

DATE: October 12, 2023

TO: Whitewater Township Planning Commission's Resident Outreach Subcommittee (ROS)

FROM: Barry Hicks, AICP, LIAA
Randy Mielnik, AICP, North Place Planning, LLC

RE: **Master Plan Open House Results and Goals and Strategies Session Planning**

The Whitewater Township Planning Commission, and its Resident Outreach Subcommittee (ROS) held an Open House at Mill Creek Elementary School on Thursday, September 28, 2023, to receive input from residents to help develop goals and objectives for the Master Plan update. There were 76 participants that signed-in, though some participants came together and only one person would sign in. Participants were asked to provide feedback at five stations around the room about various topics such as zoning/land-use, infrastructure, and development. The information received will be used to help develop goals and objectives at the next public input session. Below is a summary of the feedback received from each station at the open house.

2015 Master Plan

- Respect private property rights.
- Encouraging new development.
- Do NOT streamline the permit process – what does this mean? Do residents not like the current the process? What is working or not working in the ordinances or permit process?
 - Identify what ordinances need work.
 - Differentiate between what should be policies vs guidelines.
 - Clarify zoning map.

Zoning/Land-Use

Preserve, Enhance and Transform

- Downtown Whitewater Township needs some attention – what specifically do we need to address here?
- Corner of Crisp and Moore – traffic concerns, possibly a stop sign needed.
- Petobego Creek Natural Area – some attention needed.
- Battle Creek Natural Area – liked, but might need some attention.
- Whitewater Township Park – liked, but might need some attention.
- Trails in the southern portion of township are liked.
- New development near M-72 and Baggs road – potentially some room for resident concerns.

Alternative Energy

- A mix of support or dissent for alternative energy, specifically solar fields – concerns about siting and visual impact.

- Some comments about wind energy – similar concerns to solar regarding visual impact.
- Some comments and interest received regarding net-zero emissions housing.

Rural Character

- Generally, all of the pictures received positive feedback with the exception of the red-commercial/newer looking barn.

Development

Housing

- Most commercial development should be focused along M-72 near Williamsburg Road Intersection.
- Medium to high density residential areas should be near M-72 near Williamsburg. Some votes also focused near M-72 between Skegemog Point Road and Baggs Road.
- Most people favored low-density, single family dwellings on larger lot sizes with some feedback received indicating the need for smaller lot sizes to allow for lower- to moderate-income housing.
- Traditional medium to high density single-family residential neighborhoods as well as higher-density apartments or condos were not favored.
 - NOTE: Some exceptions for higher-density apartments or condos were favored with more green/open space. Lower height (one- to three- story max) would be better than anything taller.

Commercial

- Detached, single-unit Commercial development along the M-72 corridor is preferred.
- Traditional Rural American architectural styling (such as a colonial or craftsman look with gables or hip-roofs and porches), is preferred with materials such as wood or metal siding and roofs.

Downtown

- There is support to develop a more traditional downtown area in Williamsburg.
- Traditional look with seating, pedestrian scale lighting and permeable/transparent storefronts are preferred.

Infrastructure

Trails

- Generally, participants felt the trails were a positive attribute of the township.
- Some comments received indicated there could be better signage at trail heads to help locate and identify trails.
- Bike trails and walking trails could be separated.

M-72 and Traffic

- Participants were overwhelmingly supportive of limiting curb-cuts along M-72
 - Improve safety and reduce the number of opportunities for accidents.
 - Combined curb-cuts for multiple businesses.
- Some concerns around who will pay for these improvements.

Facilities

- EMS and fire facility should use some improvement. Some felt a new facility was needed or a combined EMS/Fire/Town Hall facility could be constructed.
- Public Transportation – while many felt traffic control and safety were a high priority, the integration of more public transportation was not necessary at this time.
- Town Hall - Many comments received indicated the building was in good shape or needed minor repairs. Most felt a new facility was not necessary.
- A resident posed the question as to whether or not there should be septic field inspections on lakefront property. This question was written on the general comment board and received 11 “yes” votes and four “no” votes.

General Feedback

- Support for short-term rentals is split between those opposed and those not opposed so long as there are restrictions or regulations in place.
- The condition and the need for better/more maintenance were mentioned several times.
- Many comments were directed towards enforcing the current ordinances.

Master Plan Goals and Strategies Session

The next session will be held on Tuesday, November 7th from 7-9pm and will be held at Mill Creek Elementary School. This session will be a guided workshop that will take participants through the results of the public input process and help develop possible goals. Prior to this session, the ROS Committee will be tasked with reviewing some suggested goals that were developed by the planning consultants which are based on feedback from the recently conducted survey and open house.

ROS Committee Responsibilities

Attached to this memo is a working document titled “Whitewater Township Planning Principles, Goals, and Implementation.” It takes the four goals/topics identified in the 2015 Master Plan and provides some context as well as some potential goals for each one. These are meant to be a starting point for the ROS and Planning Commission to review and may require further refinement and development prior to the next session.

