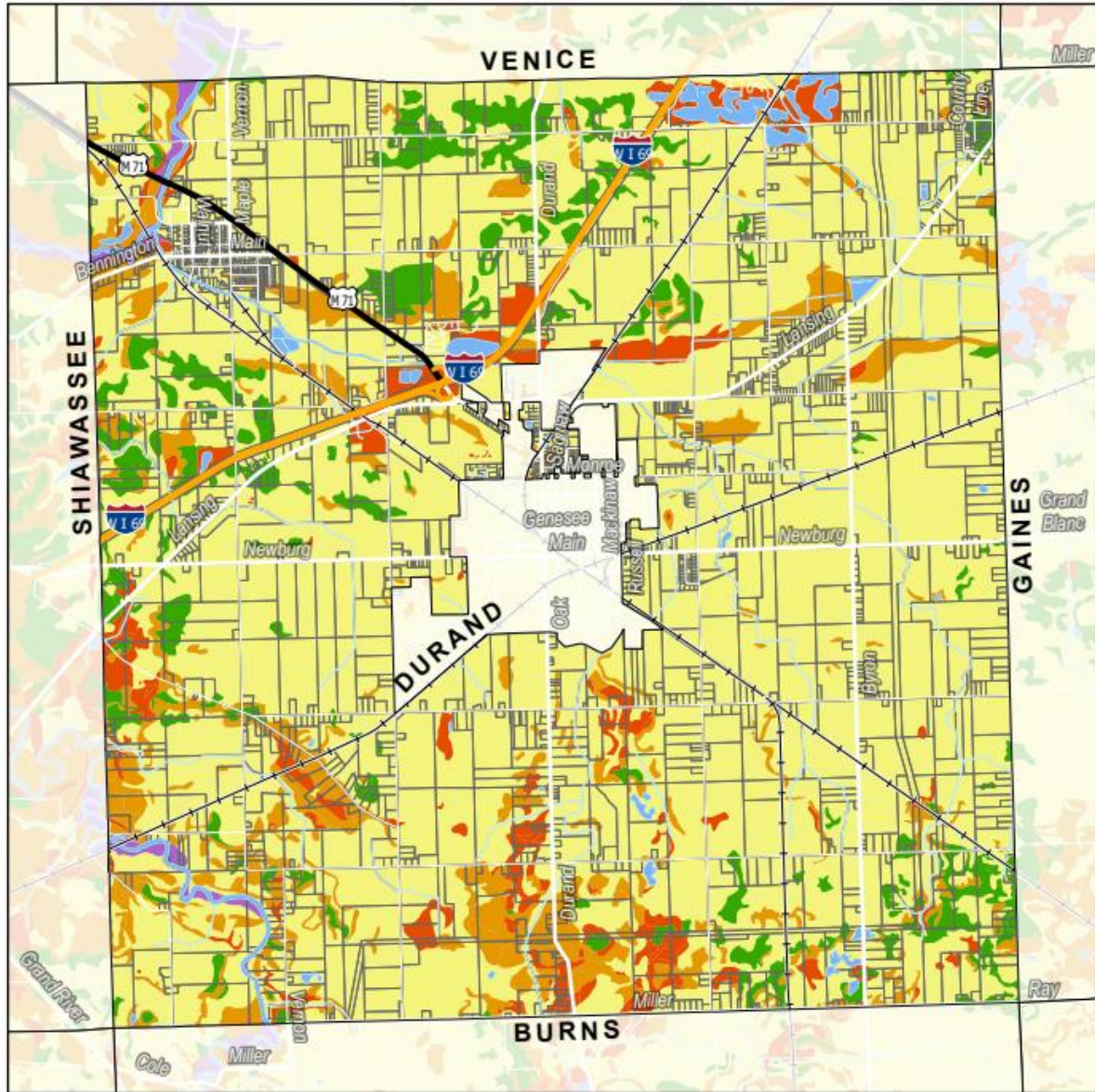
Due to the importance of farming in Vernon Township, soil composition is an important natural feature to consider when planning for future development and growth. If there are areas with better soil for farming than others, then the Township should work to protect those areas from the pressures of development. Similarly, some soils are not well suited for septic systems. In that light, development should be steered away from those areas as well.

PRIME FARM LAND

Agricultural production has a key role in the landscape of Vernon Township and contributes to the economy, character, and identity of the community. The preservation of agricultural land can provide environmental, aesthetic, recreational, and historic benefits to the community. Open farmland also assists in the replenishment and maintenance of groundwater supplies.

Soil types are an important element in determining the suitability of land for farming. To produce crops, soil must be well-drained, without steep slopes, and able to support vegetation. Based upon the U.S. Soil Conservation Service ratings, the Township is overwhelmingly suitable for farming and agriculture, with very few areas considered less than prime for farming. Most areas in the Township are considered prime farmland if properly drained. This natural resource is crucial to the food systems of the state and region, as well as the economy of Vernon Township. Thus, preserving farmland is one of the Township's highest land use priorities. The following map provides a visual representation of where suitable farmland is located within the Township.

Map 3: Prime Farmland



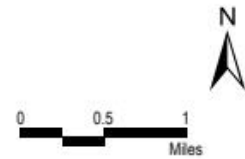
Prime Farmland

Vernon Township

July 28, 2022

LEGEND

-  Freeways
-  State Highways
-  Railroads
-  Major Streets
-  Lakes and Rivers
-  Streams and Drains
-  Parcels
-  Prime Farmland
-  Prime Farmland if Drained
-  Farmland of Local Importance
-  Not Prime Farmland
-  Prime farmland if drained and either protected from flooding or not frequently flooded during the growing season



Basemap Source: Michigan Center for Geographic Information, v. 17a. Data Source: County or Local Community Source. McKenna 2020.



Land Use Classifications

How land is used provides very important insight for a community – it tells us where businesses cluster together, where residential neighborhoods are thriving, and where change is happening.

The following section outlines, in more detail, the location of land and their characteristics within Vernon Township. Existing land uses are divided into several different categories in order to analyze the existing pattern of development. This analysis will help to define which characteristics the Township should work to preserve and enhance throughout the duration of this Plan.

What is “land use”? Land use is a term that refers to the activities happening on a piece of property. Land use can be described in general or very specific terms. For example, the land use for the Riverside Market could be called “grocery,” or more generally “commercial.” Similarly, the land use for Durand Area High School could be called “education,” or more generally “semi-public.”

AGRICULTURE

For the purposes of this land use analysis, agricultural land is defined as any land that is predominately or wholly used for the raising of field or tree crops, utilized as a resource in animal husbandry, or maintained as rural open space. This category represents the overwhelming majority of land in the Township. Therefore, the Township’s priority is protecting the character and viability of the rural lifestyle, natural ecosystems, and food system output associated with the agriculture land use category.

Agriculture land uses are generally characterized by large lots located on arterial County roads. In these areas, traffic speeds are generally higher with infrequent stops. Intersections are typically fitted with stop signs rather than traffic signals. On land utilized for Agriculture, many lots include a residential single-family home with accompanying farm buildings. Oftentimes, operational farms will include multiple accessory buildings incidental to agriculture businesses. Additionally, areas within the agriculture existing land use designation can also be characterized by existing single-family homes located on large lots.

SINGLE FAMILY

For the purpose of classifying this land use category, single-family housing land is defined as any land that is predominately used for single-family housing. This category represents areas of the Township where single-family homes are more densely placed but lack significant acreage pertaining to lot size. Single-family housing is scattered across the Township, with access to such sites along principal roadways.

MULTIPLE FAMILY

This land use category is defined as any land that is predominately used for multiple-family residency. This category encompasses housing types such as apartment complexes and attached dwelling units, such as row housing. Multiple-family housing is limited within the Township, due to the significant land uses being that of agriculture and single-family.

MOBILE HOME

The mobile home, or manufactured housing, classification is defined by the presence of densely placed single-family dwelling units, which are placed on prefabricated spaces, within a mini-community. This type of land use typically shares a common element, such as green space, and provides small "lots" for its residents. Vernon Township has mobile home/manufactured housing communities along M-71 and Goodall Road, located towards the northeastern portion of the Township.

COMMERCIAL

The commercial land use in Vernon Township is utilized for small-scale business entities. The Township does not have a large amount of commercial land uses currently: of those located in the Township, most are situated along a main corridor, such as M-71 or near Interstate 69.

INDUSTRIAL

The industrial land use in Vernon Township is utilized predominately by fabrication plants. Industrial land use is located along M-71, near the northwest portion of the Township, just east of the Village of Vernon. Currently, existing industrial land uses make up a small percentage of the overall land uses within the Township.

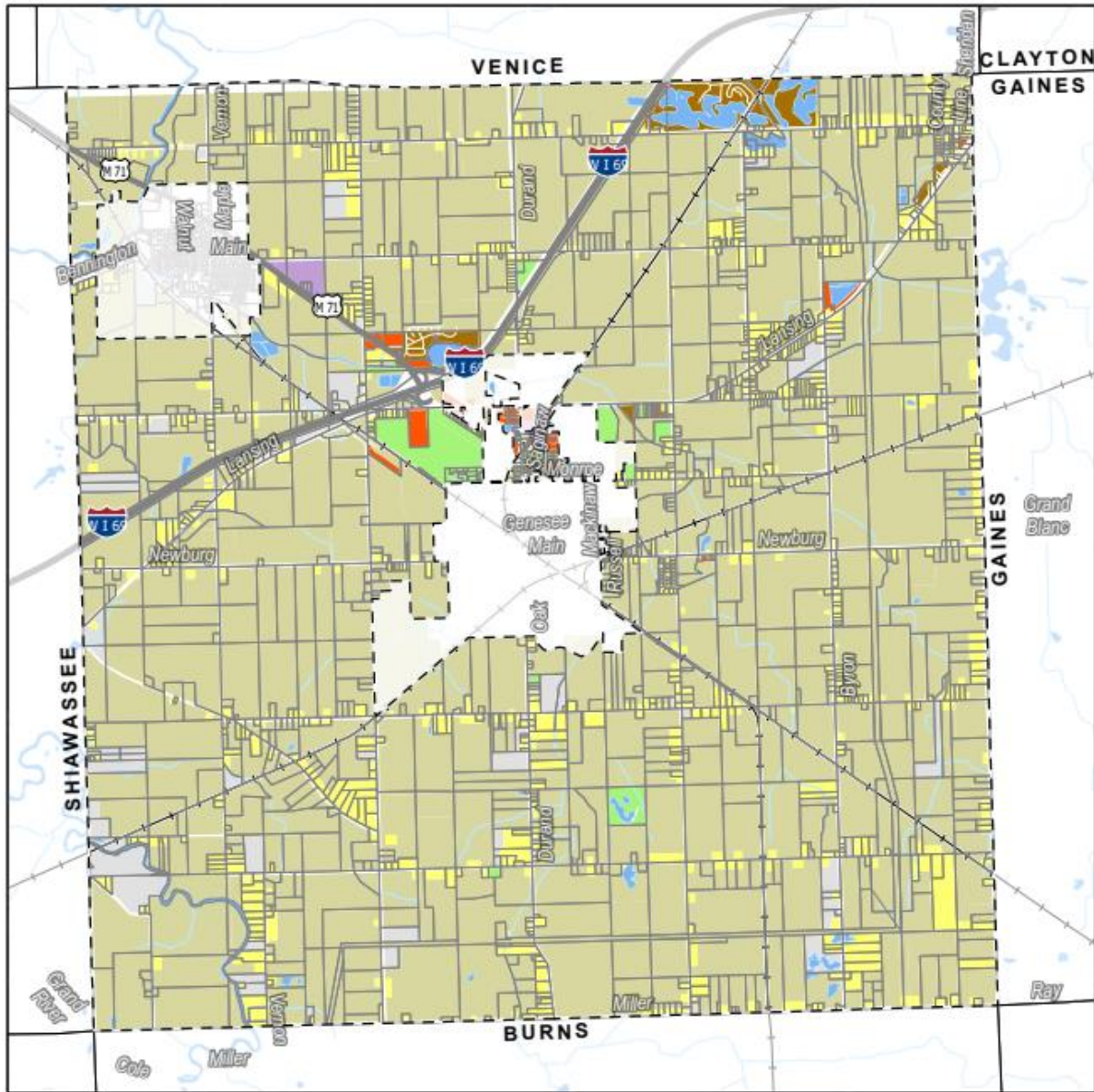
PUBLIC/SEMI-PUBLIC

These land uses in Vernon Township are limited to Township-owned property. In this case, Township Hall, public school facilities, subdivision open spaces, sportsman's clubs, Dutch Hollow Golf Club, and Love Joy Cemetery are designated as Public/Semi-Public land use.

RECREATION

The Recreation land use includes all land that is available exclusively for outdoor recreation purposes. Although they are not technically a park, it should be noted that the open space within Leisure Lake and Holliday Shores is considered recreation land, and it is privately accessible to property owners on the lakes.

Map 4: Existing Land Use



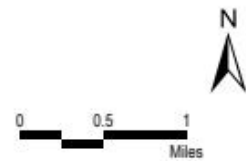
Existing Land Use

Vernon Township

July 26, 2023

LEGEND

- Agricultural
- Commercial
- Industrial
- Mobile Home
- Multiple Family
- Public/Semi-Public
- Roadways
- Single Family
- Vacant
- Parcels
- Freeways and Highways
- Railroads
- Lakes and Rivers
- Streams and Drains



Basemap Source: Michigan Center for Geographic Information, v. 17a. Data Source: County or Local Community Source. McKenna 2020.



Transportation System

A community's transportation system functions much like the circulation system in the human body. Roads and rights-of-way throughout the Township act like veins and arteries that pulse across the land. They carry the life of the community: its energy and its day-to-day activity.

Roads provide a means for people to get from one place to another. Primarily by automobile, but also by bike, foot, and other means. Roads connect people and places and help define the boundaries between homes, sections, parcels, homesteads, and other pieces of land. Roads and road rights-of-way also provide locations for public utilities, such as gas, electric, and telephone lines. Roads provide the means by which emergency and public services are delivered to residents. Finally, roads provide access to parcels of land, thereby increasing the utilization potential of vacant and agricultural lands.

Transportation has a significant impact on the economy, environmental quality, energy consumption, land development, and the general character of the Township. Therefore, it is important that land use planning and the transportation system be coordinated in order to manage the existing and future growth of the Township.

Roads in Vernon Township are under the jurisdiction of two agencies: the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) and the Shiawassee County Road Commission. MDOT has jurisdiction over the I-69 & M-71 corridor, while the Shiawassee County Road Commission oversees the remainder of Township roadways.

TOWNSHIP ROAD NETWORK

In Vernon Township, the roads can all be categorized into several classifications. These classifications are known as the National Functional Classification (NFC) determined by state road agencies. The NFC classifications in Vernon Township include the following:

- Interstate
- Minor Arterial
- Major Collector
- Minor Collector
- Local Road

INTERSTATE

The primary function of an interstate is to move vehicles and commerce over long distances between states at high rates of speed with very limited and controlled access. Typically, interstates have posted speed limits between 55 and 70 mph in rural and 55 to 65 mph in urban areas. Interstate 69 on the north side of the Township is the only interstate within Vernon Township.

MINOR ARTERIAL

Roads that are classified as Minor Arterials in a rural context such as Vernon Township consist of a connected network of rural contiguous roads. These roads typically serve corridor movement having a trip length and travel density characteristics indicative of substantial statewide or interstate travel. According to MDOT, Minor Arterial roads typically are characterized by less traffic and are more local in nature than other main roads. These roads are also eligible for federal aid.

Additionally, Minor Arterial roads typically provide an integrated network without stub connections. M-71 from I-69 north to the Township border with Shiawassee Township is classified as a minor arterial. M-71 continues this classification to the north until it connects with the City of Corunna, the County seat.

MAJOR COLLECTOR

In Vernon Township, Major Collector roads are described as serving primarily intercounty travel. These roads are less traveled than Minor Arterial roads and the distances are typically shorter. On average, Major Collector roads have moderate speed limits. Additionally, these roads provide service to larger towns not directly served by higher systems. Major Collector roads link places such as parks and consolidated schools within nearby towns or cities. Several of Vernon's roads are classified as major collectors. Durand Road (from the northern to the southern boundary of the Township), Lansing Road (from the eastern to the western boundary of the Township), Byron Road (from the southern boundary north to Lansing Road), and Newburg Road (from the eastern to the western Township boundary) are the major collector roads of Vernon.

