

The following document is a working draft of the first four chapters of the New Master Plan for Whitewater Township. This material was created to help understand our community's past/current conditions and trends. It provides an overview of Whitewater Township and briefly describes the many special characteristics that make our community great.

Future chapters will be coming together late in 2023 and early 2024. These future chapters will address key planning issues facing Whitewater Township and define what residents hope Whitewater Township will be like in the future. These future chapters will be based on results from the recent public survey and insights gained during the community planning open house and workshops.

Comments are welcome and encouraged on these first four chapters regarding missing content you think is important or any factual errors (a complete grammatical and spelling review will be done when the whole document is assembled). We hope you can provide additional information to more completely describe our community. Please email written comments to Rachel Steelman, Whitewater Township Planning Commission Chairperson, at [RSteelmanPC@yahoo.com](mailto:RSteelmanPC@yahoo.com), or Randy Mielnik, Planner, at [randy@northplaceplanning.com](mailto:randy@northplaceplanning.com).

Thank you.

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# Whitewater Township Master Plan

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*WORKING DRAFT-  
(UPDATED 9-13-23)*

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## ***Acknowledgement Page***

## ***Approval Dates / Adopting Resolution***

**This Master Plan is a forward-looking document that describes the desired direction for community development in Whitewater Township. It considers local history, current conditions, and trends, then looks forward, establishing a long-range vision for growth, redevelopment, and preservation. This vision is inspired by, and is the product of, substantial community engagement and public input.**

**With the long-range vision for community development, specific implementation steps are carefully developed. These steps include development policies, action initiatives, and zoning recommendations. When implemented, these steps will guide construction, redevelopment, and preservation efforts toward desired community goals.**

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# 1

## Introduction

The places where we live do not stay the same. Fundamentally, this is because the numbers and characteristics of residents generally change over time. Populations grow or shrink as people are born, die, and move in and out of communities. At the same time, residents transition through different stages of life, from dependent children to middle age, to older adults. These changes drive demand for numbers and types of housing units in an area, commercial needs, employment opportunities, and public services. With these demographic changes, the physical environment also changes. Buildings are built or repurposed, transportation systems develop or improve, and more complete public facilities are provided in response to evolving needs.

Sometimes physical change is nearly imperceptible, and sometimes it is dramatic and hard to miss, especially over a long time. The following chapter provides a brief historical overview of Whitewater Township. The community just a few generations ago is so much different than the community we live in today. Change is fueled by advancements in transportation, technology, socioeconomic trends, and even larger regional forces, as communities are almost always part of larger regions with important characteristics and dynamics.

Community master plans are fundamentally about understanding this change and charting a desired course forward. Creating this understanding generally begins with an educational and discovery element in Master Plans. Most importantly, however, the emphasis should be on articulating a long-term

and comprehensive perspective of what people want the future to look like. This Master Plan provides a vision for the future grounded in public engagement. It aims to speak authoritatively about what Whitewater Township residents hope for in the future regarding community development.

It is essential also to recognize that while completing a Master Plan is an important goal, it represents more of a milestone in the ongoing story of community development and redevelopment. This is not the first Master Plan update for Whitewater Township and is unlikely to be the last. Community planning is a forward-looking process that revisits established planning issues and helps identify new ones with fresh community engagement and participation. It also affords consideration of old and new issues with updated information about current conditions and trends.

Whitewater Township (and the larger region) is much different today than in 2015. Notably, the COVID pandemic began in 2020 and has helped fuel new community development trends. These include the growth in remote work options allowing people to live where they wish, as they are less tied to an office or other physical place than before. These and other considerations (to be discussed later) will likely have a lasting impact on Whitewater Township.

### Legal Context

Apart from helping to satisfy the basic desire to plan for the future and provide a direction for community change, there is an important legal dimension

to Master Plans. More than a dozen states require a local Master Plan (also called a comprehensive plan), and others encourage it in various ways. Michigan's controlling statute is the Michigan Planning Enabling Act (MPEA) of 2008. This act consolidated older, related planning statutes and defined basic requirements and procedures for developing a Master Plan in Michigan communities. One significant legal aspect of the MPEA is the connection between the Master Plan and zoning. The MPEA requires steps to reconcile proposed land use categories in the master plan with existing zoning districts in the zoning ordinance. Additionally, the Michigan Zoning Enabling Act of 2006 (Section 125.3203) similarly connects to the Master Plan by explicitly stating that a zoning ordinance shall be based on a plan designed to promote public health, safety, and general welfare.

## MPEA

While MPEA is generally silent regarding the process and steps by which a community gathers information and pursues citizen engagement as it develops a Master Plan, it does describe several elements to be included. While not an all-inclusive list, some major content-related issues include the following (Sections 125.3831 and 125.3833):

- Making careful and comprehensive surveys and studies of present conditions and future growth within the planning jurisdiction with due regard to its relation to neighboring jurisdictions.
- Consulting with representatives of adjacent local government units to avoid conflicts in Master Plans and zoning.

- Cooperation with state and federal governments, public transportation agencies, and other public agencies concerned with economic, social, and physical development.
- Addressing land use and infrastructure issues, projecting 20 years or more into the future.
- Developing maps, plats, charts, and descriptive, explanatory, and other related matters showing recommendations for physical development.
- A land use plan that classifies and allocates land for various purposes.
- All components of a transportation system and their interconnectivity (considering all legal users of the public right-of-way).
- Recommendations as to the general character, extent, and layout of redevelopment or rehabilitation of blighted areas; and the removal, relocation, widening, narrowing, vacating, abandonment, change of use, or extension of streets, grounds, open spaces, buildings, utilities, or other facilities.
- A zoning plan for various zoning districts that control the height, area, bulk, location, and use of buildings and premises. The zoning plan explains how the land use categories on the future land use map relate to the districts on the zoning map.
- Recommendations for implementing Master Plan proposals.

*For a full description of required content see:  
The Michigan Planning Enabling Act, Act 33 of 2008*

**One significant legal aspect of the MPEA relates to the connection between the master plan and zoning. The MPEA requires steps to reconcile proposed land use categories in the master plan with existing zoning districts found in the zoning ordinance.**

## Master Plan

### Related Local Planning

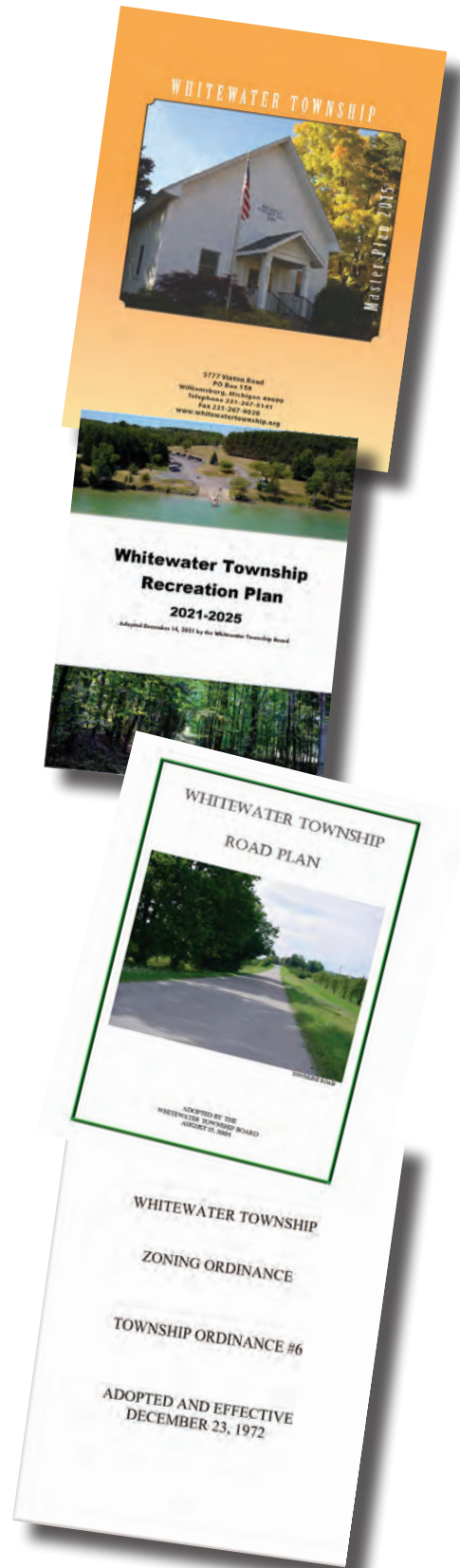
This Master Plan updates and replaces the 2015 Whitewater Township Master Plan. It provides a substantial amount of new information, along with updated goals, vision, and implementation steps.

Like many Michigan communities, Whitewater Township has a Recreation Plan. It was adopted on December 14, 2021. It is a 5-year plan (2021-2025) with content that reflects requirements set forth by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources to secure and maintain grant eligibility. It describes Whitewater Township and provides a recreational inventory, action plan, and capital improvements schedule related to park improvements. This Master Plan is therefore largely silent on Park and Recreation issues.

Finally, Whitewater Township has a Road Plan adopted in 2004. This document is discussed in Chapter 3.

### Relationship Between A Master Plan And The Zoning Ordinance

Sometimes there can be confusion between a community's Master Plan and its Zoning Ordinance. It should be clear that a Master Plan does not directly set forth legal requirements for public or private development. Rather, it provides the rationale and reasoning behind existing zoning and related land use controls. It also frequently recommends updating a zoning ordinance to respond to evolving land use needs and community desires. For example, a Master Plan may identify the need to provide a greater mix of housing types based on community input and related data. The Master Plan might also identify regulatory barriers to achieving a desired housing mix and may identify the need for zoning amendments to accomplish desired goals. Steps to amend the zoning ordinance would follow adopting a new Master Plan as an implementation step. The zoning language developed afterward would contain all required details, such as dimensional standards, use regulations, and development review procedures. The planning process associated with a Master Plan could also identify local environmental issues related to land development and recommend regulatory measures to prevent further problems. The recommended actions in the Master Plan are typically general but are followed by developing and adopting specific regulations.



## Planning Process

The planning process to develop this Master Plan update followed a logical pattern of discovery about Whitewater Township's past and present. Much of this discovery process occurred in the winter and spring of 2023.

While this discovery work was taking place, the Planning Commission formed the Resident Outreach Subcommittee to explore options for community engagement. This included a review of a prior community survey (conducted in 2009), steps to prepare a new survey to learn of updated community perspectives, and steps to plan for and organize public events to allow for an open house and planning workshop.

The list below provides a description of activities

Date(s)	Activity
12/7/2022	Presentation to the Planning Commission Introduction to Master Plan review process
1/4/2023 2/1/2023	Planning Commission discussion about citizen engagement and community outreach
3/10/2023 3/17/2023	Resident Outreach Subcommittee Meetings
4/5/2023	Planning Commission discussion about citizen engagement and resident survey
4/24/2023	Resident Outreach Subcommittee Meeting
5/3/2023	Planning Commission discussion about citizen engagement and resident survey. Also released Chapters 1-4 of the Master Plan in draft form for comment. Draft posted on the township website.
5/4/2023 5/11/2023	Resident Outreach Subcommittee Meetings focused on resident survey logistics and launch.
5/17/2023	Special Joint Township Board and Planning Commission Meeting
5/22/2023 5/31/2023	Resident Outreach Subcommittee Meetings focused on resident survey logistics and launch.

6/7/2023	Planning Commission discussion about resident survey and subsequent citizen engagement steps
6/14/2023	Due date for surveys to be returned
7/6/2023	Resident Outreach Subcommittee Meeting - Survey tabulation and RFP for workshop facilitation discussion
7/12/2023	Planning Commission Meeting - Survey tabulation and RFP for workshop facilitation discussion
8/2/2023	Planning Commission Meeting - Survey tabulation and RFP for workshop facilitation discussion
8/10/2023	Resident Outreach Subcommittee Meeting on Open House Planning
8/24/2023	Resident Outreach Subcommittee Meeting on Open House Planning
9/6/2023	Planning Commission Meeting - Approved survey results to be posted on the township website. Analysis of survey results. Planning for Open House on September 28.

TO BE EXPANDED AS PLANNING PROCESS  
CONTINUES



# 2

## Historic Context

Before beginning to consider the current or future characteristics of Whitewater Township, it makes sense to review local history. Many previous generations have called Whitewater Township home, and their stories and past milestones give insight into why some of the features we see today are as they are. The 2015 Master Plan provided considerable historical information expanded upon below.

Historical information is provided for three reasons. First, some historical facts may come as a surprise to some who are less familiar with the area. In the past, Williamsburg was far more of a commercial hub than it is today. Secondly, looking back at history helps draw attention to how communities change over time. Buildings are built and torn down, roads move, technology advances, and social behavior changes. Thirdly, historical material provides context and understanding from which we can look at current and future conditions. Understanding what came before expands our understanding of the present character of Whitewater Township. It also suggests a sense of place that is uniquely Whitewater Township. Whitewater Township is unique partly because of its history.

