

HOMER TOWNSHIP

MASTER PLAN

2017



ADOPTED:

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This section gives a brief overview of the Master Plan and the process used to develop the plan.

Purpose and Planning Process

The purpose of the Homer Township Master Plan is to provide guidelines for future development within the community, while protecting the natural resources and the agricultural and rural character of the township. The Michigan Planning Enabling Act, P.A. 33 of 2008, as amended, states a Township may adopt, amend, and implement a master plan. Both the Township Board and the Township Planning Commission took an active role in the development of this plan.

Based on information gathered early in the process, it was determined that the Township Board wanted to stay-the-course as it pertains to future development. The Township Board envisions the community remaining predominantly agricultural with some residential development along with very small pockets of commercials and industrial development in the foreseeable future. Therefore, specific benchmarks for future new development were not established. To ensure that this process was comprehensive, however, the Township developed goals and objectives. These goals and objectives, along with a series of maps including soils, existing land use, and zoning, provide the basis for the Future Land Use Map.

To help understand current and future development pressures, this plan presents social, economic, and demographic data, as well as inventories of natural resources and existing land uses. These data help to present a clear picture of the existing conditions in the Township while projecting future conditions.

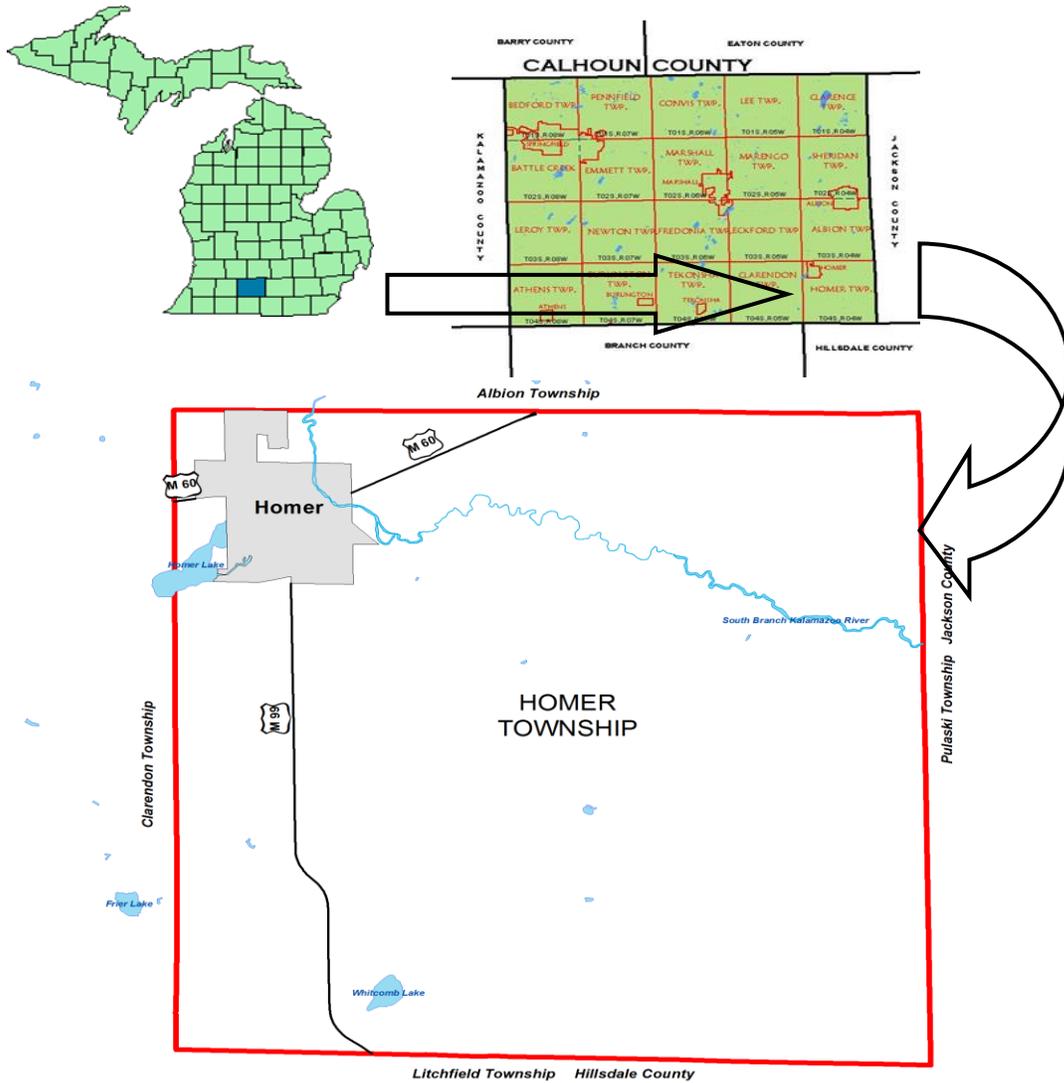
This Master Plan was developed for the Homer Township Planning Commission and Board of Trustees by the Southcentral Michigan Planning Council (SMPC) with assistance from the Kalamazoo Area Transportation Study (KATS). This plan looks at a twenty-year planning horizon, with required revisits every five years or sooner if warranted.

The Status of Planning and Zoning in Homer Township

The Township adopted updates to its 1964 Basic Plan for Future Development in 1988. This Master Plan is the first comprehensive planning process undertaken by the Township since 1988. Homer Township recognizes the need for developing a Master Plan in compliance the Michigan Planning Enabling Act, P.A. 33 of 2008, as amended. Two key reasons are to provide a legal foundation for the Township Zoning Ordinance and to plan for and manage future development within the Township.

By documenting existing conditions such as natural features, socio-economic characteristics, and lands use within a master plan, the Township is able to formulate appropriate land use goals and policies to guide development and serve as the basis for legally enforceable zoning. The master plan will in turn be used as a basis for re-examining the Township's zoning districts and land use development controls.

Map 1-1: Location and Regional Setting



Homer Township is located in the southeastern portion of Calhoun County, in the southcentral region of Michigan’s Lower Peninsula. The Township occupies an area of 36.18 square miles (approximately six miles square). The Village of Homer lies completely within the Township. The Township is not home to any other cities, villages, or unincorporated areas. The bulk of the commercial and industrial activity occurring in the Township is found in the Village of Homer. The Township is predominately comprised of large-scale farms and scattered residential.

The South Branch of the Kalamazoo River snakes from east to west through the northern third of the Township.

The Township is home to two state highways (M-60 and M-99) and numerous county roads. The state highway corridors provide the limited commercial services in the Township. Access to Interstate-69 is about 10 miles from the western edge of the Township by way of M-66. The closest (by way of major roads) metropolitan areas are as follows:

- Jackson, MI ~25 miles to the northeast
- Coldwater, MI ~25 miles to the south
- Battle Creek, MI ~30 miles to the northwest
- Kalamazoo, MI ~50 miles to the northwest
- Lansing, MI ~60 miles to the north
- Ann Arbor, MI ~60 miles to the east
- Ft. Wayne, IN ~85 miles to the south

CHAPTER 2: TOWNSHIP STATISTICS

This section of the Master Plan is an analysis of social and economic factors that help define the character of the Township.

Population

The most important component in any community is its residents. The actions of the residents directly impact the characteristics and future of all sectors of the community. The diversity of backgrounds and the common identities among residents merge to give a community its distinct and unique character and personality.

Table 2-1 lists the population counts and illustrates the trends for all townships and cities in Calhoun County for census years 1980, 1990, 2000, and 2010 as well as an estimate of the 2015 population according to the U.S. Census and the American Community Survey. The 2015 population of Homer Township is estimated at 2,970. The 2010 Census count of Homer residents was 3,015. The population of Homer Township has remained fairly static for the past 35 years; the population has varied between a low of 2,875 in 1990 and a high of 3,041 in 1980.

Since Homer Village is contained within Homer Township, its population is counted both as part of the Township and the Village. Homer Village has an estimated 2015 population of 1,634. The Village contains approximately 55% of the Township's population. The 2015 estimated population of the Township without the Village is 1,336. The Township population living outside the Village has grown substantially since 2000; the Township only population in 2000 was 1,159. The increase to an estimated 1,336 residents constitutes a 13.2% increase. During the same time, the Village has lost a significant portion of its population; in 2000 the population of Homer Village was 1,851, in 2015 it was estimated at 1,634 – a 13.3% decrease. The overall township population has remained stable while the Village has decreased and area outside the Village has increased at almost the same rate. It is difficult to determine if these changes are due to residents moving from the Village moved to other areas of the Township but the numbers and timing are interesting.