According to MDOT, Major Collector routes funnel traffic from local and minor roads to arterial routes. These roads typically directly serve schools, businesses, and other important public functions. Major Collector roads are eligible for federal aid.

MINOR COLLECTOR

Minor Collector roads within a rural context are typically spaced at intervals to collect traffic from local roads. These roads provide service to smaller communities and link locally important traffic generators within rural areas. Miller Road on the southern boundary of the Township and a small section of Vernon Road are the only minor collector roads in the Township.

According to MDOT, Minor Collector roads are defined as having more through traffic than local roads (described below), but not as heavy as Major Collector roads. These roads often directly serve schools,

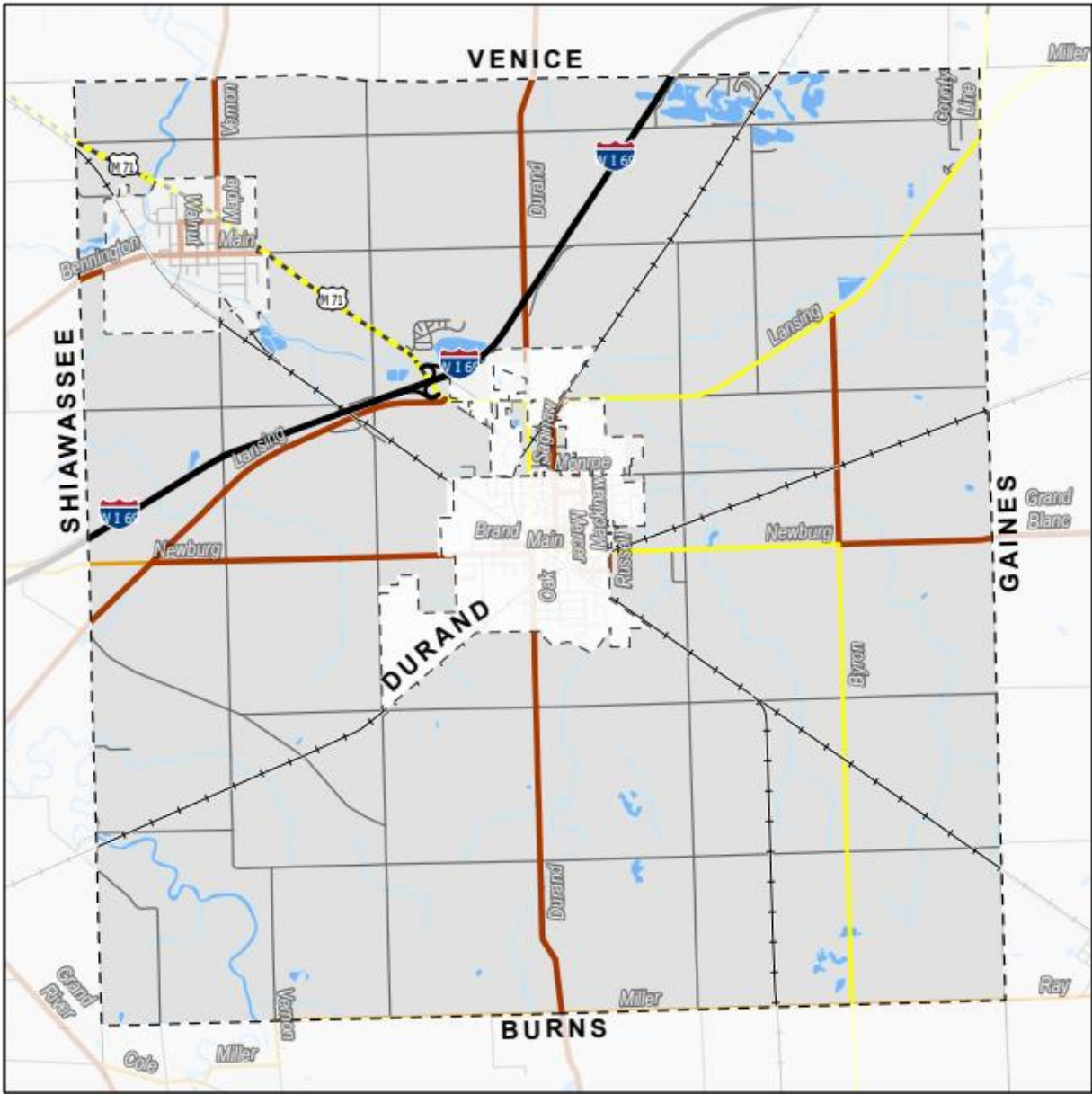
businesses, and other public functions, but are deemed less important than Major Collectors. Rural Minor Collector roads have limited federal-aid eligibility.

LOCAL ROADS

Within rural areas, Local Roads should serve primarily to provide access to adjacent land and are typically utilized to travel relatively short distances. Within Vernon Township, roads that have not been previously mentioned are considered local.

Local Roads are predominately traveled by motorists accessing their property, such as rural farms, residential dwellings, and residential neighborhoods. Local Roads are not eligible for federal aid.

Map 5: Act 51 Road Classification



National Road Classifications

Vernon Township

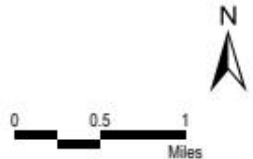
July 26, 2023

LEGEND

- Freeways
- State Highways
- Railroads

National Road Classification Categories

- Minor Arterial
- Minor Collector
- Major Collector



Basemap Source: Michigan Center for Geographic Information, v. 17a. Data Source: County or Local Community Source, McKenna 2020.

COUNTY ROAD AGENCY

In Vernon Township, the Shiawassee County Road Commission has jurisdiction over almost all roads, except M-71 and I-69. The Shiawassee County Road Commission is responsible for more than 1,378 miles of roads throughout Shiawassee County, and also for the following duties in Vernon Township:

- Snow and ice removal
- Dust control on gravel roads
- Roadside mowing
- Traffic signs and signals
- Pavement markings
- Pothole patching
- Design of roads and bridges
- Construction inspection
- Traffic studies

The Township and the Road Commission keep in communication to ensure that roads within Vernon Township are safe and well-maintained.

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

The Shiawassee Area Transportation Agency (SATA), located in Owosso Michigan, began operations in January of 2000. The SATA provides curb-to-curb demand response service within Shiawassee County. According to the SATA public internet website, the agency provides free rides to Shiawassee seniors Monday through Friday from 9:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. 12 municipalities participate with the Shiawassee Area Transportation Agency, of which Vernon Township is a participating governmental unit.

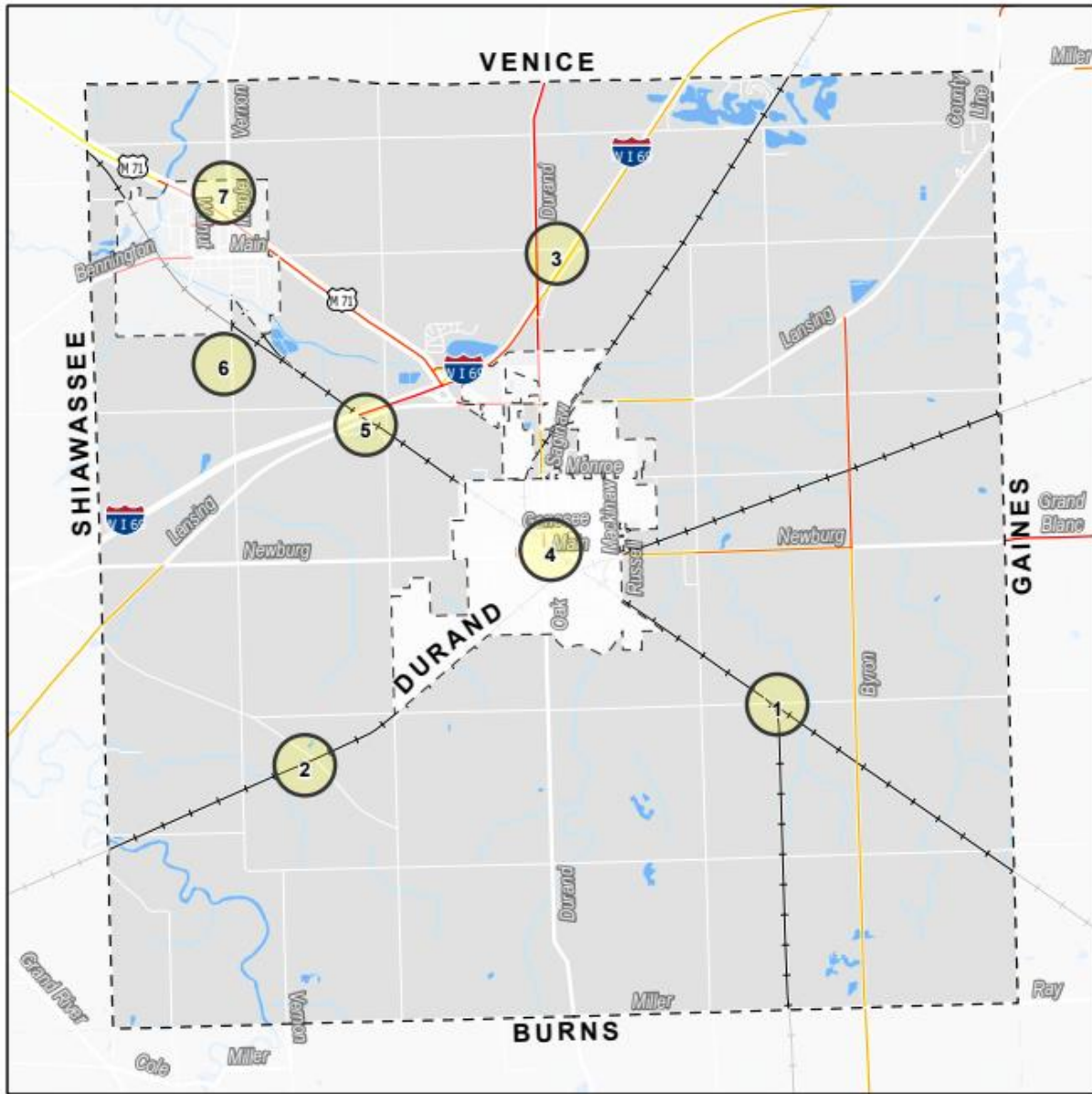
RAILROADS

Two rail lines pass through the Township: CN (Canadian National Railway) and HE (Huron & Eastern Railway). The Canadian National Railway network spans Canada and Mid-America, connecting three coasts; the Atlantic, Pacific, and Gulf of Mexico via their 20,000 miles of line. The Huron & Eastern rail encompasses an estimated 394 miles of line (as of 2019) and generally operates in the thumb region of the State of Michigan.

NON-MOTORIZED TRANSPORTATION

Non-motorized transportation refers to the use of bicycles, pedestrians, and other similar transportation for destination-oriented trip-making. Presently, the Township does not have any existing bike paths within its boundaries. A select few sidewalks are located in the portion of the Township that is surrounded by the City of Durand, near the intersection of Monroe Road and Lenawee Street.

Map 6: Road Volumes and Key Points



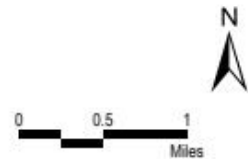
Traffic Volumes and Key Points

Vernon Township

July 26, 2023

LEGEND

- Cars Per Day
- 1 - 2000
 - 2001 - 4000
 - 4001 - 6000
 - 6001 - 8000
 - 8001 - 10000
 - + Railroads



Basemap Source: Michigan Center for Geographic Information, v. 17a. Data Source: County or Local Community Source: McKenna 2020.

KEY POINTS IN TRANSPORTATION NETWORK

Through the public engagement process, the following locations were identified as key points for improvement in the transportation network. Although the Township does not have control over its roads and railroad crossings, it is important to explain these issues for the benefit of the County, the City of Durand, the Village of Vernon, and numerous railroad companies that own tracks in the Township. These points are displayed on Map 7 and summarized below.

- 1. Pittsburgh Road Railroad Crossing.** The railroad crossing at grade at Pittsburgh Road is a major source of backups in the Township. There is no nearby overpass, so residents are forced to either wait for the stopped train to move or drive 3+ miles to get around the train. Additionally, there is no pull-off area for farm equipment to turn around at this intersection without driving into someone's front yard. The Township would support a dedicated pull-off space at this intersection or a grade separation, to help mitigate train-related backups.
- 2. Newberry Road Railroad Overpass.** The railroad overpass at Lansing Road is one of the few overpasses in the Township and is critical when there is a train traveling east-west through the Township. However, this overpass recently burned down and has not been replaced. The Shiawassee County Road Commission indicated that the Newberry overpass is owned by the railroad, and as such the County does not have jurisdiction to replace it. These combined issues make it one of the most important, but challenging, infrastructure projects in the Township.
- 3. Bennington Road Intersection.** The Bennington Road intersection, which connects to the Durand Road overpass over I-69, is an important connector between the northeast and northwest portions of the Township. However, the limited sight distance and narrow roadway geography at this intersection make it risky for both cars and farm equipment to try to turn on Durand Road. The Township would support a re-alignment of this intersection to improve safety.
- 4. Downtown Durand Road.** In downtown Durand, several median planters are used as crosswalks on Durand Road. While these crosswalks do provide an important safety measure for pedestrians, they also prohibit wide-load farm equipment from using the road. Because Durand Road is the most direct route from the northern to the southern side of the Township, this impediment forces people with farm equipment to travel much longer distances to reach their destination. The Township would support a revised crosswalk layout at the planter location, which eliminates the planter and instead includes striping, signage, lighting, and a moderate grade change.
- 5. Lansing Road Overpass.** The railroad overpass at Lansing Road is one of the few overpasses in the Township and is critical when there is a train entering from the west. The Township would like to see this overpass prioritized when it comes to roadway improvements.
- 6. Vernon Road.** Vernon Road is one of the most important north-south connectors in the Township and is critical for the movement of farm equipment around downtown Durand. As such, the Township supports improvements to this road to enhance safety for drivers and pedestrians, as well as dedicated pull-off spaces at railroad crossings.
- 7. Vernon & M-71 Intersection.** The Vernon Road and M-71 intersection includes a blind hill for those traveling north-south. Although this intersection is covered by the jurisdiction of the Village of Vernon, the Township would support plans to improve visibility through signage, lighting, re-grading, brush clearing, speed limit enforcement, or other mechanisms.

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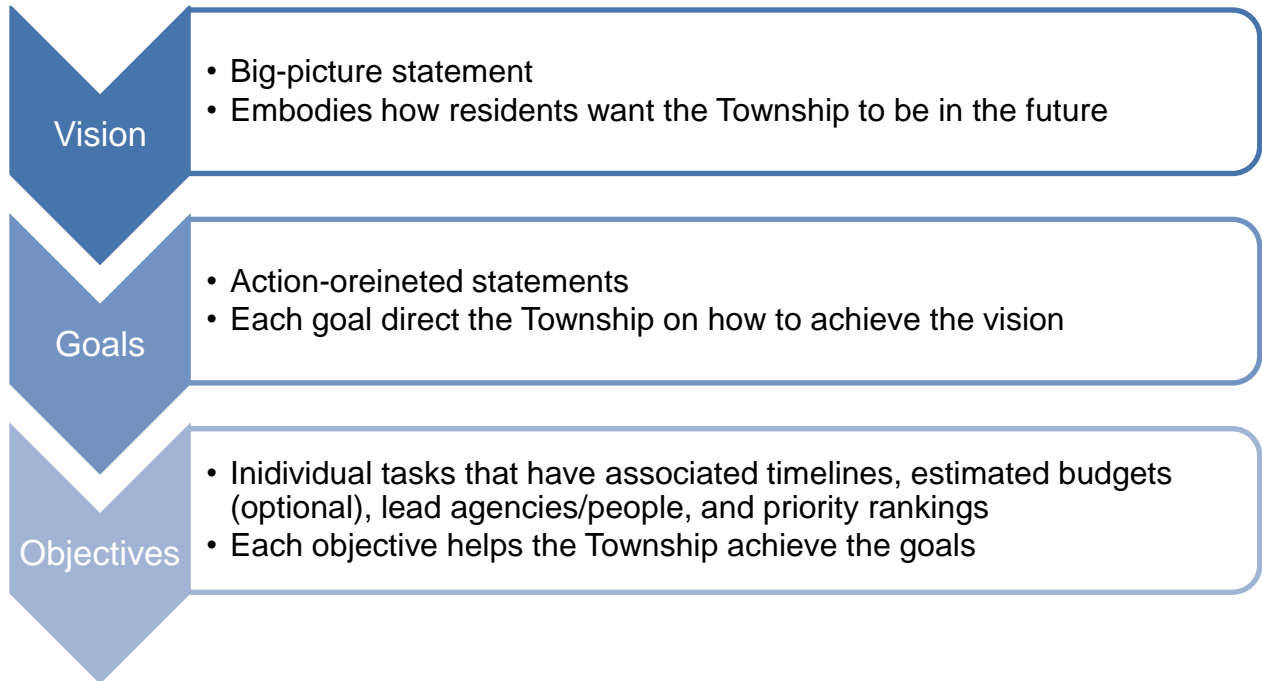


Vernon Township Tomorrow

The Vernon Township Master Plan envisions the future of the community, as articulated by its residents and officials. In general, Vernon strives to preserve its rural character while providing high quality of life to all residents.