**“When our grandparents came in the 1850’s, Whitewater Township was a wilderness covered with huge pine and hemlock. Many white pine were three and four feet through and some even five feet. These were also beech, maple, elm, oak and birch with a few basswood, also cedar and tamarack in the swamps.”**

*Rob’s Recollections, An Early History of Whitewater Township and Skegemog Point Grand Traverse County, Michigan By Robert Lucius Samels*

### Native American History

Archaeologists theorize that five or six different cultures of people have occupied the area of the Township around Skegemog Point beginning approximately 10,500 BC. Before the white settlers in the area, the Mascoutin (or “People of the Open Prairie”), a branch of the Algonquin Tribe, lived in the area until the 1630s, followed by the Chippewa and Ottawa Indian Tribes. The majority of Native Americans were moved north to a reservation after 1857.

### Early European Settlers

Following Father Baraga’s mapping of the area between 1830-1840, the Government Survey of 1850 was completed and the

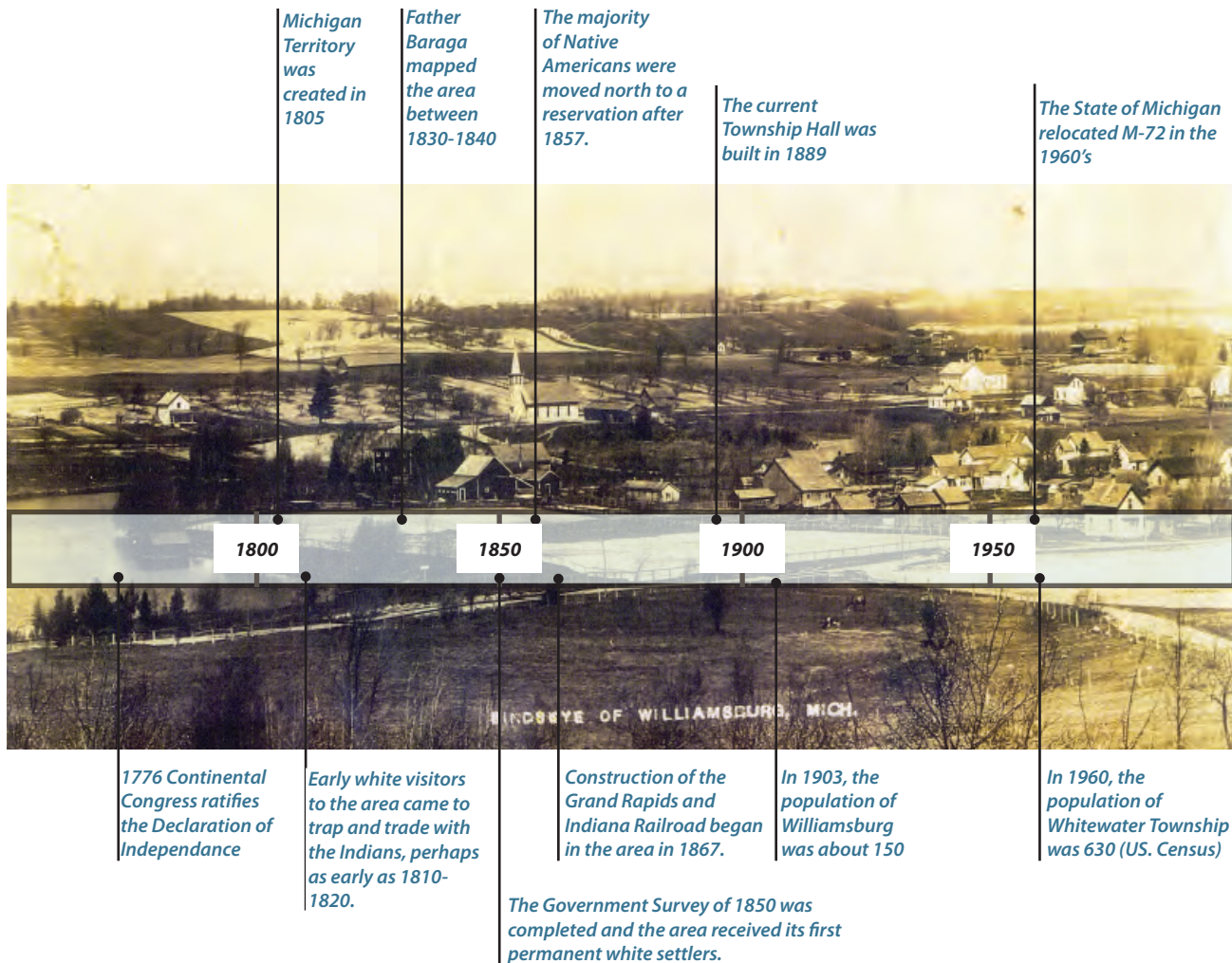


*This monument is found at Hi-Pray Park honoring the early pioneers of Whitewater Township of 1856 (Langworthy, Cox, Gay, Scofield).*

area received its first permanent white settlers. Amon Langworthy, George Brown, and William H. Fife (who later became the Township's first supervisor) came in 1854, Joseph Sours in 1855, H. S. Beach in 1856, and J. M. Merrill in 1858. At "Hi" Pray Park, a stone memorializes the Williamsburg pioneers of 1856.

Before construction of roads and railroads in the area, supplies came by boat from Elk Rapids on Elk and Round (today known as Skegemog Lake) Lakes and were transported cross-country to the Williamsburg area.

## Some General Historic Milestones





The area of Williamsburg was originally part of a large county called Michilimackinac and was the largest settlement in the area. In 1859, Whitewater Township became the third township in the county, after Peninsula and Traverse. It covered the area from Elk Lake to Grand Traverse Bay.

Williamsburg was the fourth name assigned to the emerging town. Three former names proposed included Cedar Rapids, the Mill or Scofield's Mill, and Dunbar. Finally, Williamsburg was proposed and approved by the Postal Service beginning in 1856.

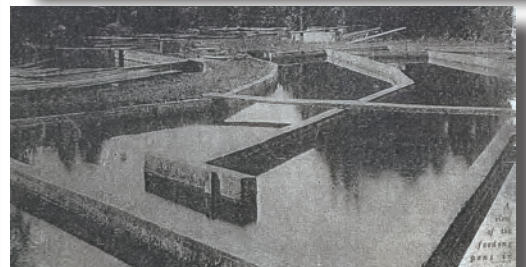
The current Township Hall was built in 1889 on land donated by David Vinton, Jr. and is still in use today. Before the ceiling was lowered, plays were also performed in this building, as well as basketball games.



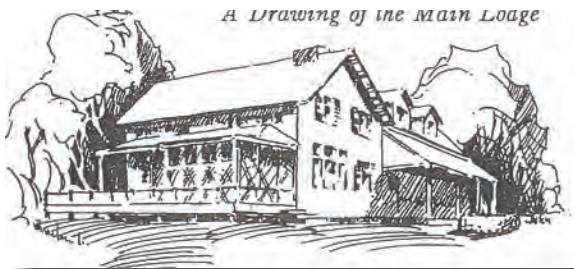
In 1903, the population of Williamsburg was about 150. With agriculture on the rise, the town contained a store, hotel, blacksmith shop, sawmills, gristmill, grange hall, Township Hall, a Methodist-Episcopal Church, and was home to seven schools. By the 1930's the population was 460.

The Grist Mill was an important feature in the area before it was torn down in about 1915. It was built at the end of the civil war. John H. Bissell, a Detroit area attorney, owned the pond.

Another prominent feature in Williamsburg between 1890 and 1940 was a large fish hatchery and fishing lodge. The Charles M. Greenway's estate called "Weesh-Ko-Wong," meaning "clear cold water," was a large and notable fish hatchery. Numerous springs fed the pond (also known as Bissell's Pond). Famous for his brook and rainbow trout fingerlings, he also tried repopulating the grayling, a native fish decimated by logging and non-native trout species in Michigan. During one year, the hatchery sold 65,000 brook trout, and the egg capacity was one

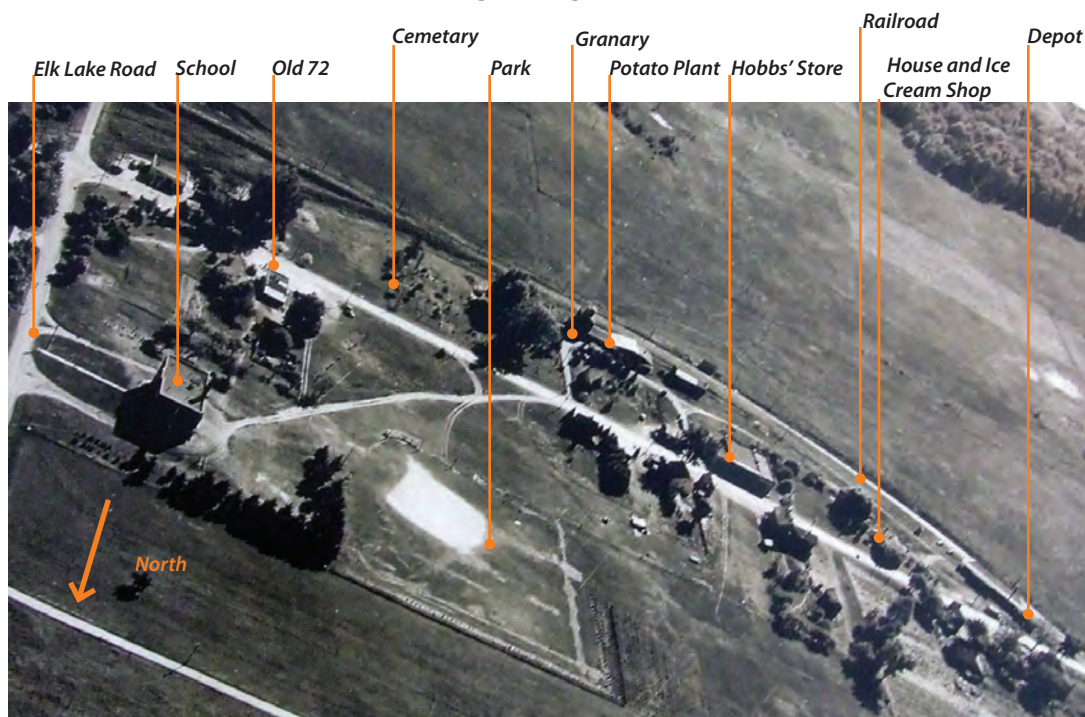


million eggs per season. The fishing lodge had accommodations for about eleven people, including bathrooms, a kitchen, a living room, laundry, and a dining room.