Table 2-1

Township	Population					% Change				
	1980	1990	2000	2010	2015**	'80-'90	'90-'00	'00-'10	10-'15	'80-'15**
Albion	1,413	1,256	1,200	1,123	862	-12.5	-4.7	-6.9	30.3	-63.9
Athens*	2,272	2,515	2,571	2,554	2,522	9.7	2.2	-0.7	-1.3	9.9
Bedford	10,157	9,810	9,517	9,357	9,372	-3.5	-3.1	-1.7	0.2	-8.4
Burlington*	1,909	1,773	1,929	1,941	1,946	-7.7	8.1	0.6	0.3	1.9
Clarence	1,916	2,051	2,032	1,985	2,054	6.6	-0.9	-2.4	3.4	6.7
Clarendon	1,176	1,100	1,114	1,139	1,271	-6.9	1.3	2.2	10.4	7.5
Convis	1,734	1,739	1,666	1,636	1,546	0.3	-4.4	-1.8	-5.8	-12.2
Eckford	1,273	1,217	1,282	1,303	1,422	-4.6	5.1	1.6	8.4	10.5
Emmett	11,155	10,764	11,979	11,770	11,669	-3.6	10.1	-1.8	-0.9	4.4
Fredonia	1,755	1,741	1,732	1,626	1,510	-0.8	-0.5	-6.5	-7.7	-16.2
Homer	1,250	1,117	1,159	1,347	1,330	-11.9	3.6	14.0	-1.3	6.0
Lee	1,186	1,281	1,257	1,213	1,011	7.4	-1.9	-3.6	-20	-17.3
Leroy	2,929	3,026	3,240	3,712	3,696	3.2	6.6	12.7	-0.4	20.8
Marengo	1,811	1,801	2,131	2,213	2,274	-0.6	15.5	3.7	2.7	20.4
Marshall	2,564	2,655	2,922	3,115	3,103	3.4	9.1	6.2	-0.4	17.4
Newton	1,979	2,025	2,493	2,551	2,541	2.3	18.8	2.3	-0.4	22.1
Pennfield	8,743	8,386	8,913	9,001	8,932	-4.3	5.9	1.0	-0.8	2.1
Sheridan	2,257	2,139	2,116	1,936	2,064	-5.5	-1.1	-9.3	6.2	-9.4
Tekonsha*	1,771	1,749	1,734	1,645	1,620	-1.3	-0.9	-5.4	-1.5	-9.3

City	1980	1990	2000	2010	2015**	'80-'90	'90-'00	'00-'10	10-'15	'80-'15**
Albion	11,059	10,066	9,144	8,616	8,214	-9.9	-10.1	-6.1	-4.9	-34.6
Battle Creek	35,724	53,540	53,364	52,347	51,649	33.3	-0.3	-1.9	-1.4	30.8
Marshall	7,201	6,891	7,459	7,088	7,053	-4.5	7.6	-5.2	-0.5	-2.1
Springfield	5,917	5,582	5,189	5,260	5,216	-6.0	-7.6	1.3	-0.8	-13.4

County	1980	1990	2000	2010	2015**	'80-'90	'90-'00	'00-'10	10-'15	'80-'15**
Calhoun	141,557	135,982	137,985	136,146	134,447	-4.10	1.45	-1.35	1.26	-5.29

Source: American Community Survey *figures include respective villages **2015 estimates

Housing

Of the 502 housing units reported in Homer Township by the 2010 Census, 447 (89%) were occupied and 55 (11%) were vacant. Of the occupied units, 88% were owner-occupied and 12% were rentals. The rental vacancy rate was 19.1%. The average number of people per household in owner-occupied units was 2.99 whereas the number of people per household in renter-occupied units was 2.42.

Age Distribution

In addition to analyzing total population figures, analyzing the age distribution within a community clarifies will help a community plan for its future needs. The needs and interest of people living in a community can vary according to their age; a predominantly younger population has different attitudes and seeks different activities than an older population. The American Community Survey estimates the median age of the population of Homer Township as 36.6 years, lower than the median age of Calhoun County (39), the State (38), and the United States (37); 30% of the total population is under 19 years of age, while 12% is 65 years and over. The most populous age group in the Township is 35-44 years old making up 14% of the population.

Income

A reliable measure of the economic health of families is median household income. The median household income is the midpoint of income for all households in the Township. While Calhoun County and Homer Township have generally exhibited a steady increase in median income over the past several decades, they lag behind the state as a whole. The Great Recession resulted in a drop in median household income for the Township. Table 2-2 displays information on the median household income for Homer Township, Calhoun County, and the State of Michigan.

Unit	2010 Census	2015 ACS Estimate
Homer Township	\$ 36,250	\$40,068
Calhoun County	\$38,918	\$42,520
State of Michigan	\$44,667	\$49,576

Source: US Census

The American Community Survey (ACS) estimates that median household income in Homer Township from 2009-2015 was \$40,068. Nineteen percent of households have an income of \$35,000 to \$49,999, however over 41 percent of Homer Township residents have a household income of below \$35,000 and 60 percent have a household income of less than \$50,000. Therefore, a large percentage of the township population is at an income level which is significantly lower than the ACS median income in Michigan and the United States. Nearly 17% of families in Homer Township live below the poverty level.

Employment

From 2009-2013, 58% of the labor force in Homer Township was employed. Production and transportation occupations as well as management, business, science and arts occupations were the largest occupation clusters. Together, those occupation clusters account for 57% of occupations. 35% of the civilian labor force was employed in manufacturing. Additionally, educational services, health care, and social assistance continue to be important industries for employment in Homer Township.

Unemployment

The unemployment rates for Calhoun County have historically been lower than the State of Michigan but higher than the United States. Calhoun County's economy, like the state of Michigan, was stronger in the late 90's than currently. Since 2001, the annual average unemployment rate for Calhoun County began to rise until finally reaching over 11.7% in 2009 but still less than that for the State of Michigan (13.6%). Since 2009, unemployment rates have steadily declined. The most current unemployment rate for Calhoun County was with an unemployment rate of 5.1% in August 2017.

Agriculture & Public Act 116

Agriculture is an important part of the identity of the Homer Township. Many of the residents derive a livelihood from the agriculture operations in the Township and many see the community as a farming community. The Township has a significant Amish community that participates in agriculture activities.

In Homer Township, there are nearly 14,000 acres of land – nearly 40% of the land area in the Township – is enrolled in Michigan’s Public Act 116 Farmland and Open Space Preservation Program. The program is designed to preserve farmland and open space through agreements that restrict development, and provide tax incentives to property owners for program participation.

According to the 2012 Census of Agriculture prepared by the United States Department of Agriculture, the amount of land farmed in Calhoun County has decreased from 227,994 acres in 2007 to 224,877 acres in 2012. The reduction was experienced mostly in the acres used for pastureland. There was an increase in the acres used for cropland in that same time period. USDA reports that 163,922 acres of cropland were harvested in 2012.

Corn for grain, soybeans for beans, and wheat for grain are the primary crops in Calhoun County. Additionally, there are significant acres of land used for hay and haylage, grass silage, and greenchop. Cattle, hogs and pigs, sheep and lambs, and chickens make up most of the livestock production in the County.

...there are nearly 14,000 acres of land – nearly 40% of the land area in the Township – enrolled in PA 116.

CHAPTER 3: NATURAL FEATURES

This chapter describes the natural conditions that influence the development and economy of Homer Township.

Topography

A basic understanding of the Township's topography is useful as ground elevation influences present and future land use. Similar to other areas of southcentral Michigan, Homer Township was shaped by glacial action. The receding glaciers created most of the water features, hills, ridges and low-lying areas. The topography of Homer Township ranges from flat to hilly. Topographic changes occur within a general range of elevations from between about 990 feet above sea level where the Kalamazoo River traverses the Township in the north to around 1060 feet above sea mostly in the eastern third of the Township. Map 3-1 depicts the topographic relief found in Homer Township.

Climate

The climate is typical of much of southcentral Michigan. It is warm during the summer with high temperatures averaging in the 70's-80's and cold during the winter with average high temperatures in the 20's-30's. The warmest month of the year is July with an average high temperature of 83.3°F. January is typically the coldest month with an average low temperature 15.8°F. The annual precipitation average is 36.4 inches. Rainfall is evenly distributed throughout the year, however September is the wettest month with an average rainfall of 4.1 inches.

