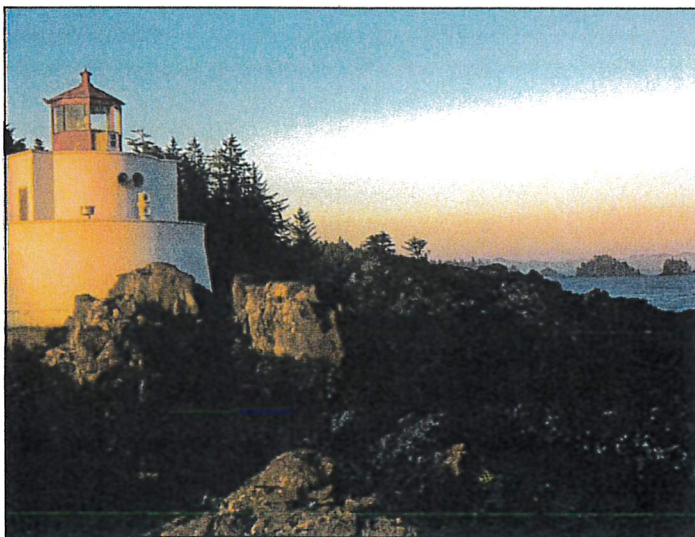


Covert Township Master Plan



**UPDATED
2019**

**APPROVED
2020**

MASTER PLAN
for
COVERT TOWNSHIP
Van Buren County, Michigan

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Preface

A Master Plan provides a vision for change and growth for a township. It examines current conditions, potential for development and environmental features. It then integrates these factors with the desires of citizens and leaders of the community as documented in the community survey. This is then documented as the Master Plan by the planning commission. The Master Plan is then implemented by a variety of methods. These include the zoning ordinance, capital improvements, financing methods, development authorities and a variety of other instruments to realize the vision of the plan.

The State of Michigan has recognized the value of a Master Plan process and has created state- enabling legislation for the purposes of planning by townships, including the need to:

- promote the public health, safety and general welfare;
- encourage the use of resources in accordance with their character and adaptability;
- avoid the overcrowding of land by buildings or people;
- lessen the congestion on public roads and streets;
- facilitate provision for transportation, sewage disposal, safe and adequate water supply, recreation and other public improvements; and
- consider the character of the township and its suitability for particular uses judged in terms of such factors as the trend in land and population development.

Recent changes in state law recognize the importance of planning and require notification and coordination with adjacent units of government and the County. The Master Plan was submitted to the Township Board for adoption.

State law outlines the basic elements in a plan and includes maps, plats, charts and descriptive explanatory and other relevant information to outline the Planning Commission's recommendations for the physical development of the township. The Township Planning Act states that the basic plan includes the following subjects that reasonably can be considered in the future development of the township:

- A land use plan and program, in part consisting of a classification and allocation of land for agriculture, residence, commerce, industry, recreation, ways and grounds, public schools, soil conservation, forest, wild life refuges and other uses and purposes.
- The general location, character and extent of streets, roads, highways, railroads, bridges, waterways and water front developments; flood prevention works, drainage, sanitary sewers and water supply systems, works for preventing pollution and for maintaining water levels; and public utilities and structures.
- Recommendations as to the general character, extent and layout for redevelopment or rehabilitation of areas; removal, relocation, widening, narrowing, vacating, abandonment of transportation corridors; and changes in use or extension of ways, grounds, open spaces, buildings, utilities or other facilities.
- Recommendations for implementing any of its proposals.

This Master Plan is not intended to regulate development in the same way as the zoning ordinance and other regulatory items, but it is an important element in the process. In fact, courts often look

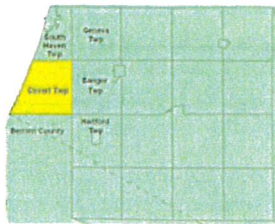
at the relationship of Master Plans in rendering decisions on zoning ordinance provisions. Thus the Master Plan is an important guide for future development of the township.

Perhaps the most significant part of the planning process is the discovery of a community's long-term vision for its future. These vision statements for the future are a powerful factor in many public and private decisions made by citizens, investors and elected officials. In Covert Township, community-wide visioning and goals came from a variety of means, including a meeting early on in the process consisting of community leaders and interested citizens to discuss issues of importance to the township; as well as a Community Survey to all residents to include within the Master Plan document. Finally, the required public hearing was held. All of the above efforts were combined to ensure that a plan was created that would have broad community support.

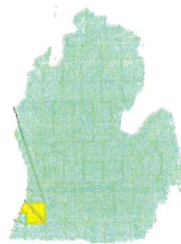
Change is occurring incrementally in some areas of the township and dramatically in other areas. By actively participating in the planning process, Covert Township can protect in things that the community values most; and on change where it is most acceptable and appropriate.

This Covert Township Master Plan is also unique in that it consists of two separate planning documents. One is this Covert Township Master Plan and the second is the companion Coastal Management Plan. Consequently, this plan does not detail most data west of the I-196/US-31 freeway.

I. INTRODUCTION



Covert Township
Van Buren County



Regional Context

Covert Township is a rural, largely residential and agricultural community on the shore of Lake Michigan. The Township is located in Van Buren County along the shores of Lake Michigan in southwest Michigan, 36 miles north of the Indiana border. The nearest Michigan metropolitan communities are Benton Harbor/St. Joseph, 13 miles southwest and Kalamazoo, about 45 miles east on M-43 and I-94. The City of South Haven is about seven miles north of Covert Township and supplies most local commercial and industrial services.

The unincorporated hamlet of Covert is located near the center of the township.

The dominant natural feature in the township is the critical sand dune formation along approximately seven miles of Lake Michigan frontage. Lake Michigan is about 600 feet above Atlantic Ocean sea level as the land rises to 750 feet along sand dunes at Lake Michigan. This entire shoreline area, however, is nearly all developed by seasonal residences, parks and two power plants.

The sand dunes are as much as 150 feet above the surface of Lake Michigan with a steep incline of more than 30 percent. The sand dunes, which are considered Critical Dunes by the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality, cover the entire Covert Township frontage on Lake Michigan. Sand dunes occupy land extending approximately a mile east of the shoreline. The Lake Michigan coast is also a high-risk erosion area.

Covert Township has access to Lake Michigan with a campground and park occupying a quarter mile of Lake Michigan frontage at the southwest corner of County Road 378 and Blue Star Memorial Highway. The township also has less than a quarter mile of Lake Michigan frontage at the Van Buren State Park in its extreme northwestern corner. The majority of the Van Buren State Park land is north of Covert Township in South Haven Township.

The Nature Conservancy, a non-profit land conservation organization has acquired over 1,500 acres of sensitive lands primarily east of I-196/US-31 and west of 78th Street. The area includes woodlands, wetlands and a small, undrained lake (Mud Lake). The highest elevation in the township is near the hamlet of Covert and drainage consists of small streams principally draining east and west from M-140.

The areas apart from Lake Michigan are primarily single family, rural residential, with areas of forest and agriculture uses. There are only modest local commercial and industrial activities in the township, with the exception of two very large industries. One is the Palisades Nuclear Power Plant in the northwest part of the township, occupying nearly a mile of Lake Michigan frontage, with 580 employees, most of who live outside of Covert Township. In addition to the Palisades Nuclear Power Plant, the township also is home to the Covert Generating Company (PGE - Pacific Gas & Electric) gas-fired electrical generating power plant which employs a small number of employees, and West Michigan Flocking & Assembly a full service manufacturer that provides flocking and injection molding to a wide range of industries.

Introduction

Brief History

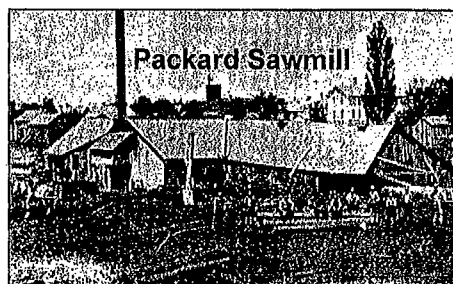
Prior to 1675, Native Americans, particularly the Miami Indians, first used the southwestern Michigan area for transient hunting and camping. Later the Miami tribe left and the Pottawatomis took control. The Pottawatomis had three documented sites in Covert Township. These were at the mouths of the Brandywine Creek in the north and the smaller Rogers Creek to the southwest and another site just northwest of Covert village.

After Europeans started to dominate the area in the early 1800s, the area of present-day Covert became part of what was known as Lafayette Township. Lafayette was further subdivided and the Covert area became part of South Haven Township. In 1855, the Van Buren County Board of Supervisors separated Deerfield Township from South Haven Township. Because there were so many Deerfield Townships in Michigan, the name of the township was changed to Covert, reportedly to reflect the reclusive nature of deer.

As the lumbering era began in the 1860s, Covert grew in population. The land was cleared of both its coniferous and deciduous trees during the lumber era concluding in the 1900s.

Wherever additional trees grew back, deciduous trees such as beech, maple and oak replaced the virgin trees. As the land was cleared, it was used for growing fruit in what was then Michigan's fruit belt. Agriculture began to replace lumbering as the primary enterprise.

African Americans found that the Massachusetts Congregationalists dominating Covert welcomed them and extended unusual access to various business and social societies. Consequently, Covert Township became a destination for many free African Americans after the Civil War. Many of the African Americans currently live in the hamlet of Covert near the township's center.



In 1888, the first railroad came through Covert to serve both the waning lumber industry and growing fruit industry. However, it did not prosper for long and regular rail service disappeared by the mid-century. The last gasp for the railroad was during construction of the Palisades Nuclear Power Plant. The State of Michigan then converted the rail right-of-way to a non-motorized rail trail.

At the turn of the century, Lake Michigan frontage became a seasonal vacation mecca for out-of-state residents – primarily from the Chicago area. Palisades Park, Linden Hills, Thunder Mountain Heights and other seasonal subdivisions, homes and private parks started to dot the lake shore and sand dunes. The influx of out-of-state residents provided some new economic strength for Covert Township as the lumber era ended.

Historic/Cultural Resources

There are no listings for any property on the National Register of Historic Places or the Michigan Register of Historic Places for Covert Township. The building housing the library and historic museum may be an eligible structure for historic designation. Many of the sites associated with the history of the township have been demolished.

There are at least three archeological resource sites from Native American activities on Brandywine and Rogers Creeks and in an area northeast of the hamlet of Covert. Any Native American habitation on Lake Michigan has likely been obscured or removed by lake levels, wave action or development. No other known cultural site exists in the township.

Introduction

By 1923, Covert Schools was a leader in both school consolidation and in initiating school busing in southwest Michigan. Upon the completion of the consolidated school, the hamlet of Covert became the center for education in the community.

Covert Township remains a premier seasonal destination for second homes along Lake Michigan, as well as a major electrical power-producing center for Michigan.

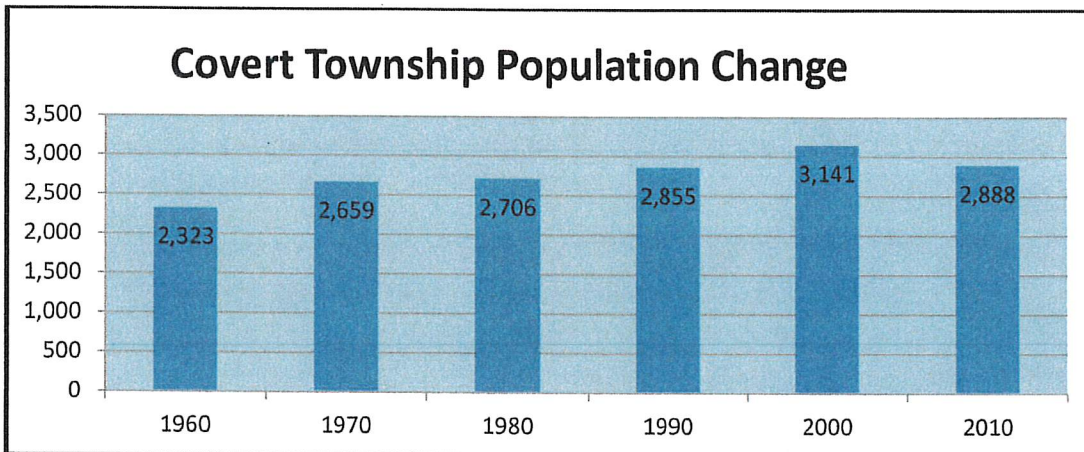
II. DEMOGRAPHICS

Evaluating demographic data is an important and fundamental component for preparing a Master Development Plan. By analyzing data and forecasting trends, a snapshot of the township is taken in time, and local officials can plan for future development by anticipating growth and development.

Population Change

According to the U.S. Census, Covert Township has been growing at a very modest pace, gaining just 822 people over the past forty years. The township's largest population increase occurred between 1960 and 1970, when it grew at a rate of 14.4%, and between 1990 and 2000, with a growth rate of 10%. Although the growth rate has declined, it has been consistent as the population has increased every decade.

Some of the population growth over the last forty years is related to the township's desirable Lake Michigan frontage, but growth has also occurred in the rural inland areas. The township can expect continued high levels of seasonal residents for the near future, but increased changes in population may result as some of the seasonal residents take up full-time residency.



The number of new housing units grew by a larger percentage annually than the total population. This difference is because there is a long-term decline in the number of people per household, primarily because of a decline in the birth rate. On a long-term basis this means that the percent of middle age and elderly persons is increasing, creating less demand for schools, but more demand for such services as senior citizen and health care facilities.

Regional Growth

Growth changes in Covert Township's neighboring communities are documented in the following tables. Both South Haven Township, located directly north, and Hagar and Coloma Townships, located directly south of Covert Township, experienced losses in population. The City of South Haven and Hagar Township had the largest losses of 15.5% and 19.8% respectively since the 1990 census.

The net population loss for all of the communities was 148 people or 0.5%. Covert Township, with a 16.2% gain was the third fastest growing township and the only community with Lake Michigan frontage showing a population increase. This trend may slow somewhat as most of the Lake Michigan frontage already has seasonal dwelling units and there is not much more available land.

Community	1980	1990	2000	2010	Change	
					#	%
Covert Twp.	2,706	2,855	3,144	2,888	182	6.7%
South Haven City	5,943	5,563	5,021	4,403	-1,540	-25.9%
south haven Twp.	4,174	4,185	4,046	3,983	-191	-4.6%
Geneva Twp	2,984	3,162	3,975	3,573	589	19.7%
Bangor Twp.	1,993	1,948	2,121	2,147	154	7.7%
Hartford Twp.	2,707	3,032	3,159	3,274	567	20.9%
Coloma Twp.	5,345	5,123	5,217	5,020	-325	-6.1%
Hagar Twp	4,943	4,113	3,964	3,671	-1,272	-25.7%

Age

It is important to understand the population characteristics of a community in order to guide officials, planners, and leaders to think comprehensively in terms of providing infrastructure to all populations. Analyzing demographics provides insight for providing schools, nursing homes, and other public services that correspond to growth in a community.



Age Characteristics are often broken down by recognizable groups, known as "cohorts". Each group is given a name that identifies it as a station in life. Commonly used groups that are discussed as part of this Chapter include:

Children 5 to 19	School Age Group
Age 20 to 24	Young Adults
Age 25 to 44	Family Forming Years
Age 45 to 64	Mature Adults
Over 65	Senior Citizens

In Covert Township, Mature Adults and Family Forming cohorts make up the two largest segments of the total population; comprising 26.2% and 21.6% of the total population, respectively. The smallest age cohort is Young Adults at 6.1%. The School Age cohort of 750 persons, or 25.9%, indicates that schools and recreational facilities will still be needed to accommodate this group.