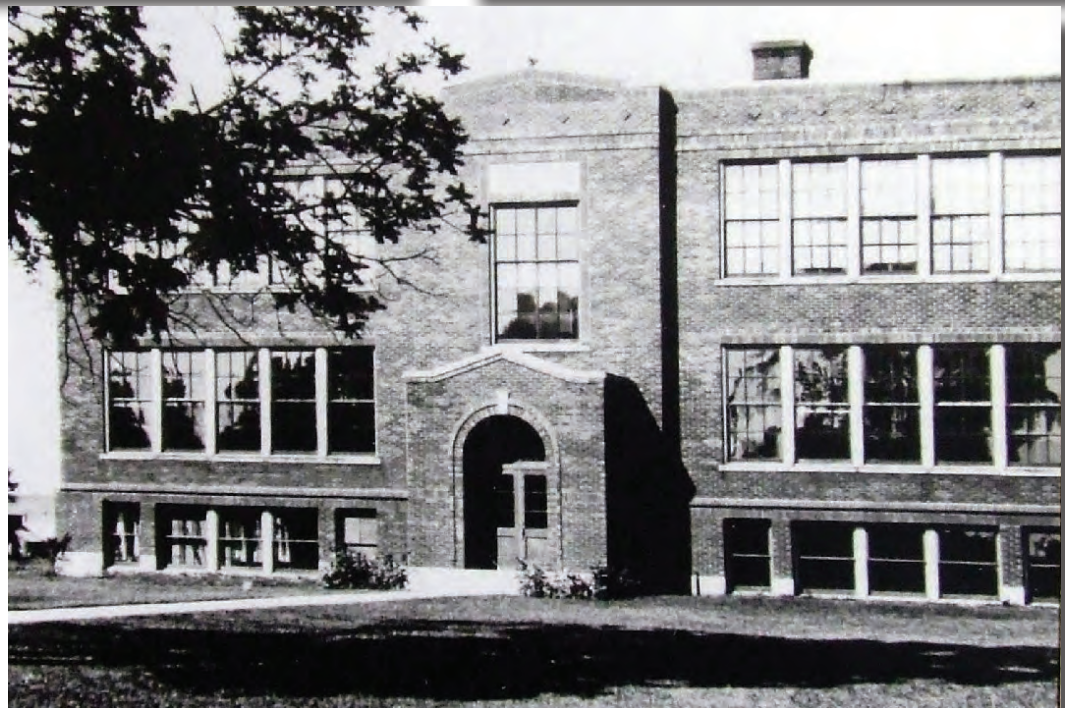
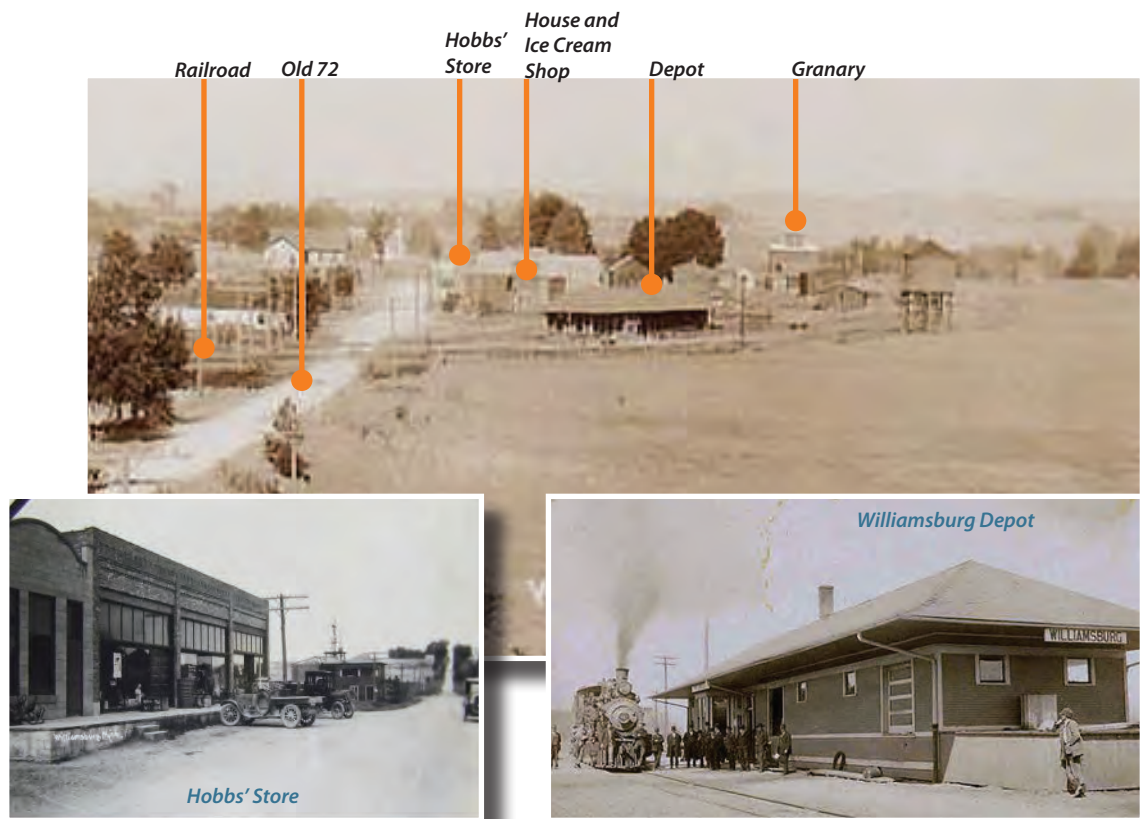
Williamsburg expanded in the early 1900s with new construction that followed the railroad construction in the 1890s. To the north, along Old 72, businesses included a granary, ice cream shop, mercantile & farm implement store (Hobbs Store), and other establishments. Development activity also included a school and park (Hi-Pray Park today), as shown below.

## Buildings Along Old M-72





## Master Plan



*Williamsburg High School - Elk Lake Road*

South of Old 72, other commercial activity existed. Specifically, the Charles Will Hardware Store was located on Vinton Street (nearly across from the Township Hall). Unfortunately, this establishment (along with others) burned down. The house that can be seen north of the hardware store was owned by Charles Will and still stands today.

Just south of the Charles Will Hardware Store was an area called "The Corners." This area was located at the corner of Church Street and Vinton Road. An ice cream shop existed here, along with a grocery store and dry goods store.

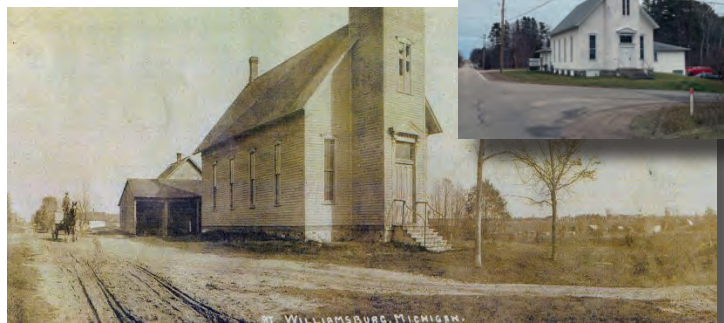


*Church Street - Looking East Toward Vinton St.*



*Intersection of Church Street and Vinton St.*

Perhaps the most prominent building south of Old 72 was the Church built at the intersection of Williamsburg Road and Church Street. This Church is among the oldest standing buildings in Williamsburg. The sign at the north entrance indicates that it was established in 1881. It has been added on to and altered but still stands intact today.





Like everywhere in America, the 1960s changed Williamsburg and its 630 residents. The State of Michigan relocated M-72, bisecting the town, and the last railroad steam engine traveled the tracks. The Williamsburg Consolidated School became a part of the Elk Rapids School District in the 1950's. The gymnasium remained, hosting community events and well-known dances attended by people from miles around well into the decade.



### Transportation History

Along with the relocation of M-72, transportation has been an important factor for many years. Before the invention of the automobile in the late 1800s and its growing popularity in the early 1900s, people traveled by boat, horse, and railroads. In the late 1870s through the early 1900s, boats moved passengers and goods across the Great Lakes and within the interconnected system of rivers and lakes known as the Chain of Lakes. The Chain of Lakes is a 75-mile-long waterway with 14 lakes and rivers connecting Elk Lake and East Grand Traverse Bay with communities northeast of Whitewater Township, such as Bellaire, Central Lake, and Elsworth. Historically, this waterway was used to transport logs to sawmills. Today, boat traffic is oriented mainly toward recreational purposes, and the Chain of Lakes is a popular tourist destination with seasonal and year-round homes along the shorelines. It is even officially defined as a water trail for kayaking, paddle boarding, and canoeing (see [www.michiganwatertrails.org](http://www.michiganwatertrails.org)).



In the 1890s, railroads began serving the area, moving passengers, logs, agricultural products, and other goods. A train station was built in Williamsburg, along with a water tower to support the needs of the steam engines. As reliance on private motor vehicle transportation grew in the early parts of the 1900s, demand for rail service declined. Today, the rails and rail beds are still visible in Williamsburg (just a few hundred feet west of the Williamsburg Post office on Old M 72). This same rail bed extends westward behind the Turtle Creek Casino toward Acme and crosses M 72 at Bates Road. South of Bates Road, the railroad right-of-way includes a paved recreational trail that is part of the regional TART Trail system.

With growing numbers of auto and truck traffic in the last 100 years or so, the road network of Whitewater Township evolved from trails to paved roadways. In the early years, instead of paying taxes for road maintenance, people would work a certain number of days on the road, according to the amount of land they owned. A highway commissioner was elected and called the Pathmaster. The Pathmaster would make sure each settler did their allotted time on the roads.

M 72 is the busiest road in Whitewater Township today. It is a state trunkline highway that was first designed as a state highway in 1919. It has evolved over the years to be one of three state highways that crosses the Lower Peninsula from Lake Michigan to Lake Huron. The development of M 72 as an important state route has included bypasses and routing to avoid denser and more populated areas, allowing for higher traffic speeds and heavier traffic volumes.

### Major Underground Gas Leak

For older residents, the memory of the major gas leak is a significant reminder that parts of Whitewater Township were almost lost to an explosion. About 50 years ago (April 1973), Whitewater Township was the site of a near disaster due to a natural gas blowout. According to MLive (April 21, 2016), hundreds of craters and geysers appeared with gas seeping from underground, and hundreds of local people were evacuated and displaced (some over a long period of time). Some holes were 15-20 feet across. The Township Hall and M-72 were threatened, and there was fear that a spark could create an explosion. After this incident, lawsuits were filed, and new regulations and orders were promulgated. There are thousands of oil and gas wells in Northwestern Michigan.



Source: Acme Heritage Society, Record Eagle, MLive.

### Other Places and People

#### Mabel

A little town known as Mabel existed east of Williamsburg. At one time, Mabel had a post office, store and sawmill. A sign drawing attention to Mabel is still visible along the North side of M 72.



#### Samels Farm:

William and Mariam (Watson) Samels moved to the Williamsburg area from Bruce Mines, Canada, in 1855 to begin farming. Frank Samels was the third son and fifth child of William and Miriam. Frank purchased 64 acres at the end of Skegemog Point Road in 1889, built a farmstead and raised a family of four sons. Native American artifacts were found on the site, and archaeologists discovered the remains of an entire woodland village along the Skegemog shoreline. The Samels farm was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1972 (one of 13 sites in Grand Traverse County). The Samels Family Heritage Society was formed in 2003 to help preserve the site and educate visitors about local history. Events at the Samels Farm during 2022 included a blacksmith class, farm work bee, quilting workshop, photography workshop, dances and gatherings.



*Photos courtesy of Samels Family Heritage Society*

#### Hi Pray

Hilan (Hi) Pray, was born in 1909, and spent his early life in the Williamsburg area. He attended school in Williamsburg and graduated from Traverse City Central High School. He was the captain of the baseball team at Western Michigan University and taught school for a number of years. He also coached baseball and basketball. He played semi-pro baseball as a pitcher in both the Frankfort and Traverse City areas for a number of years. He was employed by the United States Postal Department.



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# Present Conditions of Whitewater Township

The Michigan Planning Enabling Act requires Planning Commissions to conduct careful and comprehensive surveys and studies of present conditions and future growth within the planning jurisdiction, with due regard for relationships to neighboring jurisdictions. This Chapter breaks down various features and characteristics of Whitewater Township to help understand current and potential community development challenges.

## Regional Context

Whitewater Township is part of a larger region, and the characteristics of this larger region significantly influence community development. Regions can be defined in multiple ways, but the fact that Whitewater Township is located in Grand Traverse County, just east of Traverse City is important from many standpoints. Three important considerations in terms of regional context include 1) growth pressure, 2) the presence of tourism and numbers of seasonal residents, and 3) major nearby development in Acme Township to the west.

### Important considerations in terms of regional context include:

- 1) Growth pressure
- 2) Tourism and seasonal residents
- 3) Nearby development

## Growth Pressures

First and foremost, there is the issue of growth pressure. More population information will be provided later, but it is important to recognize that, unlike many Michigan counties with a more or less stable population, Grand Traverse County has been growing. In the last decade (2010-2020), Grand Traverse County grew by about 10 percent, while the State of Michigan grew by less than 2 percent (between 2000 and 2010, Michigan was the only state to lose population).

## Tourism & Seasonal Residents

While the growth rate for permanent residents in the larger region is important, tourists and seasonal residents should also be considered in ways that are unique to this area and in terms of impact on community development. Networks Northwest found that the current permanent population of Grand Traverse County of about 95,000 swells to about 161,000 when summer tourists and seasonal residents (mostly June, July, and August) are accounted for (see Seasonal Population Study for Northwest Lower Michigan, published October 2022). This seasonal population is drawn to area attractions (outdoor activities, wineries, restaurants, etc.) and accommodated in short-term rentals, hotels, and motels.

Available evidence suggests that the trend toward more seasonal residents and tourists will continue. According to the Traverse City Ticker ([www.traverseticker.com](http://www.traverseticker.com) - November 19, 2022), eight new hotels are in the development pipeline in the

*The Traverse City region is an attractive destination in many respects. Manmade and natural features in the area draw both tourists and people who wish to become seasonal or full-time residents. Evidence of the attractiveness of the area is found in national and even international rankings. Some recent examples found on the Traverse City Tourism website include:*

- *The 23 Best Places to Go in the U.S. in 2023 (December 2022) - Condé Nast Traveler*
- *12 Best Places to Buy a Lake House in the U.S. (November 2022) - Travel & Leisure*
- *The Best Ski Resorts in the U.S./Crystal Mountain (October 2022) - U.S. News & World Report*
- *Premier Affordable Area to Retire in the US (August 2022) - Herald Review (Realtor.com)*
- *8 Most Charming Towns in the U.S. for a Fall Getaway (August 2022) - Best Life*
- *USA Today Best Winery Hotel-Readers' Choice 2022/Chateau Chantal (August 2022) - USA Today*
- *The Most Accessible National Parks in the U.S./Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore (July 2022) - Condé Nast Traveler*
- *Every State's Top Fourth of July Show (July 2022) - Travel Pulse*
- *7 of the Most Outdoorsy Cities in the U.S. (June 2022) - Trip Trivia*
- *7 Secret Beaches that are Worth the Trip to Get There (May 2022) - Morningstar*
- *The Most Beautiful Place in Each State (May 2022) - Travel & Leisure*
- *10 of the Best Scenic Drives in U.S. National Parks (May 2022) - Trip Trivia*
- *6 Great US Wine Regions You Haven't Visited Yet and Should in 2022 (April 2022) - Lonely Planet*
- *8 Pro Traveler's Best Road Trip Ideas (April 2022) - AARP*
- *8 Unexpected US Foodie Destinations (March 2022) - Lonely Planet*
- *Midwest Living's Best of the Midwest Winners 2022 (February 2022) - Midwest Living*
- *Top 50 Beaches in the US for 2022/Sleeping Bear Dunes (January 2022) - Randall "Mr. Beach" Kaplan*
- *8 Charming Great Lake Beach Towns (January 2022) - World Atlas*
- *22 Places You Need to Travel to in 2022 (January 2022) - Matador Network*

**Source:** <https://www.traversecity.com/meetings/media/accolades/>

area that will add nearly 800 new rooms to the local hotel room inventory (a 20 percent increase over the 4,000 now available).

