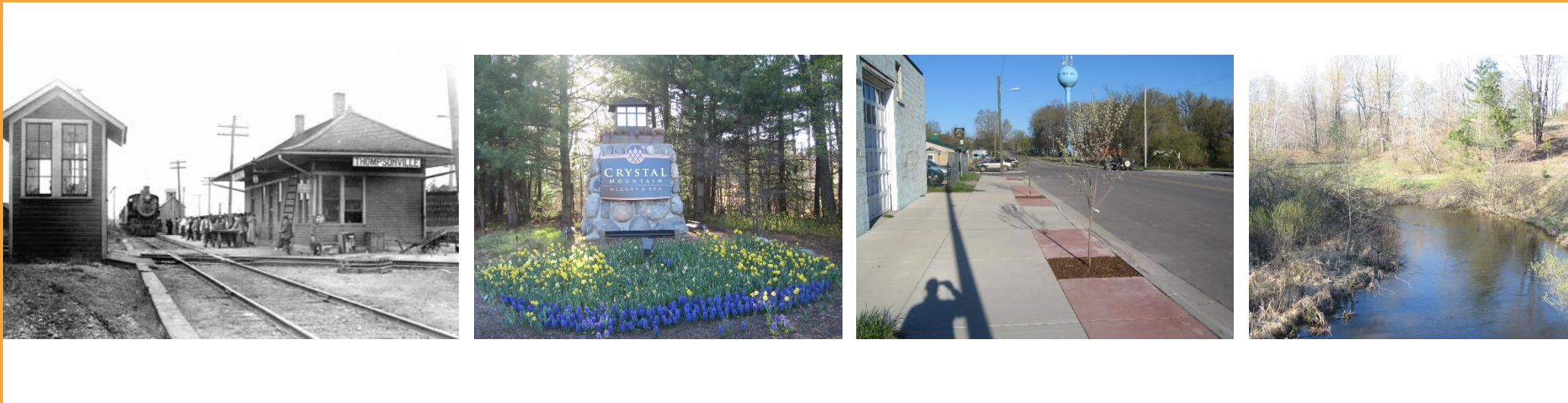


# Weldon Township

## Master Plan

### 2020



“Good fortune is what happens when  
opportunity meets with planning.”

- Thomas Edison

## Acknowledgments

### Weldon Township Master Plan Ad Hoc Steering Committee

Charles Kraus, *Chairperson*  
Eugene (Geno) Allen  
Kirk Davidson  
Scott Kladder  
Sue Meredith

### Weldon Township Planning Commission

Charles Kraus, *Chairperson*  
Robert Aldrich  
Chris Bobek  
Carrie Aldrich  
Sue Meredith  
Becky Sharp  
Scott Williams

### Weldon Township Board of Trustees

Ron Hitesman, *Township Supervisor*  
Fran Griffin, *Clerk*  
Sally Bobek, *Treasurer*  
Sue Meredith, *Trustee*  
Gary Stevens, *Trustee*

This Plan was adopted by the:

Weldon Township Planning Commission on January 6, 2020  
Weldon Township Board on January 14, 2020

(resolution on the following page)

Prepared By:



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Township of Weldon  
County of Benzie, Michigan  
Weldon Township Board Resolution No. 01062020

TOWNSHIP BOARD RESOLUTION TO AMEND MASTER PLAN

WHEREAS, the Michigan Planning Enabling Act (MPEA) authorizes the Planning Commission to prepare a Master Plan for the use, development, and preservation of all lands in the Township; and

WHEREAS, the Planning Commission prepared a proposed updated Master Plan and submitted the plan to the Township Board for review and comment; and

WHEREAS, the Weldon Township Board received and reviewed the updated Master Plan prepared by the Planning Commission and authorized the distribution of the Master Plan to the Notice Group entities as identified in the MPEA; and

WHEREAS, the Planning Commission held a public hearing on January 6, 2020 to consider public comment on the proposed updated Master Plan; and

WHEREAS, the Planning Commission, based on a review of the existing land uses in the Township, a review of the existing Master Plan provisions and maps, input received by the Township Board, public, and Notice Groups, as well as the public hearing, finds that the proposed updated Master Plan is desirable and proper furthers the use, preservation, and development goals and strategies of the Township;

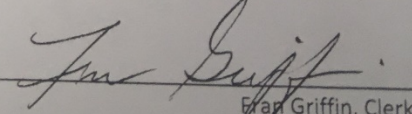
WHEREAS, the Planning Commission recommends that the Township Board adopt the amended Master Plan;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Weldon Township Board hereby adopts the updated 2020 Master Plan, including all of the chapters, figures, maps, and tables contained therein.