Goals and Objectives

Before a community can actively plan for its future growth and development, it must first set certain goals and objectives that emulate its needs and aspirations and thus establish a basis for the formulation of a Future Land Use Plan. These goals and objectives must reflect the type of community desired and the kind of lifestyle its citizens wish to follow, given realistic economic and social constraints. Otherwise, the Master Plan will not accurately reflect the desires of the community.



The following pages contain the goals (the ultimate purpose or intent of the Plan), objectives (the means of attaining those community goals), and policy statements (specific statements which guide action) that should be used to guide the local government in making future land use decisions.

GOALS

Vernon Township adopts the following general community goals to guide future development activities and programs:

- 1. Encourage the preservation of agricultural land uses and natural resources.**
- 2. Prepare for and manage future industrial development in the Township to ensure it is compatible with the community and provides a benefit to residents.**
- 3. Ensure the continued protection of groundwater, soils, water, ecosystems, and agricultural systems to preserve the sustainable rural environment.**
- 4. Provide a balanced mix of land uses that meets the needs of residents and businesses, while respecting the context and character of the community.**
- 5. Support residents through all stages of life and provide for an aging population.**

OBJECTIVES

With these primary goals in mind, the following specific objectives and policy statements have been formulated to guide actions, programs, and land use decisions in the Township. These are the steps and measures that can be taken to help achieve the goals.

Land Use Objectives

1. Preserve agriculture and rural residential as the predominant land uses in the Township.
 - (a) Establish standards for evaluating development applications on prime agricultural land.
 - (b) Encourage the concentration of commercial and residential uses around the boundary with the City of Durand and around other established residential clusters.
 - (c) Restrict future industrial development to the Megasite Flex Area and the existing industrial district around Durand Road.
 - (d) Take into account the viability of the groundwater and soils for well and septic systems when determining the appropriateness of a rezoning or other development application under the Zoning Ordinance.
 - (e) Create an “Agricultural Preservation Overlay” in the Zoning Ordinance which corresponds with the areas targeted for conservation (either of prime farmland or natural features) on the Future Land Use Map. In the event that a Transfer/Purchase of Development Rights program is established, prioritize parcels in the Overlay.
2. Provide for future residential development but control development on lots under five acres to prevent suburbanization and loss of rural character.
 - (a) Residential development with lots under five acres should only occur when communications infrastructure, soils, groundwater, and road infrastructure are sufficient to support the development.
 - (b) Residential development should be limited in scale and scope and should be separated by areas of open farm ground, to preserve rural character.
 - (c) Residential development should be limited to the Residential Flex Area on the Future Land Use Map. Residential lots in this area should be no larger than 0.5 acres, to encourage clustering and provide for greater preservation of farmland.
 - (d) Adopt open space preservation regulations that allow for some small lot development opportunities in rural areas in exchange for preserving the open space in the form of large setbacks.
3. Encourage the continuation of agriculture-related uses to enhance the incomes of farm families.
 - (a) Allow farmers to sell locally grown produce and other materials to residents and visitors of the Township at approved farm stands that meet established criteria.
 - (b) Promote the enrollment of the PA116 Program and encourage the sale of development rights for farmers seeking to preserve their land.
 - (c) Allow agritourism uses in a limited fashion as a special use to ensure they are compatible
4. Encourage a diversity of commercial land uses to support a range of employment and economic opportunities in the Township.
 - (a) Evaluate the existing commercial uses permitted in the Township and update the permitted and special uses as needed to reflect changes in economic demand and emerging uses.

- (b) Cluster commercial uses around the existing commercial area at Lansing and Durand Roads to create a commercial center for the Township.
 - (c) Evaluate the Zoning Ordinance to determine if there are current regulatory barriers that prohibit business owners from re-occupying existing, vacant commercial buildings that could be reused.
5. Support aging-in-place for Township residents at all stages of life.
 - (a) Evaluate the Zoning Ordinance and eliminate unnecessary barriers to home accessibility retrofits.
 - (b) Encourage all future residential developments to include age-friendly features, such as barrier-free entryways, accessible bathrooms, and more.
 - (c) Consider establishing a contractor resource list to pair residents with vetted contractors for home retrofits.
 - (d) Continue to support the programs and efforts of the Shiawassee Council on Aging.
 6. Establish strict design guidelines for industrial development, following the Major Industrial Development Policy included in this Master Plan. This includes, but is not limited to:
 - (a) Adequate setbacks, screening, and buffering should be provided and standards for lighting, noise, odor, and other potential nuisances should be established to minimize the adverse impacts of industrial development on adjacent residential or agricultural areas.
 - (b) Quality building materials, architecture, and landscaping should be required in the industrial area.
 - (c) Industrial developments should incorporate a mix of uses, such as office and training facilities, which will help support the development and buffer any industrial operations from the right-of-way.

Natural Resource Objectives

1. Prevent environmental degradation of prime soils, groundwater, open spaces, and water bodies
 - (a) Ensure that all development – residential, commercial, or industrial – has received any and all necessary permits from local, County, State, and/or federal regulatory agencies.
 - (b) Require new development to maintain and enhance the quality of air, soil, surface water, and groundwater.
 - (c) Potential for impact on the environment will be a consideration of approval when reviewing development applications in areas including or surrounding sensitive areas.
 - (d) Potential for impact on adjacent property owner’s ability to enjoy the natural environment – i.e. blocked visibility, bright lights, - will also be a consideration of approval when reviewing development applications.
2. Protect habitat areas for both aquatic and terrestrial species
 - (a) Establish programs to encourage preservation of open spaces, particularly woodlands and other spaces used as habitat.
 - (b) Restrict non-rural development to maintain large habitat areas and connections between them.
 - (c) Measure the impact of development on water and soil quality before approving construction.
 - (d) Restrict activities along water bodies that negatively impact water quality and habitat.
 - (e) Require natural buffers be maintained along all major waterways, especially the Shiawassee River.
3. Provide recreational opportunities for Township residents and visitors.

- (a) Provide for conservation easements as a part of any purchase of development rights program.
- (b) Evaluate the typical cost (per square foot) of a recreation easement along the Shiawassee River or other waterways.
- (c) Support regional railway and recreational efforts, including the establishment of rail-trails.

Infrastructure Objectives

1. Provide adequate transportation infrastructure for Vernon Township residents, as well as travelers through the Township.
 - (a) Continue to work with MDOT and Shiawassee County to ensure roadways in the Township are a priority for maintenance.
 - (b) Advocate for improvements at railroad crossings during County construction projects.
 - (c) Minimize the number and frequency of automobile access driveways along road corridors.
 - (d) Ensure connectivity not only within the Township but also between Township and the surrounding communities.
2. Discourage the construction of private roads, which can erode rural character and frequently have long-term maintenance problems.
3. Follow the Wind and Solar Policies included in this Master Plan.
4. Support and reinforce the projects that advance the Township's Complete Street Policy in this Master Plan.
5. Do not extend public water and sewer service into Township unless an emergency involving contaminated groundwater or failing septic systems arises and needs to be mitigated, or the cost of the extension is covered by the development which induces its need.
 - (a) Establish requirements for developers to cover infrastructure costs as a part of all major industrial, residential, or commercial developments.
 - (b) Require major development projects to include a traffic impact study and offset maintenance costs to the road system.
6. Improve internet and communications service access throughout the community, including both broadband and wireless.
 - (a) Plan for communications service connectivity, and work with providers to expand service in the community. Specifically, aim to provide 5G wireless service throughout the community.
 - (b) Seek grant opportunities or other funding sources to ensure the economic viability of broadband expansions in the community.
 - (c) Advocate public and private decision-makers for improved service in the Township, to prevent the community from being overlooked due to its low density and proximity to well-served areas.
 - (d) Support new wireless infrastructure in parts of the Township that are underserved.
 - (e) Partner with private landowners, especially those with tall structures like silos, to locate telecommunications infrastructure in strategic locations.
 - (f) Partner with MDOT and Shiawassee County to locate communications infrastructure in public rights-of-way.
 - (g) Remove zoning barriers to the installation of communications technology, especially "small cell" wireless devices.



Policies

Building on the Goals and Objectives, these Policies provide detail for the path forward on some of the most important issues facing the Township.

The best way to ensure a Policy is followed is to codify it as an ordinance or adopt a formal resolution of support. ***The following policies should be further refined and adopted***, as specified in the Objectives chapter.

WIND AND SOLAR ENERGY

To preserve the natural, rural beauty of the Township, the viability of the Township's farmland, the precious ecosystems contained within the Township, and the health, safety, and welfare of the Township's residents, Vernon Township adopts the following policies with regard to the development of solar and wind energy facilities within its borders.

- **Renewable energy** is important for the sustainability of ecosystems, food systems, economies, and communities. However, the large-scale positive impacts must be weighed against local negative impacts, including the health, safety, and welfare of the residents of Vernon Township.

- **On-site solar and wind energy systems** provide ecological and economic benefits, at a scale that is desirable in a rural community and with fewer impacts on the immediate surroundings than utility-scale solar and wind energy systems. However, the impacts that they do have must be managed through zoning regulations.
- **Utility-scale solar energy systems (“solar farms”)** should be developed with careful consideration of the impacts on local ecosystems, farmland, rural beauty, and the health, safety, and welfare of the Township’s residents.
- **Utility-scale wind energy systems** have been shown to negatively impact the health, safety, and welfare of nearby residents, can spoil rural character, and can harm local ecosystems. Therefore, they shall be treated as industrial uses, and, if large-scale wind turbines are proposed in the Township, they must be considered carefully, and meet the Township’s goals in order to be approved:

Specifically, in determining whether to approve a new solar farm or utility-scale wind energy system, the Township will take the following into account:

- **The Township’s natural beauty must be preserved**, especially wetlands and woodlands. Existing wetlands and woodlands should not be removed for solar or wind energy development. The Township will also require the provision of pollinator habitat within solar farms, in order to promote a healthy ecosystem.
- **The Township’s agricultural systems must be protected.** The Township will prioritize agricultural land uses to retain the vibrant food production economy that already exists in the community.
- **Nearby residents** must be protected from noise, shadow flicker, glare, and aesthetic degradation, through appropriate setbacks and landscaping for solar and wind installations.
- **Solar farms and utility-scale wind energy should be located in appropriate locations with regard to transmission infrastructure**, to prevent the need for large-scale transmission lines to be built across the community.
- **The Township may, at some point, hit its “solar and/or wind limit.”** Vernon Township acknowledges the importance of renewable energy, but, as described in this section, other priorities, such as local ecosystems, agricultural production, transmission infrastructure capacity, and rural aesthetics, are also important. Therefore, if utility-scale solar or wind facilities are approved and operational in the Township, the Township may restrict the size of new proposals, or not approve them at all, in order to keep balance between the community’s priorities.

COMPLETE STREETS

According to Michigan Public Act (PA) 135 of 2010, a “complete street” provides “appropriate access to all legal users in a manner that promotes safe and efficient movement of people and goods whether by car, truck, transit, assistive device, foot or bicycle.”

The state does not require all streets to be complete streets, it simply encourages communities to develop complete streets policies. This is because complete streets policies for urban environments will differ from those in rural environments, and it is important to consider local context.

Additionally, as a Township, Vernon does not have control over street improvements or maintenance – both are under the jurisdiction of Shiawassee County. As such, Vernon Township’s complete streets policy reflects the needs of the Township and serves as guidelines for Shiawassee County as the two work together to improve transportation in the Township.

- 1) **Ensure proper clearance along main agricultural routes for farming equipment, including clearance around corners and over blind hills**
- 2) **Maintain clear mowed areas along all Township roads to make walkers, joggers, bicyclists, and wildlife more visible**
- 3) **Mitigate the negative impacts resulting from stopped trains. This includes but is not limited to establishing turn-outs near major train crossings that can accommodate agricultural equipment and allow passenger vehicles to pass and turn around as needed**
- 4) **Ensure railroad crossings are adequately lit and constructed using quality materials**
- 5) **Complete the sidewalk network in the areas directly adjacent to Durand to improve safety and connectivity, and to make it easier for people to travel between commercial centers.**
The following are current priority areas:
 - Durand Rd from Lansing Rd to W Monroe Street
 - The Summit St neighborhood
- 6) **Support the development of rail trails and other similar amenities as projects arise.**

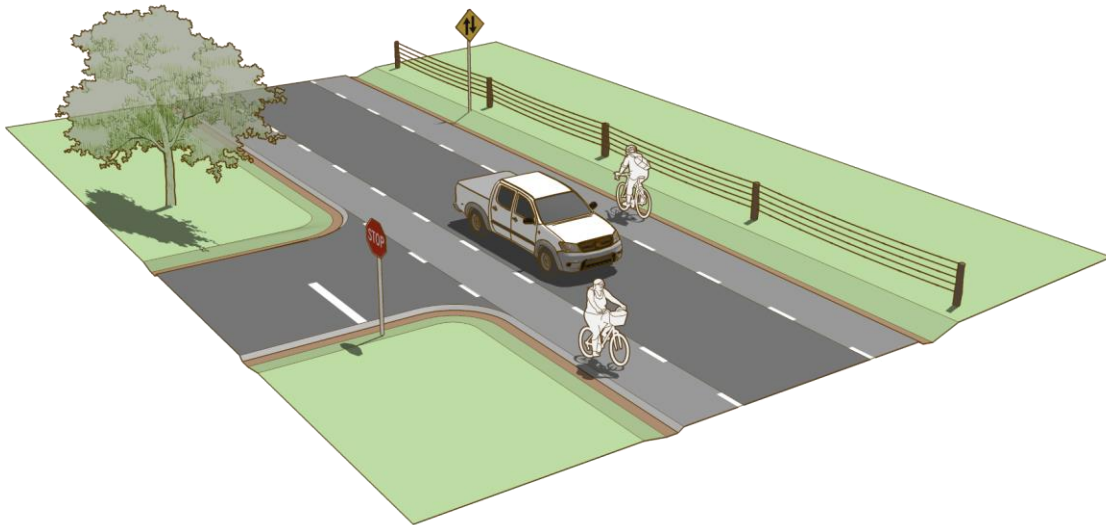


Figure 1. A walking and biking shoulder (Source: Small Town and Rural Design Guide, 2023).

MAJOR INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT

One of the biggest challenges facing Vernon Township is the State of Michigan’s ongoing “Megasite” project. Since 2021, the State has been working with the Shiawassee Economic Development Partnership (SEDP) to assemble and market land, located in the northeast corner of the Township, for large-scale industrial development. The State is focused on Vernon Township because of the prime location between Lansing and Flint, ample farmland, existing railroad service, and high quality of life.

The Township recognizes that a new industrial business could result in community benefits by providing increased tax revenue and a greater diversity of jobs, which are highly sought after by residents. However, a new large-scale industrial plant also has unprecedented potential to disrupt the rural character of the community – traffic and noise, loss of viable farmland and forests, increased utility costs, and more. As such, any future major industrial development would need to provide extensive community benefits, above and beyond taxes and jobs, to be a worthwhile tradeoff for the Township.

