



**T**he purpose of this chapter is to provide the Planning Commission with a series of observations compiled by the consultant team. These observations resulted from the data collection and analysis phase of the Master Plan program, combined with the public input solicited during the Issues and Solutions workshop. The consultant team's observations are designed to supplement the Planning Commission's formulation of goals and objectives statements, and assist in establishing the basis for the land use patterns to be shown on the Land Use Plan Map.

### **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

During the Issues and Solutions workshop participants were encouraged to identify issues facing the Township. Once issues were identified participants were asked to offer solutions. In addition to the identification of issues and solutions, they were asked to comment on the positive and negative aspects of the Township today, via a short survey, and to provide feedback on what the preferred future should be like in the Lenox Township of tomorrow.

Through the brief survey and the Issues and Solutions workshop, the participants assisted the Planning Commission in isolating the challenges facing the community as it continues to grow and develop. After a discussion of the issues, solutions were identified for many of

the issues presented. The concentration on potential solutions led the community to focus on positive strategies for change designed to take advantage of the opportunities that lie ahead. The brief survey allowed participants to share their opinions regarding what they like and dislike about living in the Township and voice their preferences for future development.



*Participants ranked issues and solutions identified during the vision process.*

The Appendix at the end of this chapter includes the identification of Issues and potential Solutions offered by the individuals who participated in the workshop as well as a summary of the results of the survey instrument used during the workshop.

In addition to the Issues and Solutions workshop Lenox Township residents participated in a Citizen Opinion Survey administered by the Michigan State University Extension (MSUE). MSUE sent out surveys to randomly selected residents in the ten communities that

make up northern Macomb County. The data for all the communities was combined and summarized in a report; a summary of the individual results for Lenox Township was provided to the Planning Commission for their review and consideration.

## **REGIONAL AREA TRENDS**

- ❑ Over the past several decades, Macomb County communities, have seen steady growth and development, evidenced in the large retail developments found along its State Highway corridors especially Hall Road (M-59), Van Dyke (M-53) and Gratiot Avenue.
- ❑ More than 5 Million square feet of non-residential development was constructed in Macomb County in 2002.<sup>1</sup> Much of the County's non-residential development has taken place within the Hall Road Corridor however, a significant amount of non-residential development has occurred along Gratiot Avenue from as far south as 8 Mile Road to 24 Mile Road at the north end.
- ❑ In June of 2001 the Michigan Department of Transportation reported that the Hall Road (M-59) Corridor east of M-53 carries more daily traffic than the busiest

---

<sup>1</sup> Heaton, Dan. "Macomb County's growing Gratiot Avenue." The Macomb Daily. July 7, 2003.

stretches of Woodward, Grand River, Gratiot or Michigan Avenue<sup>2</sup>. The Hall Road Corridor borders fast growing communities such as Chesterfield, Macomb and Shelby Townships and is the primary retail hub serving Macomb and northeast Oakland County residents.

- ❑ Growth in traffic volumes has followed the population growth within the Gratiot Corridor as well. From 1997 to 2001, average daily traffic just north of 25 Mile Road saw a 55% increase. Volumes along Gratiot just south of 32-Mile road reveal a 60% increase in traffic for the same period.
- ❑ As with other counties in southeast Michigan, population estimates reveal that Macomb County's older communities are beginning to loose population. A comparison of the 1990 and 2000 Census Bureau figures detail declining population for communities such as Centerline, Eastpointe, Roseville, Mt. Clemens, Utica, St. Clair Shores and Warren.
- ❑ According to estimates released in July of 2003 by the U.S. Census Bureau Macomb County added more people between 2000 and 2002 than any other Michigan County. The Census Bureau estimated an increase of 20,380 people in Macomb County during the two year time period since the last decennial census.
- ❑ The population growth trend within the County is clearly moving north of M-59. From 1990 to 2000 the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments, SEMCOG reported that Macomb Township was the fastest growing community in southeast Michigan, its population more than doubled during the ten-year period. Population growth in Chesterfield and Columbus Township's exceeded 40% from 1990-2000. Both Richmond Township and the Village of New Haven experienced increases in population greater than 30% for the same period.