Another dimension to the seasonal attributes of the region is the Flintfields Horse Park to the west in adjacent Acme Township. The Flintfields Horse Park sits on 130 acres and is a top equestrian destination in North America. Major events begin in June and conclude in September. The impact of this facility is felt as patrons of Flintfields seek local accommodations for extended periods and seek goods and services during their stay. A prime example is the fact that Whitewater Township will soon have two new veterinary clinics on M 72, which undoubtedly will help support the Flintfields Horse Park.

Nearby, Turtle Creek Casino, and the Grand Traverse Resort and Spa also draw many visitors from near and far. The Turtle Creek Resort just underwent a renovation project of its 137 guest rooms. The Grand Traverse Resort and Spa in Acme Township includes 579 hotel rooms, spa, dining, golf, and a conference center.

### Major Nearby Development

Slightly more than two miles west of Whitewater Township is the Grand Traverse Town Center development along the south side of M-72. This controversial development was initially proposed in 2004 as a mixed-use development. It includes 182 acres. Planned uses included retail, hotel, civic spaces, housing (multifamily, townhouses, row houses, senior housing, and single-family) and other uses. In 2015, Meijer opened its doors to a 195,000-square foot supercenter as part of this development. The much larger balance of the area has been improved with internal roads, street lighting, walkways, and utilities, but it is currently undeveloped. The significance of this development to planning

in the area is that the large undeveloped portions of Grand Traverse Town Center development represent more or less “shovel-ready” construction sites. This inventory of sites may help meet the growing demand for new building spaces in the area.

### Organization and Geography

Whitewater Township is one of 1,240 townships in Michigan. Township government is a common form of government in the Midwest that generally serves rural areas. Often, townships are 36 square miles in size (6 miles by 6 miles), but they can vary in size for several reasons. As a local government, townships are often regarded being “closest to the people” and most responsive to local needs. The legal

framework within which Michigan Townships operate is established primarily by State law (Michigan Compiled Laws or (MCL)). The elected officials who serve residents include a supervisor, clerk, treasurer, and two trustees (in some cases four trustees). Under Michigan law, townships can be “general law” townships, or “charter townships,” with additional governmental powers. Three townships in Grand Traverse County are charter townships and they include Garfield, East Bay and Long Lake. Whitewater Township is a General Law (or Civil) Township operating under Chapter 41 of the MCL.



Williamsburg is an unincorporated place. Unlike cities and villages incorporated under state law as a distinct local government unit with elected officials and legislative powers, Williamsburg is an identified place with a historically denser development pattern and a postal zip code. Whitewater Township is the relevant local government applicable to Williamsburg.

## Geography

Whitewater Township is part of Grand Traverse County and next to Kalkaska County. It is almost midway between Traverse City and Kalkaska. The northern edge of Whitewater Township abuts Antrim County. Whitewater Township is larger than many Michigan Townships as it includes more than 53 square miles. Almost 6 square miles of Whitewater Township includes Elk Lake.



## Demographics

Community demographics provide insight and understanding of the people who call Whitewater Township home. While the following statistics provide only a generalized view of local residents, it helps provide more understanding of the community and potential preferences. To provide greater meaning to Whitewater Township statistics, comparisons to other areas are also provided to provide context and contrasts.

# 2,688

The population of Whitewater Township according to the 2020 U.S. Census

AGE			
	Whitewater Twp.	Grand Traverse County	Michigan
Persons under 18 years	21.4%	19.9%	21.4%
Persons 65 years old and older	24.6%	21.3%	18.1%
Median Age (years)	51.4	43.4	40.2
The median age of a Whitewater Township Resident is about 8 years older than that of a Grand Traverse County resident, and more than 11 years older than that of a State of Michigan resident.			
Source: ACS 1-Year Estimates Data Profiles, 2021 and ACS 5-Year Estimates Subject Tables			

# 24.6%

Almost one in four residents of Whitewater Township is 65 years old or older.



## INCOME (2021 Est.)

	Whitewater Twp.	Grand Traverse County	Michigan
All Households (mean income)	\$91,842	\$84,905	\$86,093
All Households (median income)	\$75,685	\$65,651	\$63,498

Whitewater Township residents generally have higher household incomes than the County and State as a whole.

Source: ACS 5-Year Estimates Subject Tables and ACS 1-Year Estimates Subject Tables and ACS 5-Year Estimates Subject Tables

# \$75,685

Household incomes are generally higher in Whitewater Township.

"Mean" refers to the average of a set of values.

"Median" refers to middle number in a sorted list of numbers

## HOUSEHOLDS

	Whitewater Twp.	Grand Traverse County	Michigan
Average Household Size	2.56	2.34	2.43
Owner-Occupied Housing Units	90.7%	76.3%	73.2%

Residents of Whitewater Township live in somewhat larger households.

Source: ACS 1-Year Estimates Data Profiles, 2021 and ACS 5-Year Estimates Subject Tables

# 90.7%

More than 9 out of 10 homes in Whitewater Township are owner-occupied.



## YEAR HOMES WERE BUILT (PERCENT OF OCCUPIED UNITS)

	Whitewater Township	Grand Traverse County	Michigan
2020 or later	.6%	.6%	.4%
2010 to 2019	3.5%	11.3%	5.2%
2000 to 2009	15.0%	19.8%	10.4%
1980 to 1999	44.2%	31.1%	22.1%
1960 to 1979	25.2%	21.4%	27.1%
1940 to 1959	4.0%	7.6%	21.1%
1939 or earlier	7.6%	8.2%	13.7%

More than 4 out of 10 occupied housing units that exist today in Whitewater Township were built between 1980 and 1999. This suggests that during this time, a local building boom occurred.

Source: ACS 1-Year Estimates Data Profiles, 2021 and ACS 1-Year Estimates Subject Tables

## Educational Attainment

	Whitewater Twp.	Grand Traverse Co.	Michigan
Population 25 years and older with a Bachelor's Degree	25.4%	21.8%	19.2%

Source: ACS 1-Year Estimates Subject Tables and ACS 5-Year Estimates Subject Tables

25.4%

About 1 in 4 adults in Whitewater Township have a Bachelor Degree.

## Labor Force By Industry

Civilian employed population 16 years and over	Whitewater Twp.	Grand Traverse Co.	Michigan
Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and mining	2.8%	1.5%	1.1%
Construction	13.8%	8.2%	5.6%
Manufacturing	10.3%	10.3%	18.7%
Wholesale trade	3.2%	2.0%	2.3%
Retail trade	14.3%	13.7%	10.8%
Transportation and warehousing, and utilities	3.4%	3.0%	4.6%
Information	0.9%	1.2%	1.3%
Finance and insurance, and real estate and rental and leasing	5.7%	6.8%	5.7%
Professional, scientific, and management, and administrative and waste management services	9.8%	9.9%	9.8%
Educational services, and health care and social assistance	21.1%	24.7%	23.3%
Arts, entertainment, and recreation, and accommodation and food services	7.4%	11.7%	9.0%
Other services, except public administration	5.3%	3.8%	4.5%
Public administration	1.9%	3.1%	3.4%

Source: 2021 5-Year Estimates Data Profiles

## Other Labor Force Characteristics

	Whitewater Twp.	Grand Traverse Co.	Michigan
Population 16 years and over in Labor Force	57.2%	62.0%	60.9%
Workers 16 years and over - Mean travel time to work (minutes)	26.7	21.3	23.8

Source: ACS 1-Year Estimates Subject Tables and ACS 5-Year Estimates Data Profiles

26.7

Minutes to get to work

Workers in Whitewater Township generally travel further for employment.



### Lifestyle Characteristics

Beyond basic demographics is a range of socioeconomic characteristics that suggest certain lifestyles and behavior. Considerable research often goes into understanding lifestyles for sophisticated business locational decisions. Such analysis is not needed to support a Master Plan, but it is helpful to briefly look at available information about resident lifestyles that can be associated with an area. One source of this data type is from ESRI, which classifies neighborhoods nationwide into 67 unique segments (Tapestry Segments) based on demographics and socioeconomic characteristics. This data is available by ZIP Code. The Whitewater Township zip code is 49690, and while this zip code extends beyond Whitewater Township itself (west to East Bay and east into Kalkaska County), it covers Whitewater Township for the most part.

Three tapestry segments dominate the zip code and include the following:

#### Cozy Country Living - Green Acres (37.45%)

The Green Acres lifestyle features country living and self-reliance. Avid do-it-yourselfers, they maintain and remodel their homes with all the necessary power tools to accomplish the jobs. Gardening, especially growing vegetables, is a priority, again with the right tools, tillers, tractors, and riding mowers. Outdoor living features a variety of sports: hunting and fishing, motorcycling, hiking and camping, and even golf. Other traits include:

- Primarily (not exclusively) older homes with acreage;
- Residents pursue physical fitness vigorously, from working out on home exercise equipment to playing various sports.
- Residents are active in their communities and a variety of social organizations, from charitable to veterans' clubs.
- They are cautious consumers with a focus on quality and durability.
- An older market, primarily married couples, most with no children living at home, or no children at all.



### Cozy Country Living - Rural Resort Dwellers (30.62%)

Although the Great Recession forced many owners of second homes to sell, Rural Resort Dwellers remain an active market, just a bit smaller. These communities are centered in resort areas, many in the Midwest, where the change in seasons supports various outdoor activities. Retirement looms for many of these blue-collar, older householders, but workers are postponing retirement or returning to work to maintain their current lifestyles. Workers are traveling further to maintain employment. They are passionate about their hobbies, like freshwater fishing and hunting. Other traits include:

- Housing is owner-occupied, single-family homes, with some mobile homes. A strong market for second homes, these rural areas contain homes valued near the US median.
- Rural Resort Dwellers residents are close to retirement. They've accumulated wealth and begun to shift their portfolios to low-risk assets.
- Residents drive older domestic vehicles and prefer to spend their disposable income on gear to support their hobbies, which include freshwater fishing, hunting, and motorcycling.



### GenXurban Comfortable Empty Nesters (19.72%)

Residents in this large, growing segment are older, with nearly half of all householders aged 55 or older; many still live in the suburbs where they grew up. Most are professionals working in government, health care, or manufacturing. These Baby Boomers earn a comfortable living and benefit from years of prudent investing and saving. Their net worth is well above average. Many are enjoying the transition from child-rearing to retirement. They value their health and financial well-being. Other traits include:

- Married couples, some with children, but most without.
- Most households' income from wages or salaries, but a third also draw income from investments and retirement.
- Home maintenance a priority among these homeowners.
- Comfortable Empty Nesters residents are physically and financially active
- Residents enjoy listening to sports radio or watching sports on television.
- Physically active, they play golf, ski, ride bicycles, and work out regularly.

For more complete information see-  
<https://www.esri.com/en-us/arcgis/products/data/data-portfolio/tapestry-segmentation>





### General Landscape and Watersheds

Whitewater Township is unique because it offers a diverse landscape with man-made features built on natural terrain with lakes and streams. The land itself is the product of glacial activity. Geologists estimate that the last ice sheet receded from the area thousands of years ago, carving out the deep lakes and leaving rolling hills and sandy soils.

The topography of Whitewater Township is such that higher elevations are found to the south. Rainfall that does not soak into the ground or evaporates, flows into streams and creeks that flow into Lake Michigan. Streams and creeks generally carry water northward into Elk Lake (and ultimately into the East Bay Grand Traverse Bay in Elk Rapids) or south to the Boardman River (and ultimately into the West Bay of Grand Traverse Bay near Downtown Traverse City).

**Map 1** shows the topography of Whitewater Township. Darker shades illustrate higher elevations, while lighter ones show lower elevations. There is about 500 feet of elevation difference between the lowest areas and the highest areas.