The Young Adults currently comprise 6.1% of the total population, up from 4.6% in the 2000 Census. The Mature Adults comprises 26.7%, an increase of 3.7% since 2000.

As people continue to look to Covert Township as a retirement location, and the Mature Adults continue to age, a shift towards higher demand for social and health care services will become apparent. As the number of "empty-nesters" and smaller households

Demographics

increases, shifts toward smaller, although not necessarily less expensive, housing units for retirement couples will be evident.

Racial Composition

Since 2000, there were moderate shifts in the racial make-up of Covert Township as reflected in the 2010 Census. The shift occurred in the two largest racial components of the total population. In 2000, whites comprised 58.3% of the total population, while a decline in the percentage of African Americans was experienced between 2000 and 2010, declining 8.8%, and comprising 27.2% of the population in the 2000 Census. Also, a percentage other 20.4 were reported by the 2010 Census, *as compared to the 2000 Census*.

Employment

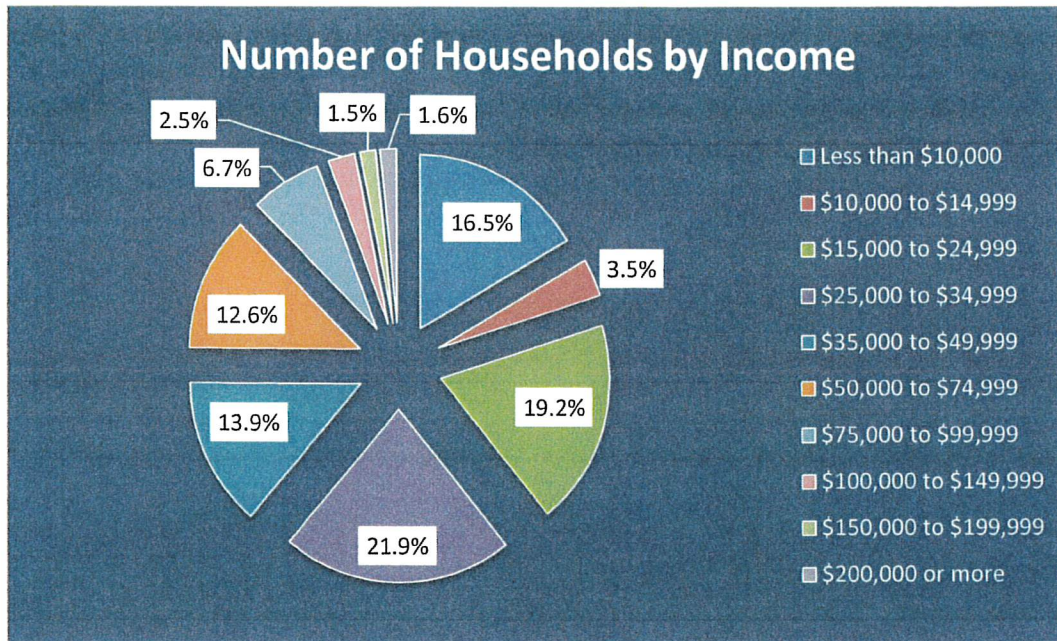
Covert Township is not an employment community. Even most of the workers at the electrical generating plants are not residents of the township. Thus the working population in Covert generally commutes to employment centers outside of the Township.

Education, Health and Social Services are the primary employers for the community. Manufacturing is the largest employer for Covert Township residents. Since there is only a small manufacturing employment sector in the Township, virtually all residents commute to employment centers in Holland, South Haven and Benton Harbor/St. Joseph.

Unemployment rates in the 2010 Census reported 6.9% unemployment in Van Buren County and 6.0% employment in Covert Township, reflecting the lack of employment opportunities within the township.

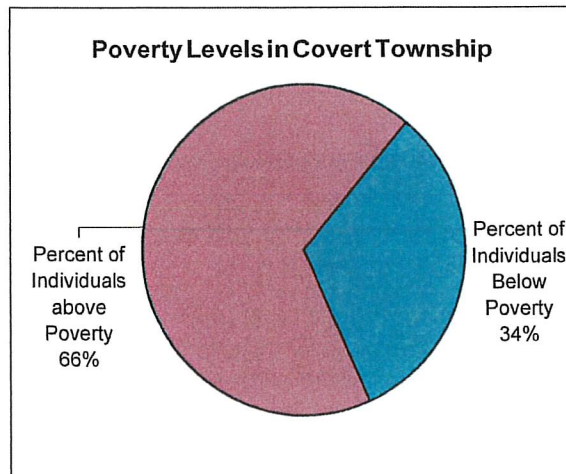
Income

The chart below shows households in Covert Township by categories of income levels. The largest group of households is the \$25,000 to \$34,999 group at 21.9 percent. The 1999 median household income for Covert was \$28,573 compared to \$39,365 for Van Buren County.



Poverty is classified by household size by the U.S. Census Bureau. An example of a person in poverty status, according to the 2010 Census definition, is an individual under 65 years of age who earned \$8,959 or less per year.

In 2015 the U.S. Census figures showed 16.7% of Michigan's population lived in poverty and 18.8% percent of Van Buren County's population lived in poverty. According to the 2000 Census, the number of individuals in Covert Township reported to be living in poverty was 34%, which was significantly higher than both the County and State population at poverty level.

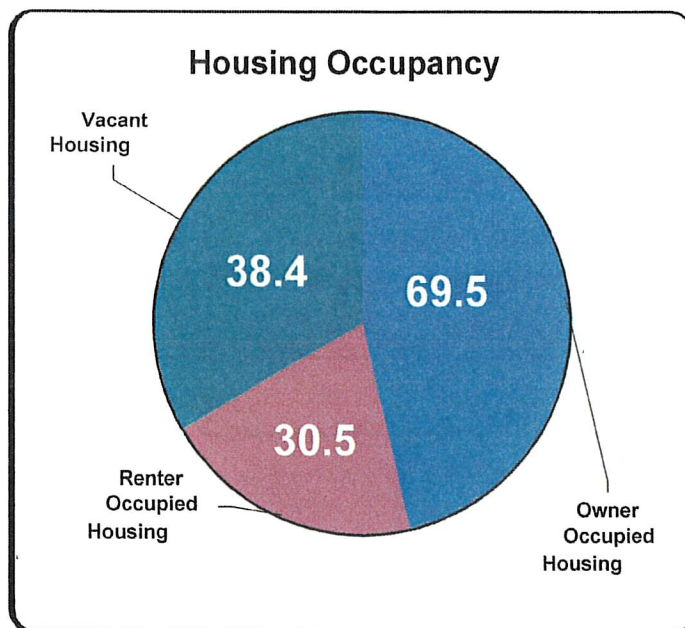


Housing Trends

Along Lake Michigan, housing stock reflects the seasonal attractiveness of the area and the wealth of the lakefront property owners. The 2010 U.S. Census showed 38.4% of all housing units within the Township were considered vacant or unoccupied, 70.4% of which were used for seasonal or recreational use, indicating the strong drawing power of Covert Township as a premier second home destination location.

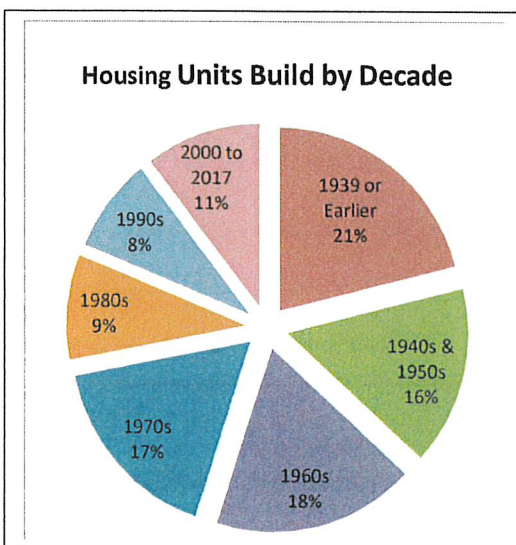
Since vacant housing is represented by predominately seasonal housing (27.% seasonal dwelling units) the four townships in Van Buren County with the highest number of vacant housing units also have the largest number of seasonal or vacation homes along Lake Michigan or an inland lake (Paw Paw Lake). It is evident that seasonal housing and rental housing are both unusually high in lakefront areas.

The median value of owner-occupied housing units in Covert Township is \$63,800 which is relatively low compared to the Van Buren County median value of \$94,200. Similarly, the township rental cost is \$403 month versus \$451 for Van Buren County.



Year Housing Built

The "Housing Units Built by Decade" graph shows that the number of houses constructed in any decade varied with the state of the economy, and changing community and life styles. Covert Township has experienced stable growth in total number of dwelling units through the decades, ranging from 18% to 22%. This is consistent with population growth rate of 16.2% within the past 20 years.



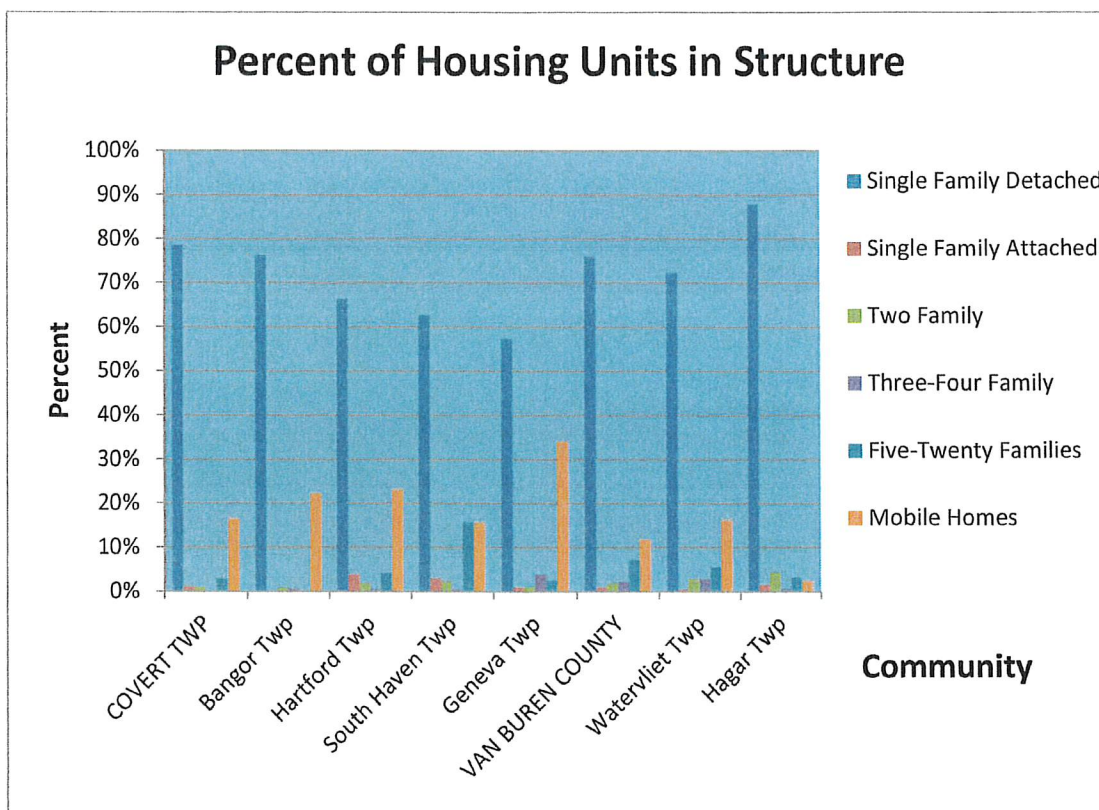
Most of the Lake Michigan frontage was developed prior to 1939, directing new growth to the inland areas of the township.

Because Covert Township permits individual lot location for manufactured homes, some of the growth is from placement of manufactured homes on individual parcels. The Township does not have a manufactured home park but still has 376 manufactured home units comprising 22.3 percent of the total housing units.

Number of Housing Units in Each Structure

The following chart shows the types of housing units for Covert Township and the adjacent communities. Covert Township is comprised primarily of Single Family Detached homes

and Mobile Homes, which is also the dominant structure for surrounding communities. The definition for Mobile Homes also includes manufactured homes in manufactured home parks.



Hagar Township has the largest variation of Single Family detached homes with a correspondingly smaller number of Mobile Homes. That variation is likely due to Hagar's small geographic size and the community of "Lake Michigan Beach" homes. Geneva Township has an especially large percentage of Mobile Homes, possibly because it has no sanitary sewers for higher density and due to its location has come to serve much of the market need for mobile homes in the South Haven area. True to most counties, Van Buren has a balanced housing stock, with a higher percentage of apartments and lower percentage of mobile homes. That is primarily because of the character of more eastern townships in the county that do not have any water front properties.

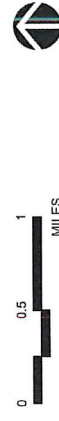
Covert Township is generally near the median in terms of single family detached and mobile homes. It has fewer higher density housing units ranging from two to twenty housing units per structure. Townships with a large amount of land abutting Lake Michigan – such as Covert and Hagar – also have a large amount of single family detached housing units.

MAP 1

Existing Land Use

Covert Township, Van Buren County, MI

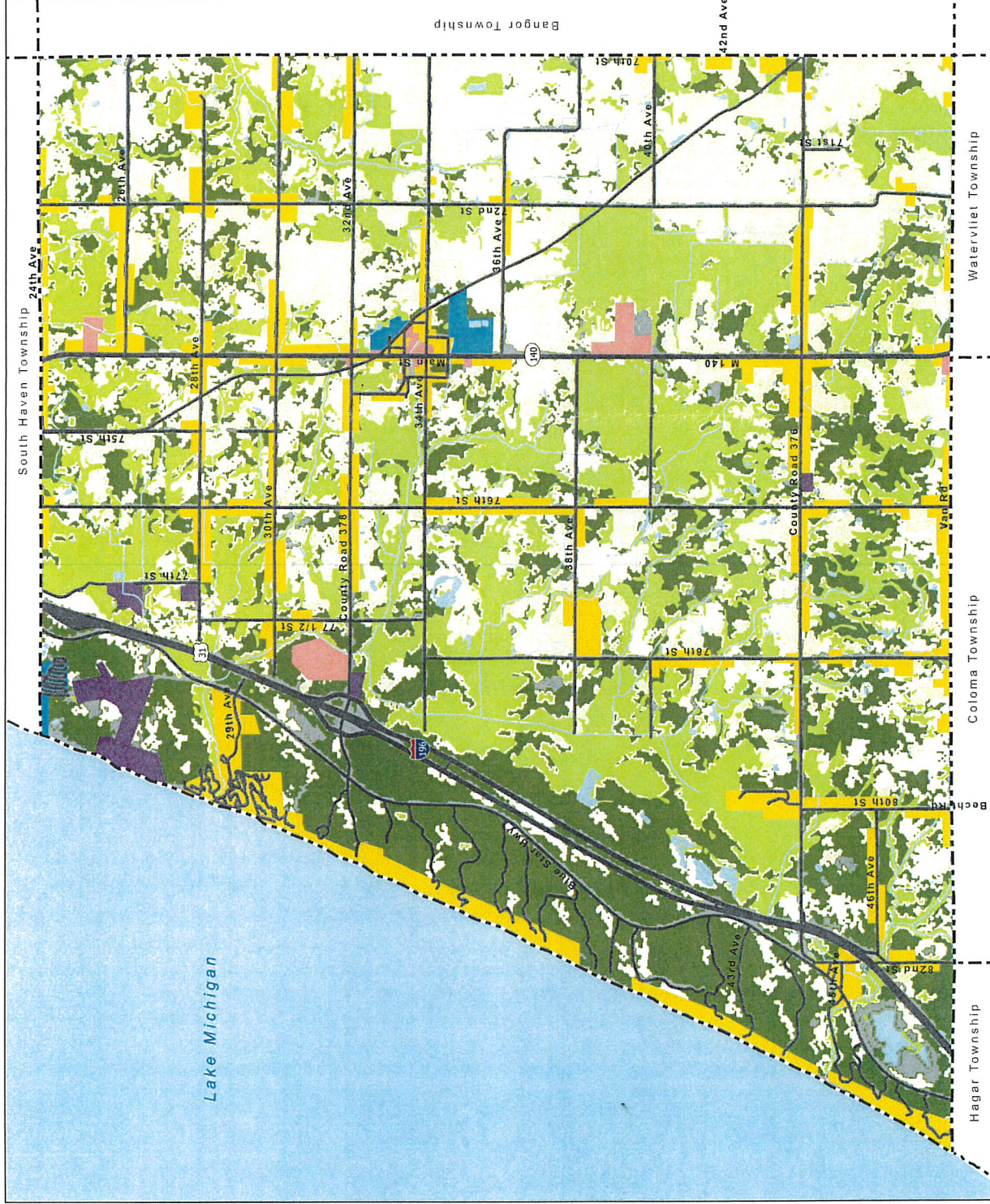
- Commercial
- Industrial
- Public
- Residential
- Open water, rivers, streams, and drains
- Barren / Extractive
- Forest
- Vacant / Undeveloped
- Agriculture
- Wooded or Vegetated Wetland
- All_Roads
- Municipal Boundaries



Base map source: MCGI 2017, Data Source
National Land Cover Database 2011, National Wetlands Inventory 2016, Mckenna 2018.