The following expectations, outlined below, must be substantially met in the case of any future major industrial development. Such development would be most appropriate as a Planned Unit Development (PUD), as provided for in the Township Zoning Ordinance.

Design Expectations

It is expected that any major industrial development will include exceptional design, to ensure the project is in harmony with the surrounding properties, immediate neighborhood, and Township overall. The term “design” includes not only the materials and craftsmanship of buildings but also the operations of the site.

1. **Liner Buildings:** Development should incorporate a mix of uses, such as office and training facilities, which will help support the development and buffer any industrial operations from the right of way. These uses should be incorporated through the establishment of “liner buildings,” which are located on the perimeter of the site and help buffer the industrial use from the right-of-way. These buildings should incorporate uses that are complimentary to the industrial use but are more office and low-intensity commercial in nature. These “liner” uses should also be diversified so as to protect the Township from having a vacant industrial site, if the primary industrial user closes. Lastly, these buildings should incorporate a rustic design and low profile (such as the Domino’s Farms office complex) to blend into the community.
2. **Screening and Buffers:** Adequate setbacks, screening, and buffering should be provided and standards for lighting, noise, odor, and other potential nuisances should be established to minimize the adverse impacts of industrial



Figure 2. Domino's Farms design (Source: Domino's Farms Office Park website, 2023)

development on adjacent residential or agricultural areas. Landscaped buffers of no less than 50 feet should be incorporated around any development, providing adequate screening through berms and dense vegetation. Buffers should use native plants and incorporate pollinator habitat to support the pollination of nearby farms.

3. **Architecture:** In addition to establishing high-quality “liner” buildings, quality building materials, architecture, and landscaping should be required in the principal industrial area. This includes varied heights and colors of facades, landscaped parking lots, and durable materials such as brick or masonry as the main design element.
4. **Environmental Impact:** The design of any future development should minimize its environmental impact to the greatest extent possible, to ensure it is supporting the viability of surrounding prime farmlands, natural features, and waterways. This may take a variety of forms but should incorporate:
 - a. On-site stormwater detention and retention (including green infrastructure above and beyond basic ponds) to ensure the groundwater in the Township is adequately recharging and that the surface waters remain clean
 - b. Measures to reduce the heat and glare of the site (green roofs, shade trees, etc.) so that surrounding air temperatures remain moderate during the summer months
 - c. On-site solar panels and other forms of renewable energy to help to lessen the draw on the local energy grid
 - d. Sustainable, “green” building materials, such as permeable pavers (or similar alternatives to asphalt), recycled concrete, and recycled steel
 - e. Energy-saving measures on building interiors, such as high-quality insulation, smart light fixtures, and more.

Community Benefit Expectations

It is expected that any major industrial development will be accompanied by community benefits in the form of financial contributions, infrastructure improvements, and other projects which support a high quality of life for Township residents. Many of these benefits would also enhance the City of Durand, due to its central location within the Township.

There are a variety of means by which the community can capture the financial gains from a major industrial development: establishing Tax Increment Financing (TIF), a Local Development Finance Authority (LDFA), a Community Benefits Agreement (CBA), or an Enterprise Overlay District are just a few of the options on the table.

To determine the best path forward, the City and Township should collaborate to establish a Joint Planning Commission, whose sole purpose is to negotiate and navigate future industrial development.

The following is a non-exhaustive list of desired community benefits:

1. **Utility Improvements:** Provision of all utilities necessary for the industrial site *without* passing the cost onto Township taxpayers, and *without* requiring adjacent landowners to connect to new sewer or water lines (or coverage of the cost of connection, should it be required by the utility authority). Contribution toward improved roadways abutting the site through infrastructure projects which conform to the Complete Streets Policy.
2. **Preservation Program:** Establishment of a Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) program, and sufficient funding to pay owners of agricultural property to permanently conserve their land. This would

be expected to fund the purchase of enough conservation easements to equal the area occupied by the major industrial development (800-1,000 ac conserved).

3. **Education Funding:** Establishment of a trust to contribute toward elementary and secondary education, either through scholarships or some sort of “Kalamazoo Promise” type program. The deliberate inclusion of an education provider as a tenant in one of the “liner” buildings for the site, providing trades training (such as a Genesee Career Institute satellite campus).
4. **Public Recreation Funding:** Purchase and dedication of a conservation easement along the Shiawassee River to establish a public park and greenway, to provide both recreation and protection of local natural resources.
5. **Housing Improvements:** Contribution of funds to renovate existing homes and build new homes in Durand to accommodate an influx of workers and residential demand. Following complete build-out in Durand, a contribution of funds toward utility extension costs for future residential/subdivision development in the Township. Future housing construction should be confined to the area designated as residential within the Future Land Use Map.
6. **Rail Crossing and Intersection Upgrades:** Upgrades of existing road intersections through the addition of signals, turn arounds, or lighting, especially in the Lansing Road area. Upgrades to the existing rail crossings throughout the Township and City to establish grade-separated crossings, improved at-grade crossings, and equipment turnarounds.



Future Land Use

The Future Land Use plan is a guide for future public and private land development over the next 10 to 15 years.

The Future Land Use Plan is based on an analysis of land use challenges facing Vernon Township, existing land uses and other conditions, demographic and housing statistics, physical constraints and resources, existing and planned transportation network, and the Master Plan's overarching goals and objectives.

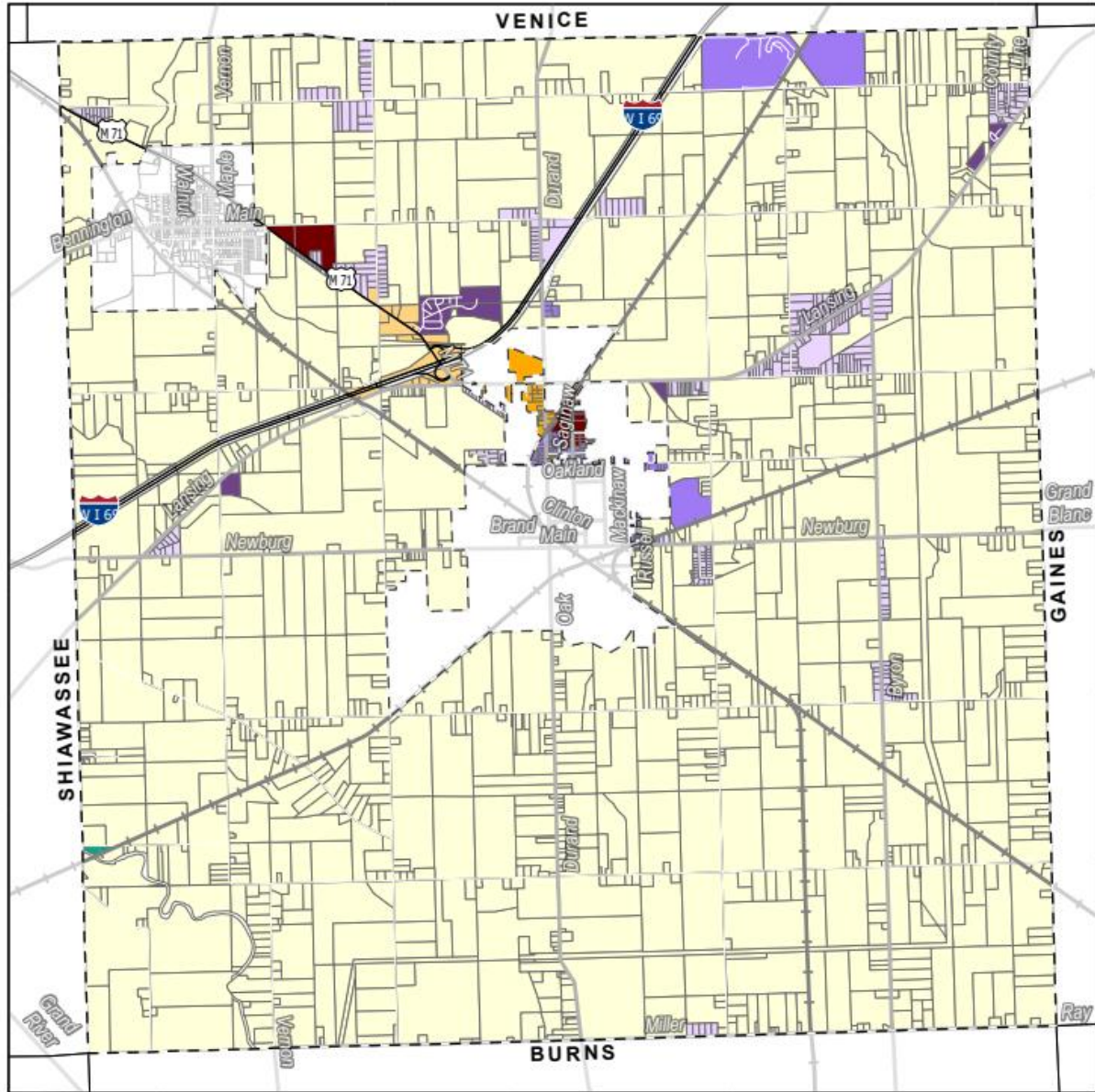
Traditionally, a Future Land Use Plan constitutes the development policy of a community. As a community grows, the Future Land Use Plan should be reviewed and updated to address how growth has impacted infrastructure and other existing conditions.

However, in Vernon Township, agricultural and rural preservation, coupled with a lack of municipal infrastructure, such as area-wide public sewer and water utility lines, is the main driver for the planned future land use composition in the community.

The primary goal of the following Future Land Use Map and corresponding designation descriptions is to preserve the existing rural setting of the Township and limit any growth to appropriate areas. However, it is also important to anticipate and plan for the possibility of small-scale/low-density commercial or residential development in the Township should the opportunity arise.

While the lack of public infrastructure such as water, sewer, cell, and broadband may be the largest challenge facing the Township in terms of commercial and residential development (such as low to medium-density neighborhoods), the Vernon Township Future Land Use Plan accommodates the potential for these types of development in pragmatic and strategically planned areas – along the M-71 and I-69.

Map 6: Future Land Use















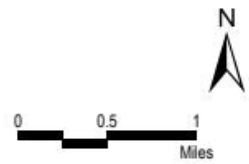
Future Land Use

Vernon Township

April 6, 2023

LEGEND

- | | |
|--|---|
|  Agricultural Residential |  Outside Township Jurisdiction |
|  Residential - Low Density |  Freeways and Highways |
|  Residential - Medium Density |  Railroads |
|  Residential - Modular | |
|  Commercial - Auto-Oriented | |
|  Commercial - Central Business Corridor | |
|  Commercial - Downtown | |
|  Industrial | |
|  Public/Semi-Public | |



Basemap Source: Michigan Center for Geographic Information, v. 17a. Data Source: County or Local Community Source. McKenna 2020.

PLANNING PRINCIPLES

Land use planning principles are used as a guide in evaluating development alternatives and public policy decisions. The following are general planning principles that should be applied to all land use categories:

1. **Consistency with the Plan.** Development should be reviewed for general consistency with the intent of the master plan as well as other regional plans. In addition other governing bodies, such as the State or County, should be encouraged to use the Master Plan in considering programming for Vernon Township.
2. **Concurrence and Compactness.** Growth should generally be compact and in most cases directed to areas that maximize the use of the existing public investment in capital improvements. Development should occur concurrently with the provisions for infrastructure. Development should occur in a pragmatic and meaningful way to discourage incompatible adjacent land uses.
3. **Sustainability and Natural Systems.** Special consideration should be given when development is proposed in environmentally sensitive areas, particularly around the Township's natural beauty corridors, scenic agricultural areas, and river and creek systems.
4. **Human Scale.** The community should be designed on a human scale with a land use pattern balanced around activity centers such as lakes, schools, community facilities, parks, or other similar sites.

FUTURE LAND USE CATEGORIES

The land use categories are graphically displayed on the Future Land Use Map and are described in this section of the Master Plan on the following pages.

Agricultural Residential

The Agricultural Residential category includes active farms, fallow agricultural land, and single-family homes that are associated with agriculture.

Low-Density Residential

The Low-Density Residential category includes single-family homes that are located on 1/4- to 1-acre lots, typically not associated with any agricultural activity. These areas are generally concentrated around the City of Durand but are also scattered throughout the Township along major roadways.

Medium-Density Residential

The Low-Density Residential category includes single-family and two-family (aka duplex) homes that are located on 1/8- to 1-acre lots, typically not associated with any agricultural activity. These areas are concentrated around the border with the City of Durand.

Commercial – Auto-Oriented

The Commercial – Auto-Oriented category includes all commercial activities that are intended to serve car users, particularly those existing and entering I-69. Uses in this category include gas stations, car washes, drive-through fast-food restaurants, car sales lots, and more. In general, these areas are concentrated around the I-69 interchange.

Commercial – Central Business Corridor

The Commercial – Central Business Corridor category includes all commercial activities that support the Township's central business corridor around the Lansing-Durand intersection. Uses in this category include

restaurants, retail businesses, contractor businesses, medical and office services, motels and hotels, gyms, and more.

Commercial – Downtown

The Commercial – Downtown category includes all commercial businesses that directly abut downtown Durand and serve the downtown customer base. Uses in this category include specialty offices, restaurants, and other retail services.

Industrial

The Industrial category includes all light and heavy industrial uses, such as manufacturing, compounding, processing, and warehousing.

Public/Semi-Public

The Public/Semi-Public category includes public and private recreation areas, including cemeteries.

FLEX AREAS

A “flex area” is an area on the Future Land Use Map that has more than one compatible future use.

Residential Flex Area

The residential flex area denotes parcels in the Township that are currently designated as Agricultural Residential on the Future Land Use Map but may also be appropriate for Low- or Medium-Density Residential development. This is not to say that all the land within the flex area should be developed as residential, but rather that additional residential development should generally be limited to within the flex area boundary. As such, the flex area acts as a sort of a “growth boundary” that concentrates new subdivisions near existing residential areas, particularly around the City of Durand.

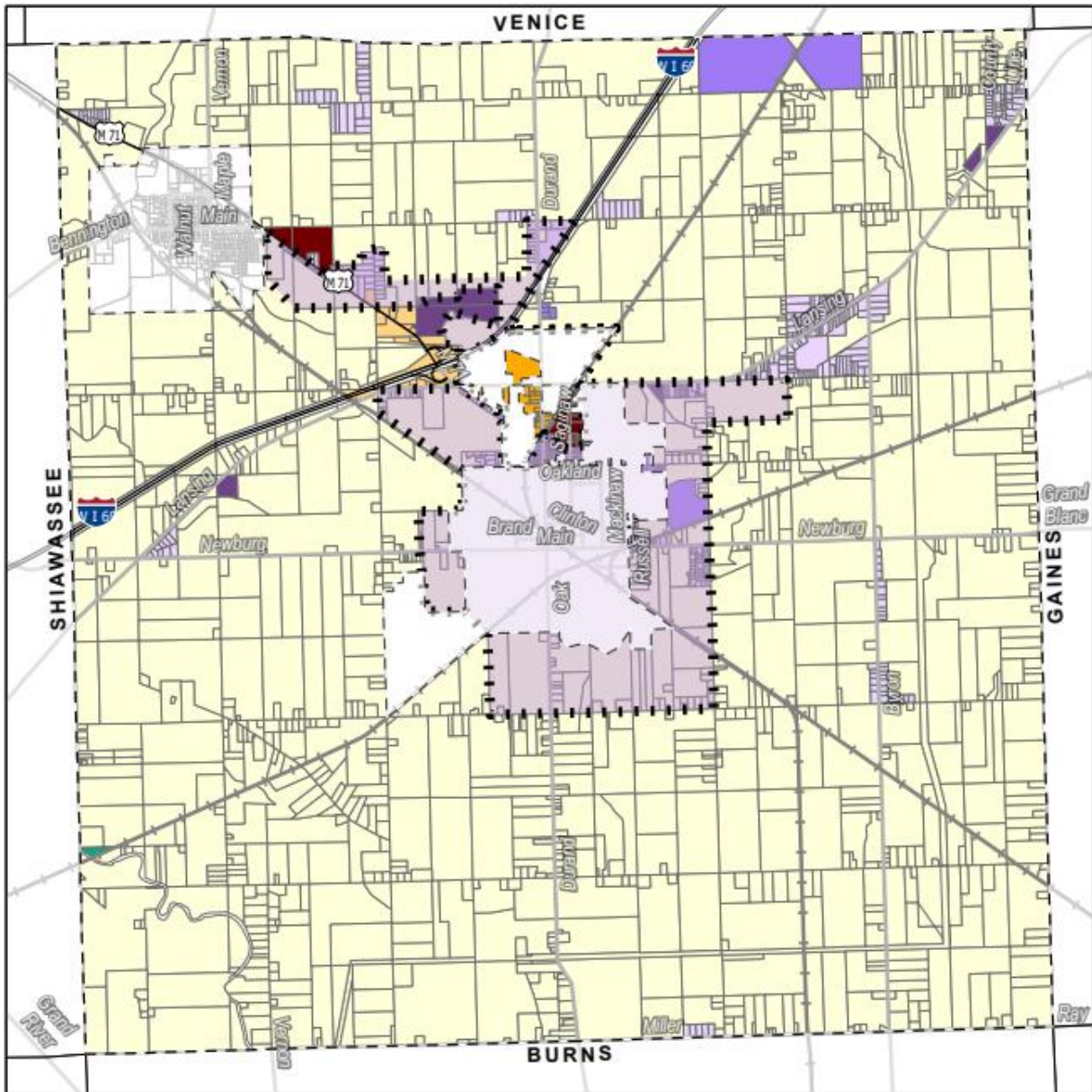
Overall, the purpose of the residential flex area is to manage development in a manner that minimizes the cost to taxpayers and maintains the Township’s overall rural, small-town character. The area immediately around Durand is the most easily serviced by power, water, sewer, and other public services, making it the least costly for new residential development. To maintain the rural character enjoyed by Township residents, medium-density residential development should generally be limited to the parcels that are immediately adjacent to the Durand border, while low-density residential development is generally acceptable to the greater extent of the residential flex area.