**Map 2** shows the watershed associated with the Boardman River in southern Whitewater Township. Water in the blue areas drains south, and west toward downtown Traverse City, where it empties into West Bay.

The Boardman River is noteworthy because it is among Michigan's top ten trout streams. It is also designated as one of sixteen Natural River systems in Michigan. Natural River designation includes requirements for how land within the river corridor can be used. This is accomplished through zoning requirements that apply to properties within the river corridor.

Substantial efforts are underway in the region to remove dams and return the Boardman River to a more natural state. According to the Great Lakes Fishery Trust, this dam removal project is the largest in Michigan's history and one of the most significant in the Great Lakes Basin. The benefits of dam removal and the return to natural conditions include restoring aquatic habitats and improved outdoor recreation opportunities. (*see: <https://www.glft.org/the-boardman-ottaway-a-river-reborn/>*)

### Five Regions

Breaking down Whitewater Township's diverse natural and man-made landscape reveals at least five distinctive and unique regions that look, feel, and function differently from others. These areas uniquely combine natural characteristics with the presence (or absence) of human activity. The planning implications of this are explored in future chapters, but for introductory purposes, the following five regions of Whitewater Township are listed below, illustrated on **Map 3**, and subsequently described.

**Region 1 - Northern Forests**

**Region 2 - Rural Agricultural**

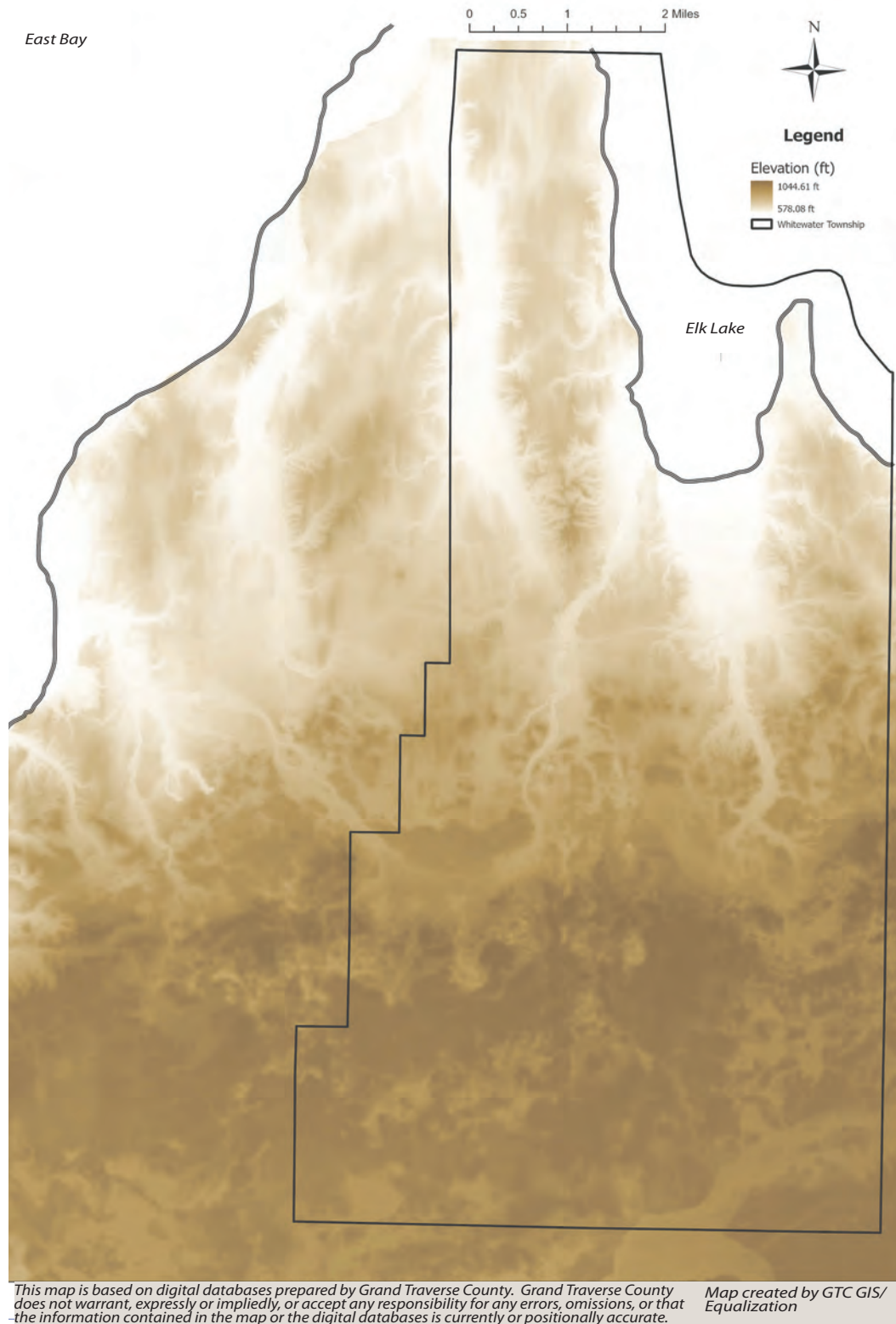
**Region 3 - The M-72 Corridor.**

**Region 4 - Extensive Wetlands**

**Region 5 - Residential Lakeshores.**

Map 1

# Whitewater Township Topography

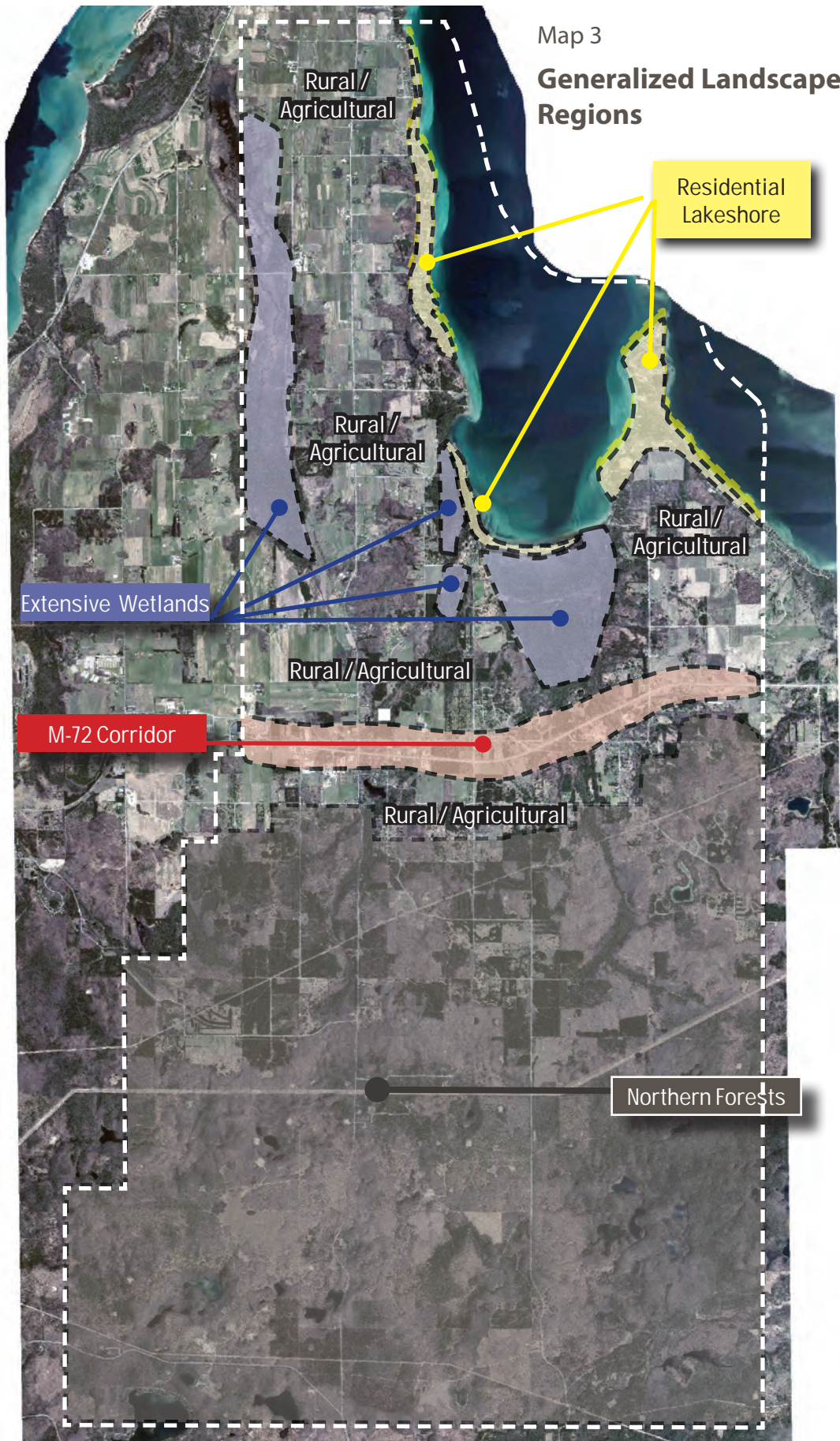


Map 2

## Boardman River Watershed





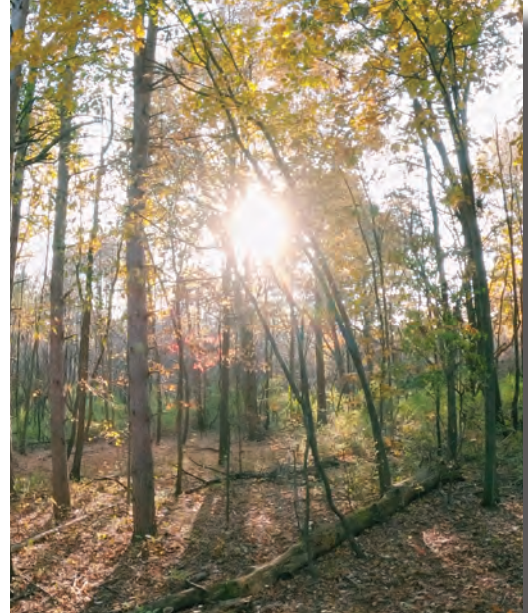




### Region 1 – Northern Forests.

Generally, south of M-72, the landscape is heavily wooded, with trees extending across a gently rolling terrain. Tree species include northern hardwoods (maple, birch, oak, beech, etc.). Much of the land south of M-72 is part of the Pere Marquette State Forest which extends throughout more than a dozen counties on the western side of Michigan's lower peninsula. Permanent and seasonal homes on larger lots, along with seasonal roads and recreational trails, are found throughout this region.

**Map 4** shows the large amount of land owned by the State of Michigan in Whitewater Township (shown in green). Whitewater Township has 34,957.99 total acres. The State of Michigan owns 15,044.8 acres, or about 43% of Whitewater Township.



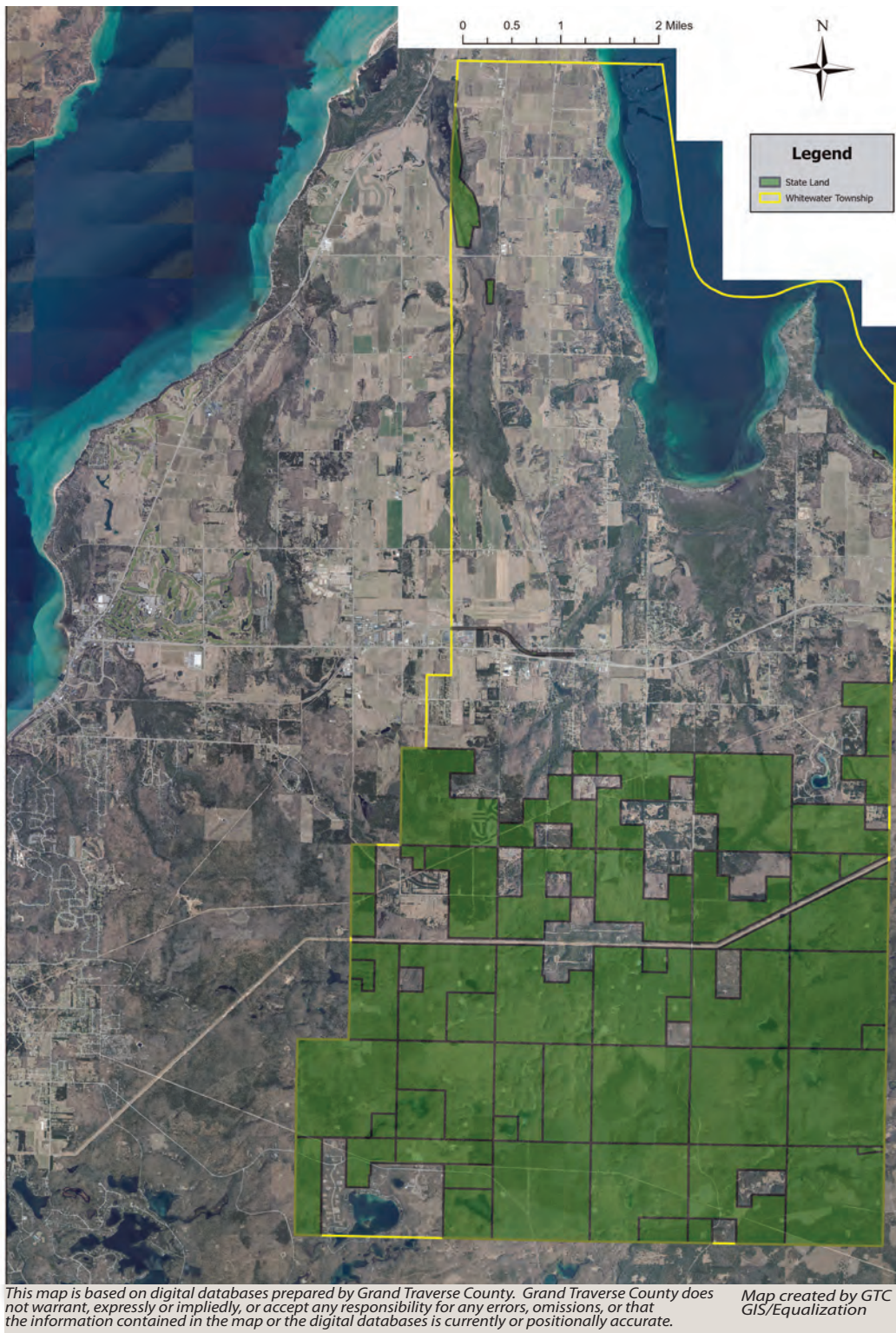
### Region 2 – Rural / Agricultural.