## **LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PATTERNS**

- ❑ Lenox Township's rapid population growth of nearly 75% from 1990 to 2000 presents several challenges to the community. Increased traffic volumes and development pressures are threatening to alter the Township's rural identity associated with its agriculture, woodlands, wetlands, stream corridors, wildlife, and similar natural features that originally drew residents to the community.
- ❑ Residential development within the Township has primarily consisted of individual homesites and large lot developments on existing county roads. Soil limitations

---

<sup>2</sup> McGraw, Bill. "Motor City Journal: Get in line on M-59: Macomb County's part explodes into key artery and colossal retail carnival." The Detroit Free Press. June 11, 2001. [www.freeep.com](http://www.freeep.com).

within the Township have naturally restricted residential development in the Community.

- ❑ Unlike many similar rural communities, cul-de-sac residential development using the land division parcel split formula has not been popular in Lenox. The cost of constructing a road to public road standards combined with the limited number of splits feasible due to soil limitations has likely discouraged this type of development.
- ❑ The availability of utilities along the Gratiot Corridor is attracting potential development as evidenced by increased requests for rezoning and development reviews for this segment of the Township.
- ❑ The Township hosts several intensive non-residential uses such as the Macomb Regional Corrections Facility, natural gas compressor station, and the Pine Tree Acres landfill with characteristics similar to Heavy Industrial uses; the impact of these uses on the future development of the Township should be carefully evaluated.
- ❑ The Gratiot Corridor is the main travel route through the Township and is designated as the Township's primary location for future development. Increasing traffic levels are expected to persist along the Corridor as development pressure continues.

## **CHALLENGES FOR PLANNERS**

As the metropolitan region of Detroit continues to change and evolve, professional and lay planners are presented with a host of problems and hurdles to overcome. It is important to view these problems as "challenges" rather than insurmountable obstacles. Challenges can have positive results while obstacles are usually viewed with despair. The principal challenges that the Planning Commission must confront during the Master Plan program will likely include:

- ❑ Unlike older, historical settlements, Lenox Township lacks a town center that people remember when they think about the community.
- ❑ Although Township residents consider the preservation of farmland and open space as important to the Township's future, funding mechanisms for preservation are limited.
- ❑ The Township needs a common and identifiable town center to provide a stronger sense of identity and community for its citizens.
- ❑ As Lenox Township begins to transition from an agricultural community particularly along the Gratiot Corridor it is experiencing its share of problems related to traffic

congestion, loss of natural character, deterioration of older development, and inappropriate mix of incompatible uses.

- ❑ Existing development along the Gratiot Corridor is ripe for redevelopment and improvement. Non-residential developments that are beginning to experience physical deterioration should be encouraged to make investments in their property to meet changing consumers preferences and incorporate modern site design techniques.
- ❑ As the community's residential population demands facility and service improvements, a properly balanced tax base is essential to keeping tax rates reasonable.
- ❑ The Township has experienced problems with the quantity and quality of private, on-site water supplies. As development continues to occur west of the railroad corridor, there may be pressure to expand the municipal water service district.

Non-residential growth and development must occur in a well-planned manner that provides needed jobs and tax base without adversely impacting the quality of life in Township neighborhoods or adding congestion to its roadways.

- ❑ Development frequently outpaces road upgrades and other infrastructure improvements, leaving residents to suffer through congestion or service cut-backs.
- ❑ Development must bear its fare share of the cost for infrastructure improvements, and development timing is likely the key to avoiding a disproportionate share of the burden falling upon residents.
- ❑ Societal changes in the new "Information Age" take place so rapidly that the community's young people often lack places and activities that are relevant to their needs and interests today.
- ❑ The way the community has grown in the past need not be the blueprint for its future.