Additionally, the residential flex area is designed to connect existing residential areas – Durand, the Village of Vernon, and the Lansing/Brown Road residential cluster. These connections help facilitate community-building among residents living in these areas, while also preserving the agricultural character that is valued across Vernon Township.

“Megasite” Flex Area – Possible Future Addition

As a part of the Master Plan process, the Planning Commission considered adding a flex area for future industrial development in the northeast corner of the Township – the area being considered by the State of Michigan for a “Megasite” project. However, the Township decided that the State’s project is too preliminary at this time for the Township to commit a specific location as a “Megasite” flex area. As such, the Commission will revisit the possibility of adding the flex area at a later date, most likely during the 5-year update of the Master Plan in 2028. In any case, future large-scale industrial development should be located in the northeast corner of the Township to the greatest degree possible, not to exceed 1,000ac, and should comply with the policies set forth for Major Industrial Development that are enumerated earlier in this chapter.

Map 7: Flex Areas FLU



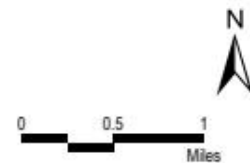
Future Land Use Flex Areas

Vernon Township

July 26, 2023

LEGEND

- | | |
|--|-------------------------------|
| Agricultural Residential | Outside Township Jurisdiction |
| Residential - Low Density | Freeways and Highways |
| Residential - Medium Density | Railroads |
| Residential - Modular Density | Residential Flex Area |
| Commercial - Auto-Oriented | |
| Commercial - Central Business Corridor | |
| Commercial - Downtown | |
| Industrial | |
| Public/Semi-Public | |



Basemap Source: Michigan Center for Geographic Information, v. 17a. Data Source: County or Local Community Source. McKenna 2020.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Prime Farmland Areas

Areas that are considered Prime Farmland (as designated by the USDA) should be maintained as agricultural to the greatest extent possible. The soil in these areas is highly valuable to maintaining Vernon Township's economic base. Some of these areas have already been subdivided and redeveloped into housing, but most remain agricultural today. Single-family homes are often associated with farm parcels that contain Prime Farmland, and they are generally compatible due to their minimal impact on the soil.

Other non-agricultural low-impact uses that do not degrade soil may also be suitable for Prime Farmland areas. These include, but are not limited to:

- Conservation, forestry, and land management for wildlife habitat
- Recreation
- Game land or preserves

The Township should consider a Transfer or Purchase of Development Rights program to help encourage the preservation of these prime farmland areas. The Michigan Association of Planning (MAP) defines the Transfer of Development Rights program as:

“A program that communities can set up to allow property owners in an area zoned for agricultural, conservation, or very low density to benefit financially from the value of their property without actually developing it. A community sets up a “sending” zone and a “receiving” zone, and property owners in the “receiving” zone can buy additional density for development from those in the “sending” zone. TDR is one of the most effective ways to preserve property values while preserving natural space.”

Natural Areas

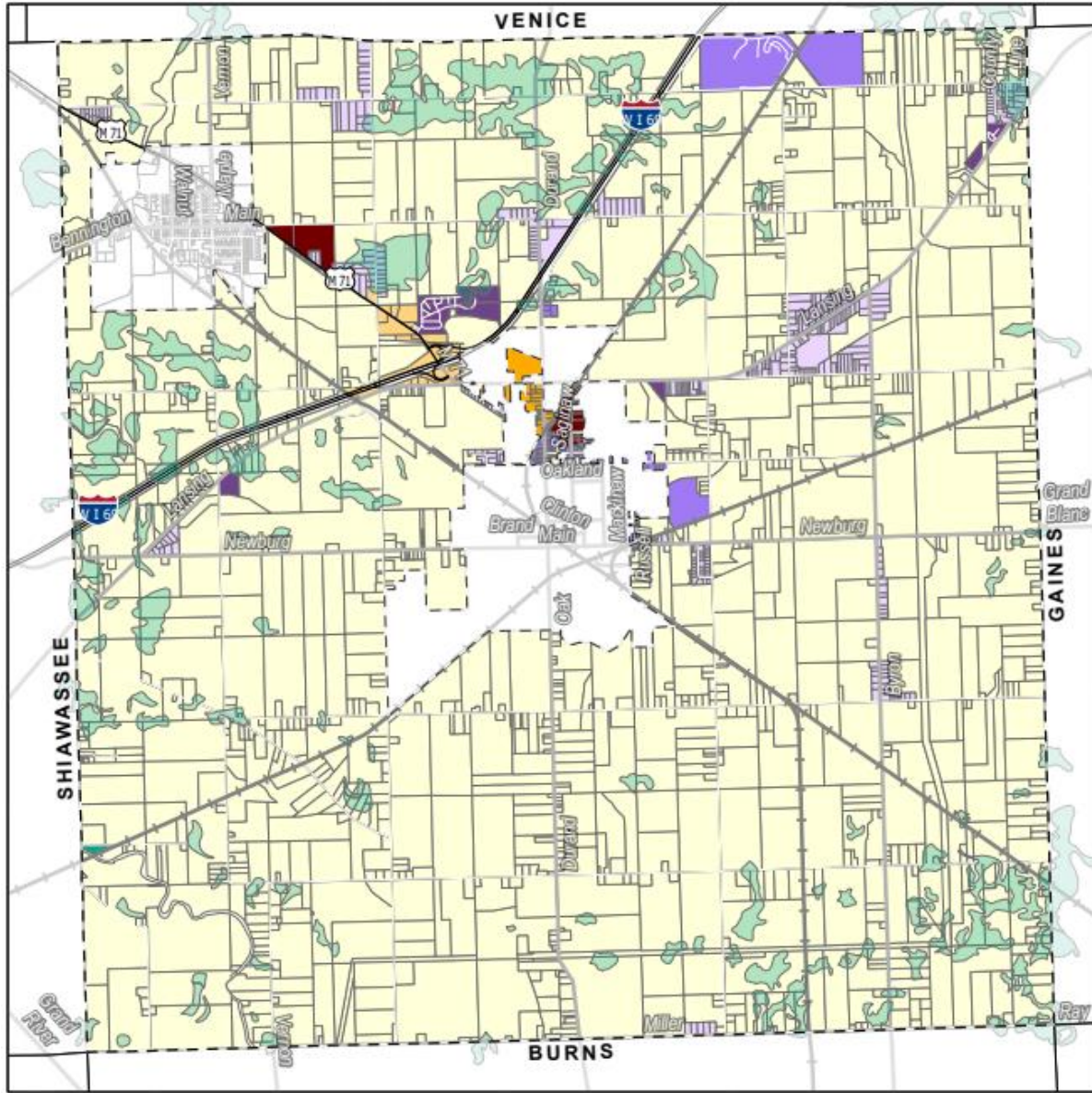
Natural areas are those which are covered by natural features such as woodlands, wetlands, streams, lakes, and rivers. Parcels containing these features should be developed in a way that conserves these features to the greatest extent possible. Future development or redevelopment should leave adequate natural vegetative space around waterways and conserve large stands of woodlands. These standards are not meant to prohibit development of parcels that contain natural areas, but rather to guide development so that wetlands, woodlands, and waterways can continue to benefit Vernon Township residents in the future.

It is important to note that some natural features are regulated by other governmental jurisdictions. Any wetlands that are regulated by the State of Michigan are subject to the development requirements set forth by the Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE). Any navigable waterways are subject to the development requirements set forth by the United States Army Core of Engineers.

Railroad and Highway Corridors

Railroads and highways generate more noise pollution than a typical roadway. Additionally, areas adjacent to major highways have higher dust and particle pollution, making them more hazardous to human health. As such, non-residential uses are most appropriate for the parcels immediately adjacent to I-69 and the railroads that run through Vernon Township. These uses include commercial operations, industrial manufacturing, logistics, semi-public uses (churches, cemeteries, government buildings, etc.) agriculture, conservation, and recreation. Some residential areas of the Township – particularly those near downtown Durand – are already directly adjacent to railroad tracks or the I-69 corridor. To the greatest extent possible, these areas should be buffered from any noise or air pollution if redeveloped in the future.

Map 8: Prime Farmland FLU
















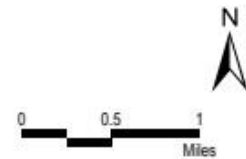
Future Land Use Prime Farmland

Vernon Township

April 6, 2023

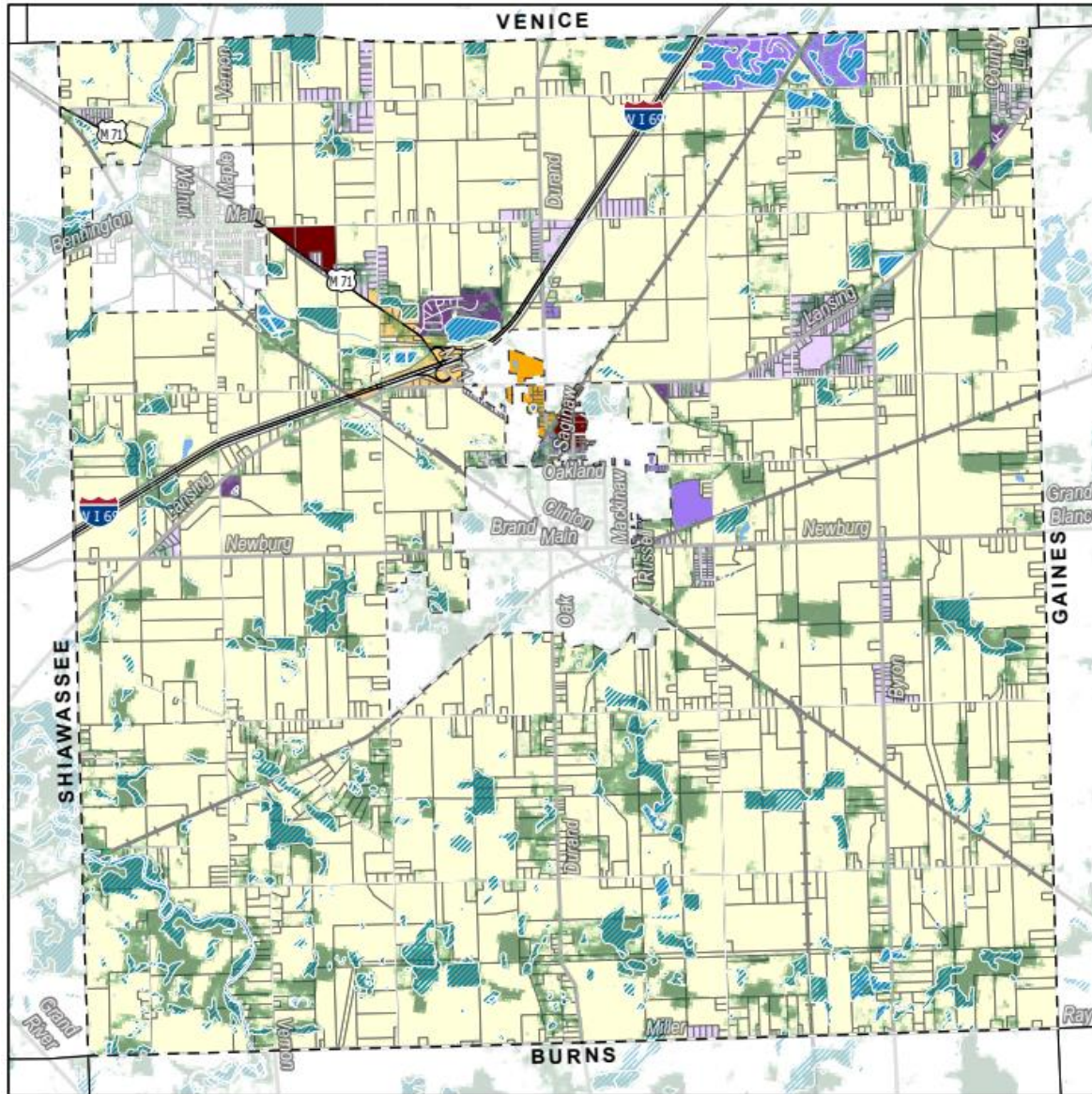
LEGEND

- | | |
|--|---|
|  Agricultural Residential |  Outside Township Jurisdiction |
|  Residential - Low Density |  Freeways and Highways |
|  Residential - Medium Density |  Railroads |
|  Residential - Modular |  Prime Farmland Soils |
|  Commercial - Auto-Oriented | |
|  Commercial - Central Business Corridor | |
|  Commercial - Downtown | |
|  Industrial | |
|  Public/Semi-Public | |



Basemap Source: Michigan Center for Geographic Information, v. 17a. Data Source: County or Local Community Source, McKenna 2020.