November 8, 2019
DRAFT

MCKENNA



III. HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

EXISTING LAND USE

The Existing Land Use map shows the general relationship of land uses throughout the township. The existing land use categories are different than those used for the Future Land Use map and the zoning ordinance.

The Existing Land Use map shows large areas of extensive land uses – which are lands covering large areas that have sparse human habitation. The most intensive uses are in the area of the Covert hamlet and along a mile-wide corridor east of Lake Michigan, where the development includes single-family, recreational vehicle parks and campgrounds. The coastal area of the township includes a township park and part of the Van Buren State Park. The complementary Coastal Management Plan addresses this region in more detail.

The adjacent chart shows the acreage and percent of township total for individual land uses. This chart, based on land use data from the Michigan Resource Information Systems, shows the large area of extensive land uses compared to the smaller area of intensive land uses. Most existing land uses are of the year 2000, with some updates.

EXISTING LAND USE CALCULATIONS Covert Township

<u>Description of Land Use</u>	<u>Acres</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Extensive Land Uses		
Agriculture	4,157	18.7%
Forests Land	11,811	52.8%
Wetlands	558	3.0%
Beaches and River Banks	58	0.3%
Rivers, Creeks & Streams	3	0.0%
Open, Vacant & Undev.	4,013	16.9%
Lakes		1.4%
<hr/>		
<i>Sub-Total Extensive Land</i>	<i>20,600</i>	<i>93.1%</i>
Intensive Land Uses		
Single Family/Duplex	1,062	4.8%
Commercial	38	0.2%
Industrial	3	0.01
Public/Quasi-Public	123	0.6%
Utilities*	112	0.5%
Roads	396	1.8%
<hr/>		
<i>Sub-Total Intense Land Use</i>	<i>1,734</i>	<i>6.9%</i>
Total Land Uses	22,334	100%

* This includes only developed lands. Utility companies own additional lands within the township.

Existing Land Uses East of I-196

The existing land uses east of the I-196 freeway are detailed below. The Coastal Management Plan describes the areas west of the freeway.

Residential land uses are most intense in the hamlet of Covert. Although the hamlet consists of both single-family and duplex housing, it is predominantly single-family housing. All of Covert Township has only 16 units of two-family structures. Covert also has very little higher density housing such as apartments. The single-family homes do include a fairly large number of mobile homes on individual parcels. These mobile homes are predominantly in three zoning districts that permit them between the freeway and M-140. The township has a public housing project with 28 units of one-story housing near Lake Street in Covert. Twelve low-income homes were built on scattered sites in the Covert hamlet area.

Commercial development occurs in very limited areas along M-140 near the hamlet of Covert just south of County Road 378. In all there are about 20 commercial businesses in the township, some of which are in the coastal zone area along Blue Star Memorial Highway.

Industrial land use, which is not a dominant land use in Covert Township, is a major economic activity for the township. The largest employer is a nuclear-powered electrical generation plant in the coastal area and is detailed in the Coastal Management Plan. Near that plant and just east of the freeway is the Covert Generating Company (PGE) natural gas fueled electric power plant. The plant is capable of generating as much as twice the electricity as the Palisades plant with only a handful of employees. Both plants draw employment from a larger labor market than the township because of the unique skills required.

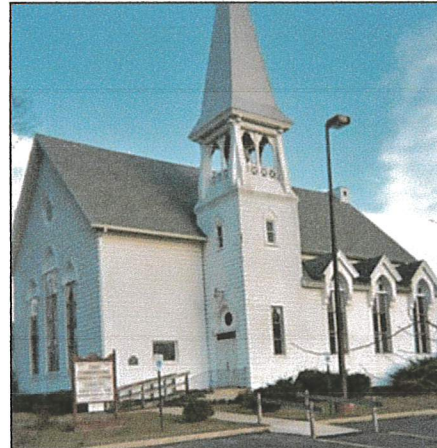
There are a few local industrial operations such as Swing-Lo Suspended Scaffold Company – an internationally known suspended-scaffolding operation on County Road 376 near M-140.

Public/Quasi Public organizations are also located in Covert Township. These include:

- Covert Public Schools, a campus of 31 acres for its K-12 schools, located on the east side of M-140 near 36th Avenue.
- Major township facilities are located in the hamlet of Covert at 34th Avenue and M-140. These include a Township Office Building/Meeting Center and a Police/Fire/EMS Complex. They are on smaller individual lots rather than a single site.
- The Covert Township Historical Museum and the Covert Branch Library on M-140 just north of 34th Avenue.



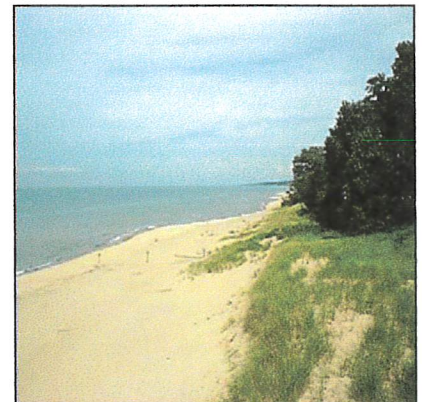
- There are 6 churches in the township, mainly located on M-140 near the hamlet of Covert.
- The Federal Government has a variety of public facilities in the Township. These include the post office, a Department of Housing and Urban Development project of 28 homes, and scattered homes throughout the hamlet.
- The Whirlpool-Brandywine Creek Training and Education Center was built on the Brandywine Creek in the northeast quadrant of the I-196 interchange at 32nd Avenue. The 35 employees there serve the Whirlpool Corporation leaders.
- The Van Buren United Civic Center is located on 17 acres at 34th Avenue and I-196/US-31.
- A Covert Community Center was built through the efforts of the Covert Lions Club near the exit of I-196 on the south side of County Road 378.



Other public uses include public and private parks and recreation open spaces. These facilities are described below:

Public and Quasi-Public Parks and Recreation Facilities:

- Van Buren Trail State Park, operated by the State, is discussed in the companion Coastal Management Plan.
- A multi-purpose trail is on the site of a former CSX railroad right-of-way traversing from the southeast part of Covert Township to the hamlet of Covert and northerly to South Haven Township. The rail right-of-way was acquired by the State of Michigan to keep it intact for reuse as a trail.
- Covert Township Beach and Campground is owned by the township. It is also detailed in the Coastal Management Plan.
- Covert Community Park on M-140 Hwy downtown Covert
- Covert KOA family owned and operated right along M-140 Hwy.
- Dune Lake Campground with a small lake nestled in the woods of CR-376.
- The Nature Conservancy owns approximately 1,430 acres east of Blue Star Highway and also east of I-196/US-31 between County Road 376 on the south and 34th Street on the north. It includes small Mud Lake and about one and one-half miles of Brandywine Creek.



- The Covert Public Schools has open space and athletic fields for its students and the community on M-140 near 36th Avenue.
- There are two Township-owned cemeteries in Covert Township. The Covert Cemetery is located on the south side of 32nd Avenue just east of state highway M-140. The second cemetery is on 38th Avenue near 78th Street and is known as Fish Cemetery.

Private Recreation Facilities:

- Palisades Park subdivision has 3/4 mile of beach, with tennis courts and other amenities, immediately south of the Palisades Nuclear Power Plant. However, it is restricted to members and guests of the 220 homes in the park.

Agriculture is a significant use of land in Covert Township. There are fruit orchards with blueberries and grapes and some field crops in the central and western portions of the township. The orchards are based on the more temperate and moist climatic conditions associated with land near Lake Michigan. Generally the soils are not suitable or are marginal for agricultural operations in most other areas. The rural character imparted by the agriculture helps make the township particularly attractive for low density residential development.



Forests shown on the map exist over much of the township, but especially the western portion where the soils are not well suited for farming and seasonal recreation is paramount. Most of the forests are deciduous second-growth, as the virgin growth which included many coniferous was harvested before 1900.

Wetlands are located primarily along the Brandywine Creek and tributaries of the Cedar Creek.

Surface water is confined to Lake Michigan, the small inland lake Mud Lake, Le Lac Appelle, ponds and the Brandywine, Rogers and Cedar Creeks.

Vacant/Undeveloped land exists in a variety of locations throughout the township. Some is fallow farmland and has remained undeveloped since the forests were harvested.

Public Infrastructure

Transportation Systems

The primary roadway transportation network in Covert Township consists of one freeway (I-196/US-31) that traverses north to south within a mile and a half of Lake Michigan. It has a township interchange at 32nd Avenue (County Road 378). The freeway is the principal route to South Haven, Holland, Grand Haven, and other northern destinations. State Highway M-140 also traverses north and south through the township connecting to I-94 about 7 miles south of the township boundary.

In addition, there are about 19 miles of county primary road in Covert Township. The road network is generally well maintained with few congestion or design problems. There is no regularly scheduled statewide, county or local transit service available.

There is a major trail going through the township on the former railroad right-of-way traveling southeast to north through the entire township. The trail was made from a former rail bed by the State of Michigan.

The South Haven Airport is immediately north of the township on County Road 380 about a half-mile east of M-140. It is a general aviation airport without routine air carrier passenger service.

Public Utilities

Covert Township operates two major public utilities; a smaller sanitary sewage system and a large water distribution system.

A collection system of sanitary sewers was constructed by Covert Township in 1989 and treatment is through a septic field system. The system serves the immediate hamlet of Covert with a force main to the treatment field and a force main to the Whirlpool Center on County Road 378 and Brandywine Creek. Treatment is at the septic field system on the northwest quadrant of 77½ Street and 34th Avenue. The Township system is virtually at capacity and would require over \$2.5 million for a lagoon project to increase that capacity.

Covert Schools have a separate sanitary sewage lagoon system exclusively for its facilities immediately adjacent to the hamlet of Covert.

A public water distribution system is operated by the City of South Haven and covers the entire township. The public water comes to Covert Township on M-140 from the City of South Haven. A 200,000 gallon elevated water tower is located adjacent to the public schools in the hamlet of Covert.

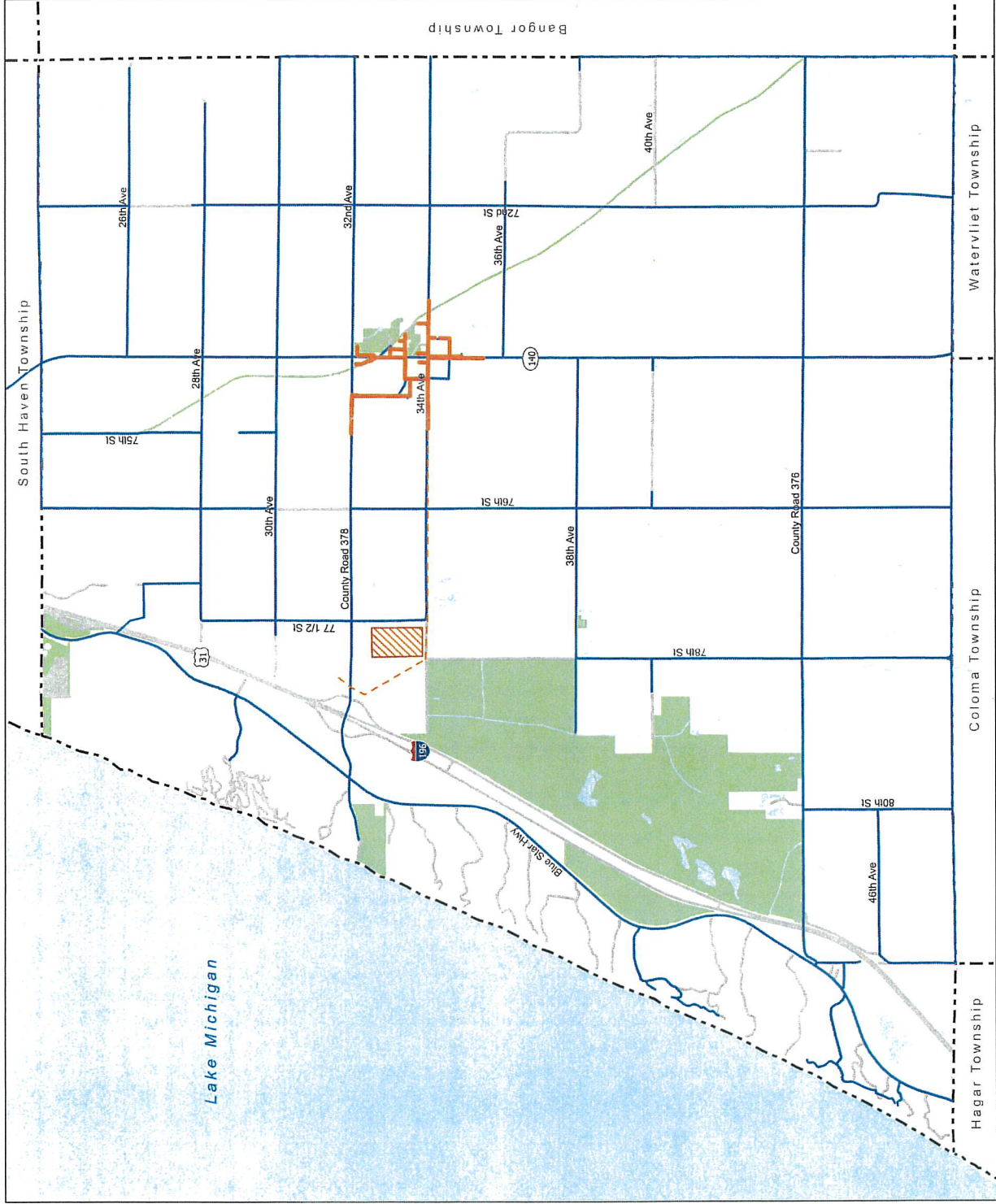
MAP 2

Water and Sewer Infrastructure

Covert Township, Van Buren County, MI

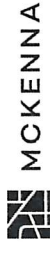
LEGEND

- Water Main
- Sanitary Force Main
- Sanitary Gravity Main
- Sanitary Treatment Area
- Water Bodies and Streams
- Parks, Schools, & Cemetery
- Roads
- Municipal Boundaries