Soils

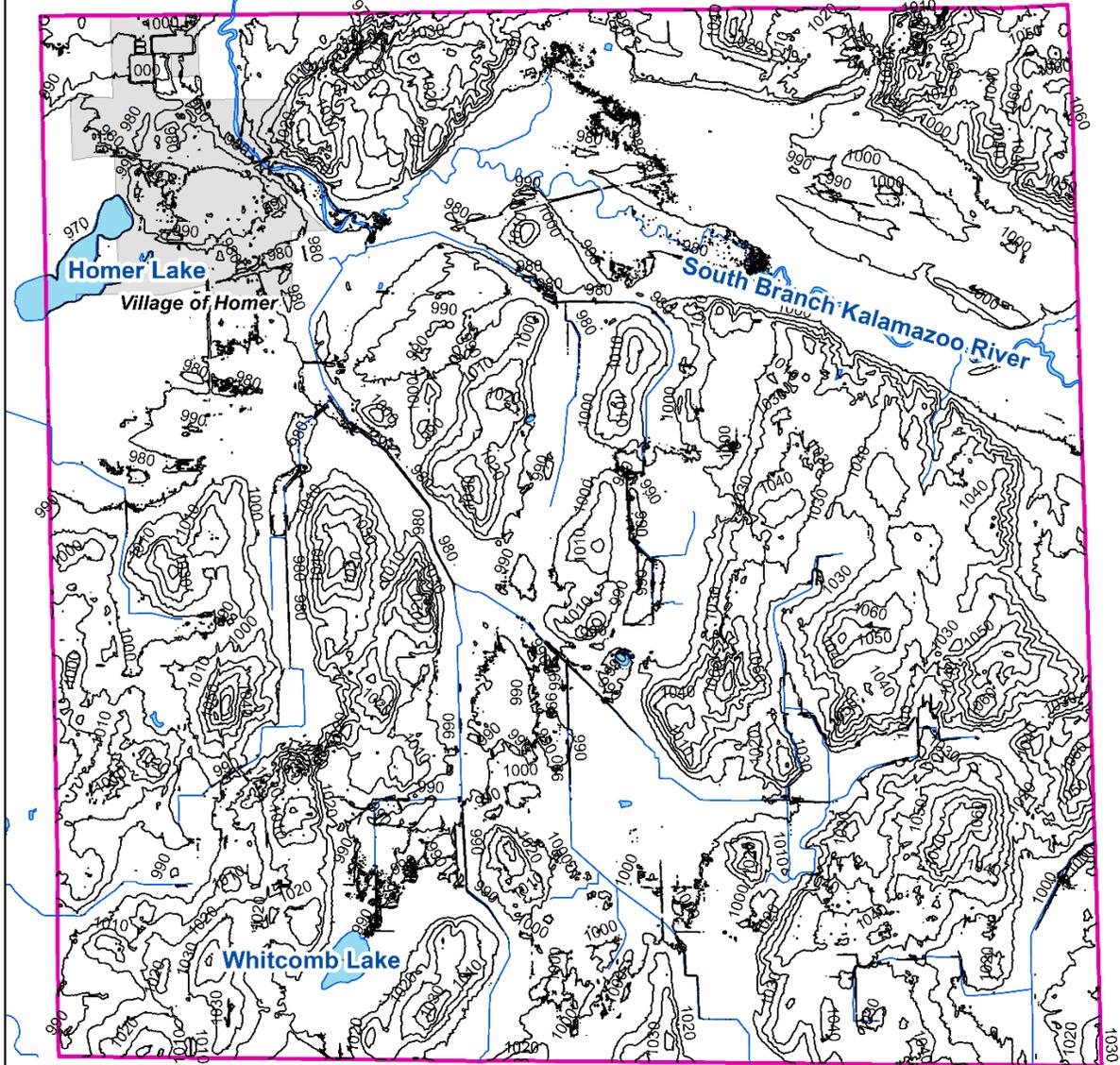
Soils play an important part in determining the suitability of land for specific types of uses. Agricultural uses in particular are determined based on the type of soil; agriculture product feasibility is, at least partially, determined by soil typology.

Soil characteristics may also influence the intensity of use on a site. Soil characteristics such as permeability, slope, filtering capacity, bank stability, wetness, etc. may impact the intensity of use. The soils in Homer Township are well-suited for cropland with some areas suitable for pasture or woodland. The predominant soil type in the Township, Hillsdale sandy loam, is well-drained. Matherton loam, also found in large amounts in the Township, is somewhat poorly drained – Matherton loam is often used as cropland in the Township. The next most commonly occurring soil type is Sebewa loam. Also used for cropland, this soil can be found along drains and other wet areas such as open ditches.

It is important to note that in Homer Township, existing land use – predominantly agriculture – was largely determined by the suitability of the soils. Map 3-2 depicts the drainage of the soils found in Homer Township.

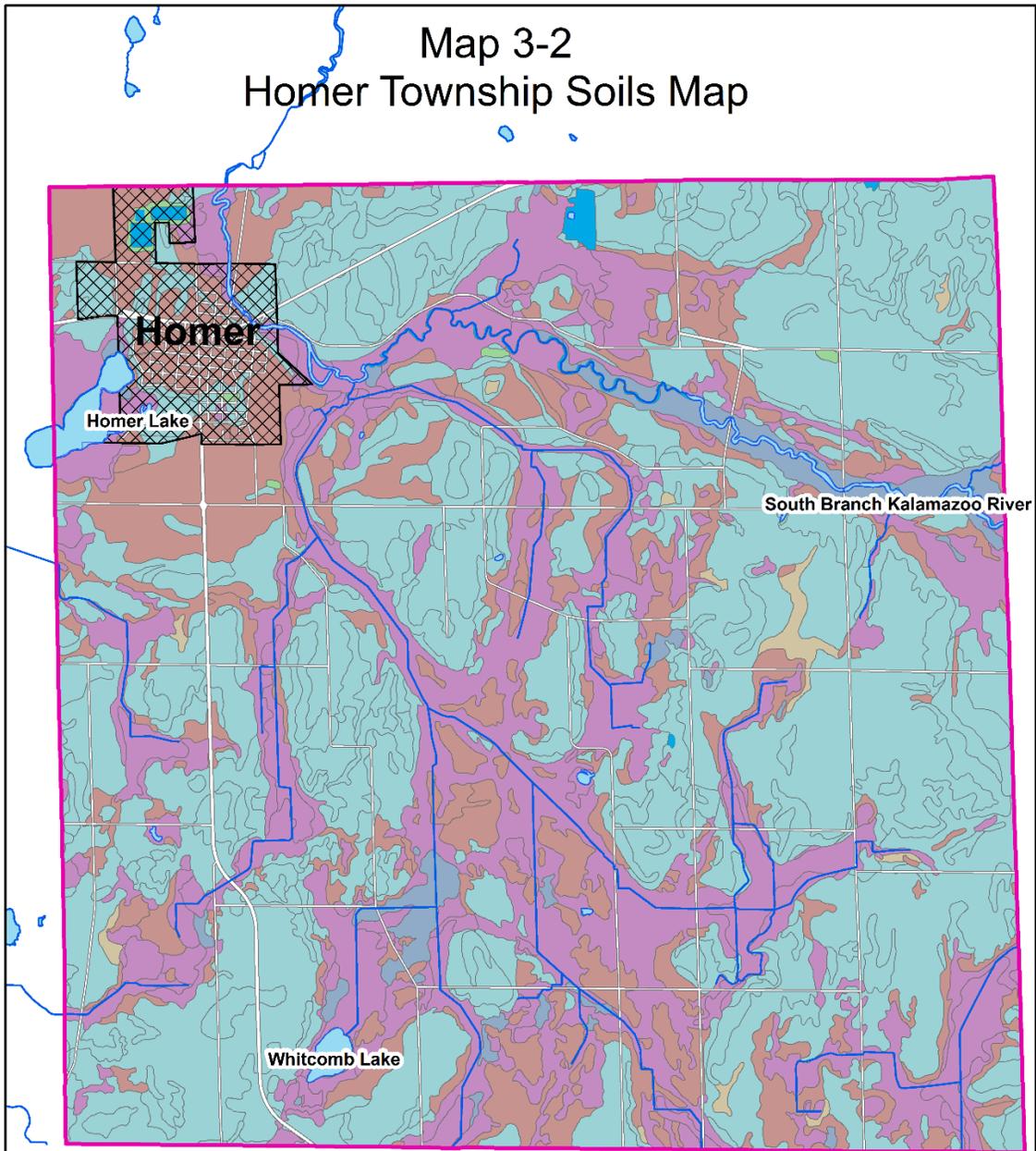


Map 3-1 Homer Township Topographic Relief Map



February 2015
source: Calhoun County

Map 3-2 Homer Township Soils Map



Legend

Soils Drainage

	Water		Moderately well drained
	Excessively drained		Somewhat poorly drained
	Well drained		Poorly drained
			Very poorly drained



Source: Natural Resource Conservation Service
February 2015

Wetlands

Wetlands are often referred to as marshes, swamps, or bogs. The US Army Corps of Engineers defines wetlands as: "...those areas inundated or saturated by surface or ground water at a frequency and duration sufficient to support, and that under normal circumstances do support, a prevalence of vegetation typically adapted for life in saturated soil conditions." Beyond their aesthetic value, wetlands protect the quality of water entering lakes, rivers, and streams by filtering polluting nutrients, organic chemicals, and toxic heavy metals. Wetlands are closely related to high groundwater tables and serve to discharge or recharge aquifers. Additionally, wetlands support wildlife and wetland vegetation protects shorelines from erosion.