Map 9: Natural Area FLU



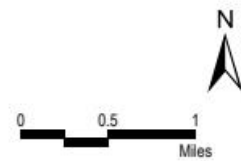
Future Land Use Natural Areas

Vernon Township

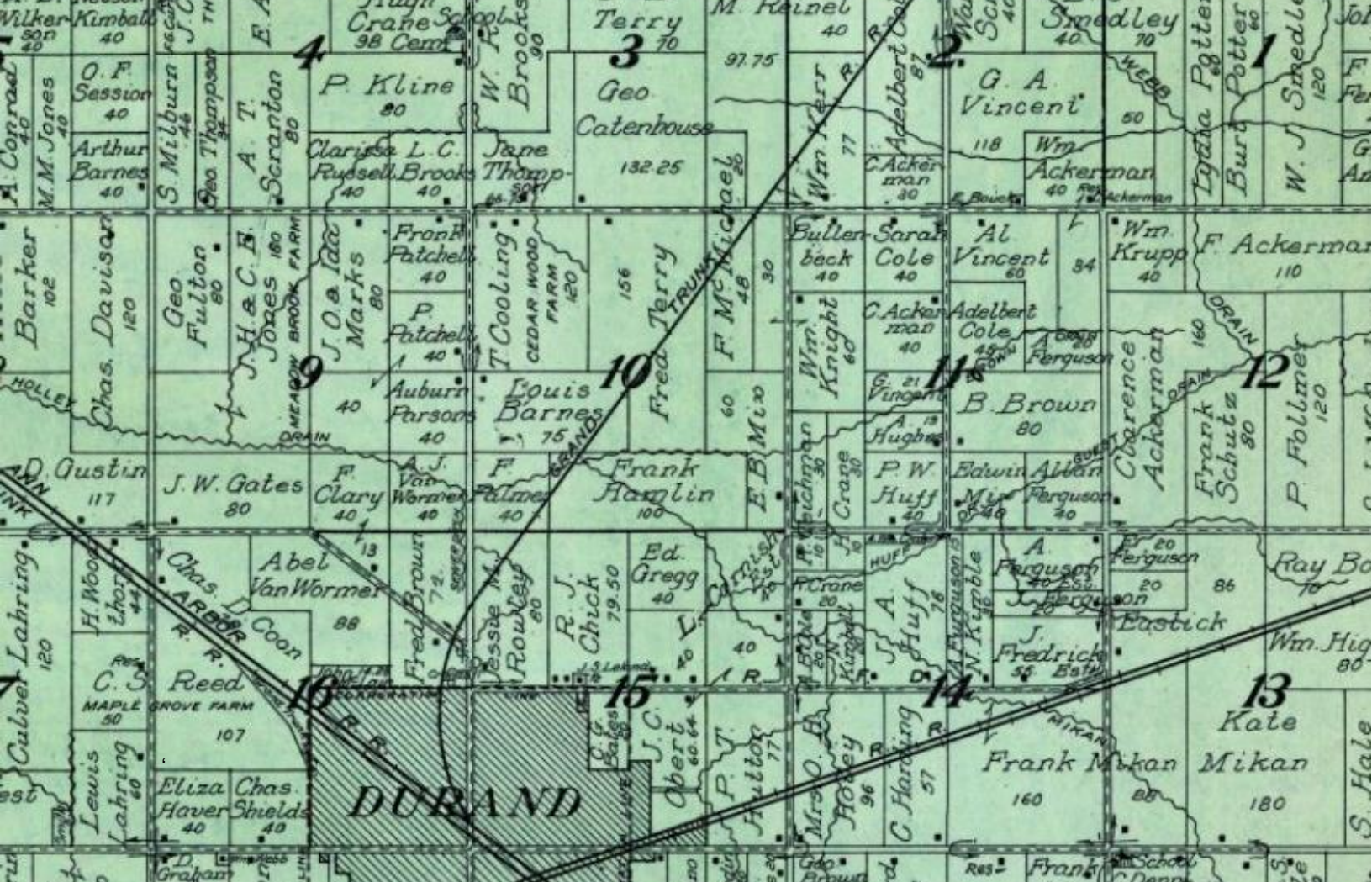
April 6, 2023

LEGEND

- | | |
|--|-------------------------------|
| Agricultural Residential | Outside Township Jurisdiction |
| Residential - Low Density | Freeways and Highways |
| Residential - Medium Density | Railroads |
| Residential - Modular | Wetlands |
| Commercial - Auto-Oriented | Lakes and Rivers |
| Commercial - Central Business Corridor | Tree Cover |
| Commercial - Downtown | High |
| Industrial | Low |
| Public/Semi-Public | |



Basemap Source: Michigan Center for Geographic Information, v. 17a. Data Source: County or Local Community Source. McKenna 2020.



Zoning Plan

The Zoning Plan helps translate the Future Land Use map into terms that match the Township’s Zoning Ordinance. The Zoning Plan helps guide us whenever a change to the Zoning Ordinance is proposed.

In 2022, the Vernon Township Board of Trustees adopted the Vernon Township Interim Zoning Ordinance. This process was the culmination of the effort by the Vernon Township Planning Commission and Board of Trustees’ desire to have a direct regulatory impact on the land uses and vision of the Township. Prior to 2022, Vernon Township’s land development regulations were overseen by Shiawassee Community Development. The County was the de facto planning department for the Township, taking into consideration the desires of the Township Planning Commission and Board of Trustees, but ultimately approving or denying land use development and regulations based on the Shiawassee County Master Plan.

The following Zoning Plan includes the recommended changes and enhancements to make to the Township’s Zoning Ordinance as a first step to the implementation of the Master Plan’s goals and objectives.

The following table represents the Vernon Township Zoning Districts that would appropriately implement the vision of the Future Land Use categories as described above. Rezoning requests should be reviewed against this table, as well as the rest of the Plan, to determine whether the requested district is supported by this Plan.

Future Land Use Category	Zoning Districts
Agricultural Residential	A-2
Residential – Low Density	R-1A R-1B
Residential – Medium Density	R-1C R-1D
Residential – Modular	R-T
Commercial – Auto-Oriented	B-3 B-2
Commercial – Central Business Corridor	B-2
Commercial – Downtown	B-1
Industrial	M-1 M-2
Public/Semi-Public	Any District
Residential Flex Area	R-1C R-1D

ZONING ORDINANCE RECOMMENDATIONS

In addition to the zoning recommendation specified in the Goals and Objectives section, the following changes are recommended to achieve the goals and objectives of this Plan.

Agriculture / Rural Preservation

The following list indicates the recommended changes to the Township Zoning Ordinance to accommodate the Township’s goals for agricultural and rural residential preservation.

- Allow for farm buildings and associated operations as principally permitted uses.
- Create an “Agricultural Preservation Overlay” which corresponds with the areas targeted for conservation (either of prime farmland or natural features) on the Future Land Use Map.
- Expand the range of defined and permitted uses to accommodate desired agritourism uses.

Residential Density

The desired density of residential development under the Future Land Use plan does not exactly match the densities currently required by each zoning district. The minimum and maximum densities of the zoning districts should be revised to reflect the objectives of this Plan.

Additionally, it should also be noted that the Leisure Lake/Holiday Shores area does not perfectly fit into any one zoning district due to the unique configuration, and considerations may need to be made for future development on these sites.



Action Plan

Implementation strategies are a key component of any community's Master Plan. They determine how the Plan's guidelines and recommendations become reality. The Vernon Township Master Plan should not be viewed as a finished product. As events alter conditions within the community or the needs of Township residents change, various adjustments or additions will need to be made to the Plan. It is not anticipated that the Plan's major goals and objectives will require change, but rather, as the Plan is interpreted and implemented, certain aspects will require periodic adjustment.

The following section presents tools and techniques that community leaders, the Planning Commission, and the Township Board can use to implement the Future Land Use Plan. The techniques can be used individually or in tandem to achieve the objectives and eventually the overall goals of this Master Plan. While the direct impact of some of the techniques cannot be immediately assessed, over time these procedures can effectively guide the land use decisions and development within Vernon Township.

PLAN FOR NATURAL AREAS

The natural features - the woodlands, wetlands, streams, and prime soils - are an essential component of life in Vernon Township. They establish the rural character, they attract people to live and work here, and they drive the local economy. It is vitally important that these resources are protected.

To protect them effectively, one must know if they are being harmed. Surveys of woodlands and wetlands should be conducted, even if on a simplified level, at regular intervals, to determine if these resources are being lost to development. Similarly, analyses of soil samples should be conducted regularly to see if the quality of the soil remains at the high level it is today.

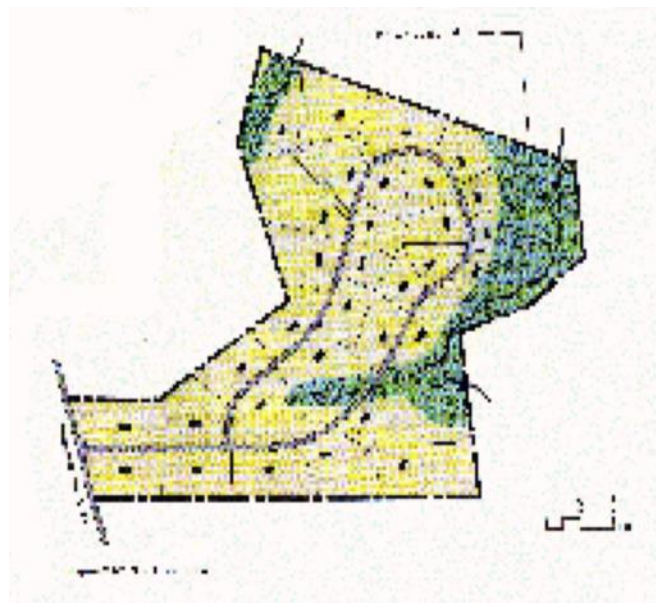
LAND DIVISION REGULATION

Like zoning, land division regulation, under the Michigan Land Division Act (P.A. 288 of 1967, as amended through P.A. 591 of 1996) is a tool for the implementation of this Plan. While zoning deals with land use on a site-by-site basis and activities in selected areas, land division standards are concerned with the process of dividing land and maintaining the quality of individual developments. The Township should review its Land Division policies and procedures, regulating lot splits, to ensure that it is consistent with the goals and objectives of this Plan.

OPEN SPACE DEVELOPMENT

Rural open space development is an alternative to conventional site development and is intended to promote the preservation of the Township's rural character. Conventional site development often results in residential sprawl that consumes large amounts of land and divides open spaces into fragments on individual home sites. It does not contribute to a rural appearance and is not conducive to agriculture, wildlife habitat, or other rural open space uses.

Conventional site development places lots on every available acre of the site. Open space development (also known as cluster development) on the other hand, allows for the grouping of dwellings onto part of the site, and a permanent easement covers the remainder preserving it as open space. The cluster of dwellings can be placed either within woodlands, to preserve agricultural land, or on the agricultural land, preserving the woodlands and other existing natural features. The development also typically has a large setback from the road and limited access points in order to preserve the rural views and limit the corridor development effect.



Conventional Residential Development



Continued enhancements to the Township Zoning Ordinance should be made/planned to ensure the rural character of the Township is protected while permitting well-analyzed and reviewed growth opportunities. The Township Zoning Ordinance requirements should be revised to be no more difficult for rural open space development than for conventional residential development. This development alternative is most effective when the Township offers a small incentive for open space development - one or two bonus lots - thereby

encouraging developers to use this option. A density bonus is contingent upon the developer preserving a sufficient number of natural features and open space as well as providing appropriate infrastructure for the dwellings with limited impact on the surrounding area.

RIGHT TO FARM ACT

Michigan enacted a Right-to-Farm Act (P.A. 93 of 1981) to provide farmers with protection against nuisance suits for standard farming practices. New amendments to this law prohibit local governments from passing laws that are more restrictive than Michigan's Right-to-Farm Act. The existence of such laws is important in areas where residential development and agricultural farm uses meet. Often new residents of these areas object to agricultural uses which involve the spraying of chemicals, industrial-like harvesting of crops, and odorous animal wastes. Newcomers to rural areas have been influential in having nuisance ordinances passed and pressing nuisance suits against farmers to limit their operating practices. The Right-to-Farm laws do not exempt farmers from state and federal laws relating to pollution and safety. They do, however, serve to underscore the legitimacy of farm uses, even the primacy of farm uses, above other land uses that may develop in agricultural districts.

Farmers should be aware that they are covered by the Right-to-Farm laws only in the event of a lawsuit. The Right-to-Farm Act in Michigan requires farmers to abide by the GAAMP (Generally Accepted Agriculture Management Practices) to receive legal protection from nuisance lawsuits. Township land use regulators will recognize the provisions of the Michigan Right-to-Farm Act; however, restrictions will be established on animal units and Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs) consistent with the GAAMPs to control environmental and nuisance impacts that can be generated by these uses.

PLANNING COMMISSION

A stable and knowledgeable Planning Commission is critical to the success of the zoning process. The Commission's responsibilities include long-range plan formulation and the drafting of appropriate, reasonable zoning ordinance regulations designed to implement the Master Plan's goals and objectives. Adoption of the Zoning Ordinance by the Township Board then provides the legal basis for enforcement of the Zoning Ordinance's provisions. The ultimate effectiveness of the various ordinance requirements, however, is dependent upon the overall quality of ordinance administration and enforcement. If the administration procedures are lax or handled in a sporadic, inconsistent manner, the results will be unsatisfactory at best; conversely, fair and efficient administration generates a quality built and natural landscape.

Another role of the Planning Commission is to provide planning recommendations to the Township Board. This planning function is a continuous process that does not terminate with the completion of this Plan. Both the rural and lakefront areas are in constant change, and planning is an ongoing process of identification, adjustment, and resolution of problems. To sustain the planning process and generate positive results, maintain momentum, and respond to change, the Plan should be reviewed and updated regularly. As stated earlier, the State enabling legislation requires reviews and updates to the plan at least every five (5) years to maintain the validity of its data and relevance as a policy document. The Implementation section should be reviewed annually to monitor progress, budgetary assignments, and project goals for the coming years.

The Planning Commission recognizes the possibility of change and the fluidity of this document. It recognizes that it must be regularly reviewed and updated to assure the overall regulatory framework is supported. The Planning Commission shall review the document at least once every five (5) years, as required by the Michigan Planning Enabling Act, to assure the Plan continues to represent the goals and objectives of the Township's residents. The Plan will be updated or revised, as needed, in order to continue to provide a firm foundation for land use planning and regulation.



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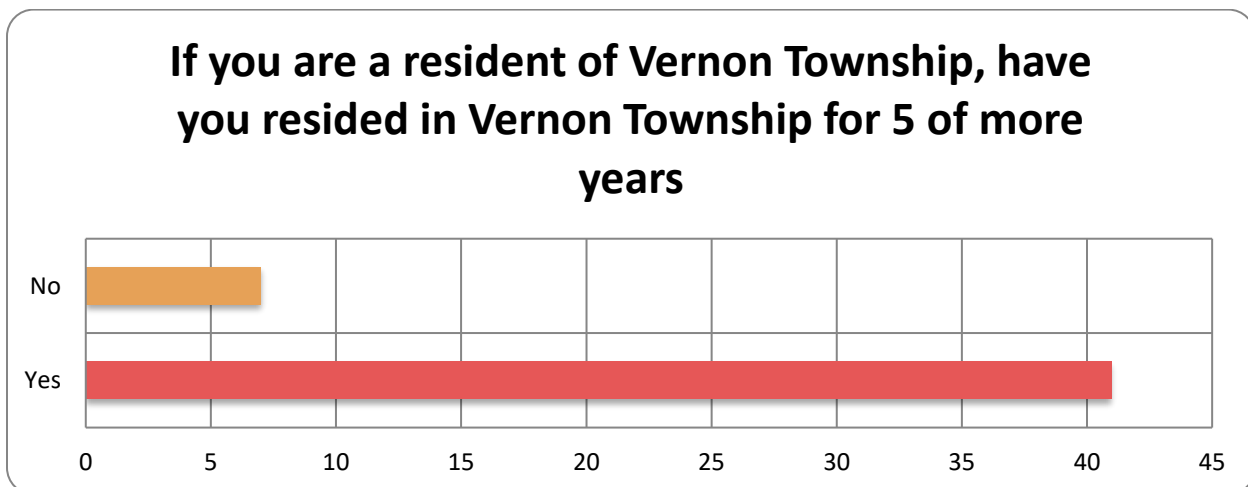
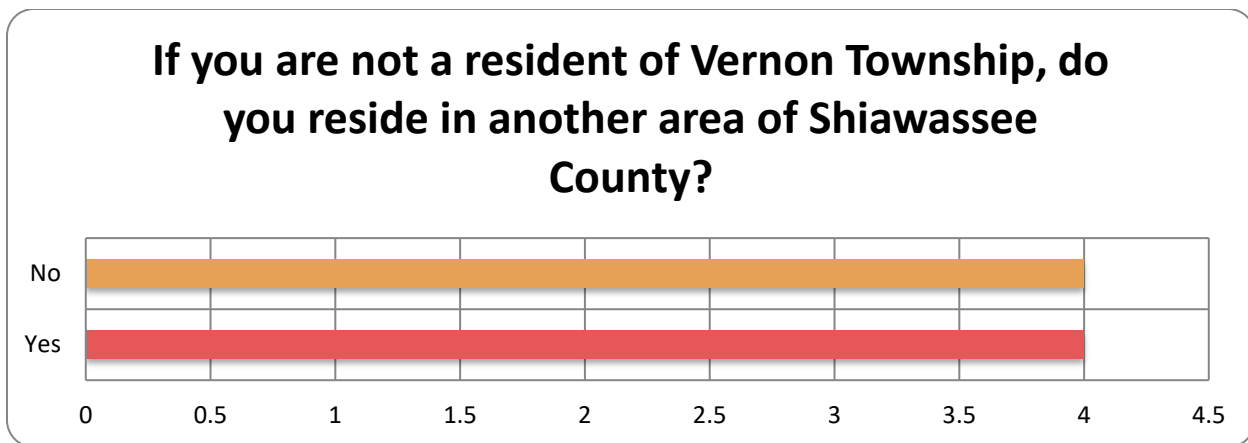
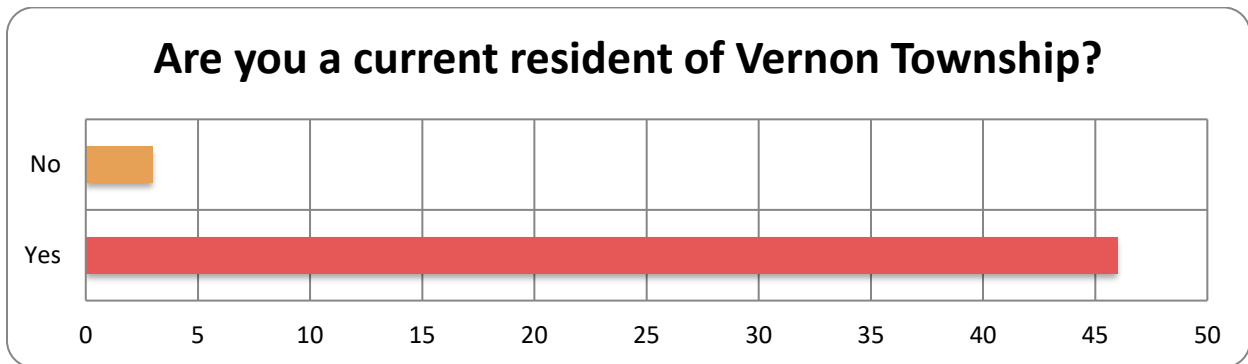
John Jackson, AICP
Kyle Mucha, AICP
Nani Wolf, AICP, CAPS
Jeff Keesler