Basemap source: MCGI 2017, Data source: Covert Township

November 8, 2019
DRAFT



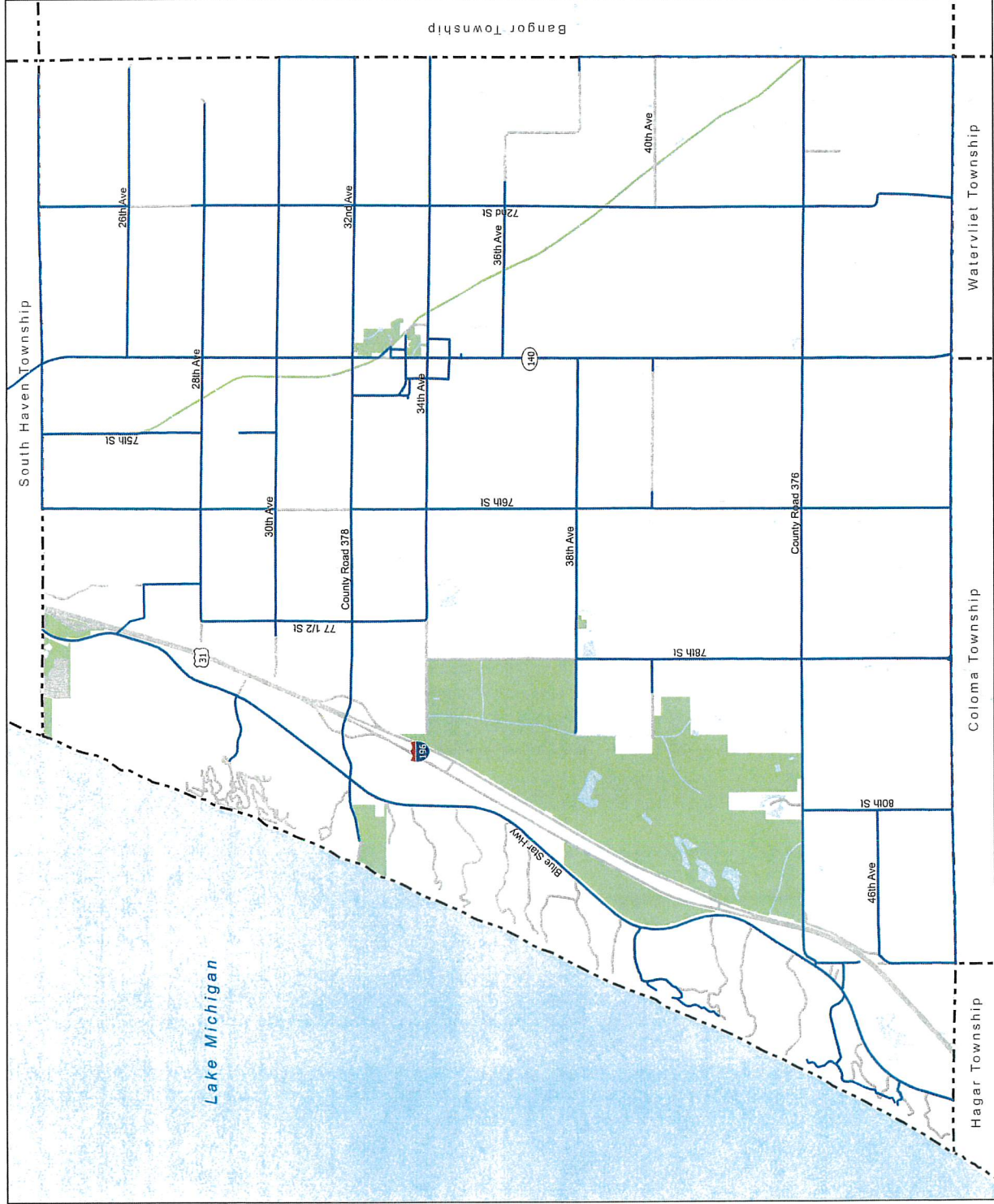
MAP 3

Water Infrastructure

Covert Township, Van Buren County, MI

LEGEND

- Water Main
- Parks, Schools, & Cemetery
- Water Bodies and Streams
- Roads
- Municipal Boundaries



Basemap source: MCGI 2017. Data source: Covert Township.

November 8, 2019
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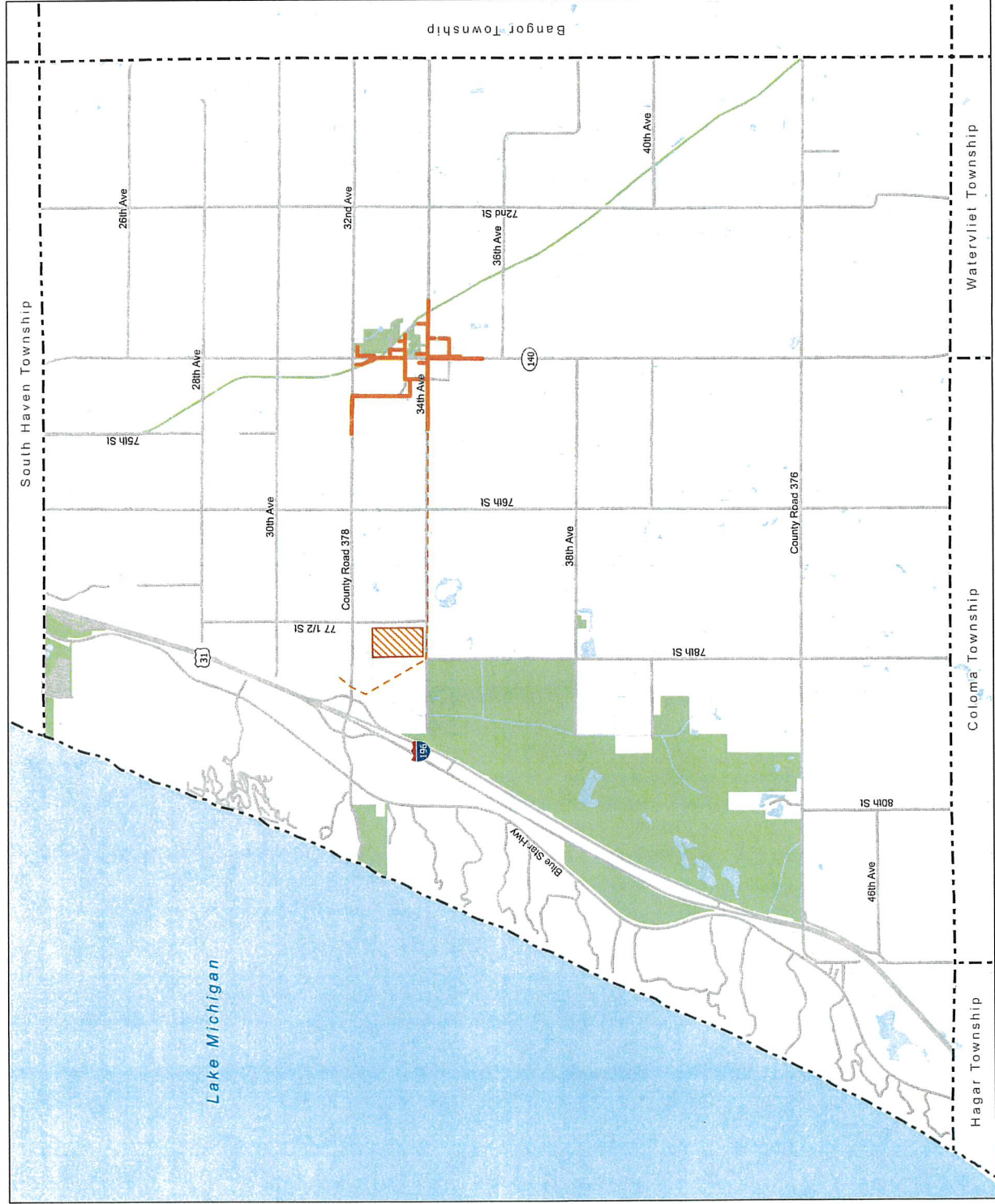
MAP 4

Sewer Infrastructure

Covert Township, Van Buren County, MI

LEGEND

- Sanitary Force Main
- Sanitary Gravity Main
- Sanitary Treatment Area
- Parks, Schools, & Cemetery
- Water Bodies and Streams
- Roads
- Municipal Boundaries



Basemap source: MCGI 2017. Data Source: Covert Township.

November 8, 2019
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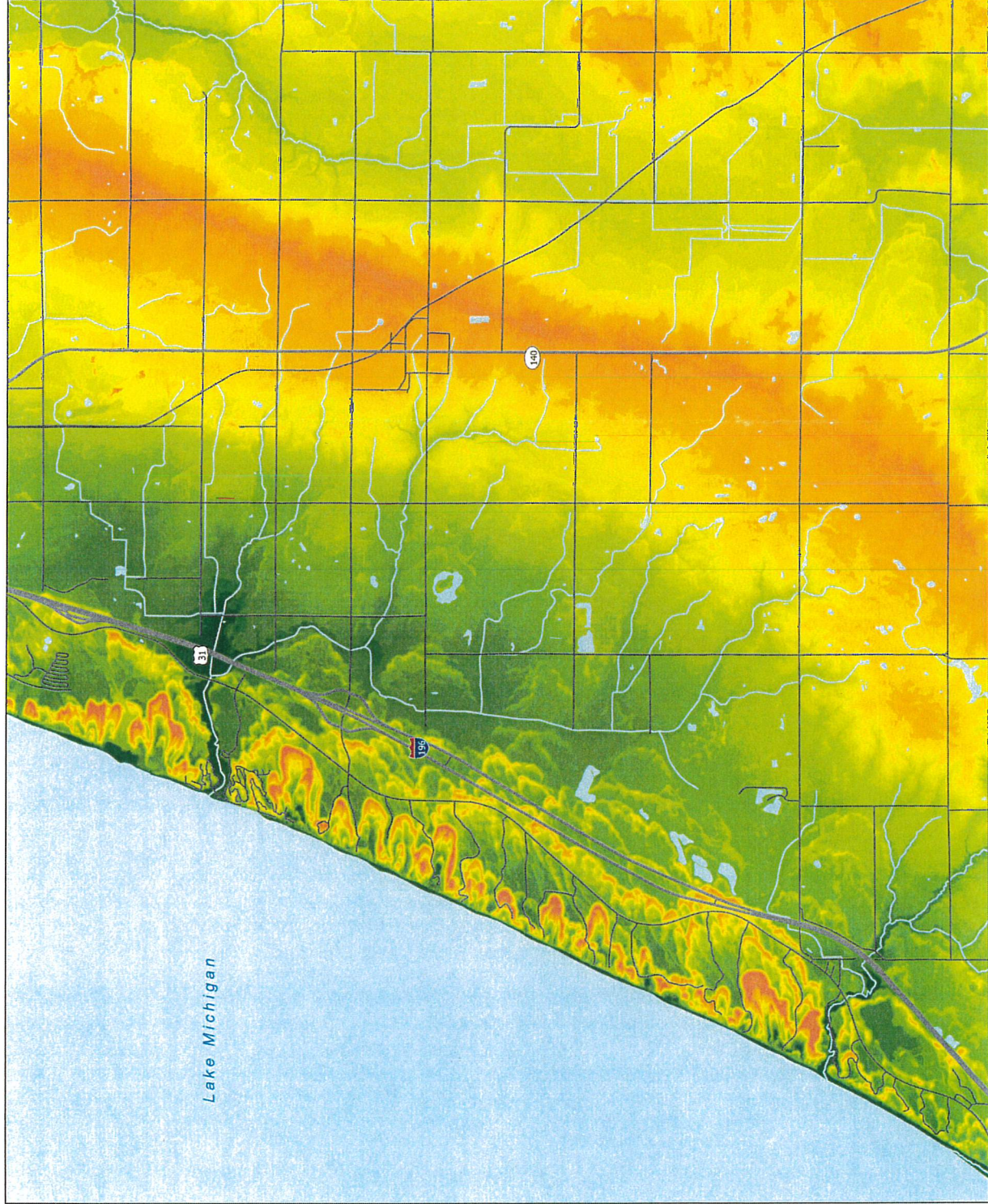


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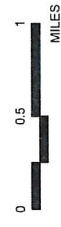
MAP 5

Topographic Map

Covert Township, Van Buren County, MI



Elevation (ft.)



Base map source: MCGI 2017, Data Source: National Wetlands Inventory 2018, Michigan DEQ 2018.

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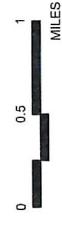
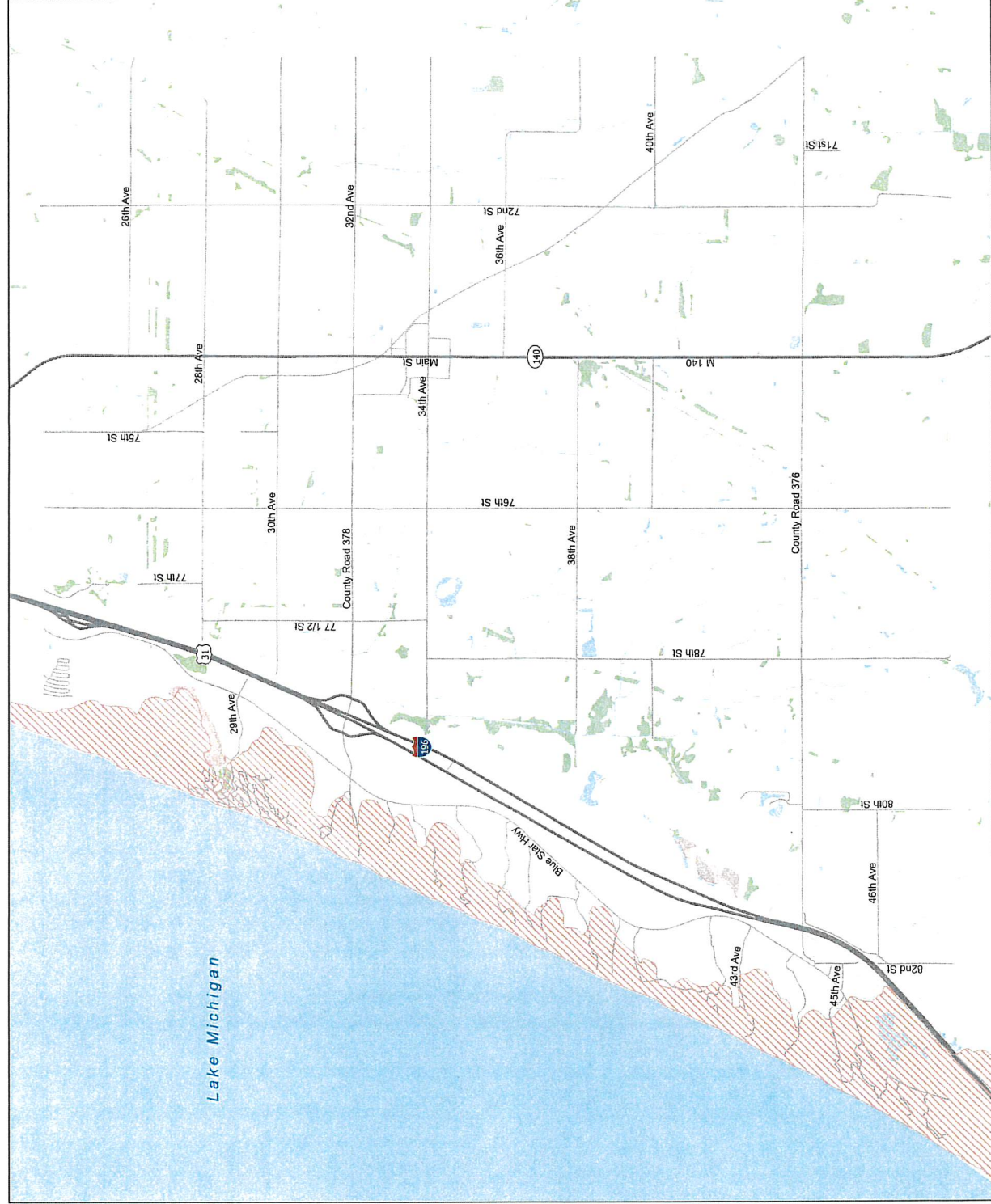
MAP 6

Natural Features

Covert Township, Van Buren County, MI

LEGEND

- Municipal Boundaries
- Dune Type
 - Barrier Dunes
 - Exemplary Dune Associated Plant Community
- Wetland Types
 - Freshwater Emergent Wetland
 - Freshwater Forested/Shrub Wetland
- Water Bodies
- Rivers
- Roads



Basemap source: MCGI 2017. Data Source: National Wetlands Inventory 2018, Michigan DEC 2018

November 8, 2019
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IV. NATURAL FEATURES

Understanding the role natural features play within the township can help determine the effective use and preservation of natural features for the benefit of township residents. Natural features that are dominant within the township include upland areas of sand hills and critical dunes/steep slopes, as well as significant water features such as Lake Michigan and the Brandywine, Rogers and Cedar Creeks.