Agricultural practices and land use planning activities should focus on protecting and preserving these limited and critical resources. Map 3-3 is a color thematic map prepared from the US Fish and Wildlife Service National Wetlands Inventory. As displayed in the map, wetlands are a finite resource that is concentrated along water features – the Kalamazoo River, Homer Lake, and Whitcomb Lake. The dominant wetland class in Homer Township occurs as Freshwater Forested/Shrub wetland.

Groundwater

All residents within Homer Township derive their domestic water supply from groundwater sources with an average well depth of 88 feet. According to the Calhoun County Health Department, water quality within the Township's aquifers continues to be generally good. Groundwater will continue to serve as the primary source of domestic water in the Township. Because of this, measures to protect the groundwater aquifers are important if residents are to continue to have safe supplies.

Additionally, groundwater from private wells supply all the water for agricultural and commercial land uses within Homer Township. Groundwater is an important but unseen resource. Because it is not easily observed, it is particularly vulnerable to mismanagement and contamination. Proper management of the water supply is important for the future of the Township.

Surface Water

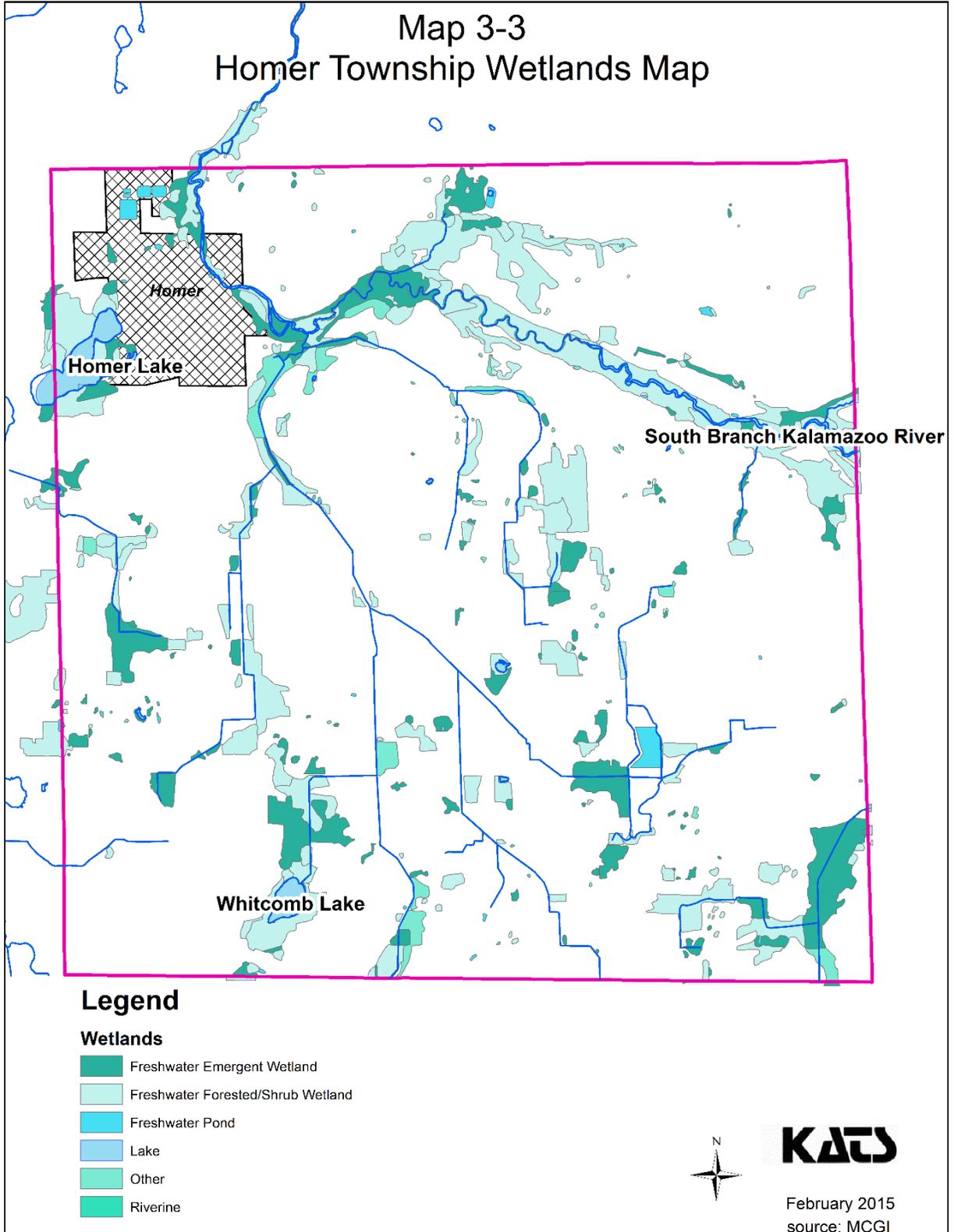
Two small lakes, Homer Lake and Whitcomb Lake, are found in the Township. Land around the lakes is mostly wooded which serves as protective buffer from runoff derived from agricultural, residential, commercial, and industrial land uses.

The South Branch of the Kalamazoo River enters the Township from the east in the northern third meandering west/northwest until it reaches the Village of Homer where it turns and flows in a more northerly direction. Similar to the lakes in the Township, woodlands provide a buffer to the river except for those areas within and north of the Village of Homer. In those areas, a mix of residential and nonresidential properties abut the river banks.

Woodlands/Greenspace

Wooded areas are present in the township with the most extensive of these associated with low lying areas and lakes. While there are no large-scale upland forests remaining in the area, there remains a fairly extensive patchwork of woodland cover especially in the north and east. The patchwork of woodland cover is partially comprised of wooded wetlands. These wooded areas provide a variety of habitat settings for wildlife and are an important attribute of the local landscape.

Map 3-3 Homer Township Wetlands Map



CHAPTER 4: EXISTING LAND USE AND COVER

Existing Land Use

Existing land uses and land cover types were mapped for the Township. The map of existing land uses, shown as Map 4-1, illustrates the distribution of land uses throughout the Township. The map represents an update of the 1992 National Land Cover Dataset (NLCD). The NLCD was updated with 2008 digital orthophotos taken by Calhoun County. The updated information was then digitized and field checked to produce the Existing Land Use & Land Cover map and statistics.

Found throughout the Township, farmland dominates the landscape of Homer Township. Over 60% of the Township land cover consists of farmland, either crops or pasture. Woody Wetlands are found concentrated along the river and lakes. These lowland areas provide wildlife cover and more importantly, protect water quality. Approximately 4% of the land cover is classified as a residential land use and is scattered around the Township, while the limited commercial and industrial land uses are found along the two state trunklines – M-60 and M-99.

Residential

Residential land uses make up approximately 4% of the Township. Residential land uses are comprised of single-family homes, farmsteads, cemeteries, and churches. Residential development is scattered throughout the Township almost entirely along the main roads.

Commercial/Industrial

Homer Township has very limited commercial and industrial development as nearly all the commercial and industrial development has occurred in the Village of Homer. A couple small pockets of commercial/industrial development exist along M-60 and along M-99 south of the Village of Homer.

Prior to developing a future land use map, a community must first assess existing land uses. This chapter presents information on the types and location of existing land uses and land cover. The process identifies both built-up urban land uses along with natural land cover types like woodlands and wetlands. The map presented in this chapter reflects land cover and land use.