Most of the land just south of and north of M-72 is agricultural. Trees were removed long ago to make way for pastures and orchards in areas with gentle slopes. The agricultural productivity of landscapes in northern Whitewater Township is aided by the proximity of Lake Michigan and Grand Traverse Bay, especially for fruit production. Because waterbodies warm and cool slower than land, Lake Michigan and Grand Traverse Bay moderate the spring and fall temperatures on adjacent land. As a deep and large body of water, Lake Michigan retains summer warmth in the fall and remains cool longer into the spring. The result is a moderation of adjacent land temperatures as winds move air from the water across the land. This is beneficial for fruit production for various reasons. The suitability of the area for agricultural production is also aided and supported by the well-drained sandy soils found throughout the region.



Map 4

State Land in Whitewater Township





### Region 3 - The M-72 corridor.

M-72 more or less bisects Whitewater Township in an east-west direction. This heavily-traveled route includes a mixture of residential, commercial, and industrial land uses. M-72 is a primary gateway to the Traverse City area and therefore is important both locally and regionally.

### Region 4 – Extensive Wetlands.

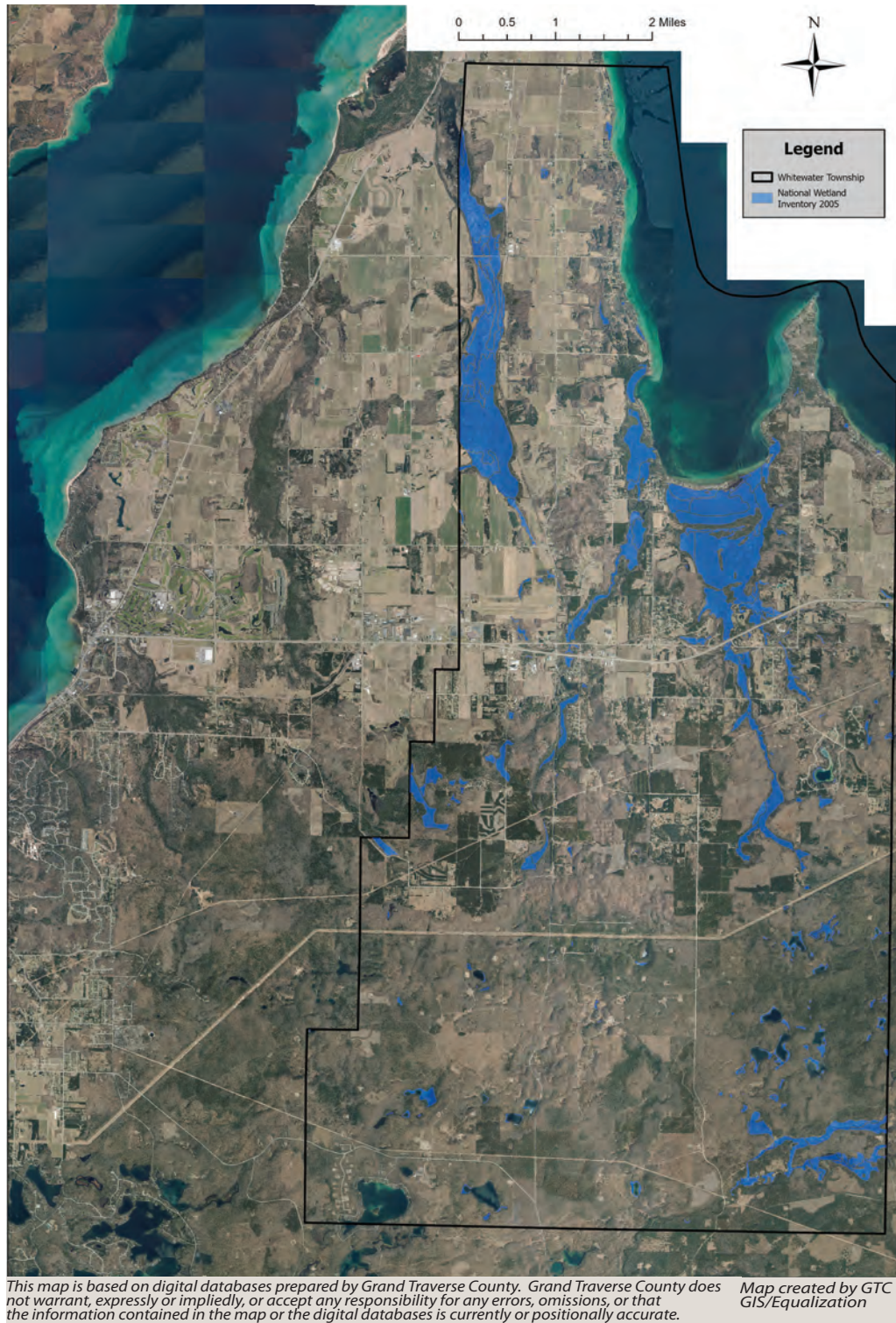
Interspersed in the rural agricultural area and elsewhere are large tracts of land with ponds, standing water, and wetlands. Wetlands are valuable natural assets because they clean the water, recharge water supplies, reduce flood risks, and provide fish and wildlife habitats. State and federal laws require permits before dredging or placing fill material in wetlands, or construction activity in a regulated wetland.

The presence of wetlands in and of itself is not unusual in the Midwest, but the amount of land locally identified as a wetland is. According to the National Wetlands Inventory, produced by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Whitewater Township has about 2,640 acres of wetlands (or about 7.5% of Whitewater Township). This is depicted in greater detail on **Map 5** (blue areas are wetlands). It should be noted that this map is intended to show the large areas of wetlands in the area and is not a substitute for site-specific wetlands studies to determine the boundaries of regulated wetlands for permitting requirements.

One area of extensive wetlands in Whitewater Township is the Petobego Natural Area and another is south of Elk Lake and Miami Beach Road where Battle Creek empties into Elk Lake. Both of these areas are visible on **Map 5**.



Map 5  
Wetlands Map





### Region 5 – Residential Lakeshores.

Finally, the land adjacent to Elk Lake and Lake Skegemog have shoreline characteristics all their own. Homes on smaller lots found here are on wooded or cleared lots, often with beaches or natural shorelines. Residential density (units per acre) is usually higher here compared with rural residential and agricultural homes further from the shore, but nearby. Waterfront property generally provides premium property values.



### Floodplains

Related to the issue of wetlands in the matter of land subject to periodic flooding. The floodplain is the land next to a water body, such as a lake, river, stream, or creek that is subject to flooding when significant rain events combine with other conditions to force water above normal levels. Floodplains have been mapped nationally by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) as part of the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) and are associated with a 100-year flood event. In other words, land included in the 100-year flood plain has a one percent chance of flooding in any given year.

The NFIP enables property owners to purchase flood insurance. In return, communities agree to adopt and implement local floodplain management regulations that contribute to protecting lives and reduce the risk of new construction and substantial improvements from future flooding. The recently completed 2022 Grand Traverse County Natural Hazard Mitigation Plan contains important floodplain-related information for all of Grand Traverse County.

From a land use perspective, the identification of 100-year floodplain boundaries helps understand general limitations on future development. The 100-year floodplain boundaries are depicted in greater detail on **Map 6**. This map is provided for general reference only and is based on the new Flood Insurance Rate Map (FIRM) that became effective in April 2023. However, any questions about whether a particular property is in the regulatory flood plain should be made using actual FIRM maps by qualified individuals.

It should also be understood that while flooding potential is an obvious and important limitation for how land can be used and built upon, land in the 100-year floodplain can be developed provided floodproofing measures are met. These include measures such as raising habitable floors above flood elevations. Whitewater Township is participating in the NFIP (pursuant to General Ordinance 53) and has an agreement with Grand Traverse County to enforce all Floodplain Management elements as FEMA requires. Grand Traverse County acts through its County Construction Code Office.

Map 6  
Floodplain Map



*This map is based on digital databases prepared by Grand Traverse County. Grand Traverse County does not warrant, expressly or impliedly, or accept any responsibility for any errors, omissions, or that the information contained in the map or the digital databases is currently or positionally accurate.*

*Map created by GTC  
GIS/Equalization*

## Transportation and mobility

Vehicular mobility on a roadway system is the primary means of transportation in Whitewater Township. The local public roadway system consists of a state trunkline (M-72) maintained by the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) and a system of county roads maintained by the Grand Traverse County Road Commission (GTCRC). There are also private roads that generally serve residential areas and are maintained with private funding.

M-72 is the primary east-west route and Elk Lake and Williamsburg Roads combine to provide the primary north-south route. The intersection of these two routes is more or less in the center of Whitewater Township and this intersection was recently signalized.

### M-72

Along with being the major road in Whitewater Township, M-72 connects with I-75 in Grayling and is a primary route into and out of the greater Traverse City area. As mentioned, M-72 crosses the Lower Peninsula from Lake Huron to Lake Michigan. M-72 connects to M-22 in Empire near the shore of Lake Michigan with US 23 in Harrisville near the shore of Lake Huron.

M-72 traffic volumes are the heaviest in Whitewater Township west of the Williamsburg/Elk Lake Road signal. Some current and recent traffic counts available from MDOT are as follows:

While the total traffic volumes on M-72 seem to have generally increased over time, some recent fluctuations are likely related to the impact of the recent COVID pandemic. The total number of vehicles driven nationally declined substantially during the pandemic with work-from-home orders and related considerations.