President
Project Manager
Lead Project Planner/GIS Mapping
Project Planner

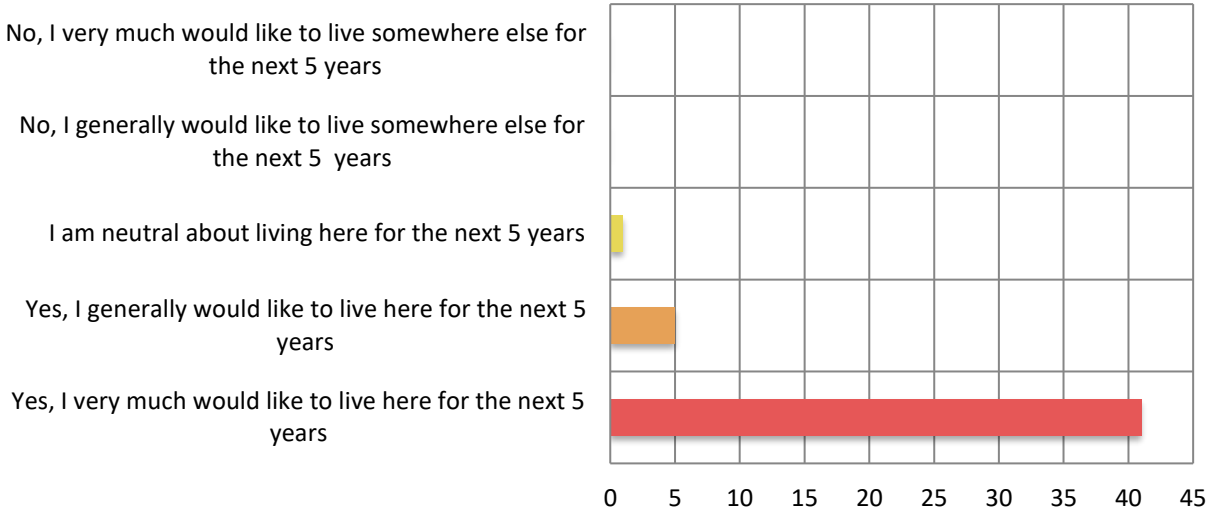
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Appendices

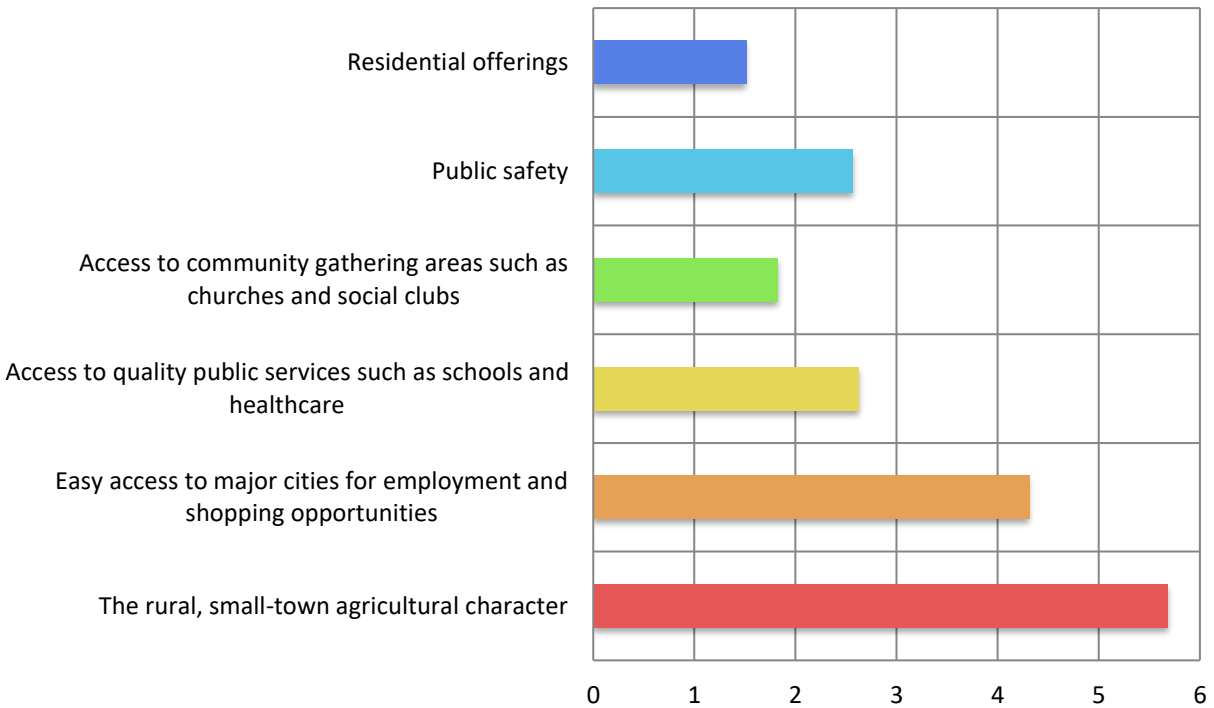
Full Survey Results



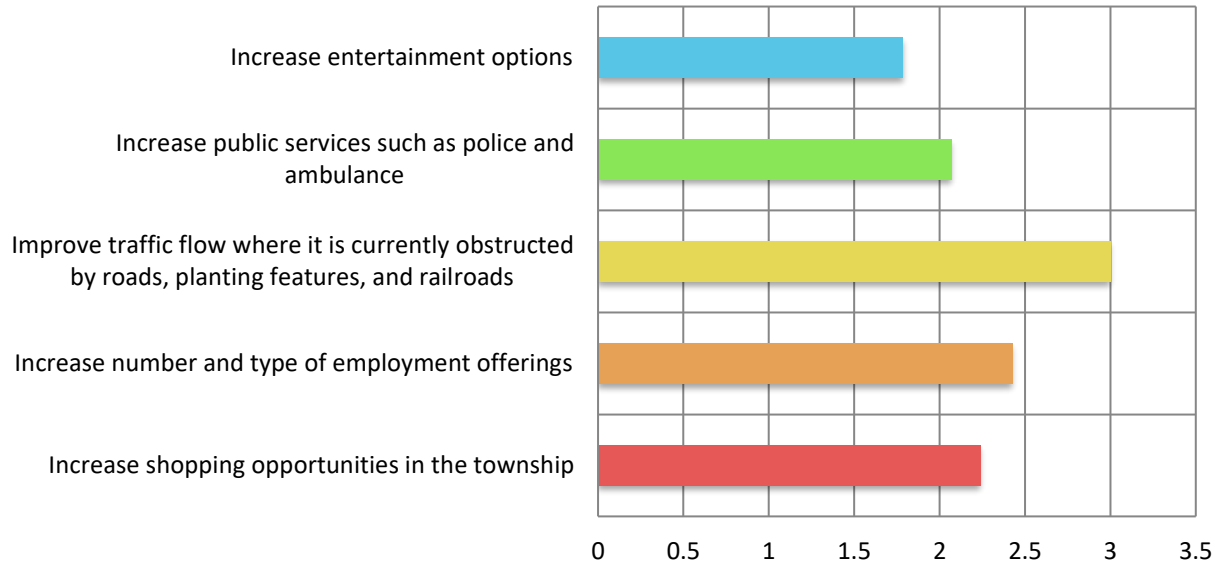
If you are a resident of Vernon Township, do you plan on residing in Vernon Township for at least the next 5 years?



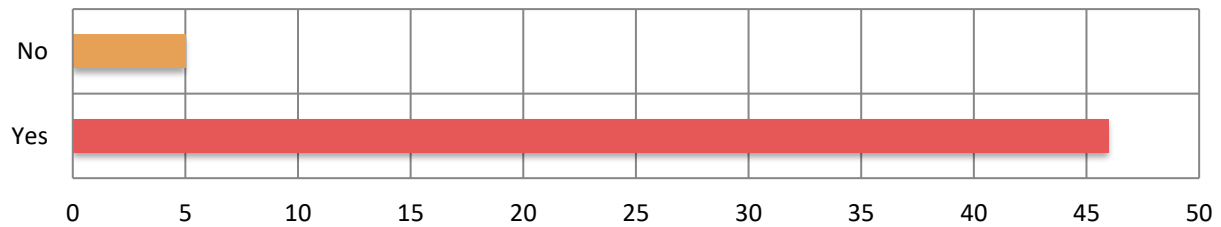
Please rank what you like about Vernon Township from most to least important:



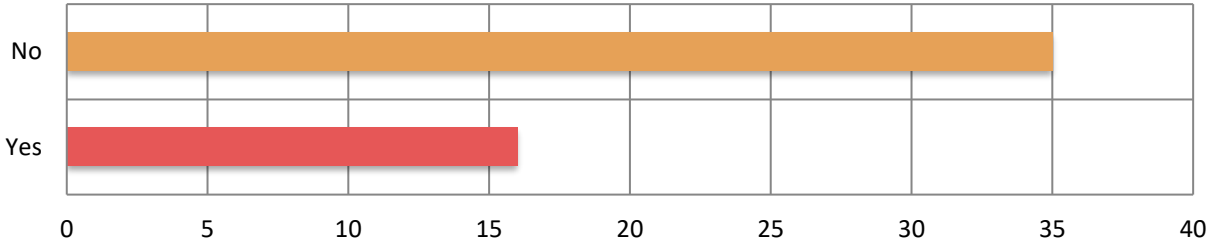
Prioritize the following items for improvement - which should the Township focus on most?



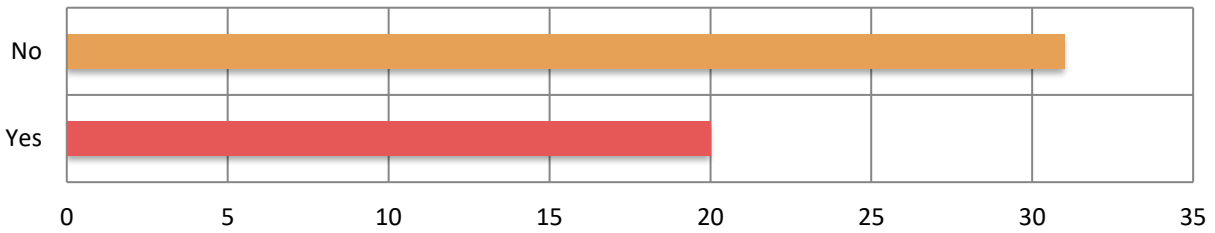
Would you like to see Vernon Township maintain a similar rural character in the future?



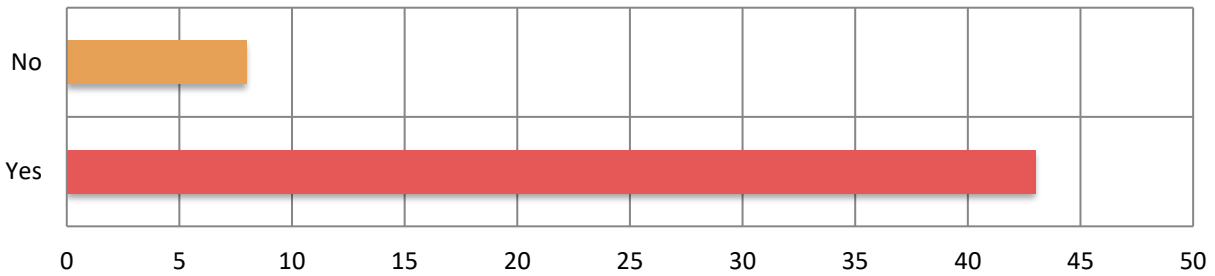
Would you be in favor of designating a significant portion of Vernon Township to industrial development?



Would you be in favor of more Township land being used for passive energy activities such as windmills or solar farms?



Would you be in favor of additional recreational sites such as parks, woodlands, and trails?

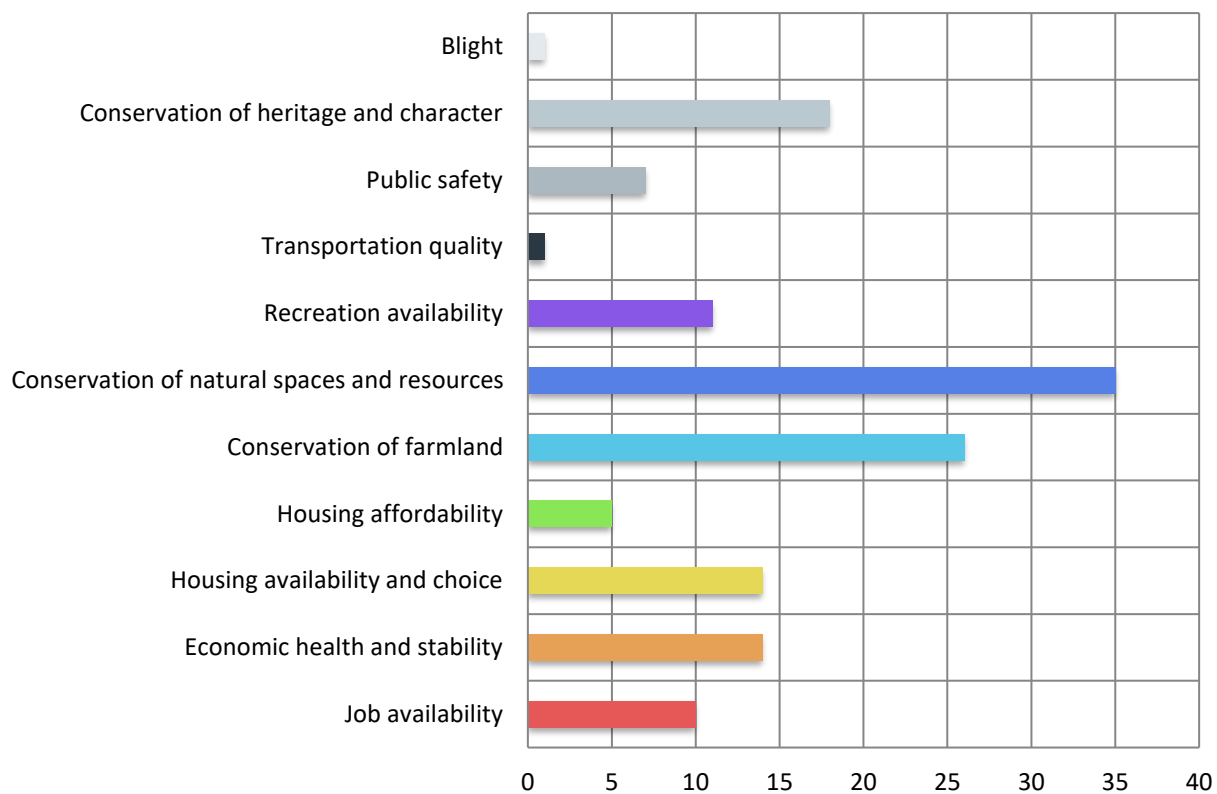


If you answered "No" to any of the 4 questions above, please explain why:

- Vernon Township is a small farm area, with that being said we do not need any industrial shops brought in. I feel that in the area we have enough parks and do not need to spend money on more.
- Have read too many horror stories of others who have had that stuff foisted on them.
- Solar farms and windmills do not create enough jobs for the land that they take up
- No solar farms or windmills that do not benefit the residents
- Love the rural, small town feel. We need to preserve our farmland.
- Don't want loud, noisy, stinky factories! Our natural features are too valuable! would rather have parks! How about a State park? Shiawassee County is the only county in the state of Michigan that doesn't have a State park within it
- Most of the above questions were supported would change the rural character of our community Vernon Township
- Mega sites for industry or wind or solar doesn't fit in our community
- Passive energy is not sustainable. Current industrial sites under utilized.
- Wind and solar farms create short term employment
- The township lacks the utilities necessary to support industrial development.
- The township needs GROWTH to support business, schools so they can grow and bring in more shopping experience instead of driving to the BIG cities and taking dollars 💰 out of the community
- I've only ever seen industrial development cause problems. They come and go and when they leave, they do not clean up after themselves.
- The development would be great but my main concern is the private, quiet nature of the area
- I've read solar farms are actually bad for the local environment and destroys the property for future use. Wind farms are an eye soar and fairly loud.
- Windmills are detrimental to the environment and the views. We have enough parks in the are. We need condos.
- Would like to see newer houses or subdivision
- Don't see the need to change the culture here with bringing in all the industrial businesses when it is already great.
- I moved here to get away from city life
- We are a farming community
- Questions require more options than yes or no
- Because I don't want to look out my window at an ugly industrial building.
- I love the small town feel that the community has to offer along with the agriculture aspect of the community. Bringing in large industrial business and windmills, solar farms ruins the agriculture aspect and is bad for the environment.
- Because Vernon has been a farming community and I feel like it should stick to being a farming community.
- This is Vernon township. Not Flint!
- Industrial development might decrease property values in the township.
- If I wanted more industry I would move to Flint or Lansing.
- Windmills aren't good for environment.
- Windmills aren't economically sustainable long-term. Solar farms are a wasteful use of resources, too costly to maintain. These are fad energy ideas.
- Keep it a small area.

- I don't want to see factories and windmills/solar farms taking up our land. I don't feel it would benefit us.
- I enjoy the rural nature of the area, the primary reason I moved here.
- Can't have significant portion of the go to industry and remain a small towns flavor.
- Windmills are ugly kill eagles, take up too much eye space. Solar is ok but block views by natural landscaping around perimeter.
- Degrades area.

Which topics are your biggest concerns for Vernon Township as it continues to change over time? Choose up to 3 answers.



What is one change that you believe would improve the quality of life in Vernon Township?

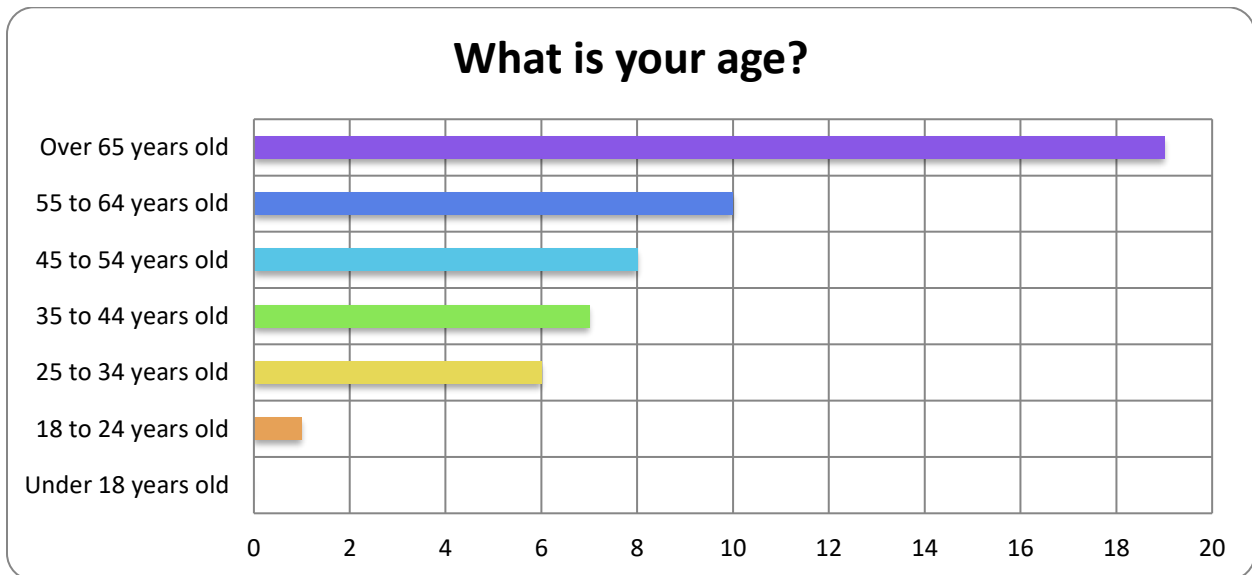
- Find a way to fix railroad blockades. I hate stopped trains blocking the road.
- Creating an area for industrial development would bring much needed jobs to our community and ultimately more residents and businesses to serve them. Our current decline in population is not sustainable for our future.
- Increase trails, parks, recreation. We have no walking trails or bike paths. We don't even have bike lanes on roads and there is very little shoulder for even taking a walk. Maybe even a dog park.

- Controlled growth of industrial park
- The future of our Township should be determined by its residents and not by outside forces.
- No change as the people who live here because of the Character of the Township.
- Vernon Township and City of Durand having joint meetings to help develop Durand rd property
- Access to natural areas or recreational opportunities.
- GROWTH AND NEW OPEN MINDED PEOPLE
- Dropping the industrial conversation all together. How many times is it going to be brought up? Can we just move on with our lives and leave this stress behind?
- A well maintained hiking trail.
- More employment that pays a living wage
- It would be nice to have a newer build of homes or a subdivision outside of the Durand area with easy access to I-69
- It would be great if a new subdivision/housing development community could be built near Durand for new housing builds and close to the highway for access to employment. The one in Durand is further away from the highway system and is difficult to get through town with all the train traffic.
- Do NOT change the township. Do NOT add industrial areas. Do NOT allow solar or wind farms.
- Stopping Durand from taking township land into the city.
- More housing.
- More entertainment/shopping to build the area up and bring jobs, and more people to the area.
- Bring business in that can use the facilities that are already built. Ensuring that windmill and solar farms along with big industrial facilities stay out of Vernon Township.
- Industrial
- Better relationships between (and within) the various entities (Durand, Vernon, Vernon Township and the people within them) to work together. Too much energy is spent in conflict and not enough recognition that while interests may not coincide no one benefits when residents feel it is "us vs them" when we all are part of the same larger community. Unfortunately the township residents learned with the Project Tim event that we really have little to no voice in these mammoth development projects. They are not accountable to local governments or residents when the non-elected economic development people are involved.
- Better traffic flow not blocked by trains.
- More restaurants (not fast food), bettering our parks, hiking trails, splash pad, things for families.
- Having a rec center, hiking/cycling trails, rail trail connect.
- Better police work. More ways to get over the railroad tracks.
- Having an economic center that remains in the township - nothing that might be annexed by the City of Durand.
- Ambulance service
- Either go with the City of Durand for a bridge over the R.R. tracks to the depot, or reforest the land north of 69 and add trails for walking and cross country skiing, and parcels for community gardens and fruit trees.
- Cooperation with other Gov't units.
- More housing, work to bring more people in for jobs, schools. Fill the town's empty stores.
- More job opportunities.
- Job opportunities. Better Internet services. More paved roads. More support of quality services.
- A combination of job opportunities, even if that means adding better Internet so you can work from home. More paved roads and natural gas access.
- A true working relationship with the City of Durand built on trust and mutual respect.

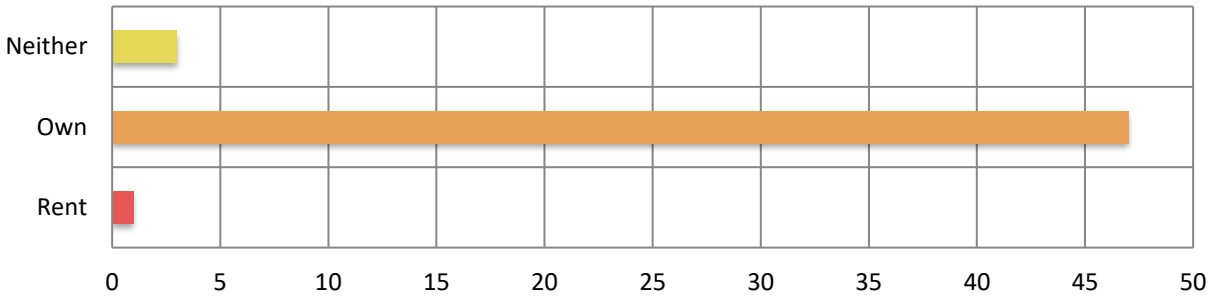
In your own words, describe what you would like to see for Vernon Township in the next five years:

- Remain the same small, quaint town that it is.
- A huge downfall for the township is the lack of fire and ems personnel. This is an issue in all area's surrounding Vernon township as well but being that I live here I would definitely like to see something done to help with stationed ems in our area like it used to be. As well as working on our volunteer firefighting to help boost moral.
- Avoid mega-billion dollar industrial developments.
- I would like to see the township become the leaders for positive change in our County by enticing large industrial development to our community.
- Bring business to downtown Vernon. We have an adorable main st that could bring so much \$\$ to our village.
- Bike paths
- Keeping our rural community rural. Adding recycling would be nice. Also, more communication from the township.
- Controlled growth in housing frastructure and industrial
- Stability
- Unchanged
- More farm and wetland conservation
- large environmentaly freindly business development the Durand rd property
- Well managed growth that preserves the townships existing character.
- GROWTH, increase of businesses so its not just farm land so young people will stay here shopping opportunity so I don't have to drive to the big cities, things to do here, theater restraunts activities. This community is dieing and needs growth
- Comfort in our current position.
- Conservation/preservation of what we have, with focus on schools and public safety
- Additional stick built homes, business friendly, reasonable taxes, and recreational activities.
- I would like to see an increase in recreational oppourtunities for the community. Paved biking trails connecting communities would be a great addition.
- Stability in the townships leadership. Current leadership is close to retirement and it is important that younger citizens are mentored for the roles that will open up.
- More housing.
- To grow without losing its integrity.
- New housing, added recreation areas such as parks or trails
- A new housing development in Durand.
- No changes
- Growth of small businesses.
- Condos for families and older citizens, well paying jobs that do not destroy the environment and adequate public services
- To grow but keep our small town feel.
- Better police protection. Walking trails.
- Use of facilities that are already built being used. Not adding large business and using agricultural land.
- Better maintenance of roads.
- Growth
- No change

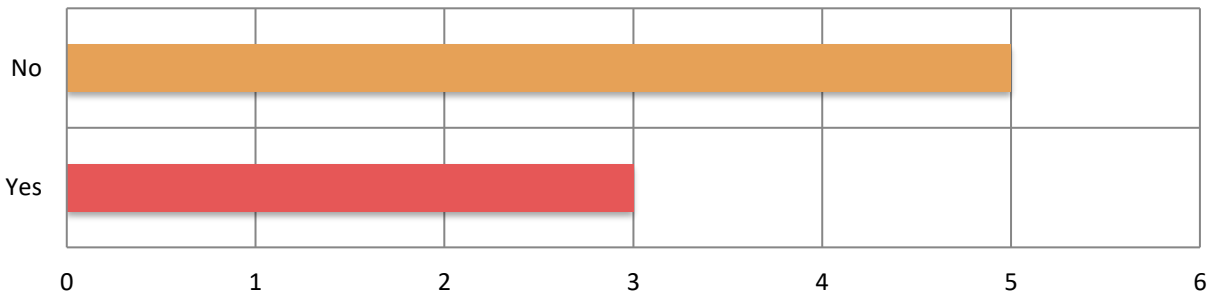
- I want to see the quiet,slow pace of the township. Or even better is a place to ride off-road, for four wheelers ,dirt bikes , or dune buggies! Of course just for township folks.
- A community recognizing the positive attributes of the area as it is and building on those strengths.
- Leave the rural spaces alone
- Growth, more local businesses, parks updated.
- Better roads, better traffic flow, trains.
- Work better with surrounding areas to have a balanced community.
- More stop signs.
- Economic development that doesn't rely on industrial/heavy industrial.
- Better Emergency services/police services.
- A more diverse community of businesses.
- Better care for all of our cemeteries, including the mausoleum in Vernon.
- A small increase in economic development.
- Be healthy, wealthy, wise. More jobs, people, stores
- More job opportunities.
- Modernized
- Modernization.
- Agriculture remaining a dominant part of the local economy, with an increase in livestock production and support services for that. Maybe even combining solar farms and grazing.
- Controlled growth without destroying the small town/rural atmosphere.



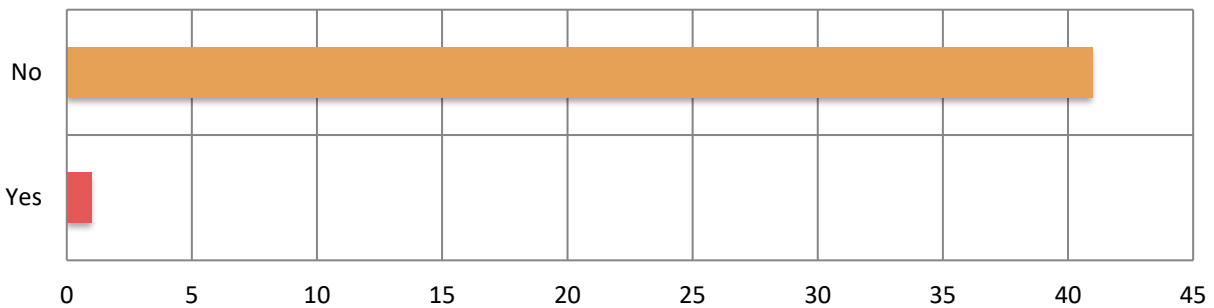
Do you own or rent your residence in Vernon Township?



If you are a property owner in Vernon Township but do not currently reside in Vernon Township, are you planning on making Vernon Township your future residence?



Do you own property in Vernon Township but reside outside of the township?



Advertising Samples

2023 MASTER PLAN UPDATE

SHARE YOUR IDEAS

for the future of Vernon Township!


Vernon Township is updating our Master Plan in 2023, and we need your ideas!

The future of the Township will be carefully planned out and we need to hear from YOU to inform the decisions that are made. Are YOU a resident, business owner, farmer, police/fire/EMS, individual in health services, education, clergy, or just a concerned citizen?

Paper copies of the survey are available at the Durand Public Library, the Vernon Public Library, and the Vernon Township Hall.

The survey opens on **February 6th** and closes on **March 6th**, so don't delay!

Take the Survey



Scan the QR code with your phone camera to take the survey and help shape the future of Vernon Township.

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WELCOME to the Master Plan Homepage!

Scroll down to find multiple ways to leave your feedback on the future of Vernon Township. Tell us your likes, dislikes, and ideas on housing, jobs, infrastructure, and more. Your feedback will be used to help update the Master Plan, which is used to guide the township for the next 10 years.



Frequently Asked Questions

- What is a Master Plan? ▾
- Why do we need a Master Plan? ▾
- Where can I find the last Master Plan? ▾

Take the Survey

The public survey will be open for one month to gather feedback from people

Drag to comment > Ideas Dislike Like