Agriculture

Agriculture is the most extensive land use in the Township. Approximately 11,000 acres exist in an agriculture use. Agriculture uses are found throughout the Township and not concentrated in any particular area. The large percent of the land use devoted to agriculture is appropriate given the extensive areas of prime agricultural soils throughout the Township.

Woodlands

Wooded areas are also found throughout the Township. The wooded areas tend to exist in concentrated areas rather than small scattered stands.

Wetlands

Wetlands are defined as land that has sufficient water at, or near, the surface to support wetland or aquatic vegetation. These areas are commonly referred to as swamps, marshes and bogs. The wetland category comprises non-forested types such as emergent herbaceous wetlands and also woody wetland areas found along the South Branch Kalamazoo River. Non-forested wetlands account for 2,462 acres (or 10 percent) of the Township. Woody wetlands occupy 1,560 acres (7 percent) of the Township. Woody wetlands can be found on soils with a seasonally high water table that support lowland hardwoods and conifers.

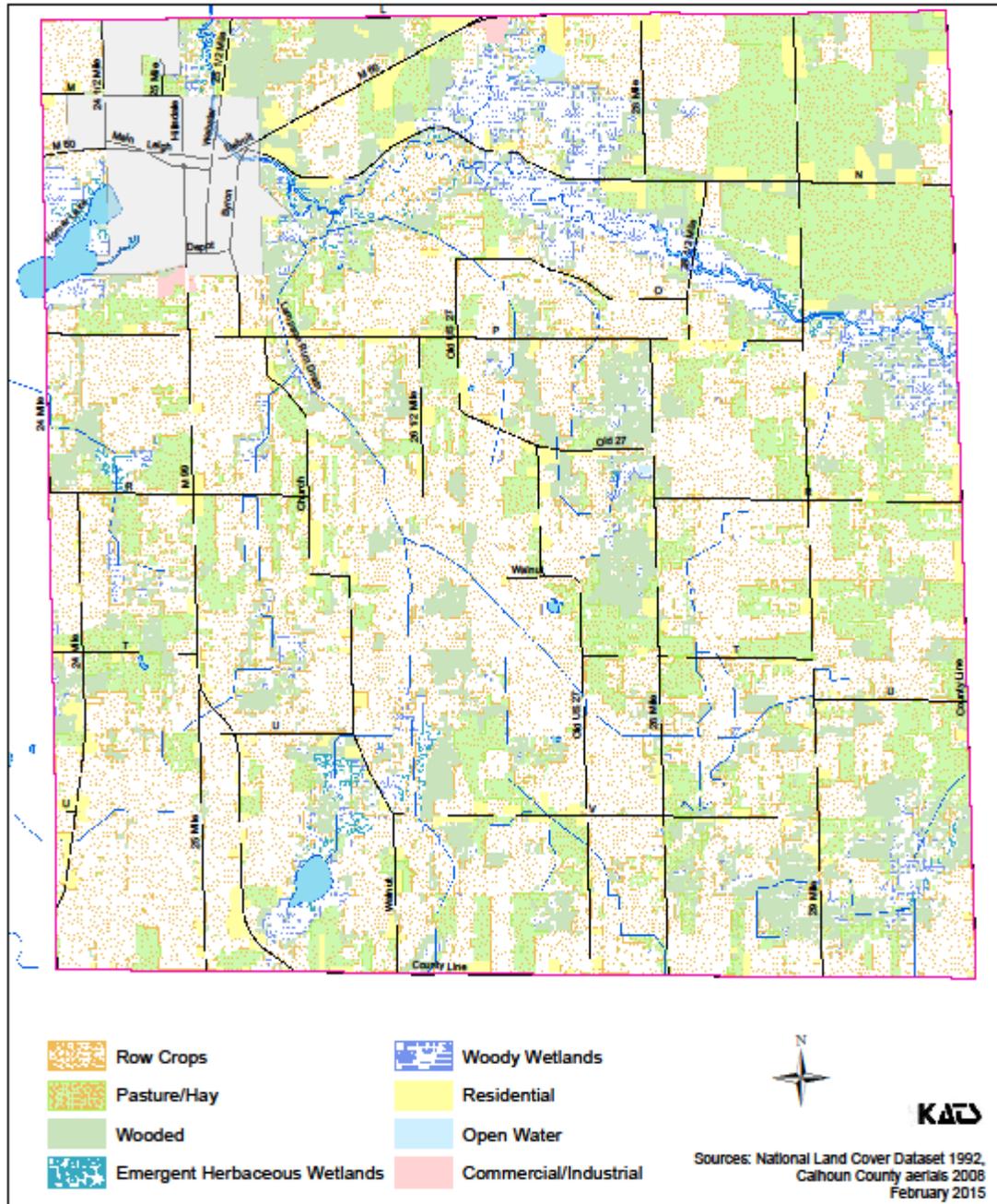


Two of the most important functions of wetlands are water quality protection and ecological corridors. As seen in the Existing Land Use Map, the major wetland areas are adjacent to the river and lakes in the Township. The network of wetlands receives surface water and subsurface water discharge creating the many streams, creeks, and drains that, in turn, flow into the area lakes and the river. The interconnected resources exemplify how activities distant from major water bodies can still have an impact on the water quality. It is important to note that existing land use statistics used in this chapter are based on National Land Cover Dataset (NLCD). Forested and wetland information contained in the NLCD was not verified by field inspection when the data was compiled. Thus, areas shown as wetlands may not actually meet State and Federal criteria for legally regulated wetlands. However, the information is still valuable for general land use planning decisions.

Surface Water

Open, surface water comprises 165 acres (or less than 1 percent) of Homer Township. Water features include the South Branch Kalamazoo River, Homer Lake and Whitcomb Lake as well as numerous named and unnamed drains, streams and creeks.

Map 4-1 Homer Township Existing Land Use & Land Cover Map



CHAPTER 5: GOALS AND POLICIES

Goal 1: Agricultural Preservation

The first, and primary, goal is to maintain the agricultural and rural character of the Township.

Policies

- Maintain agricultural lands through master planning and zoning.
- Connect farmers with various state and federal assistance programs.
- Maintain or increase communication with the agricultural community.
- Examine the possibility of limiting uses allowed in agriculturally zoned lands; i.e. maintain an ordinance that allows a limited number of accessory or secondary uses that may encroach on farming operations.
- Encourage and support the use of federal, state, and regional farmland preservation programs.



This section of the Master Plan outlines the goals for Homer Township for the next 20 years. It also outlines the policies the Township could employ to carry out each related goal. Goals are an important way for the Township to articulate the long-term direction of the community. The goals must also reflect the vision of the Township Board, business owners, residents, and other interested parties regarding the future of the Township. Goals should also shape the policies implemented by the Township. To this end, the following goals and policies are achievable, relevant, and represent community attitudes.



Goal 2: Economic Development

Encourage context sensitive commercial and industrial development while maintaining the rural and agricultural character of the Township.

Policies

- Work with state and local economic development organization to determine exactly which parcels could be of interest to developers/employers.
- Make allocations for limited commercial and industrial development in concentrated sections of the Township.
- Make available, and periodically review, tax abatements and incentives used to attract development.

Goal 3: Provide appropriate housing

Encourage a variety of housing options while maintaining the rural, low density pattern of housing currently found in the Township.

Policies

- Provide for the development of single family homes in areas of the Township that are not currently farmed and where such development will not negatively impact the environment.
 - Non-wetland wooded and unfarmed lands are the most appropriate for new houses.
- Establish levels of density that maintain the rural character of the Township.
- Establish levels of density that allow the soils to process septic system discharge.



Goal 4: Roads and Transportation

Maintain a road system that will preserve the rural character of the Township while promoting agriculture uses and economic development.

Policies

- Improve communication and coordination with the Calhoun County Road Department.
- Establish priorities for road improvements within the Township.
- Utilize dirt roads where appropriate.
 - Dirt roads are most cost-effective and environmentally friendly.
- Encourage clustered residential, commercial, and industrial development to reduce the need for additional road improvements.
- Limit the number of driveways and access points on M-66 and M-99.

- Less access points to busy roads lead to fewer opportunities for accidents.



- Participate in the five-county Transportation Rural Task Force to promote the maintenance and improvement of M-60, M-99, and other roads.

Goal 5: Integration of, and accommodations for, the Amish populations

Promote an atmosphere of mutual respect and understanding with the local Amish population.