At this time, we are asking the committee members to review the proposed goals and to provide feedback to either help edit/refine the proposed goals, or to provide new ones. You will notice that each goal is identified as either an “Initiative” or a “Policy.” Each of these terms are defined in the document. As you review the proposed goals or develop new ones, consider whether or not what you are proposing falls into either of these categories.

Please provide your feedback no later than **Thursday, October 19th, by 5pm**. You may send your feedback via email to bhicks@liao.org and randy@northplaceplanning.com.

Session Outline

The general outline for the next session will be as follows:

- 7:00 – 7:30pm
The presentation will welcome participants and discuss the following topics:
 - What is a Master Plan and why are we doing this?

- Project background, maps, and township demographics
- Planning Enabling Act requirements
- Timeline – what is complete, where are we today, what happens next?
- Explanation of “S.M.A.R.T.” Goals
- Explain Key Performance Indicators (KPI) – aka “measurability”
- Explanation of policies and initiatives
- Review goals developed by the Planning Consultant/ROS

- 7:30 – 7:40 pm
 - Discuss purpose of this evening’s exercise
 - Provide instructions for the groups
 - Ground rules and respect - no criticism or judgement, focus on quality not quantity, and build on each other’s ideas
 - Role of the Moderator
 - Role of the “Group Leader/Note-Taker”
 - Explain where/how groups will convene and split up

- 7:40 – 8:00 pm
 - Group activity – appoint a group leader/Note-Taker
 - Review the proposed topic area and associated goals (as provided by the ROS)
 - Ask questions and discuss
 - What are our values (as it pertains to the assigned topic area)?
 - Where are we now?
 - Wouldn’t it be fantastic if ...
 - what is liked, disliked, agreed with, disagreed with
 - Prioritize the goals
 - What do we ultimately want to achieve and why?
 - What can we do (resources available) and what will we do (five more years will not pass by without some measurable action)?
 - What is the timeline for each goal?

- 8:00 – 8:10 pm – BREAK TIME!

- 8:10 – 8:30 pm
 - Group presentations – what was discussed and why did you rank each goal where you did?
 - Audience participation – how does the rest of the room feel the group did? Was anything missed? Should we rearrange their rankings? Could be done through round of applause.

- 8:30 – 8:45pm
 - Bringing it all together – recap each group’s goals/priorities
 - Discuss next steps in the planning process
 - Discuss how people can still participate – through public hearings/meetings, mail, email, etc.
 - Thanks!

****There is a 15-minute cushion intentionally built-in to allow for any spill-over between activities.****

Whitewater Township Planning Principles, Goals, and Implementation

Ultimately, a community master plan must chart a course for the future. While a community's vision for itself in the future can be expressed in multiple ways, the essential elements of community planning come down to defining where a community "wants to go" and implementation steps describing "how it intends to get there."

The steps to define "where Whitewater Township intends to go" began by revisiting the goals described in the 2015 Master Plan. This review revealed the fact that the four master plan goals (and bullets thereunder) are not goals in a strict sense but rather are general statements about what Whitewater Township values and hopes to encourage. These overarching principles are pertinent to many local planning issues but do not articulate a clear policy or provide actionable steps forward. They can, however, be used as a framework for more specific, actionable goals and implementation steps.

In considering and developing more specific community goals, two major considerations were to view them through the lens of current community attitudes (survey and workshops) and use a framework called "SMART goals" as much as possible. SMART goals help to define clear, realistic, and measurable targets. SMART is an acronym that stands for:

Specific: The goal should be well-defined and clear.

Measurable: The goal should have criteria for measuring progress and success.

Achievable: The goal should be attainable and not impossible.

Realistic: The goal should be within reach and relevant.

Time-bound: The goal should have a clear start and end date.

Given the development of SMART goals, implementation steps in a community master plan often fall into two general categories. First, policies are developed to help the community respond to future requests for action or provide guidance for future actions as opportunities present themselves. This might include information on how to respond to future rezoning requests. Second, initiatives are developed to define action items that must be completed to achieve something. This might include developing new zoning standards, procedures, or special planning studies to address a key issue. Defined initiatives should be associated with a sense of priority and timeframe.

Planning Principle: Respect the Rights of the Township Residents and Property Owners.

Context: The rights of residents and property owners can be infringed upon in several ways. These include:

1. No one is served by poorly drafted or ambiguous zoning requirements that create confusion, permitting delays, and legal challenges.
2. A lack of consistent zoning enforcement can leave property owners unprotected from nuisances.
3. Blighted areas in Whitewater Township diminish property values and discourage investment.
4. Existing permitted and special uses in various zoning districts may create land use conflicts (i.e., residential uses allowed in the industrial zone).
5. Effective and reasonable landscaping requirements in the zoning ordinance can mitigate visual and noise impacts between dissimilar land uses.