### Road Network

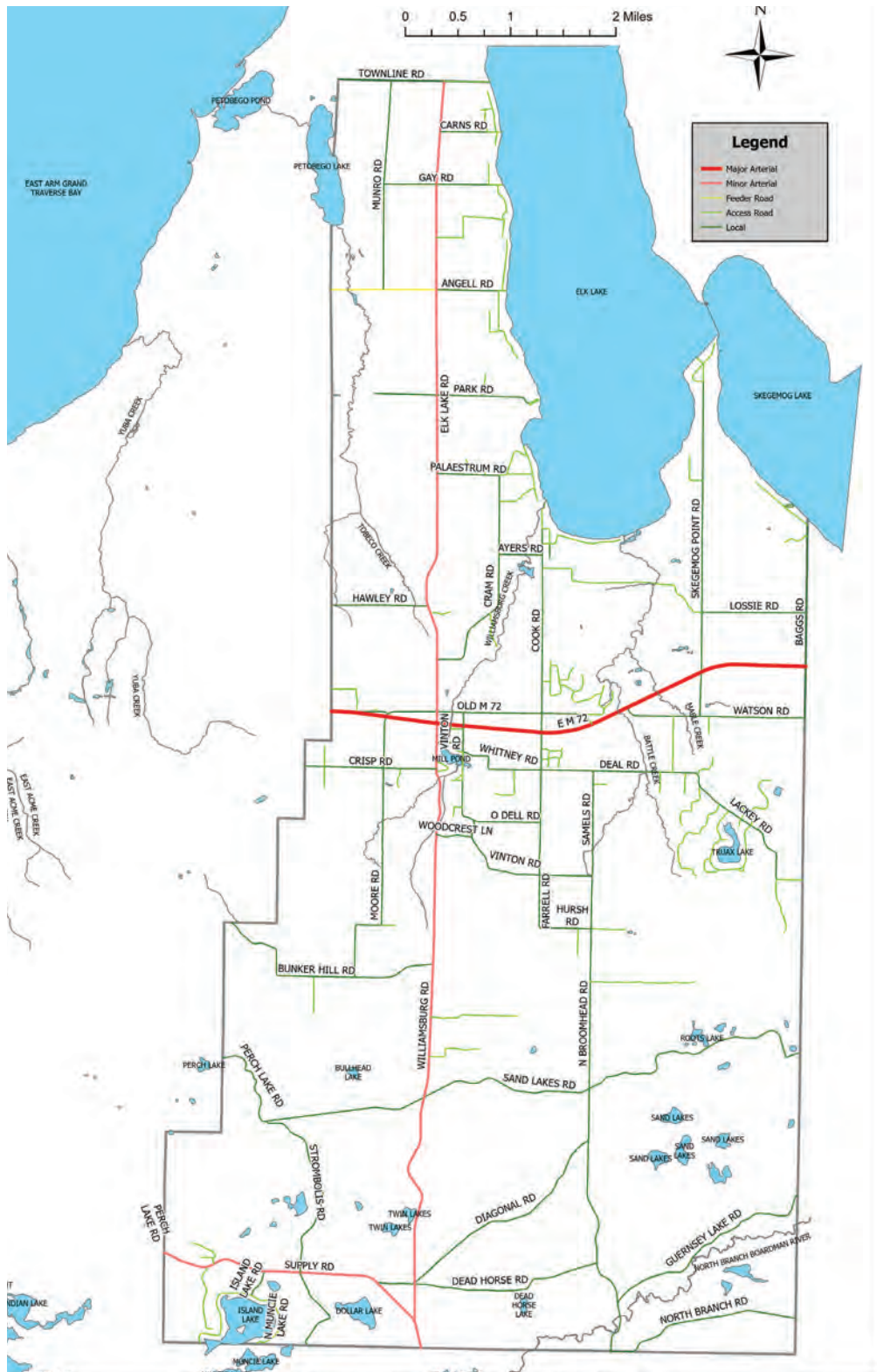
One way to look at a network of roads is to classify them according to a system according to function and other attributes. There is a hierarchy of roads, wherein roads called arterials are major roads that connect urbanized areas with higher speeds and traffic volumes. Local roads or streets typically have lower traffic volumes with the vital function of providing access to adjacent property.

The GTCRC has developed a roadway classification system for Grand Traverse County. Whitewater Township's roadway network is illustrated on Map 7. Whitewater Township's only major arterial is M-72, while minor arterials include Williamsburg Road, Elk Lake Road, and Supply Road.

	2021 Annual Average Daily Traffic (AADT)	2020 Annual Average Daily Traffic (AADT)	2019 Annual Average Daily Traffic (AADT)	2016 Annual Average Daily Traffic (AADT)	2006 Annual Average Daily Traffic (AADT)
M-72 West of Signal	16,437	14,494	16,705	15,580	16,100
M-72 East of Signal to Baggs Rd.	14,638	13,187	14,718	12,382	12,700
Source: <a href="https://gis-mdot.opendata.arcgis.com/datasets/mdot::traffic-volumes-2020/about">https://gis-mdot.opendata.arcgis.com/datasets/mdot::traffic-volumes-2020/about</a>					



# Map 7 Road Classification Map



This map is based on digital databases prepared by Grand Traverse County. Grand Traverse County does not warrant, expressly or impliedly, or accept any responsibility for any errors, omissions, or that the information contained in the map or the digital databases is currently or positionally accurate. Map created by GTC GIS/Equalization

### Seasonal Roads

Like many similar communities, Whitewater Township has several seasonal roads. Seasonal roads are county roads with signs designating them as such. Seasonal roads receive maintenance (grading) in the spring, but the Road Commission does not maintain or snowplow seasonal roads between the months of November and April. A seasonal road may not be open to public travel during this time, and private landowners perform their own snow removal.



### Trails

One significant trail in Whitewater Township is the Iron Belle Trail which connects Belle Isle (in the Detroit River near Downtown) to Ironwood Michigan in the western Upper Peninsula. The Iron Belle Trail is 2,000 miles long and it crisscrosses more than half of Michigan's counties along two distinct hiking and biking routes. The biking route utilizes many of the state's existing bike paths, bike lanes and designated biking routes as it travels up the east side of the state. The hiking route (which goes through Whitewater Township) utilizes sidewalks, trails, and the 1,000-mile plus North Country National Scenic Trail traveling up the west side of the Lower Peninsula. The trail is still under development and is more than two-thirds complete. When done, it will be the longest state-designated trail in the nation. The west leg of the Iron Belle Trail travels through southern Whitewater Township.



An illustration of all trails in Whitewater Township is provided on **Map 8**. It should also be noted that TART (Traverse Area Recreation and Transportation Trails, Inc.) is a local 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. The mission of this organization is to provide and promote a trail network that enriches people and communities throughout the greater Traverse region. The TART Trail network is within and near Whitewater Township. The Boardman/Ottaway River Trail is a 24-mile trail that crosses Supply Road, west of

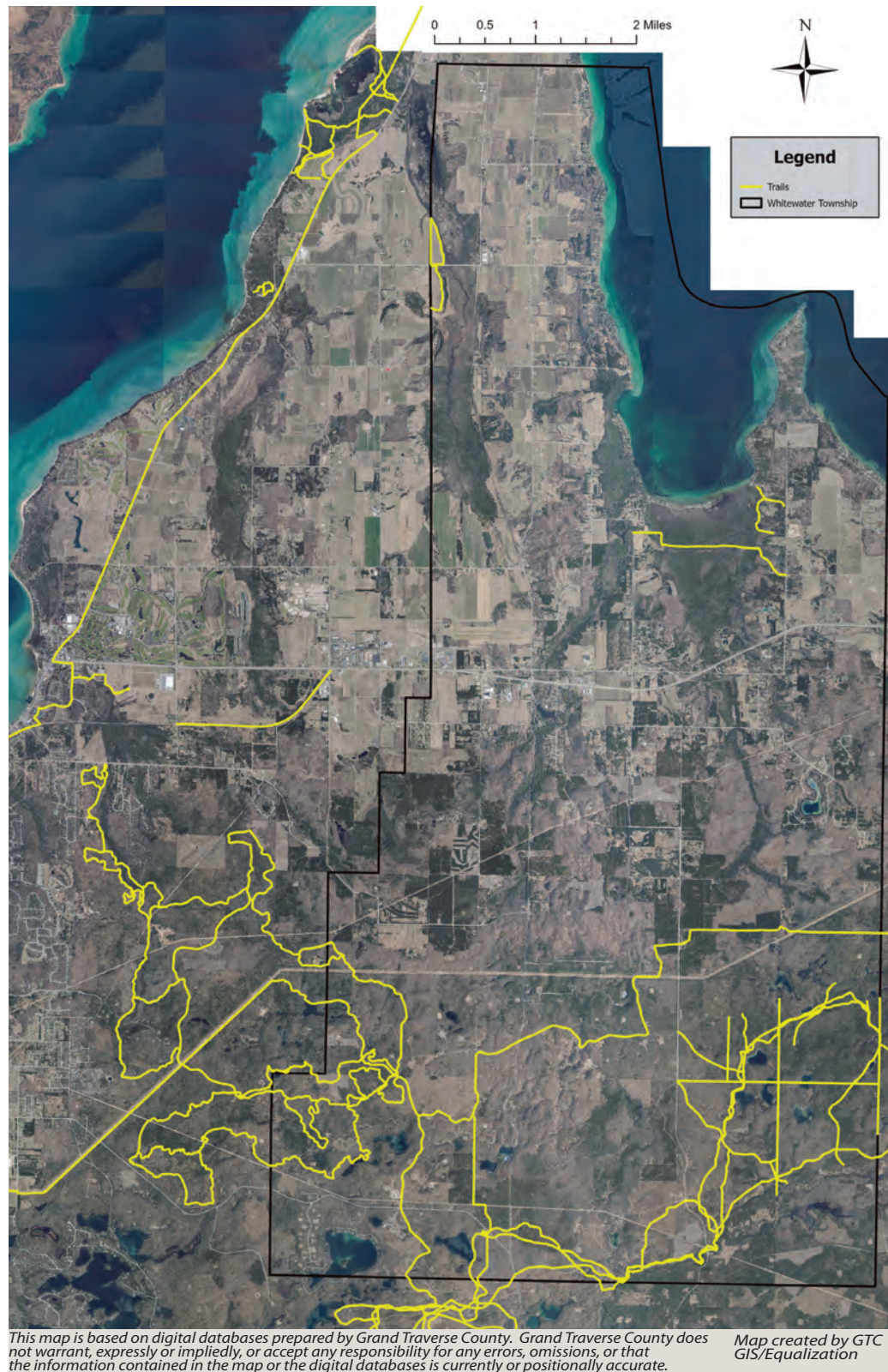
Williamsburg Road. TART has many active trail development projects in and around the region, as described at: <https://traversetrails.org/>.

### Bike Route

Just to the west of Whitewater Township is U.S. Bicycle Route 35. U.S. Bicycle Route 35 is a 500-mile route that runs from Indiana through Michigan to Sault Ste. Marie, Canada, generally follows the Lake Michigan shoreline and through the eastern Upper Peninsula.



Map 8  
Area Trails





## Access Management

As noted, the jurisdiction over public road maintenance and building improvements is the responsibility of MDOT and the GTCRC. However, the relationship between road-related issues and local planning and zoning is important. While, work in the actual right-of-way falls under the jurisdiction of MDOT or the GTCRC, Whitewater Township regulates adjacent land uses and has associated development requirements through zoning. Ideally, there is coordination between driveway permitting and the site plan review at the township level to facilitate proper access management.

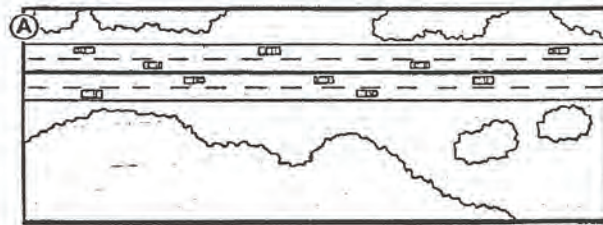
Roads have dual functions. They provide access to adjacent property and they provide a means to get from one place to another. These are conflicting purposes. An interstate highway efficiently moves large volumes of traffic at high speeds, but access

is limited to every mile or more. A local road in a subdivision provides great access to each house but with low speeds and traffic volumes.

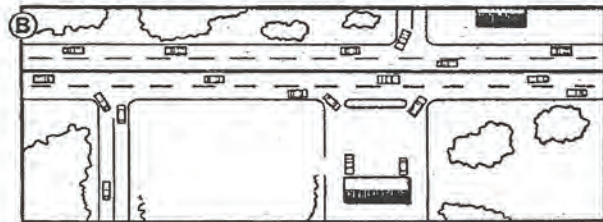
Each new drive is a potential conflict between moving traffic and left or right turning movements. Often, as development occurs in rural areas, major and minor arterial roads experience reduced capacity and safety as each new driveway introduces a new conflict point where traffic flow is potentially impeded by turning movements. Access management is the effort to carefully manage where access points (driveways) are placed to enhance safety and preserve the capacity of the roadway to move traffic. Access management tools include techniques such as limiting driveways, shared driveways, access roads, restricted turning movements, deceleration lanes, medians, passing lanes or flares, left turn lanes, etc.



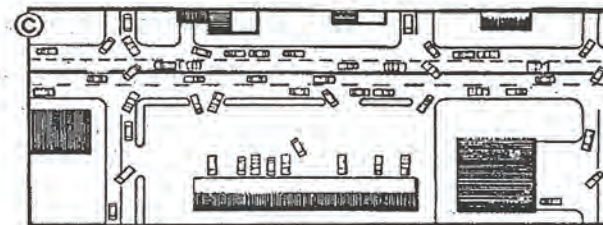
**Cumulative Impact of Increased Roadside Development ...**



**What happens when unrestricted development takes place ...**



**over time ...**



Source: Center for Transportation Research and Education, Iowa State University, *Iowa Access Management Guidebook*, October 2000, p. 19.

Source: *Reducing Traffic Congestion and Improving Traffic Safety in Michigan Communities: The Access Management Guidebook*, October, 2001 Prepared by the Planning and Zoning Center, Inc. under contract to MDOT.

### Complete Streets

In past decades, streets have been built primarily for vehicles. Efficient and safe movement of cars and trucks has been the primary focus, and when congestion and safety issues arise, the solution was often to add travel lanes. Pedestrian and bike travel in the public right-of-way was rarely an important consideration when roadways were built or upgraded. For the last 20 years or so, however, the term "complete streets" emerged (along with related terms such as "context sensitive solutions," and "green streets") to emphasize that the public right-of-way

should try to blend the needs of vehicular travel with those of bikes and pedestrians, and design improvements accordingly.