General Features

Topography and Land Character

Along the banks of Lake Michigan, Covert Township has sand dunes that rise dramatically to 150 feet above Lake Michigan within several hundred feet from the shoreline. This band of sand dunes, most of which are considered "critical dunes" by the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ), average about a mile in width, and represent the most dramatic elevation changes in Covert Township. The land drops significantly East of the I-196 freeway, forming wetlands and low-lying areas along Brandywine Creek.

Brandywine Creek is the largest creek within the township with a catchment area west of M-140. The creek drains heavily wooded and wetland areas and flows into Lake Michigan near 29th Avenue.

Three miles of Cedar Creek flows through the far eastern side of the Township before it diverts west into Bangor Township. Unlike Brandywine Creek, Cedar Creek does not empty directly into Lake Michigan. The creek travels northeast in the township and eventually ties into the Black River before it empties into Lake Michigan at South Haven.

There is no documented occurrence of land pollution from any source in Covert Township on lists maintained by the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality. There is a former landfill located on the south side of County Road 378 just west of the I-196/US-31 freeway interchange. No recorded pollution events are known at that site.

Soils

There are a variety of soil types throughout Covert Township. Identifying these soils can help to evaluate potential uses of land and identify any problems that may be associated with soil conditions. The United States Department of Agriculture Soil Conservation Service Soil Survey manual for Van Buren County reveals Covert Township has substantial sandy soils, particularly west of Blue Star Memorial Highway. This also forms the dramatic slopes and rolling hills of the sand dunes, limiting the potential for farming and restricting where homes and other structures can be built. To the east of I-196 the soil type changes slightly; hills become less prominent in favor of rolling terrain, where the suitability of soils for buildings and for limited farming improves. Farm products, such as blueberries, that can handle acidic permeable soils, survive well within these soils. Grapes and cash crops are also found among the township's agriculture areas.

NATURAL FEATURES

Buildings that are constructed within the more level parts of Covert Township must be cautious of seepage of water into homes. According to the Soil Survey manual for Van Buren County the predominant soil types reveal a risk of ponding and wetness within floor levels that are below ground level. Because of these soils much of the township contains areas that are not conducive to normal construction of on-site septic systems.

The areas around Brandywine Creek, Rogers Creek and Cedar Creek have floodplain areas, wetlands and associated vegetation that can survive in the sandy soil conditions. The natural vegetation along the banks of the creeks needs to be maintained to control small floods, preserve natural habitat and limit soil erosion control.

Wetlands

Wetlands are common in much of Michigan, although statewide loss of this valuable natural resource has been significant. Part 303 of the Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act defines a wetland as:

"land characterized by the presence of water at a frequency and duration sufficient to support, and that under normal circumstances does support, wetland vegetation or aquatic life and is commonly referred to as a bog, swamp, or marsh.."

"Wetland" is the collective term for marshes, swamps, bogs, and similar areas often found between open water and upland areas.

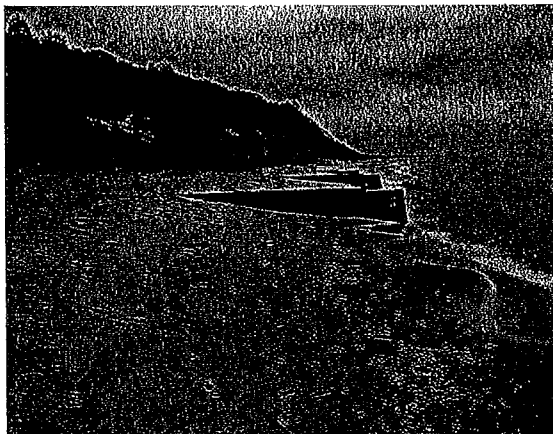
A wide variety of wetland types are found in the township. Covert's major wetlands are in Sections 23 and 26 on the east side along tributaries of the Cedar Creek and in Sections 17, 20, 29, 30, 31 and 32 along or near Brandywine Creek. Major wetlands are subject to protection by the MDEQ under several circumstances, if the wetland is:

- Connected to Lake Michigan,
- Located within 1,000 feet of Lake Michigan.
- Connected to an inland lake, pond, river, or stream.
- Located within 500 feet of an inland lake, pond, river or stream.
- Not connected to Lake Michigan, or an inland lake, pond, stream, or river, but are more than 5 acres in size and located in counties with a population of more than 100,000. Van Buren County has 76,263 people, so this does not apply to Covert Township.
- Not connected to Lake Michigan, an inland lake, pond, stream, or river, and less than 5 acres in size, but the MDEQ has determined that these wetlands are essential to the preservation of the state's natural resources and has notified the property owner.

Wetlands contribute to the quality of other natural resources, such as inland lakes, ground water, fisheries, wildlife and Lake Michigan. Wetlands serve as storage areas for excess water and nutrients and controlling floods. In addition, acre for acre, wetlands produce more wildlife and plants than any other Michigan land cover type. Wetlands are especially important for breeding certain game fish and/or supporting a variety of unique plant and animal species.

Water Quality

The watercourses, surface waters and ponds in Covert Township are too small to fall under the jurisdiction of the MDEQ to monitor existing water quality. In addition, there are few generators of potential point source water pollution (specific locations where pollution originates). Non-point sources (area-wide, or non-specific points), such as agriculture, large parking lots and roads do not appear to create a significant water quality issue.



Lake Michigan forms the western border of Covert Township but is not known to present any localized water quality problems. The MDEQ is primarily responsible for monitoring the quality of Lake Michigan. The state has designated most of the beach along Lake Michigan as a high-risk erosion area. This primarily affects existing and planned houses on the sand dunes overlooking the lake.

The only inland lake in the Township is Mud Lake near Brandywine Creek. It is a small, very shallow lake of less than 120 acres and has no development around it. It has no known water quality problems. The lake is part of property owned by The Nature Conservancy and/or its affiliated branch (the Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy).

Air Quality

Air quality is affected by the prevailing winds from the southwest coming across Lake Michigan, which is over eighty miles wide at that point. Covert Township also has no significant air pollution generators that would degrade air quality. The only compromise for air quality is the prevailing wind crossing Lake Michigan from the Chicago area and the steel mills of northern Indiana. These sources are under federal or other state regulation.

In summary, though, the township has no long-term adverse air quality issues according to the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality. There are no known significant local air quality problems for Covert Township.

Major Plant and Animal Species

The general plant and animal species in Van Buren County are identified in the 1986 Soil Survey by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and listed below. Although not specific to Covert Township, these are the more common plant species in the county and most or all of the habitats supporting them can be found in the Township. While the list is not comprehensive, it does represent common species found throughout the area. Most of these species are relatively tolerant of a low-density, rural population. As with the Threatened and Endangered species, these plants and animals are protected by the Master Plan preserving as much natural land as possible.

PLANT AND ANIMAL SPECIES IN COVERT TOWNSHIP				
MAJOR PLANT SPECIES				
Open Land and Crops	Woodlands		Wetlands & Shallow Waters	
Grain crops	<i>Deciduous</i>	<i>Coniferous</i>	Smartweed	
Seed crops	Aspen	Pine	Wild millet	
Grasses	Oak	Spruce	Arrowhead	
Legumes	Maple	Fir	Duckweed	
Wild herbaceous plants	Poplar	Cedar	Rushes	
		Juniper	Sedges	
			Reeds	
			Cattails	
MAJOR ANIMAL SPECIES				
<i>Mammals</i>		<i>Mammals/Reptiles</i>		
Cottontail rabbits		Muskrats		
Red fox		Raccoons		
Woodchucks		Mink		
Opossum		Turtles		
Whitetail deer		Frogs		
Squirrels		Snakes		
Mice		Coyote		
<i>Birds</i>				
Wild turkey		Field sparrow		
Ruffed grouse		Herons		
Woodcock		Cranes		
Thrushes		Kingfishers		
Woodpeckers		Marsh hawks		
Bobtail quail		Diving ducks		
Ring-necked pheasants		Dabbling ducks		
Meadowlark		Canada geese		
Snow geese		Bald Eagle		
<i>Fish</i>				
<i>Lake Michigan</i>	<i>Brandywine Creek & Surface Water</i>			
Salmon	Sunfish		Northern pike	
Lake trout	Perch		Bullhead	
Steelhead	Bass		Sucker/Carp	

Endangered and Threatened Species

A major concern of biota in Van Buren County is identifying the species that are most threatened by development. The most serious concerns are the endangered and threatened species in Van Buren County as identified by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Michigan Department of Natural Resources. Generally, the more fragile species and environments are on the sand dunes and wetlands.

The following Endangered and Threatened Species have been designated by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for Van Buren County:

NATURAL FEATURES

- *Eastern Massasauga: reptile species that is a candidate for listing.*
- *Mitchell's satyr butterfly: Endangered insect that inhabits fens, which are wetlands characterized by calcareous soils fed by carbonate-rich water from seeps and springs.*
- *Pitcher's thistle: Threatened plant that generally prefers stabilized sand dunes and blowout areas.*

It is likely that all three of these Threatened and Endangered species exist in Covert Township because their supporting habitats are found in the Township. In fact, the MDEQ recently found a single pitcher's thistle on some property in the sand dunes and advised that it be protected.

The Michigan Department of Natural Resources has a separate Michigan County Elements List that also includes Threatened, Endangered, Special concern and other species with a threatened habitat. The list is maintained in cooperation with the Extension Service of Michigan State University. For Van Buren County the list contains 84 entries with:

- 60 vascular plants
- 6 reptiles
- 3 invertebrates
- 2 amphibians
- 2 birds
- 1 fish. and
- 1 mammal.

In addition there are 7 communities and 2 other elements. These species can also be cross-referenced as:

- 6 Endangered Species
- 35 Threatened Species
- 32 Species of Special Concern
- 2 Other Species
- 7 Natural Communities; and
- 2 Other Elements

The above entries can be found in the Appendix. The state list probably exceeds the federal list because of more detailed fieldwork and because some species are declining in Michigan but are not declining nationally.

The federal and state listed species are included because the Master Development Plan can be beneficial to plants and animals by helping to preserve their natural habitats. As noted these are predominantly in the sand dunes, wetlands and woodlands. Some of this is already protected by land owned by The Nature Conservancy or its affiliated branch.

PRESERVATION APPROACHES

Environmentally sensitive natural features can either enhance or restrict development projects, depending on the type and extent of the feature. For example, the crest of a hill may provide a view which adds appeal to a site. Mitigating erosion and stabilizing the hillside during and after construction can dramatically increase development costs. However, the cost to the community could be the loss of a natural view.

The value of natural features in the community is recognized as needed *preservation* for the public good, or simply folded into the community and *integrated* into the cultural (man-made) landscape.

Preservation measures apply to those features that are so sensitive or valued that any alteration has negative impacts on aesthetics, property, or environmental quality. Development should either be prohibited or restricted to those projects that have only a slight effect on these features. A wetland is one example of land requiring preservation techniques.

What happens when we fail to protect environmentally sensitive areas?

- Destruction of personal property (potentially from flooding)
- Need for alternative sources of water or installation of expensive storm sewers and water purification systems
- Permanent loss of natural resources for future use

In areas where the natural features are an integral part of the community's character, but where minor changes only slightly impact the quality of life, *integration* may provide adequate protection. Integration allows natural features to remain undisturbed, yet exist in concert with development. The Township should carefully monitor land use in areas rich in these features in order to determine how they may properly be integrated into any proposed development.

Whether preservation or integration is desired, several of the tools that will be referred to in this plan

are most effectively implemented by ensuring adequate site plan review requirements and standards are in place. The Michigan Zoning Enabling Act states that the Township may "require the submission and approval of a site plan before authorization of a land use or activity regulated by the zoning ordinance." Before a site plan can be required, however, the ordinance must state which land uses or activities will need approval. Site Plan Review is required for all Special Land Uses and Planned Unit Developments.

Site plan review requirements detail what information must be included on a site plan when it is submitted for review. Although requiring significant natural features to be shown on a site plan is a first step in identifying environmentally sensitive features, this is not a means of preservation. *Site plan review standards*, on the other hand, are the criteria that the Planning Commission must use when reviewing all site plans. These standards help establish guidelines on how environmentally sensitive features on a site are to be treated.

V. VISION, GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

As an initial step in the review of the 2004 Covert Township Master Development Plan, the Township initiated a community-wide survey to gather feedback for the creation of the updated 2019 Covert Township Master Plan.

The survey was designed by Covert's Planning Commission and Township Board and distributed to over 1,000 year-round and seasonal households during a four-month period (March to June, 2019). The survey was prepared in two languages, an English version and a Spanish version. The English version received 289 responses and the Spanish version received 15 responses. The Township used Survey Monkey to collect and analyze the results of the 26 multiple choice and open-ended questions. A complete list of all questions and responses can be found in the Appendix.

Of the 303 survey-takers, 47.5% identified themselves to be in the 64-84 age category, while the next largest group (31.4%) identified in the 45-64 age category. Overall, 88.4% of the respondents were 45 and older. The majority of the survey-takers had zero children under the age of 18 living in their household and have lived in the Township for more than 25 years. In general, survey-takers tended to be mature adults who are long-time year-round residents of the community.

*A **Vision** is a long-term method of seeing a community's future with discernment and foresight.*

*A **Goal** is a destination, a final purpose that a community seeks to attain. A Goal is a broad general statement.*

*An **Objective** is a means to accomplish the Goal. It may be very specific or detail a future action that should be taken.*

The survey results were tabulated to review the Community Vision and the supporting Goals and Objectives for accuracy based on a change in conditions or attitudes. The chart to the right explains the relationship of this interrelated hierarchy of community preferences.

TOWNSHIP VISION

The Vision of Covert Township is to ensure the community grows deliberately and in a well-planned manner. The Township will expand appropriate infrastructure and focus on residential growth that maintains Covert's strong rural residential character. Industrial and commercial growth should be encouraged in logical locations and where ample utility service is provided. The Township will continue to respect its strong environmental qualities and expand its recreational opportunities, especially where possible along the Lake Michigan shoreline. A stronger identity and feeling of community will make a great place to live even better.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The Vision provides a broad context for Covert Township's future. It provides direction for creation of specific Goals to define the activities needed for developing Covert Township. The Goals further consist of detailed Objectives for their application. The Goals and Objectives are not presented in a sense of priority and deserve equal attention in decision-making.