Goal	Initiative	Policy
1. Continue current steps to improve the clarity of the existing zoning ordinance so that requirements are as unambiguous as possible. Prepare zoning amendment in early 2024.	X	
2. Have necessary ordinance language with funding to address blight enforcement with legal support as required to ensure compliance.	X	
3. Review permitted uses in <u>all</u> zoning districts to eliminate potential land use conflicts. Prepare zoning amendment in 2024 or early 2025 (if needed).	X	
4. Review landscaping requirements, particularly as they relate to buffering requirements. Prepare zoning amendment in 2024 or early 2025 (if needed).	X	

Planning Principle: Preserve Whitewater Township's Rural Character

Context: Residents value the rural character of Whitewater Township and want to preserve it. Additionally:

1. To residents, the area's rural character is the presence of orchards, farm stands, other agricultural land, woodlots and forests, and extended views of undeveloped land across the landscape.
2. Preserving rural character also includes protecting the environmental integrity of the Township floodplains, wetlands, watersheds, and water bodies.
3. Land east of Cook Road on M-72 is largely zoned A-1.
4. There is strong support for agricultural tourism as a broad category of activities that can include roadside stands, u-pick operations, and other activities incidental to the operation of a farm that brings members of the public to the farm for educational, recreational, or retail purposes.

Goal	Initiative	Policy
1. Determine a desirable minimum lot size requirement in the Agricultural Zoning District (A-1). Prepare zoning amendment (If needed) for adoption in 2024 or 2025.	X	
2. Discourage rezoning of Agriculturally-zoned land on M-72 east of Cook Road.		X
3. Create an improved PUD Zoning District that developers are inclined to use. This allows for clustering residential density and preservation of unique environmental features. Prepare zoning amendment in 2024 or 2025.	X	
4. Review and Update zoning requirements to further support agricultural tourism with roadside stands, u-pick operations, and other activities incidental to farm operation. Prepare zoning amendment in 2024 or early 2025 (if needed).	X	
5. Determine if architectural design guidelines (voluntary or mandatory) are appropriate to further rural character in new non-residential buildings. Prepare zoning amendment in 2024 or early 2025 (if needed).	X	
6. Eliminate the R-1 Zoning District along the creeks and tributaries to avoid encouraging greater residential density in and near watercourses. Prepare zoning amendment in 2024 or early 2025.	X	
7. Review the existing "Road Plan" for Whitewater Township in the context of seeking the designation of local roads as Natural Beauty Roads per the Natural Beauty Road Act (Act 451 of the Public Acts of 1994). Complete by 2025.	X	

Planning Principle: Build a Sense of Community

Context: Like many rural communities, Whitewater Township lacks a defined downtown and sense of place common in cities and villages. Williamsburg was once a commercial center, but many buildings are now gone. Additionally:

1. Many (three out of four) residents still want to encourage redevelopment of Williamsburg, north of M-72, into a downtown-type setting with small-scale retail, commercial services, restaurants, and upper-floor housing.
2. Most, if not all, of the land uses in Williamsburg (south of M-72) are now residential (except for the Township Hall and the Methodist Church).
3. Places for social and cultural activities and interaction (farmers market, car shows, concerts, etc.) are limited (except for the township park).
4. The area west of Elk Lake Road and North of M-72 is zoned "V."
5. Residents point to the need to develop more convenient bike trails and walking paths in Whitewater Township. More non-motorized transportation options in Whitewater Township would help build a sense of community.

Goal	Initiative	Policy
1. Evaluate permitted uses and development standards in the "V" zoning district to ensure they align with the development concept of a downtown-type setting with small-scale retail, commercial services, restaurants, and upper-floor housing. Steps toward this goal may include preparing land use sketches showing building mass, placement, and layouts, followed by zoning amendments in 2024 or 2025 to eliminate regulatory barriers.	X	
2. Continue to study and support investigations into central water and sewer options to support more intensive development in Williamsburg.		X
3. Develop a general non-motorized plan for Whitewater Township with a list of priority projects. Complete by 2025.	X	
4. Encourage and support the creation of a local community development foundation to assist with community projects that could support education, environmental projects, or economic development efforts.		X
5. Partner with the Elk Rapids school district as opportunities present themselves concerning facilities and programs.		X

Planning Principle: Encourage Economic Opportunities

Context: Whitewater Township is pro-business and seeks to provide an environment wherein people can succeed economically. Additionally:

1. Whitewater Township has an industrial area (generally south of MN-72, West of Williamsburg Rd and east of Moore Road). It is home to several light industrial uses that provide jobs and a local tax base.
2. The M-72 corridor (west of Cook Road) presents opportunities for new commercial development. Residents generally desire smaller building footprints (75,000 square feet or less), mixed uses (potentially retail, services, office, residential, etc.), controlled signage, limited driveways, and extensive landscaping.

Goal	Initiative	Policy
1. Evaluate designation as a “Redevelopment Ready Community” through the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC). This certification process signals that a community has clear development policies and procedures, a community-supported vision, a predictable review process, and compelling sites for developers to locate their latest projects. Complete this evaluation by the end of 2024.		X
2. Update the C-1 Zoning District to ensure permitted uses, special uses, and development standards (lot sizes, setbacks, maximum building size limitations align with desired development scenarios.	X	
3. Update the N-1 Zoning District to ensure permitted uses, special uses, and development standards (lot sizes, setbacks, maximum building size limitations align with desired development scenarios.	X	