Policies

- Maintain regular contact with the Amish community.
- Work with the Amish community to create rules that preserve the public health, safety, and welfare of the Township while respecting their beliefs and traditions.
- Work to promote the sale of Amish goods.



Goal 6: Quality of Life and Recreation

Avoid land uses that may lower the quality of life or property values in the Township and increase the recreational opportunities in the Township.

Policies

- Ensure that buffers are in place between residential dwellings and high-intensity, dangerous, or nuisance causing land uses.
- Look to establish and enforce a blight reducing ordinance.
- Develop a Recreation Plan for the Township.
- Along with Calhoun County Parks and Recreation, examine the potential for a County Park in Homer Township.
- Increase awareness and utilization of the North County Trail segment that traverses the Township.
- Create or improve access points to South Branch of the Kalamazoo River to encourage boating and fishing in the Township.
- Support state-wide recreation efforts that include or are near the Township.
- Where appropriate, encourage recreational opportunities on existing transportation infrastructure.

CHAPTER 6: FUTURE LAND USE

During the next twenty years, the Township anticipates experiencing the same land use patterns as it has over the past several decades; The Township will remain predominately agriculturally based with small pockets of residential, commercial, and industrial uses as well as significant areas of natural areas (wetlands, wooded areas). Land use patterns are occasionally subject to substantial changes due to economic or climatic shifts, but those rarely occur.

Residential Land Use

With only about 1.1% of the lands zoned residential, the township does not have many lands dedicated to residential uses. In 2013, the Township was home to 2,993 residents (2009-2013 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates – U.S. Census). Overall, the population of the township has increased since 1990 (2,875) but was largely stagnant downward between 2000 (3,010) and 2014 (3,015) (U.S. Census). The Village of Homer constitutes approximately 55% of the total Township population (1,641); that proportion has trended downward from a high in 2000 (~61.5%) (U.S. Census). Despite the decline in village population, the non-village areas of the Township are increasing; from 2000 to 2013 the non-village population grew by 187 residents (1,159-1,352) constituting an increase of 16.1% (U.S. Census).

The population of Calhoun County is anticipated to increase over the next couple of decades. The University of Michigan Institute for Research on Labor, Employment, and the Economy (UM-IRLEE) estimated that Calhoun County will grow at a rate less than 3% between 2010 and 2040. According to ProximityOne, an economic and demographic research firm, the population of Calhoun County will increase by 9.6% between 2010 and 2030. For the purposes of estimating the number of residential units needed in the non-village portion of the Township, this document will use the more conservative population projection generated by UM-IRLEE (3%). Base on their estimates Calhoun County will increase by 4,084 residents by 2040; if the non-village portions of

This section outlines the various uses in the Township and how this plan projects their provenance and placement over the next 20 years.

Homer Township increases at the same rate it will have approximately 90 additional residents in 2040. In 2013 the average household size in the Township was 2.68 persons (U.S. Census). This would mean the Township should plan to make accommodations for around 34 new housing units over the next 15 years.

Since the non-village population is trending upward, the future land use plan will need to account for increased residential dwelling units. However, the upward trend may be tempered by the increasing availability of underutilized housing in Homer Village. In 2013, the Township was home to an estimated 177 vacant residential units, of which, 75 were in the Township (U.S. Census). It is reasonable to assume that, over time, historic vacancy rates will be realized in the Village. In 2000, the vacancy rate in the township was 5.5% and 5.1% in the Village. The Township may not reach these low rates but it is trending that direction. If the Township, as a whole (including the Village), realizes a 7% vacancy rate the Township would only need to add around 20 new housing units to accommodate the anticipated growth. Currently there are an estimated 117 vacant residential dwelling units constituting 9.5% of the total housing stock, a reduction to a 7% vacancy rate would mean that 31 units that are vacant would be occupied or taken out of the housing stock – we will assume that about ten percent are taken out of the housing stock, reducing the number of formally vacant houses that are now occupied to 28; 34 housing units are needed based on projections minus the 28 formally vacant units leaves 6 new units needed.

Due to the small number of new housing units anticipated in the plan along with the scattered pattern of residential development, the future land use plan will not identify new areas for residential zones. The Township should review residential rezoning requests on an as needed basis. Any multi-home developments should occur near Homer Village where municipal water and sewer could be available.

Agriculture Land Use

As was noted in Chapter 4, agriculture is the dominate land use in Homer Township; approximately 97.3% of the Township is zoned agriculture. Township officials and residents have expressed a desire to maintain the high proportion of agriculture lands in the Township. This plan aims to maintain a high level of agricultural and rural land uses throughout the Township. Accordingly, the future land use map denotes a roughly similar amount of agriculture lands as the amount currently found in the Township.

Agriculture lands are located in every part of the Township. Other land uses may begin to occupy some of the agriculture lands near Homer Village; otherwise, the Township should remain predominately agriculture.

Michigan State University publishes an annual report on the sale and lease prices of agriculture lands in the region. The prices in the report are compiled through survey work. 2015 sale prices for tilled field crop lands were \$4,191, non-tilled field crop lands were \$3,478, sugar beet farmland was \$4,545, and irrigated lands were \$5,480. In general, the value of agriculture lands in the region decreased over the past year; sugar beet agriculture lands decreased the most at 3.3%. Nonetheless, agriculture lands have averaged at significant increases in value since 1992; tilled field crop – 7.3%, non-tilled field crop – 8.5%, sugar beet – 8.1%, irrigated – 8.3%.

Commercial Land Use

While there are no commercial land uses in the Township, there is a fair amount of commercial land within Homer Village. While the village is home to several commercial establishments including: banks, restaurants, and retailers. The Village and Township are missing a grocery store; residents need to travel several miles to access a grocery store. The lack of a grocery store may hinder the Township's ability to attract and retain residents.

Industrial Land Use

The Township is home to limited industrial uses. The current industrial land uses in the area are in or very near Homer Village. The areas near Home Village should remain the only industrial parts of the Township.

Government

Local Government service and administration and utility facilities will continue to be located in the Homer Village. Some transportation facilities may be located in the township as they are needed.

Open Space & Recreation

The need for open space is mitigated by the heavy presence of agriculture uses. The Township does not anticipate any open space needed in the near future.

While the Township does not have any municipal parks, many parks exist in the area. Homer Village offers several municipal parks and recreation areas. The Township is home to a public access on Homer Lake, the North Country Trail, and the future Great Lake to Lake Trail.

The Village of homer contains the following parks and recreation areas: Grist Mill Park, Lakefront Park, Roadside Park, Webster Street Park, and Homer Public School facilities. The Michigan Department of Natural Resources public access to Homer Lake is located on Waterman St on the northern section of Homer Lake. The North Country Trail runs from the southeastern part of the Township through the Homer Village and exits the township in the northeast section of the Township (see map below). The North Country Trail is one of 30 designated National Scenic Trails by the National Parks Service. The North Country Trail is the longest National Scenic Trail; it spans approximately 4,600 miles from upstate New York to North Dakota. The trail is predominately a hiking trail. Segments in Homer Township are not considered compete. The Township should work with the Village, County, State, and National Parks Service to complete segments in the Township.

The Great Lake to Lake Trail is proposed to traverse the Township and Homer Village. The trail, when complete will traverse the state from South Haven to Port Huron. Upon completion, the trail will span over 250 miles. The trail has considerable support from State departments and local leaders. The trail is designed for cycling, exercise, hiking, and other activities.

Map 6-1: The North Country Trail



Since the North Country Trail and the Great Lake to Lake Trail intersect in Calhoun County, it is considered the trail hub of Michigan. Since both trails intersect in Homer, Homer could very well be considered the trail hub of Michigan.