As noted previously, these Goals and Objectives are based on the survey of both seasonal and year-round residents, the Planning Commission's perspective, and input at the joint

Vision, goals and objectives

meetings of the Board of Trustees and the Planning Commission.

Quality of Life

A basic Goal is assessing the importance of the quality of life in the community. That Goal was well defined in the community survey from a wide variety of factors.

GOAL: The rural quality of life must be maintained as the community grows and develops.

In addition to little street traffic and inexpensive land prices, many survey-takers found the Township's quiet living attractive. There was strong agreement on: the current pace of growth in the Township (63% described the pace as 'just fine'); that new families moving to the Township would be 'good for the area' (56%); and, that growth should be 'encouraged in planned areas.' (70%). One resident responded, 'Covert is a lovely, rural community. We love living here.'

To meet these goals a number of more detailed objectives were developed as follows:

Objective: The Township will maintain the life style of a small town and rural quality by continuing to keep a low crime rate, providing access to Lake Michigan, preserving the quality of air and water, controlling neighborhood blight more effectively and supporting continued school improvements.

Objective: Development such as multi-family, manufactured home parks, and commercial and Industrial facilities will be modest in scale and concentrated in planned areas.

Objective: Intensive development will have visual, noise and odor barriers with broad, wooded natural buffers to ensure the rural environment is not jeopardized. Vehicular traffic will be minimized and well-managed.

Objective: Rural Residential areas will be low density and maintained in an attractive and environmentally sensitive manner.

Natural Features

As noted earlier in this plan, Covert Township has many significant natural features. The survey demonstrated that preserving those natural features was a major Goal of residents.

GOAL: Sensitive natural features of the Township require recognition and protection.

When asked about positive aspects of living in Covert Township, the Township's rural character and natural features were mentioned most frequently by community residents. When asked specifically about growth in natural areas in Covert Township, 57% of the respondents indicated 'natural areas should be protected against development', while 23% felt

Vision, goals and objectives

'natural areas should be open for development, with restrictions.' One respondent emphasized 'it is important to save the natural wooded areas and beaches.' 'Survey takers' level of support for efforts such as the application of natural area or rural character preservation techniques was largely "Important – with use of existing funds'.

Objective: Lake Michigan and its adjacent critical sand dunes area are a unique resource that must not be polluted or burdened with adverse impacts. Any related flora and fauna must also be protected through cooperation with the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality and other applicable agencies.

Objective: Forests, wetlands, creeks and open spaces should not be subjected to intensive development or allowed to deteriorate from runoff, pollution or other activity.

Objective: Land, water and air quality will be preserved at high levels.

Residential Environment

Covert Township is very attractive for both seasonal and year-round residents because of its natural features, rural atmosphere and small hamlet. Preserving that residential attractiveness is important.

GOAL: Maintain a strong rural residential environment through zoning and other regulatory measures, including the use of development incentives.

Over 90% of the residents recognized that growth should be allowed, with almost 70% supporting growth in planned areas and 25% supporting growth with as few restrictions as possible. Responses to survey questions on availability and variety of housing in the community suggest that there is a need for additional housing options in the Township.

Objective: Natural features should be preserved by appropriate zoning districts, large lots, open space/cluster provisions and by using development incentives with residential development.

Objective: Single-family homes need to be emphasized in rural areas to preserve the rural residential need, and to maintain low-density population where sanitary sewers are not available.

Objective: Preservation of active farmland should be encouraged to the extent possible, but development of farmland, when appropriate, should be permitted.

Economic Development

With the planned closing of the Palisades Power Plant, economic opportunities and challenges in Covert Township were key topics for survey-takers and the focus of many of the responses to the open-ended questions.

GOAL: Limit economic development to less intensive commercial and smaller industrial uses that maintains the character of the community.

The following development goals all received a rating of moderately important or very important: 'Encourage new commercial businesses and services' (35%); 'Attract new industrial businesses for jobs' (34%); and, 'A lack of new business in Covert Township to create jobs is a concern' (57%).

When asked 'What do you consider to be negative aspects of living in Covert Township?', the majority of responses included: 'not enough shopping options' (67%) and 'too far away from jobs' (43%). Specific statements included 'There needs to be a redevelopment plan for the downtown area. If a few restaurants and shops were available then people will start to improve houses around downtown.' And 'Many people travel on Blue Star Highway to South Haven . . if we want to encourage people to spend time here, we need to encourage more businesses on Blue Star Highway.'

Though many respondents indicated a need for economic development in the Township and many (48%) identified 'a lack of commercial services is a concern', nearly a quarter (24%) indicated they don't mind traveling for commercial services.

Objective: Modest economic development is necessary to create local jobs and to provide services.

Objective: Specific areas in the Plan are appropriately designated to locate nonresidential development. An appropriate location is in the immediate hamlet area because the facilities may be served by existing public facilities.

Parks and Recreation

When asked to describe how often they visit the Township's recreational facilities, 'Never' was the top-rated response of survey-takers, followed by the second-most rated response of 'Yearly'. However, when asked about the importance of having recreational facilities such as playgrounds, tennis courts, and access to lake Michigan, the facilities were rated 'Important . . with the use of existing funds.' In most cases, facilities were rated as 'Not Important'.

The Covert Township Parks Committee has prepared and routinely updates the Township's Parks & Recreation Plan. The Plan successfully places the Township in an advantageous position to qualify for state funding (grants) for the acquisition and improvement of recreational facilities in the Township, including trailways.

GOAL: Parks and other active recreation areas should be located to take advantage of location, terrain, land features and population centers.

Although 60 percent of surveyed year-round respondents favored Lake Michigan access for recreation, 84 percent of the seasonal residents favored that access. Without considering location, 65 percent of respondents (no appreciable difference between year-round and seasonal residents) favored developing parks and recreation activities. In contrast, only 51 percent were Very Concerned or Concerned about the availability of recreation along Lake Michigan. The latter may show concern for the cost or loss of personal land for recreational purposes. Cost may be a factor because the survey showed only 41 percent of the people felt the township should devote more resources for recreation while 27 percent disagreed with spending more for recreation.

Objective: Athletic fields, court sports and other activities requiring or using a level terrain should be developed in the centrally located and level terrain around the hamlet.

Objective: Parks that emphasize more passive uses such as picnic areas, sunbathing, hiking and water sports are best located on or near appropriate features. In Covert Township, the Lake Michigan beaches, the sand dunes, forested areas and the creeks provide effective environments for these parks providing there is good road access and it does not unduly and adversely affect existing residential areas.

Objective: Passive recreation can also provide environmental protection because of their minimal intrusion on natural feature.

Public Services

Public services include roads, sanitary sewer, water, police and fire service, ambulance, schools and code enforcement. The quality and safety of existing roads were given an 'average' rating while police and fire services were rated a combined good and excellent score, 54% and 61% respectively. All public service goals, including 'provide quality police and fire protection' and 'maintain high quality public roads' were rated as 'Important . . with use of existing funds'. However, providing police and fire protection ranked highest among services that are important with support for a millage increase.

GOAL: Public services should preserve current investments in infrastructure and expand the infrastructure where appropriate.

Vision, goals and objectives

The lack of broadband coverage in the Township was identified as a key issue for residents. Over 80% of respondents indicated that 'high speed Internet is important to them', with 88% also emphasizing 'the need for improvement in the availability of telecommunication services in the Township.' Consistent with this recognized need, nearly 56% expressed a willingness to pay for the needed improvements

- | | |
|------------|--|
| Objective: | The existing high quality of roads in Covert Township must be continued through maintenance, repair and replacement. |
| Objective: | The public water system should extend to as many houses in the township as possible. |
| Objective: | The public sanitary sewer system should be moderately expanded as development increases in the hamlet area. |
| Objective: | Maintain the high quality of ambulance response, fire and police services available to township residents. |
| Objective: | Support, and provide where feasible, increased broadband coverage within the Township. |

Community Identity and Pride

The positive nature of most input by seasonal and year-round residents also resulted in a relatively low identification with the township or a strong sense of community. This response has encouraged the Covert Township Board of Trustees and Planning Commission to address that issue.

GOAL:	Township identity and pride needs to be enhanced through community improvements in image.
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- | | |
|------------|--|
| Objective: | Covert should be encouraged to consolidate with new, small-scale retail and service development to join the Township buildings, post office and quasi-public facilities of the hamlet to create a central sense of place. |
| Objective: | A stronger community image needs to be developed and creation of a central "image-maker" should be considered, such as a tower, open-air structure or community parkland established through community effort in the hamlet. |

VI. MASTER DEVELOPMENT PLAN

The background of history, culture, economy, transportation, natural resources, and land use provide a strong basis for understanding Covert Township's trends and present conditions. The result is a master plan with a sound technical background, strong resident direction and flexibility, combined with the ingenuity and creativity of Planning Commissioners, Township Board members and other community leaders.

PLAN CONCEPT

Covert Township envisions slow to moderate and deliberate growth in its future. Growth will primarily be the construction of additional year-round residences throughout the township and occasional additional seasonal residences along the already heavily developed Lake Michigan shoreline and sand dune areas.

Mixed use and dense residential development will be directed to the hamlet of Covert where public utilities are available. Most of the remaining residential growth will be single-family homes in the Palisades Park development and within rural residential areas that feature larger lots and on-site sewage systems.

Commercial growth is expected to focus on areas around the I-196/US-31 freeway and County Road 378 (32ND Avenue) interchange and in the small hamlet of Covert. This will create a node of highway commerce as well as a modest retail growth in the economic center of the township. Large development is neither anticipated nor solicited as the nearby South Haven area continues to provide for larger commercial needs of the community.

Although two very large utility power plants anchor the northwest corner of the township, industrial land use is not strongly encouraged in Covert. However, some future sand and gravel excavation can be anticipated because of the geology of the area. Roads and public utilities are not designed for intensive development that would otherwise change the quiet, picturesque, environment sought by Township residents.

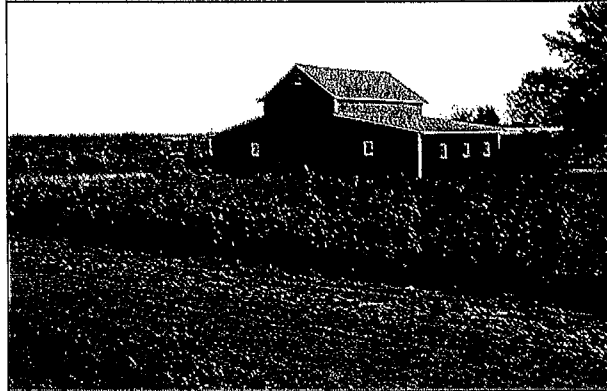
This general context for long-range development provides the framework for Covert Township's Master Plan.

Future Land Use Plan

The Future Land Use Plan sets forth the basic statement for the future vision of the township, including the extension of existing growth patterns, inevitable changes along the freeway and state route M-140, road additions or upgrades, new wastewater and public water service areas, and other changes suggested by the community survey.

The Future Land Use Map is a visual depiction of the overall land use arrangement proposed for Covert Township. The following classification scheme is used to illustrate the desired future land use pattern:

Agriculture: The Township's principal agricultural lands are identified in the Master Development Plan. These agricultural areas include a large proportion of specialty crops, such as blueberries and some grapes. The other agricultural uses are expected to continue to be field crops, which do change, but include corn, hay, wheat and oats. These principal agricultural areas were identified by both soils maps and local farmers.



In order to help preserve the agricultural land, lot sizes are expected to be somewhat larger, with a minimum parcel size of (5) five acres and three hundred thirty (330) feet of road frontage.

Residential: The intent of the Plan is to concentrate new residential growth in the general area of Covert's hamlet located at M-140 and County Road 378; permit the development of the remainder of the limited land adjacent the Lake Michigan shoreline for seasonal homes; and, permit residential development at rural densities in selected areas of the township. The Residential Land Use classifications are described as follows:

Rural Residential: In recognition of a growing desire of people to live on large lots in a rural setting, this classification is intended for non-prime farmlands where low density residential land use can best be accommodated without adversely affecting agricultural or environmental considerations.

A density of one dwelling unit per five acres is envisioned to promote land division patterns that protect natural resources and respect the rural amenities and agricultural activity in the township.

Covert Hamlet Area: The hamlet area is the only area in Covert Township with access to a public sanitary sewer system. Although that system is nearing capacity, it can – although at considerable cost – be expanded for additional development. In order to create a more central “sense of place” for Covert, the Hamlet provides for a wide variety of land uses, including all types of residential uses and densities, as well as commercial activity.

Commercial: (Planned commercial development was a high priority for those residents responding to the survey). Accordingly commercial growth will be directed and encouraged in these specific areas within the township: The Covert hamlet area; at the I-196/US-31 freeway interchange at 32nd Avenue; and, within a new commercial node on M-140 at 48th Avenue. The Commercial Land Use Classifications are described as follows:

Neighborhood Commercial: The Neighborhood Commercial classification includes only a small area of land north of the Covert hamlet on the east side of M-140 and north of County Road 378. That area is not anticipated to be served by public sewer.

Mixed Use Area in the Hamlet of Covert: Expansion of commercial land use within the hamlet is anticipated – specifically along M-140 from 32nd Avenue. This expansion is expected planned to consist of smaller developments on existing lots, such as convenience retail, professional offices and personal service shops.

“Big Box” projects such as Wal-Mart or Best Buy, and commercial developments of similar size, are more appropriately located in the south South Haven area where they are served by public utilities and surrounded by similar land use intensities.



Community Commercial: A new commercial node is anticipated on M-140 on the north side of 48th Avenue in Covert Township. This will require coordination with adjacent Coloma and Watervliet townships of Berrien County for long term development on the south side of the township. An alternative location for development is one mile north of the node at the intersection of M-140 and County Road 376, where traffic volumes are greater and all four corners could be developed.

These areas may not be serviced by public sewer so should anticipate larger lot size requirements. A minimum lot size is one acre is planned.

Highway Commercial: The I-196/US-31 freeway interchange at County Road 378 has limitations for intense development. These limitations include the secluded and effectively landscaped Whirlpool Conference Center on the northeast corner and a dramatic elevation change on the southwest and northwest corners. Consequently, highway service commercial development is expected only on the southeast quadrant where land elevations can be readily contoured for use.

Conference Center Commercial: A very limited commercial classification has been identified to accommodate specialized commercial needs. It is intended for such projects as lakeshore developments having a lodge, restaurant and considerable private recreation element. Additional development could include a golf course or other private recreation facility.

Land area with access to the I-196/US-31 freeway interchange or Blue Star Memorial Highway would be considered appropriate for the planned activities. It would not be anticipated in an area of agricultural operations or where it might have an adverse impact on non-seasonal residential development.

Industrial: Industrial activity in the township is currently limited to small operations such as Swing-Lo Systems, M-140 Auto Parts and Midwest Flocking Company. Similar to commercial, there is support for industrial growth in planned locations in the Township.

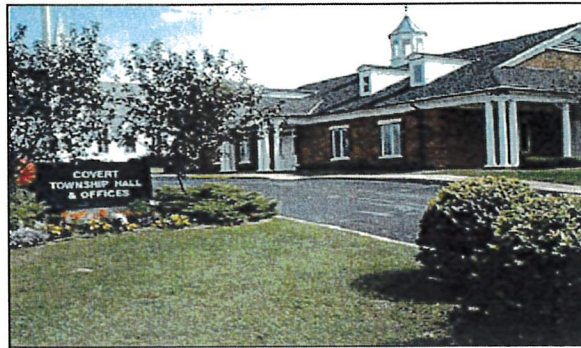


Public and Quasi-Public: The Future Land Use map shows the distribution of public

and quasi-public uses. This is a fairly broad category including local government facilities, public or private schools, state or federal government facilities, and non-profit corporations or facilities such as churches or community-wide activity centers.

