

SECTION I. INTRODUCTION

SUMMARY

This Master Plan represents the culmination of nearly three years of work by numerous local residents and local officials. It reflects the community's deep concern for economic vitality and natural feature preservation. The effort that went into this Plan illustrates a strong commitment to retain and strengthen local quality of life. This document outlines the preferred future for Byron Township and a comprehensive plan to realize it. The Plan is appropriately general, recognizing that planning for the future is a delicate blend of art and science and that sufficient flexibility will be needed to respond to the challenges of the future.

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This Plan was developed in response to a desire in the community to strengthen existing assets and preserve what the residents value. It is based on a recognition on the part of the Planning Commission that the pace and character of growth and development should be viewed in the context of its long-term impact on the community. The earlier Master Plan represented a less developed stage of growth in the Byron Township area. Byron Township has reached a critical and defining moment in its history. Through the community input process of this Master Plan, the residents of the Township have chosen to proceed with low impact patterns of development designed to enhance the sustainability of the region, while encouraging higher impact development, where appropriate, in specific areas of the Township.

Byron Township's first Master Plan was completed in 1968. Subsequent plans were promulgated in 1988 and 1998. This Plan represents the Township's latest effort to respond to a changing environment. General planning practice suggests that a Master Plan be reviewed at about five-year intervals and the Township has been fairly vigilant in doing so.

THE PURPOSE OF THE MASTER PLAN

The fundamental purpose of the Master Plan is to enable the Township Planning Commission to establish a future direction for the Township's physical development. The Township Planning Act, Public Act 168 of

1959, as amended, specifically gives the Township Planning Commission the authority to prepare and officially adopt a Plan. Once prepared, officially adopted and maintained, this Plan will serve as an advisory guide for the physical conservation of certain areas and for the development of other areas.

This plan will be successful to the extent that it:

- ◆ reflects the needs and desires of the citizens of Byron Township;
- ◆ realistically interprets and reflects the conditions, trends and the dynamic economic and social pressures that are brought about by change; and
- ◆ inspires consensus and cooperation among the various public agencies, developers, and the citizens of the Township toward achieving common goals.

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When the Planning Commission began the Plan preparation process, it had several objectives. First, it was important to clearly define the priorities of the Township with regard to growth, development and land use. Secondly, the Township sought to develop a Plan that is tailored to local conditions and yet coordinated with the planning activities of the larger metropolitan area. Thirdly, the planning process was seen as an opportunity to build and strengthen a community consensus about the future land use patterns in the Township. Finally, the Planning Commission sought realistic and effective mechanisms to achieve the Plan's objectives.

This Township Master Plan accomplishes all these objectives. More specifically, this Plan will serve the Township in the following ways:

It provides a comprehensive means of integrating proposals that look years ahead to meet future needs regarding general and major aspects of conservation and development throughout the Township. The Plan serves as the official, advisory policy statement for encouraging orderly and efficient use of the land for residences, services, and infrastructure, and for coordinating these uses of land with each other, with streets, and with other necessary public facilities and services. It creates a logical basis for zoning, subdivision design, public improvement plans, and for facilitating and guiding the work of the Township Planning Commission and the Township Board, as well as other public and private endeavors dealing with development of the Township. It provides a means for private organizations and individuals to determine how they may relate their building and development projects to official Township planning policies. It offers a means of relating the plans of

Byron Township to the plans of the Grand Rapids metropolitan area and the West Michigan region.

PLAN METHODOLOGY

The planning process involved four inter-related phases:

- ◆ Data Analysis - A Community Profile
- ◆ Goals and Objectives - A Policy Foundation
- ◆ Plan Preparation - The Preferred Future
- ◆ Implementation Strategies - Getting There from Here

Section II represents the foundation of data on which this Plan is written.

The first phase of the effort involved the formation of a citizen input structure (the Advisory Committee) and a summary review and analysis of available data gathered from local and regional sources. The Township Supervisor, Township Board and Planning Commission appointed the Advisory Committee. It included residents, business owners, public officials from the Township and school district, as well as the members of the Planning Commission. The Advisory Committee was formed as an ad hoc entity to guide the planning process and to serve as a sounding board for the consultant throughout the process.

DATA ANALYSIS

Producing a Master Plan requires a solid foundation of data to substantiate current conditions and trends of the recent past. Section II of this Plan represents that solid foundation. During the first phase, demographic, economic and land use data was gathered to support the Plan. The purpose of this effort was to develop a comprehensive impression of the patterns of growth and the challenges that will impact the Township. This phase culminated in the preparation of the Community Profile Report. This report served as a technical resource for the Advisory Committee and the consultant.

TOWNSHIP VISIONING WORKSHOPS

Two visioning workshops were held to gather citizen input through a nominal group process. Using the output of the visioning workshops, the Advisory Committee began the process of defining goals and objectives for the future of Byron Township. Information gathered from the workshops guided the development of the community opinion survey. A workshop focused exclusively on downtown Byron Center, while another concentrated generally on the entire Township.

Respectively, the workshops were held on June 23, 2005 and August 17, 2005.

COMMUNITY OPINION SURVEY

In November of 2005, 15% of the Township’s 13,688 registered voters were sent a questionnaire. In addition to providing relevant background information, the survey tested residents’ desires and preferences. Residents indicated their desire to protect private property rights, protect trees from clear-cutting during development, preserve open space and protect natural areas. The Advisory Committee used the opinions expressed in the survey to craft the preferred future for the Township.

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GOALS & OBJECTIVES

The objective of the second phase was to establish a policy basis for the Township’s planning and land use regulations. To do this it was important to “take the pulse” of the community and determine what direction residents were looking for the future of their hometown, and the visioning workshops and community opinion survey were some methods used in acquiring community input.

PLAN PREPARATION

The third phase involved drawing together the input from the previous two phases and preparing a Future Land Use Plan, which is reflected in Section III of this Plan. The future land use designations and map (Chapter 11) were developed in a series of interactive meetings of the Advisory Committee, Township staff and consultants. To support the desired development patterns envisioned in the Future Land Use Plan, the Map is supported with a narrative description of each of the future land use designations.

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

The final phase of the process involved the development of specific implementation strategies to carry out the Plan. These are reflected in general terms in Chapter 12. These strategies comprise the “action plan” element of this document and describe what should be done, by whom, when and with what resources. At the conclusion of the fourth phase, the Planning Commission held a public hearing on the entire Plan.

THE ORGANIZATION OF THE PLAN

This Plan is organized into three sections. Section I includes this introductory discussion which outlines the purpose of the plan, the process for its development, and acknowledgements to those involved. Section II is the Community Profile, which presents an overview description of Byron Township from the perspective of:

- ◆ Chapter 1. Natural and Cultural Features
- ◆ Chapter 2. Population
- ◆ Chapter 3. Housing and Economic Development
- ◆ Chapter 4. Land Use and Development Patterns
- ◆ Chapter 5. Community Facilities and Services
- ◆ Chapter 6. Utilities
- ◆ Chapter 7. Transportation
- ◆ Chapter 8. Byron Center Sub-Area
- ◆ Chapter 9. Implications

Section III constitutes the Future Land Use Plan, which includes the Township’s Goals and Objectives (Chapter 10), the Future Land Use Plan (Chapter 11), and the Implementation Strategies (Chapter 12). The Bibliography outlines all the various resources consulted in the completion of this Plan.

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Master Plan Advisory Committee

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