Map 6-2: Michigan Trail Network

CALHOUN COUNTY TRAIL REGIONAL CONTEXT MAP

Michigan's Iron Belle Trail

- Biking Trail**
- Biking - Existing Trail
 - Biking - Approved For Construction
 - Biking - Proposed Trail

- Hiking Trail**
- Hiking - Existing Trail
 - Hiking - Approved for Construction
 - Hiking - Proposed Trail

Great Lake-To-Lake Trail

- Shared Use Path – Meeting ASHTO and ADA Guidelines

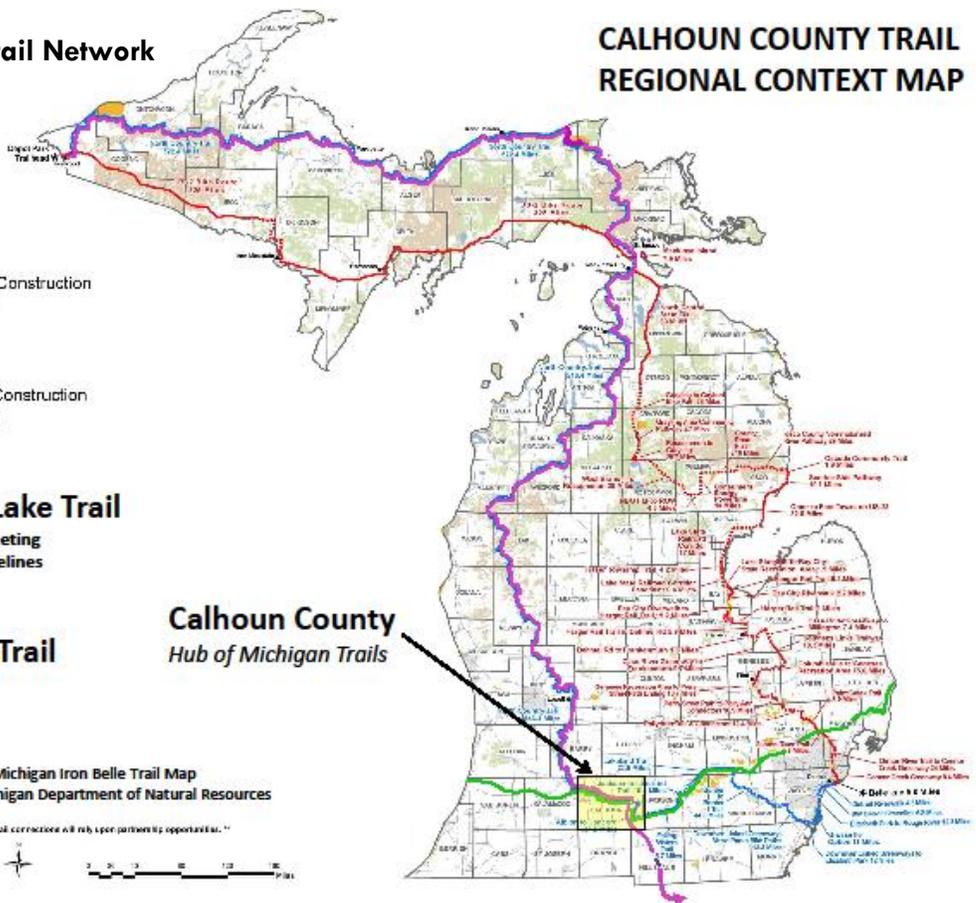
North Country Trail

- Hiking Trail

Calhoun County
Hub of Michigan Trails

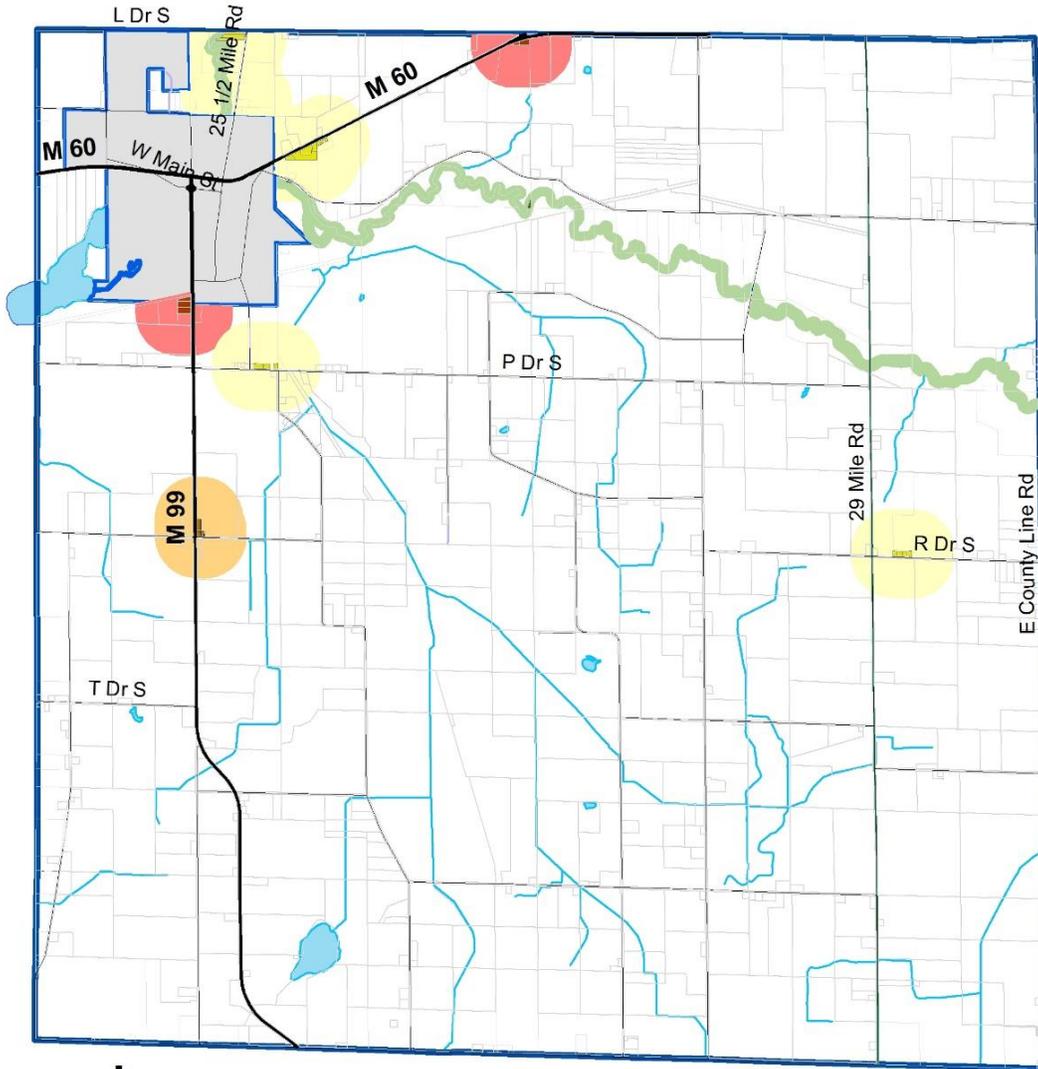
Base information – Michigan Iron Belle Trail Map
Provided by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources

** The 8 Calhoun County bicycle trail connections will rely upon permit and opportunity. **



Map 6-3: Future Land Use Map

Homer Township Future Land Use Map



Legend

- | | | |
|-----------|-----------|-------------------|
| AA | HS | Homer Village |
| OS | Future OS | Roads |
| RA | Future RA | Township Boundary |
| RB | Future RB | Water |
| Future HS | | |



CHAPTER 7: IMPLEMENTATION

Goal 1: Agricultural Preservation

The chief and primary goal of this master plan is to *maintain the agricultural and rural character of the Township.*

Policy 1 - Maintain agricultural land uses through zoning.

Implementation Strategies

- Maintain the agricultural designation for the majority of the land in the Township.
- Ensure that the future land use map reflects the desire to maintain agricultural land uses in the Township.
- Create a farmland preservation ordinance in addition to Calhoun County's ordinance.
- Ensure buffers exist between agricultural uses and intensive land uses such as industrial or higher density residential.
 - Before rezoning applications are approved, ensure that the proposed development makes allocations for buffers between the development and agriculture lands.

Policy 2 - Connect farmers with various federal, state, or local programs and organizations

Implementation Strategies

- Connect farmers with local food consumers.
 - Encourage connections between farmers and Sprout Urban Farms in Battle Creek, the future food hub in Albion, and/or the Region 8 Prosperity Committee to maintain or expand for goods produced in the Township.
- Connect fledgling farmers with seasoned farmers.
 - Create an agriculture mentorship program.
 - This may work best at the county or regional level. The local chapter of the Michigan

This section of the Master Plan enumerates implementation strategies for each goal listed in Chapter 5. The implementation strategies are specific actions that the Township can take in order to accomplish the goals and policies outlined in Chapter 5. In some cases, the Township may need to partner with local, regional, or state agencies to accomplish an implementation strategy.

Farm Bureau may be willing to facilitate this program.