Vacant land owned by the Covert Public Schools is also classified as public/quasi-public land in anticipation of future educational needs. The school district operates its own lagoon system for sanitary wastewater immediately south of the school campus.

Covert Cemetery and Fish Cemetery constitute the Township's only public facilities. There are no plans for expansions to the existing cemeteries.



Parks, Recreation and Open Space. Parks, recreation and open space areas are very significant in an area as environmentally sensitive as Covert Township. This type of land use helps to maintain the desired open, rural atmosphere that many residents were seeking in the survey. Although not protected, there is ample open space owned by private interests -- especially on Blue Star Memorial Highway. That land, however, is subject to possible development. The existing and expected formal open spaces are discussed below.

The Nature Conservancy: By far the largest use of open space land is The Nature Conservancy holdings, which has hundreds of acres in a continuous plot east of Blue Star Memorial Highway, across the freeway and over much of the Brandywine Creek. That land includes some sand dune blow-outs between Blue Star Memorial Highway and the freeway and extensive wooded and open wetlands. Previously it was known as the Ross Preserve. On the north-south axis The Nature Conservancy Land starts north of 34th Avenue and goes as far south as County Road 376 -- approximately 2 ¾ miles. Expansion is not anticipated in the future but the property lends itself to the attractive rural environment sought by the community.

Michigan Nature Association: There are 51 acres owned by the Michigan Nature Association at the southwest corner of 78th Street and County Road 376 in an area known as Fish Corners. It is immediately south of land owned by The Nature Conservancy. The land has a sparse wooded area and no major wetlands but it has minor terrain change and a small creek.

Parks and Recreation also includes the public parks located within the township - the Covert Township Park and Van Buren State Park. They are detailed in the companion document - Coastal Management Plan.

Transportation

Transportation in Covert Township consists primarily of the road network. No specific changes are planned for the M-140 corridor in that it serves the area well and is not nearing its functional capacity. Minor intersection or business area improvements, such as road widening, turn lanes, curb and gutter or other improvements at specific locations may be necessary. Improvements should generally require only minor additional road right-of-way or expansion. Dramatic growth in the township is not anticipated and the existing road is expected to remain adequate within the time frame of the Master Plan.

Public Facilities

The only township public facilities in Covert Township are a public water system and a small public sanitary sewer system in the hamlet and at the Whirlpool conference center.

The public water distribution system services virtually the entire township. It is expected that expansion will only be required where new roads or projects proposed consistent with this Master Plan.

The public sanitary sewer system has a 20-acre septic site for treatment of limited waste. The sanitary treatment system is nearing capacity and may require additional treatment capacity to meet the higher density land uses proposed in the hamlet area and the I-196/US-31 freeway interchange at County Road 378.. The additional capacity may require cooperative arrangements with developers who would propose the higher density land uses. Sanitary sewer coverage is expected to be confined to the immediate hamlet area.

Other Plan Elements

In addition to the above considerations, most of which are portrayed on the Future Land Use Map, there are several other important concerns that can be addressed by a Master Development Plan. All of these changes are proposed to improve the quality of life and preserve the attractive, rural environment of Covert Township.

Economic Development. Economic development is not foreseen as a major effort of the township. Generally the survey showed only a need for modest growth of light industry and commerce to meet localized needs and provide jobs to local citizens. The Master Development Plan does provide areas for this limited growth. A staffed and organized economic development program or a publicly sponsored technology or business park is not anticipated by Covert Township because Van Buren County can provide that service.

Sensitive Shoreline Areas. Covert Township has history of recognizing its unique and important areas of environmentally sensitive land. This has been shown by accepted expansion of The Nature Conservancy, regulation of high-risk lake erosion along Lake Michigan, the critical sand dunes and wetlands. The Township's current zoning ordinance

provided additional protection for these environmentally sensitive areas. Additional efforts are proposed under the Coastal Management Plan.

Sand Mining. Sand mining on Lake Michigan beaches and dunes are attractive to such users as foundries and road builders. It has been a difficult issue for the Township. In the southwest corner of the Township, Technisand, Inc. operates a large sand mine and there have been other small sand mining operations scattered throughout the township in the past. Generally these operations threaten desired natural environments and degrade the aesthetic and rural qualities for residential living in Covert Township. Fortunately, most of the attractive sand dunes for mining are now protected as “critical dunes” in Covert Township. Sand mining is discouraged in the environmentally sensitive areas of the Township.

Image Improvement. Developing a sense of place becomes an important element in connecting a community with its residents and creating an image with which everyone can identify. There are steps that can be taken to begin to foster this community image.

- The image of Covert’s Hamlet can be improved by a network of sidewalks and integrated plantings. In addition, new developments would be most effective for a community image if they helped link various developments.
- Construction of a central image-maker in the Hamlet could provide a single identity for the community. This could be a tower, fountain, gazebo, statue, or open-air structure that captures some of the vision and notable characteristics of Covert Township. This need not be built solely by Township, but ideally would involve citizens and businesses in the financing effort – a process that alone should help bind the community.

A Sense of Place

To love something you must first know it. To protect something you must first love it.
- author unknown

The power of place will be remarkable. - Aristotle

If you don't know where you are, you don't know who you are. - Wendell Berry

Over time, improvements in Covert Township’s image may help strengthen community identity and pride.

VII. ZONING PLAN

Future Land Use Classification	Corresponding Zoning District
Agricultural Residential	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AG Agricultural District • This district is intended primarily to retain the agricultural use and open character of large tracts of productive and temporarily fallow farmland and ancillary open land areas and wooded lands, along with allowing customary agricultural operations. • Residential land use is limited to farm homesteads and farmland preservation-based PUDs.
Rural Residential	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RR Rural Residential District • This district is intended to provide for single family residential land use and agricultural operations.
Low Density Residential	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LD Low Density Residential District • The intent of this district is to provide for low density single family residential development at a density of 1 dwelling unit/5 acres, unless located within a conservation-based PUD.
Medium Density Residential	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MD Medium Density Residential District • The intent of this district is to allow for higher density single family and two-family residential development at a density of 3 dwelling units/acre.
High Density Residential	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HD High Density Residential District • This district is designed to provide for multiple family residential development and to serve as a transition between non-residential areas and lower density residential use.
Neighborhood Commercial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NC Neighborhood Commercial District • This district is intended to provide for the shopping and service needs of residents in the immediate surrounding area.
Community Commercial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CC Community Commercial District • This district is designed to provide for serving the needs of local and regional residents and envisions multiple establishments on a single development site.
Highway Commercial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HC Highway Commercial District • This district is intended to provide for serving the needs of highway traffic at the interchange areas, developed in such a manner as to provide for a coordinated and pleasing appearance.

Zoning Plan

Mixed Use – Covert Hamlet Area	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• VMU Village Mixed Use District• This district is designed to provide an urban environment in the Covert Hamlet Area that accommodates a mix of residential and commercial uses, as well as increased densities.
Private Recreation Facilities and Conference Center Commercial	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• There is no corresponding district to this classification.
Industrial	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• I Industrial District• The intent of this district is to provide for industrial operations where external, physical effects are restricted to the area of the district.
Public/Quasi-Public	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• There is no corresponding district to this classification.• In order to better implement the Plan, development of an overlay district specific to the Township's wetlands and shorelines should be considered.
Parks & Recreation/Open Space	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• REC Recreational District• This district is designed to apply to land areas in the Township where public and private park and recreation activities can be pursued.
Coastal Management Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Applicable to land area situated west of US-31 in Covert Township.• Reference the Future Land Use Map set forth in the 2004 Covert Township Coastal Management Plan.

VIII. PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

This Master Plan will be useful to Covert Township if it is consistently consulted when making land use related decisions and actively updated and implemented in coordination with adjacent communities and the Township's regional partners: Van Buren County and the Southwest Michigan Prosperity Region.

Any master plan developed is valuable only to the extent that there is community commitment for its implementation. A plan does not set forth regulations but rather serves as a guide and identifies strategies through which the Township can move forward in realizing its visions, goals and objectives.

This chapter outlines and prioritizes specific actions identified to successfully implement the Covert Township Master Plan. Each implementation action is listed with a 'priority number' and assigned a general time frame for completion. The body primarily responsible for moving the action forward is also identified.

The 'prioritization scheme' applied within the Implementation Plan is as follows:

Priority 1: These projects should be given immediate and concentrated effort. They are the first projects that should be started after the Master Plan has been adopted.

Priority 2: These projects are those necessary to implement the Plan, but either depend on the completion of Priority 1 projects or require more complex or coordinated effort.

Priority 3: These projects implement elements of the Plan but are not urgent and can be delayed for a longer period of time. Further, these projects may be limited by budgetary constraints.

Implementation Plan

Plans, Policies, and Ordinances

Action	Responsibility	Time	Priority
1. Review the Zoning Ordinance to determine if any existing provisions inhibit or prohibit implementation of the Plan, including a review of the individual zoning districts and applicable dimensional requirements. Make amendments as necessary.	Planning Commission Township Board	1-2 Years	1

Plan Implementation

- | | | | |
|--|---|------------------------------|----------|
| 2. Amend the Zoning Ordinance to add successful Plan implementation techniques. | <i>Planning Commission
Township Board</i> | <i>1-3 Years</i> | <i>1</i> |
| 3. Amend the Zoning Ordinance to incorporate the zoning tools recommended to protect shoreline resources and property values set forth in the Covert Township Coastal Management Plan. | <i>Planning Commission
Township Board</i> | <i>1-3 Years</i> | <i>1</i> |
| 4. Develop a Capital Improvements Plan that coordinates Township funding with implementation priorities. | <i>Township Board
Planning Commission</i> | <i>1 Year and annually</i> | <i>1</i> |
| 5. Develop a strategy for promoting the development of 'missing middle' housing stock within the Covert Hamlet Area. | <i>Planning Commission
Township Board</i> | <i>1-2 Years</i> | <i>2</i> |
| 6. Review and initiate amendments to the Zoning Map that will implement the Plan. | <i>Planning Commission
Township Board</i> | <i>As Needed</i> | <i>2</i> |
| 7. Maintain an updated Township Recreation Plan to create funding for opportunities for planned improvements. | <i>Planning Commission
Township Board
Parks Committee</i> | <i>1 Year</i> | <i>3</i> |
| 8. Incorporate a 'pathways plan' in the Recreation Plan that coordinates planned bike lanes and non-motorized paths with area-wide trail systems and provides connectivity between community activity centers. | <i>Planning Commission
Township Board
Parks Committee</i> | <i>2 Years</i> | <i>3</i> |
| 9. Conduct the required 5-Year Review of the Master Development Plan respond to changing | <i>Planning Commission
Township Board</i> | <i>Annually or as needed</i> | <i>3</i> |

Plan Implementation

conditions and priorities.

Transportation Corridors

Action	Responsibility	Time	Priority
1. Work with MDOT to incorporate 'complete streets' elements on M-140, specifically within the Covert Hamlet Area segments.	<i>Township Board</i>	<i>1-2 Years</i>	<i>1</i>
2. Develop a 'sidewalk plan' that promotes 'walkability' and connectivity objectives established within the Covert Hamlet Area.	<i>Planning Commission Township Board</i>	<i>2-3 Years</i>	<i>2</i>
3. Adopt a sidewalk ordinance that will implement the 'sidewalk plan' and work to maintain connectivity within the network.	<i>Planning Commission Township Board</i>	<i>2-4 Years</i>	<i>3</i>
4. Develop, fund and implement a wayfinding sign program within the Township.	<i>Township Board Parks Committee</i>	<i>2-4 Years</i>	<i>3</i>

Economic Development

Action	Responsibility	Time	Priority
1. Develop a marketing scheme that emphasizes the <i>Covert Community</i> as a 'destination' in the region and capitalize on its coastal community and agricultural reputation.	<i>Township Board</i>	<i>1-2 Years</i>	<i>1</i>
2. Coordinate area events/festivals with Township 'destination' opportunities.	<i>Township Board Local Organizations</i>	<i>1-2 Years</i>	<i>1</i>

Plan Implementation

- | | | | |
|---|---|------------------|----------|
| 3. Work with the area businesses and surrounding communities to develop a plan for the cross-promotion of 'destination' attractions. | <i>Township Board
Local Organizations</i> | <i>1-2 Years</i> | <i>1</i> |
| 4. Promote economic development opportunities near agricultural and waterfront assets through Township-supported improvements and zoning options. | <i>Planning Commission
Township Board</i> | <i>2-4 Years</i> | <i>2</i> |
| 5. Establish a property maintenance education and incentive program in densely developed areas within the Township. | <i>Township Board</i> | <i>1-3 Years</i> | <i>3</i> |

Some of the most rewarding and effective implementation strategies are the personal commitments of Township residents, community service groups, local developers and local decision-makers, to the vision and goals of the Covert Township Master Plan.

This can be especially importance in the funding, support and personal effort toward projects that may be beyond governmental investment or regulatory authority. Projects related to community image, landscaping and signage improvements are ideal for non-governmental efforts and would help to develop and strengthen the community's identity.

The implementation of environmental objectives and economic growth strategies set forth in the Plan can also be strengthened by personal or community group commitment and involvement. An ambassador program designed to enlist 'ownership' of an adopted objective or strategy by a local community organization would be a valuable implementation technique.

Keeping the Master Plan Up-to- Date _____

Change is constant and there will be circumstances that may warrant changes to the Zoning Map that are not consistent with the Master Plan. If and when this occurs, an amendment to the Future Land Use Map in the Master Development Plan needs to be considered. The following criteria should be reviewed to determine if a proposed change to the Future Land Use Map is warranted.

Plan Implementation

- ✓ *Does the proposed new land use classification meet the objectives of the Plan?*
- ✓ *Is the zoning district and its permitted uses designed to implement the new land use classification compatible with and appropriate in the vicinity of the property under consideration?*
- ✓ *Have any conditions changed in the area since the Master Plan was adopted that justify this change?*
- ✓ *Will there be any impacts on the community that should be considered, such as increased traffic, that might create a need for additional services or improvements?*
- ✓ *Are there any environmental considerations that may be contrary to the intent of the existing or proposed classification of the land?*
- ✓ *Was the property improperly classified when the Plan was adopted or amended? Are the qualities of the property (or area) different than those described in the Plan?*
- ✓ *Will there be any adverse effects on adjacent properties as a result of the proposed change?*
- ✓ *What impacts of the proposed change will result on the public health, safety and welfare?*

Conclusion _____

Although this Plan is a comprehensive guide for land use planning in the Township over the next 20 years, it is difficult to predict with certainty what changes may occur in and around the community. Therefore, decisions related to development should be considered carefully in light of the recommendations of this Master Plan.

The Michigan Zoning Enabling Act requires the Township Zoning Ordinance to be *'based on a plan to promote the public health, safety and welfare, to encourage the use of lands in accordance with their character and adaptability, to limit the improper use of land, to conserve*

Plan Implementation

natural resources and energy, to meet the needs of the state's residents for food, fiber and other natural resources, places of residence . . . and other uses of land.'

Since the Zoning Map is part of the Zoning Ordinance, changes to zoning boundaries should be in conformance with the Master Plan. If future development decisions take these factors into account, and if the Plan is reviewed at least every five (5) years (as required by the Michigan Planning Enabling Act) and amended when necessary, then Covert Township can feel confident that development will reflect the desires of its citizens as reflected through the adopted Master Plan.