This issue goes far beyond the recreational aspects of walking or biking, as an important underpinning for complete streets relates to health issues. Years ago, studies surfaced about the significant connection between public health, safety, and transportation. In the auto-dependent environment, streets are designed for vehicular travel and people seldom walk or ride bikes even for short trips. At the same time, obesity is one of the fastest-growing health issues in the US, along



with diabetes (both of which can be delayed or prevented by being more active). In many places, opportunities to be physically active have been engineered out of daily life with a focus on near-total reliance on private vehicles. If the public right-of-way was designed to also accommodate non-motorized transportation, it is likely that more would walk and ride bikes for both recreation and health benefits. Better design to blend vehicular and non-motorized transportation also leads to fewer crashes between vehicles, pedestrians, and bikes.

Complete streets issues often receive the most attention in urbanized environments where population density is higher, trip origins and destinations are short and walking or biking is a viable choice. However, in more rural areas, there are multiple opportunities to consider complete street designs, especially in terms of paved shoulders, pedestrian crossing markers, bike lanes near public lands, connections to schools, shared-use paths, and paved shoulders in key locations.

Like access management, planning for complete streets involves a partnership with MDOT and the GTCRC. The Michigan Public Act 134 of 2010 amended the Michigan Planning Enabling Act to expand the definition of “street” to include all legal users and expands elements that may be included in a master plan to include all forms of transportation and their interconnectivity. It also specifies that transportation improvements should be appropriate to their context and implemented in cooperation with the appropriate road agency.



*Images of paved shoulders and pedestrian markings in rural areas.*

### Road Plan

In 2004, Whitewater Township prepared a “road plan” which is available on the Whitewater Township website. While this document is nearly 20 years old, it speaks to several previously mentioned issues and is still relevant today. Some particularly relevant topics include:

- **Promote Context-Sensitive Design (CSD):** CSD promotes an interdisciplinary approach to the design of road or transportation and attention to the physical setting, while maintaining safety and mobility.
- **Design Principles for Township Roads:** These principles include drainage, width and scale, grading, shoulders, alignment and vegetation.
- **Roads with Scenic and Historical Significance:** Certain roads in the Township have exceptional character, beauty, and historical significance and the Township should make special efforts to insure preservation in their current state.
- **Natural Beauty Roads:** A petition may be submitted to the Grand Traverse County Road Commission to designate certain roads as Natural Beauty Roads.
- **M-72 Corridor Study/Access Management and Boulevard:** References were made to the M-72 Access Management Plan completed in 2001. The scope of this study extended from Acme to Grayling.
- **Non-motorized Travel:** The need for well-planned pedestrian paths and bikeways can encourage non-motorized travel, is identified.
- **Funding Township Road Projects:** This includes funding from the Township general fund; establishment of special assessment districts, and levying a voted road millage; and finally, seeking grants for special projects.

## Public Transportation

The Bay Area Transportation Authority (BATA) provides over half a million rides to residents and visitors of Leelanau and Grand Traverse counties, including Whitewater Township and the city of Traverse City. BATA offers public transportation services to both counties from a voter-approved multi-year millage.

BATA provides on-line bus schedules and maps help regional riders find established loop pick-up locations. BATA also provides a fixed loop service for downtown Traverse City, and villages in Grand Traverse and Leelanau Counties. Riders outside of fixed bus loops can link to on-demand services to request a ride, similar to Lyft or UBER, and BATA's Village Link service helps rural area riders communicate with BATA Dispatch Services to schedule connections and pick-ups. Since 2017 BATA has grown to employ 120 people and has acquired new, greener buses, and renovated transfer stations.



**It should be noted that the Traverse City area recently reached the population threshold to become a Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO). Federal legislation requires that an MPO be designated for urbanized areas with more than 50,000 people to carry out a transportation planning process. An MPO produces long and short-term transportation plans and will receive additional federal funding. The exact boundaries of this new MPO have yet to be determined, but it may include Whitewater Township.**

### Public Facilities

Several public facilities support the local population. These facilities include local assets such as public buildings and utility systems. In late 2022, the Whitewater Township Board of Trustees hired C2AE to conduct a feasibility study of the township offices, fire station #3, and a potential water supply system. Some results of this study (identified as being in draft form and dated 8-1-22) are summarized below:

- **Township Offices:** The current township office building is about 2,400 square feet and it provides public meeting space, administrative offices, and storage. This building is located on a 1.5-acre site on the west side of Vinton Street and it includes a 20+/- parking lot with large recycling bins. This existing building has challenges regarding heating, cooling, and other physical conditions. It is also regarded as being too small for current space needs. The need for a new building, potentially about three times the size of the existing one (about 7,600 square feet), was identified.
- **Fire Station #3:** The Whitewater Township Fire Department Station #3 (located between the Post Office and the cemetery on Old M-72) is nearly 50 years old and is about 5000 sq. ft. in size. Many issues related to this building have been identified. A new building that would be close to 20,000 square feet is recommended to house necessary apparatus, equipment, and related spaces.
- **Combined Public Building (Offices/Fire/EMS):** For planning purposes, the concept of a combined township hall/fire station was identified as a possible option. Combining facilities is appealing because some spaces and site improvements can serve dual purposes, thereby reducing costs. A new fire/ems station (19,300 sq. ft.), together with a new administration building (7,600 sq. Ft), together with room for future additions, parking, stormwater detention, etc., creates the need for a site that is about 7.5 acres in size.
- **Water Supply:** Whitewater Township does not now have a public water system, which is important for both human consumption and fire protection



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and to support commercial or industrial operations. One option to offer public water is to purchase water from an existing system. This might include connecting to the Turtle Creek Casino & Hotel system through an agreement with the Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians. A second option is to build a system consisting of groundwater wells, water storage, and a distribution system. The C2AE feasibility study identified a potential water district that would include water lines along M-72 from Moore Road to Cook Road and along Elk Lake/Williamsburg from Cram Road south to Church Street.

- **Sewer Systems:** There are no public sewer systems in Whitewater Township, except for the system operated by the Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians for the Turtle Creek Casino & Hotel system.

Other public facilities and utility systems that serve Whitewater Township include the following:

**Electric:** Consumers Power and Cherryland Electric Cooperative provide electric services in Whitewater Township

**Natural Gas:** DTE Energy provides natural gas in Whitewater Township.

**Library:** The Elk Rapids District Library is located in Elk Rapids, near Grand Traverse Bay. The Traverse Area District Library is the major library system in the area, with the Main Library located at 610 Woodmere Ave., in Traverse City. Other libraries closer to Whitewater Township that are part of the Traverse Area District Library system include, the East Bay Branch Library at 1989 Three Mile Rd. and the Fife Lake Public Library at 77 Lakecrest Ln.

**Schools:** The Elk Rapids School District includes most of Whitewater Township. Mill Creek Elementary School is located at 9039 Old M 72 Williamsburg, and it serves 227 children (K-5). Other schools in the Elk Rapids School district include Cherryland Middle School, Sunrise Academy, Lakeland Elementary, and Elk Rapids High School. Additionally, Woodland School located at 7224 Supply Road, Traverse City, was one of the first charter schools in Michigan and it includes a K-8 educational program.

## 4

# IMPORTANT TRENDS

## Trends

Building on the previous description of Whitewater Township in the past and present, it is logical to briefly consider existing trends now at work shaping the future. Indeed, trends can and do change, but several trends identified below are quite evident. They are having an impact on Whitewater Township today and are likely to continue to affect how Whitewater Township changes in the future.

## Population and Housing Projections

Projecting the population of a smaller community is difficult because even limited development activity can be far more consequential. For example, a fifty-lot subdivision (housing about 150 people at build-out) boosts the population of a community with just 1,500 people by about 10%. That same project in a larger community of 15,000 only results in a population increase of 1%. Of course, many other factors contribute to local population growth or decline (birth rates, mortality rates, net migration), but physical development trends can be significant and less predictable in a small jurisdiction.

One way to deal with the difficulty of projecting the population of a small jurisdiction is to use the constant share method of population projection. In 2020, the population of Whitewater Township was reported to be 2,688, and the population of Grand Traverse County was 95,238. Whitewater Township, therefore,

**It's Difficult to Make Predictions,  
Especially About the Future**

- Niels Bohr

represented 2.82% of Grand Traverse County. The State of Michigan produced a report with population projections for each Michigan County in 2019. According to this report, Grand Traverse County will have 101,906 people by 2045. If Whitewater Township continues to represent 2.82 percent of Grand Traverse County, sharing proportionally in area growth, Whitewater Township will grow by nearly 190 people and will be approaching a population of 3,000 by 2045. Given the current average household size of 2.56, Whitewater Township will need about 75 more dwellings to house a growing population (apart from what may be required to replace units torn down or otherwise removed from the housing inventory).

Area	2020 Census	2045 Projected	Change
Grand Traverse County	95,238	101,906 <sup>(1)</sup>	6,668
Whitewater Township	2,688	2,876	188
Whitewater Township as a % of Grand Traverse County	2.82%	2.82%	---

<sup>(1)</sup> *Michigan Population Projections by County Through 2045, September 2019. State of Michigan Department of Technology, Management and Budget, Bureau of Labor Market Information and Strategic Initiatives, Page 137.*



## Aging Population

The trend toward an aging population is well known. According to the US Census, the share of the population that is 65 and older increased from 13.1% in 2010 to 16.8% in 2021. Further, by 2060, nearly one in four Americans will be 65 years and older. Interestingly, almost one in four residents of Whitewater Township is 65 years old or older **today** (see previous chapter). It is therefore likely that older residents will continue to represent a larger and larger segment of Whitewater Township's population in the future.

Given such dramatic national trends, it is perhaps unsurprising that the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) has been actively promoting and advocating policies to create livable communities for residents of all ages. AARP's Livable Communities Principles include encouraging the creation of mixed-use livable communities, with a range of housing and transportation options that meet the needs of people of all ages, ability levels, and backgrounds. They should also contain community features, such as parks, that meet the needs of all community members.



## Remote Working

COVID-19 placed many workers into remote working arrangements. Many believe that remote work and hybrid work arrangements (work from home and an office) are here to stay. This is a significant societal change impacting both the workplace and some communities. If some workers no longer need to live close to a workplace, they can live anywhere they desire. This is especially true for "knowledge workers" in industries such as technology, finance, media, etc., whose primary needs are a computer, phone, and internet connection. The term "zoom towns" was coined to identify vacation areas that grew with an influx of workers. While there is only anecdotal evidence of this trend in Whitewater Township, it is evident nationally, in Michigan, and specifically in the Traverse City region (see for example: *The Rise of Remote Work in Rural America - A Report by The Center on Rural Innovation and Rural Innovation Strategies, Inc., October 2021*).



## APA Trend Report

In 2022 and 2023, the American Planning Association (APA) and Lincoln Institute of Land Policy began publishing reports that identify trends to recognize while planning for the future of communities and regions. Planners can use the identified trends listed

as input to inform future decision-making. A selected number of trends identified in 2022 and 2023 include the following:

- **Support for a growing green economy:** The climate change provisions in the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), totaling \$369 billion, constitute the single largest investment in climate mitigation and adaptation in U.S. history. The IRA, promises \$60 billion in incentives for wind and solar power generation.
- **Electric mobility:** Electric transportation is increasing and will continue to grow. Five states have banned congestion-engine cars by 2035, and the U.S. Department of Energy announced a new \$5 billion program to fund the expansion of the electric vehicle charging network over the next five years. These considerations point to a future in which charging stations are common and traditional gas stations become rare. A pilot project in Detroit is also underway to create a road with a wireless charging system that allows vehicles to charge while driving or idling.
- **U.S. manufacturing resurgence:** The U.S. is experiencing a boom in manufacturing fueled by a strong dollar, a desire by many companies to simplify logistics and on-shore their production, the availability of skilled workers and raw materials, and





crucially, a series of enticing legislative actions from the federal government. This creates local economic development opportunities.

- **Increasing entrepreneurship:** 2021 saw a record 5.4 million business applications, with another record likely in 2022. The largest jumps in business formation were in the field of e-commerce and online retail, with logistics, warehousing, transportation, and service businesses also seeing significant increases compared with previous years.
- **Retail Trends:** The rise of e-commerce, and the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, have led to a large-scale restructuring of how people shop. For example, in the 1980s, there were about 2,500 shopping malls in the U.S. Today, only about 700 malls remain.



- **Zoning Reform and Housing:** States and cities are rethinking zoning to make housing more affordable and accessible. Single-family housing is the dominant residential land use in the U.S., mainly due to local zoning codes and maps that have remained unchanged for decades. These regulations keep densities low but also limit overall supply, increasing housing costs in both suburbs and central cities. California and Oregon have banned single-family-only zoning at the state level, while some cities have revised their zoning codes to permit “missing middle” housing types in single-family districts. Missing middle housing is generally building types, such as duplexes, fourplexes, cottage courts, and courtyard buildings that help expand housing options.