- Work with drain commissioner to better support farming operations.
 - Conduct regular meeting between farmers and the Drain Office.
- Work with Farm Bureau and Calhoun County Farmland Preservation Board to catalog all available and applicable programs.
- Promote the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program
 - Grants are available through the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (USDA) for training, education, outreach and technical assistance to startup farms.
 - This program must go through a state or local government.
- Promote the Farm Labor Housing Grant and Loan program
 - The USDA Rural Development office provides grants to buy, build, renovate and repair laborer housing.
 - This may help farmers who are struggling to fill vacancies.
- Promote the Environmental Quality Incentives Program
 - This is a program available through the USDA to convert a conventional farm to an organic farm.
 - Up to \$20,000 per year.
 - Could help farmers meet the changing demands of the local and national consumers.
 - Could help farmers sell produce at local grocery stores and farmers markets.
- Encourage and support the use of farmland preservation programs.

- Participate in the Calhoun County Farmland Preservation Board and preservation efforts.
- Approve P.A. 116 of 1974 agreements when consistent with the land use plan.

Policy 3 - Maintain or increase communication with the agricultural community.

Implementation Strategies

- Hold reoccurring meetings focused on the farming community in the Township.
- Create a farmland preservation board for the Township.
- Look to partner with the Village of Homer to create a local farmer's market.

Goal 2: Economic Development

Encourage context sensitive commercial and industrial development while maintaining the rural and agricultural character of the Township.

Policy 1 - Work with state and local economic development organization to determine exactly which parcel could be of interest to developers/employers.

Implementation Strategies

- Southwest Michigan First represents most of Southwest Michigan and are more than likely willing to meet with Township officials to determine which sites would make sense from a development perspective.
- The Southcentral Michigan Planning Council is willing to help the Township create site profiles for selected parcels in the Township.

Policy 2 - Make allocations for limited commercial and industrial development in concentrated sections of the Township.

Implementation Strategies

- Only approve rezoning to a commercial or industrial use if the proposed land is adjacent or located very close to other commercial or industrial lands. Also make sure the new uses will not negatively impact nearby agricultural uses or residents.
 - Lands that abut the Western portion of the Village of Homer along M-60 are most appropriate for commercial or industrial development.

- Lands that abut the southern portion of the Village along M-99 are also appropriate for commercial or industrial development.
- Lands near the M-60/M-99 junction may also be suitable for industrial development.
 - Further limit commercial or industrial development to state highways or all season roads.

Policy 3 - Make available and periodically review tax abatements and incentives used to attract development.

Implementation Strategies

- Develop a policy that outlines the conditions under which the Township will participate in PA 198 Tax Abatements.
 - This will send a signal to economic developers and developers that the Township is willing to participate in PA 198 Tax Abatements, but only under certain conditions.
- Discuss other potential tax incentives with local economic developers.

Goal 3: Provide appropriate housing

Encourage a variety of housing options while maintaining the rural, low density pattern of housing currently found in the Township.

Policy 1 - Provide for the development of single family homes in areas of the Township that are not currently farmed and where such development will not negatively impact the environment.

Implementation Strategies

- Non-wetland wooded and unfarmed lands are the most appropriate for new houses.
- Amend the Township ordinances to allow for easier development in the appropriate places while making it more difficult to develop on currently farmed lands.
- Task the Planning Commission with the goal of identifying the appropriate places for housing development.

Policy 2 - Establish levels of density that maintain the rural character of the Township.

Implementation Strategies

- Zone land near the Village of Homer to allow for residential development in order to relieve development pressures in other parts of the Township.

- If necessary, amend the ordinances of agriculture zoned areas to limit the number of accessory building per parcel.

Policy 3 - Establish levels of density that allow the soils to process septic system discharge.

Implementation Strategies

- Work with the Calhoun County Health Department to determine the appropriate level of development for the soils in the Township.

Goal 4: Roads and Transportation

Maintain a road system that will maintain the rural character of the Township while promoting agriculture uses and economic development.

Policy 1 - Improve communication and coordination with the Calhoun County Road Department.

Implementation Strategies

- Request that a representative of the Calhoun County Road Department to present at Township meeting at least one a year.
- Regularly send official communications from the Board of Trustees to the Calhoun County Road Department.

Policy 2 - Establish priorities for road improvements within the Township.

Implementation Strategies

- Work with the Calhoun County Road Department to review asset management data.
- Prioritize road repairs based on the asset management data and local priorities.

Policy 3 - Encourage clustered residential, commercial, and industrial development to reduce the need for additional road improvements.

Implementation Strategies

- Amend the zoning code to allow for development to occur on small parcels in the appropriate places.
 - Encourage the Planning Commission to designate areas for dense development.

Policy 4 - Limit the number of driveways and access points on M-66 and M-99 - less access points to busy roads lead to fewer opportunities for accidents.

Implementation Strategies

- Amend the ordinances to encourage combined driveways.

Policy 5 - Participate in the five-county Transportation Rural Task Force to promote the maintenance and improvement of M-60, M-99, and other roads.

Implementation Strategies

- Attend the annual Calhoun County Rural Task Force meeting and make the priorities of the Township known.

Goal 5: Integration of, and accommodations for, the Amish populations

Promote an atmosphere of mutual respect and understanding with the local Amish population.

Policy 1 - Maintain regular contact with the Amish community.

Implementation Strategies

- Set up a regular meeting time in which leaders from the Amish community.
 - This will allow Amish leaders the opportunity to discuss their needs with Township officials.
 - This will also allow Township officials to communicate any concerns they may have with the Amish community.

Policy 2 - Work with the Amish community to create rules that preserve the public health, safety, and welfare of the Township while respecting their beliefs and traditions.

Implementation Strategies

- Communicate local, state, and federal standards that may govern their operations.
- Create provisions in the ordinances to better accommodate the Amish way of life.

Policy 3 - Work to promote the sale of Amish goods.

Implementation Strategies

- Work to establish a local "makers" and farmer's market that could highlight Amish goods.
- Coordinate the transport of Amish goods to larger markets in neighboring cities.

Goal 6: Quality of Life and Recreation

Avoid land uses that may lower the quality of life or property values in the Township and increase the recreational opportunities in the Township.

Policies

Policy 1 - Ensure that buffers are in place between residential dwellings and high-intensity, dangerous, or nuisance causing land uses.

Implementation Strategies

- Ensure that permits include buffers against incompatible land uses.
- Before permits are issued check the future plans of the area

Policy 2 - Look to establish and enforce a blight reducing ordinance.

Implementation Strategies

- Create a task force who will examine the costs and benefits of creating an ordinance.
 - Appoint members of the task forces who are in favor and opposed to the ordinance to ensure that the decision of the group is respected by the entire community.
- Review blight reducing ordinances of similar Township in the region.

Policy 3 - Develop a Recreation Plan for the Township.

Implementation Strategies

- An approved Recreation Plan would allow the Township to seek approval from the Michigan Department of Natural Resources Trust Fund in order to apply for grants.
- Create a taskforce that examines the benefits and drawbacks of creating a recreation plan for the Township.

Policy 4 - Along with Calhoun County Parks and Recreation, examine the potential for a County Park in Homer Township.

Implementation Strategies

- Partnering with Calhoun County would allow the Township to access fund through the Michigan Department of Natural Resources Trust Fund without creating a recreation plan for the Township.
 - Calhoun County Parks has far greater resources than a potential Township parks system; it is likelier that a County park is developed before a Township park.

Policy 5 - Create or improve access points to South Branch of the Kalamazoo River to encourage boating and fishing in the Township.

Implementation Strategies

- The Township could partner with local road agencies to use their right-of-way to develop access sites to the Kalamazoo River.
- Work with the Southcentral Michigan Planning Council to develop a water trail for the Kalamazoo River to encourage utilization of the river in the Township.

Policy 6 - Support state-wide recreation efforts that include or are near the Township.

Implementation Strategies

- Increase awareness and utilization of the North County Trail segment that traverses the Township.
- Participate in planning meetings for the Iron Belle Trail that is expected to traverse the Township.

CERTIFICATION:

I, the undersigned duly qualified Clerk of Homer Township, Calhoun County, Michigan do hereby certify that the foregoing is a true and complete copy of the 2018 Master Plan and Future Land Use Map adopted by the Township Board of Trustees of the Township of Homer, County of Calhoun, Michigan at a regular meeting held on [MONTH ____, 2017] at [7:00P.M]. prevailing Eastern Time and that said meeting was conducted and public notice of said meeting was given pursuant to and in full compliance with the Open Meetings Act, being Act 267, Public Acts of Michigan, 1976.

[name], Clerk