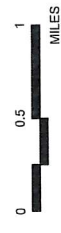
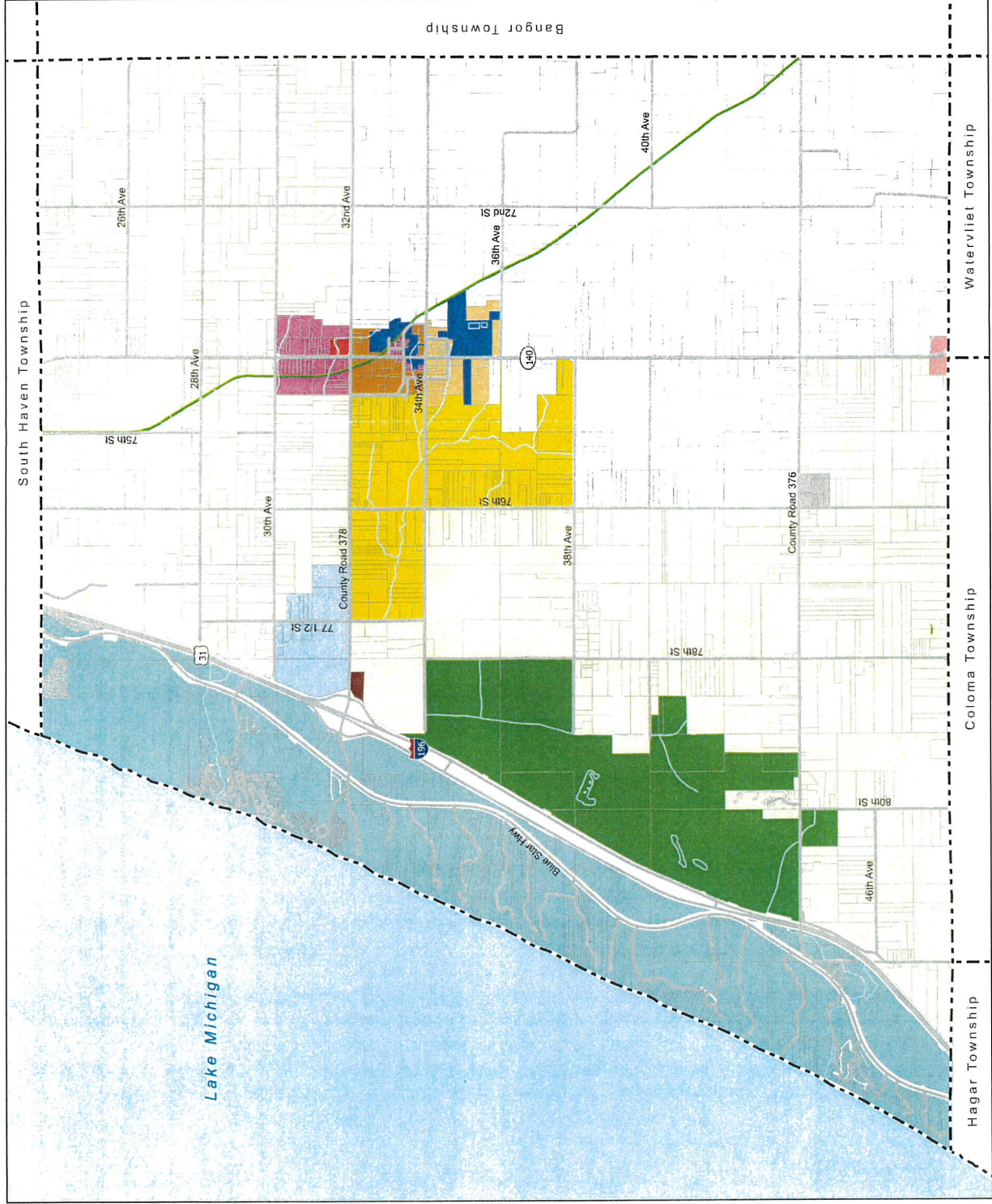
MAP 7

Future Land Use

Covert Township, Van Buren County, MI

LEGEND

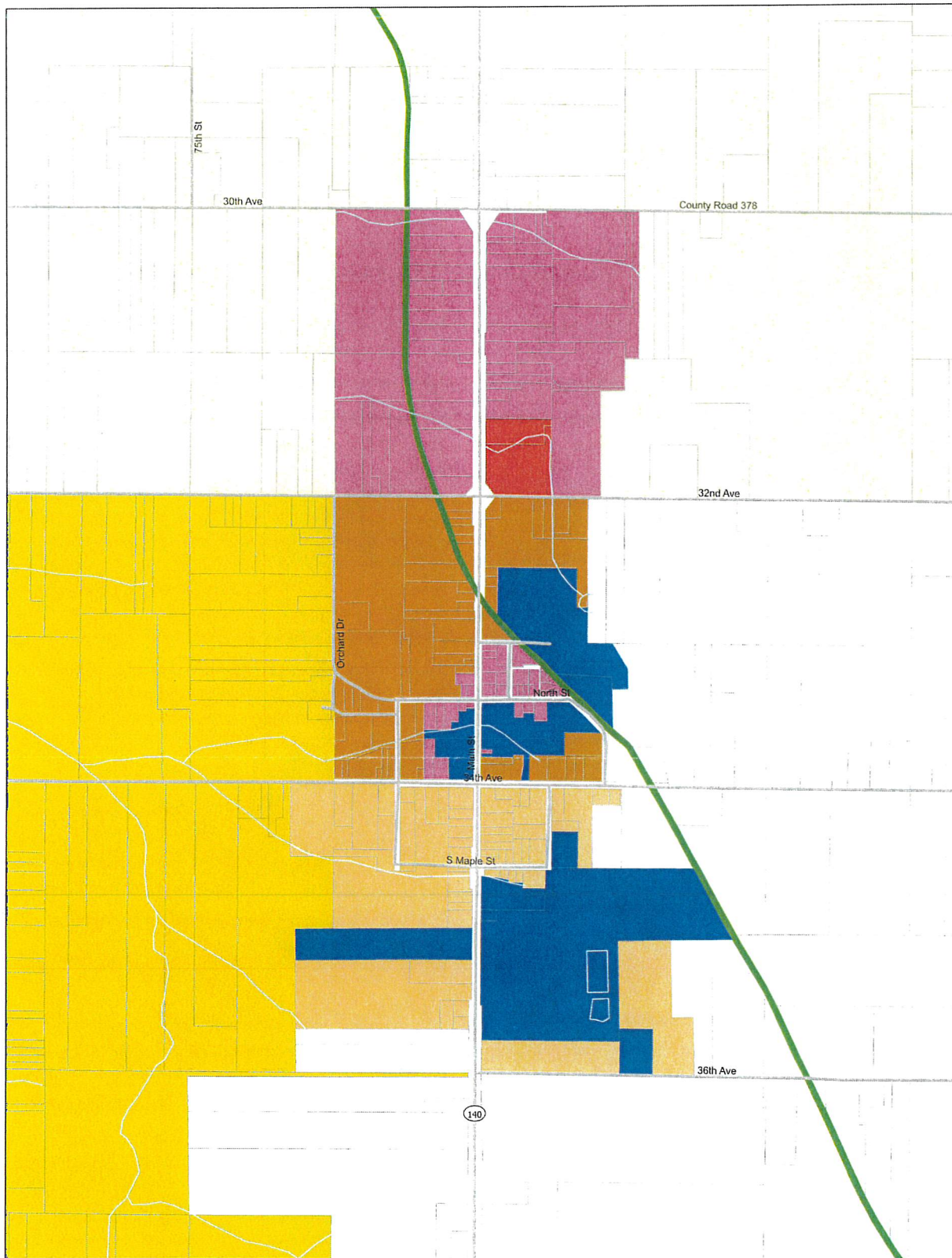
- Municipal Boundaries
- Water Bodies and Streams
- State Roads
- Roads
- FLU**
 - Agricultural Residential
 - Public/Quasi-Public
 - Parks & Recreation/Open Space
 - Rural Residential
 - Low Density Residential
 - Medium Density Residential
 - High Density Residential
 - Mixed Use
 - Neighborhood Commercial
 - Community Commercial
 - Highway Commercial
 - Conference Center Commercial
 - Industrial
 - Coastal Management Plan
 - Van Buren Trail



Basemap source: MCGI 2017, Data Source: Covert Township 2018, McKenna 2018.

November 8, 2019
DRAFT





MAP 8

Future Land Use

Hamlet of Covert
Covert Township, Van Buren County, MI

LEGEND

FLU

Agricultural Residential

Public/Quasi-Public

Parks & Recreation/Open Space

Rural Residential

Low Density Residential

Medium Density Residential

High Density Residential

Mixed Use

Neighborhood Commercial

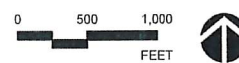
Community Commercial

Highway Commercial

Conference Center Commercial

Industrial

Coastal Management Plan

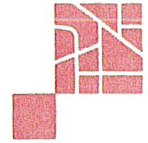


Basemap source: MCGI 2017. Data Source:
Covert Township 2018, McKenna 2018.

November 8, 2019
DRAFT



MCKENNA



2019 Covert Township Community Survey Survey Data Analysis, Combined English and Spanish Responses

INTRODUCTION

The Covert Township Master Plan team initiated a community-wide survey to gather feedback for the creation of the 2019 Covert Township Master Plan. The survey was distributed during a four-month period (March to June 2019) and collected 304 total responses. The survey was distributed in two languages, an English version and a Spanish version. The English version received 289 responses and the Spanish version received 15 responses. The Master Plan team utilized Survey Monkey to collect and analyze the results of the 26 multiple choice and open-ended questions. A complete list of all questions and responses can be found in the appendix. The following is a summary of the compiled survey results.

DESCRIPTION OF SURVEY TAKERS

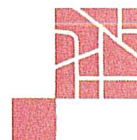
The first five questions of the survey asked responders to identify basic demographic information. Of the 303 survey-takers, 144 or 47.5%, identified themselves to be in the 64-84 age category; the next largest group (95 responses or 31.4%) identified in the 45-64 age group. Overall, 88.4% of responders were 45 and older. 48.8% of the 297 responses indicated they are part of a two-person household and an even larger majority (238 responses or 80.1%) said they have zero (0) children under the age of 18 living in their household. Additionally, the majority of survey-takers indicated they have lived in the Township for more than 25 years (139 of 295 responses or 47.1%). When asked about their housing status, of the various answer choices, 78.7% of the 301 responses identified "I own a home in Covert Township" and 40.5% responded "I am a full-time resident of Covert Township." Interestingly, 23.6% of responders identified themselves as a seasonal resident of Covert Township. In general, survey-takers tended to be mature adults who are long-time residents of the community.

GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

Survey-takers were asked several questions about recent growth and development in the Township. Of the 286 responses, 62.6% described the speed of growth in Covert Township as "just fine." Additionally, 56.4% of 298 respondents felt new families moving to the Township are "good for the area" while 39.3% had "no opinion." Question #8 asked how survey-takers felt about growth in Covert Township:

- 69.9% of the 292 responses identified "growth should be encouraged in planned areas;"
- 25.3% indicated "growth should be allowed with as few restrictions as possible;" and
- 4.8% indicated "growth should be discouraged."

When asked specifically about growth in natural areas in Covert Township, 57.2% of the 299 responses indicated "natural areas should be protected against development." However, 23.4% felt "natural areas should be open for development, with restrictions."



Question #10 focused on the availability of housing in Covert Township. Survey-takers were asked to rate several housing options from poor to excellent with an option for "don't know." The majority of responses for each housing type hovered around don't know.

- Choice of housing type: 50.7%
- Choice of home ownership: 51.4%
- Choice of housing location: 47.4%
- Availability of affordable housing: 49.5%

The responses to "don't know" may mean survey-takers are unaware of the housing options in the community or the question itself is ambiguous. However, for those who gave each housing option a rating, the majority of options were rated poor or average. Overall, these responses suggest a need for additional housing options in the Township.

When asked about positive aspects of living in Covert Township, the Township's rural character and natural features were mentioned most frequently. In addition to little street traffic and inexpensive land prices, many survey-takers found the Township's quiet living attractive.

"Covert is a lovely, rural community. We love living here."

"Important to save natural wooded areas and beaches"

"Los impuestos de agricultura son muy altos aun. Mucho sufren la perdida." [English translation – "Agriculture taxes are still very high. Many suffer the loss."]

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Covert Township's economic potential was a key topic of the survey. Several questions were directly related to economic development and many of the responses to open-ended questions discussed economic opportunities and challenges. All of the economic development goals listed in question #11 received a rating of moderately important or very important. "Encourage new commercial businesses and services" received the highest overall majority with 34.9% rated very important. "Attract new industrial businesses for jobs" received the second highest majority with 34.3% rated very important. Question #12 was a direct follow-up, which asked how survey-takers felt about jobs in Covert Township. 56.6% of the 295 responses indicated "lack of new business in Covert Township to create jobs is a concern." However, 38.0% indicated "no opinion" about jobs in the Township.

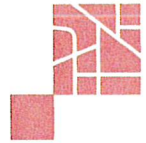
Economic development was frequently mentioned throughout the multiple choice and open-ended responses.

"Offer a better variety of businesses and commercial shopping. Attracting more jobs to cut down commute times and develop residential areas with better housing options. (To attract residents to live and work here)."

"There needs to be a redevelopment plan for the downtown area. If a few restaurants and shops were available then people will start to improve houses around downtown."

"Many people travel on Blue Star Highway to South Haven... If we want to encourage people to spend time here, we need to encourage more businesses on Blue Star."

Question #25 asked "What do you consider to be negative aspects of living in Covert Township?" and the majority of responses (151 of 225 responses or 67.1%) selected "not enough shopping options." "Too far away from jobs"



was the third most-selected response with 42.7%. While many survey responses indicate a need for economic development to improve the quality of life and increase the types of activities available to residents and visitors, question #14 asks "how do you feel about the lack of commercial services in the area?" The majority of the 291 respondents (48.1%) identified "A lack of commercial services is a concern," but nearly a quarter (23.7%) indicated they don't mind traveling for commercial services.

FACILITIES AND PUBLIC SERVICES

The last area the survey focused on was facilities (public infrastructure) and public services. Several questions asked participants to rate availability of services and many of the open-ended responses mentioned the quality of services. The quality and safety of existing roads were given an "average" rating, while drinking water, availability to connect to public sewer and natural gas rated "don't know." Police and fire services provided in Covert Township were rated a combined good and excellent score, 54.2% and 60.7% respectively. The majority of survey-takers marked "don't know" for ambulance services, code enforcement, and schools.

Question #20 asked respondents to rate the importance of various community service goals. The goal for this question was to determine how community members felt about funding various community services. All of the community service goals including "provide quality police and fire protection" and "maintain high quality public roads" were "important – with use of existing funds." However, providing police and fire protection ranked the highest among services that are important with support for a millage increase.

Questions #21, 22, and 23 addressed parks and recreation facilities in the community. In question #21, participants were asked to describe how often they visited the four recreation facilities listed. For each area, "Never" was the top-rated answer and "Yearly" was the second most rated response. However, when asked in question #22 specifically about the importance of having recreational facilities such as playgrounds, tennis courts, and access to Lake Michigan, the facilities were rated "important – with use of existing funds." In most cases, these were closely followed by "not important" or "important – at no cost" ratings.

Similarly, survey-takers' level of support for Township efforts over the next five years (question #23) was largely "important – with use of existing funds," with the exception of "allowing more housing developments in the agriculture areas" which received a majority rating of "not important." Efforts such as adopting / applying natural area preservation techniques and preserving the rural character of the Township are important but should be funded using existing funds.

CLOSING

The participants of the 2019 Covert Township Community Survey provided vital feedback for the creation of the Covert Township Master Plan. Sentiments related to growth, economic development, and public services will be used to develop goals and objectives for the Township as well as help form the basis for the Future Land Use map included in the plan.