## **OPPORTUNITIES**

The most difficult task of any planning program is identifying ways to capitalize on opportunities that reverse negative development patterns. The secret always seems to be related to identifying the positive aspects of the trends associated with local and regional change. Change must be viewed as a natural, evolutionary process. The fact that circumstances in the community change does not automatically mean that all change is bad. There are a number of opportunities available to Lenox Township and its neighbors that result from ongoing change locally and regionally. Some of the opportunities that will be presented to the Planning Commission in the future are likely to include:

- ❑ New development must be encouraged to use state-of-the-art techniques for integrating natural features, wildlife corridors, and resource preservation into essential community design.
- ❑ People moving to the Township for its rural atmosphere are typically looking for their own piece of natural open space. This type of individual could be educated to the benefits of very low density, cluster or open space development with the benefits of larger, protected open space elements that are held in trust with their neighbors. The responsibilities of common ownership and care can introduce a new sense of stewardship for the land.
- ❑ The Township must pursue an aggressive policy of finding its own center, then concentrate governmental services, cultural resources, community events, housing, retail goods and entertainment opportunities so they can be enjoyed by its residents.
- ❑ Affordable housing opportunity in Lenox Township must reach beyond a two-bedroom rental apartment or a leased site in a mobile home park. Existing neighborhoods are expected to be receptive to new ownership housing options that address affordability issues for families, young adults, and older persons at or near retirement.
- ❑ Special attention must be paid to the Gratiot corridor if its future is to be one of opportunity and continued support to the Township's retail and service needs.
- ❑ Existing development along the Gratiot Corridor is ripe for redevelopment and improvement. Non-residential developments that are beginning to experience physical deterioration and changes of use represent opportunities to improve the visual quality of the Corridor through proper landscaping and screening and site plan review.
- ❑ Evaluation of the business mix along the Gratiot Corridor can help to identify changes in land use and zoning that would encourage reinvestment in existing retail centers.
- ❑ Rising residential property tax rates are one of the components that is fueling the outward expansion of the metropolitan Detroit area. By providing an appropriate balance of residential, commercial, office, high tech, and industrial land use, the Township can maintain desirable levels of service without an ever escalating menu of special millages.
- ❑ The Township already hosts several significant non-residential uses, Pine Tree Acres, a natural gas compressor station and the Prison. Sensitive site design and aggressive buffer and screening standards must be applied to prevent new non-residential development from negatively impacting neighborhoods while it is positively influencing the tax base.

- ❑ The concentration of non-residential and higher density residential land uses proposed for the Gratiot Corridor necessitate the establishment of an access management plan for the Corridor to minimize the potential negative impacts of increased traffic volumes on the community.
- ❑ The Township's agricultural history and architectural and cultural reminders of its past must be preserved for their value in establishing the character of the Township.
- ❑ Proper timing of new development should become the principal tool for preventing infrastructure improvements from lagging behind growth. Proper timing is the Township's best insurance that development pays their fair share for infrastructure extensions and improvements.
- ❑ Today's young people need to feel they have an ownership interest in the Township's public places and daily public activities. Retail developers have responded with special "teen zones" to capture young people's spending potential. The Township needs to respond in a similar way to capture their civic potential.
- ❑ Growth and change require a new set of plans for the future of the Township. Not all of the old ways of doing things can adequately serve the community's needs in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. The Township must be open to and searching for a more relevant plan for the future as the best way to avoid becoming one of the casualties of suburban sprawl.

## **CONCLUSION**

Growth and development in Lenox Township is inevitable over the next 10 to 20 years. The Township can choose to stand back and watch it occur, effectively letting the market decide what the community will look like 20 years from now. The alternative to this laissez faire approach involves the Township establishing a positive development policy to lead the way to the year 2020. By continuing to plan for growth and regulating the development that occurs, the Township can protect and preserve the characteristics of the community that its citizens value most. At the same time, it will discourage destructive, market-driven development patterns that are out of touch with the community's needs. These can only result in loss of that special community character that was responsible for attracting past and current residents to Lenox Township in the first place. This Planning Process is intended to introduce a small dose of common sense and a healthy dose of self-determinism into the process of the community's growth and change.

*This page intentionally left blank.*