Motion to APPROVE resolution made by RH, seconded by FG:

AYE: 5  
NAY: 0  
ABSENT: —

Resolution declared adopted.

  
Fran Griffin, Clerk  
Weldon Township

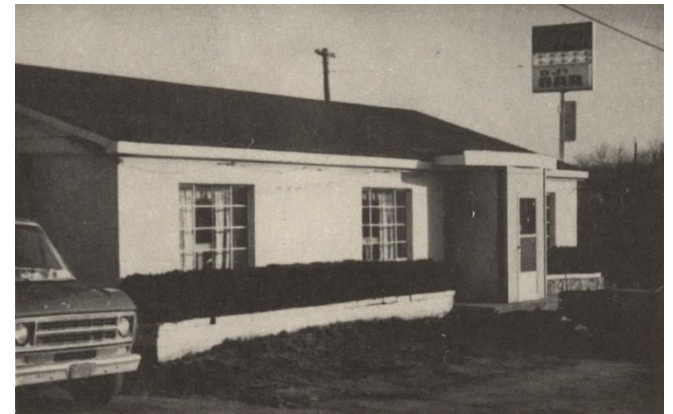
## Previous Master Plans

Weldon Township's 2005 *Weldon Township Land Use/Master Plan* and 2020 *Benzie County Comprehensive Plan* were used to develop the *Greater Thompsonville Area Master Plan - 2012*. This 2012 effort was a joint project between Weldon Township, Colfax Township, and the Village of Thompsonville. Land Information Access Association assisted with the development and ratification of this Master Plan. The Joint Planning Commission oversaw the implementation of the 2012 Master Plan and the joint zoning ordinance in 2015.

In October 2018, Wade Trim Associates and Statecraft, LLC were hired by Weldon Township to update the joint master plan for only Weldon Township. The draft plan was prepared, reviewed by the Weldon Township Planning Commission and recommended for adoption at its January 6, 2020 meeting, and formally adopted by the Board of Trustees on January 14, 2020.

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Street Fair July 4th 1899

## Introduction

This master plan provides a framework for the development of Weldon Township through a series of objectives, strategies, and action policies. The master plan is intended to take a long-range view of the community and guide development for the next 10 to 20 years while providing flexibility to respond to changing conditions, innovations, and new information.

The master plan also establishes the vision and expectations for the future development of Weldon Township. It serves as the basis for local land use regulations and capital improvements. The master plan also establishes expectations and responsibilities for its administration and follow-through. Finally, the master plan is comprehensive, providing plans and action strategies for new development and recreation, enhancing the community's sense of place, guiding land use decisions, and providing recommendations to support Thompsonville as the commercial center of the Township.

The Weldon Township Master Plan has been adopted under the Michigan Planning Enabling Act of 2008, as amended (P.A. 33 of 2008, M.C.L. 125.3801 et seq.), which states that the planning commission shall, "make and approve a master plan as a guide for development within the planning jurisdiction."

The Weldon Township Master Plan has been prepared under the direction of and with direct participation from the Master Plan Steering Committee and the Weldon Township Planning Commission. The master plan and planning process were established by the Planning Commission under the following directives.

*Build on the Past.* The *Greater Thompsonville Area Master Plan -2012* and the *2020 Benzie County Comprehensive Plan* are thorough and comprehensive documents, describing existing socio-economic trends and goals for existing land use, public utility infrastructure, recreation and natural resource preservation. While these documents are still relevant, Weldon Township continues to deal with a number of new challenges and opportunities. In addition, the community (like other communities across the state) is working to figure out its role in Michigan's transition from the Old Economy based on manufacturing and industry to the New Economy based on information technology and services.

A plan is an adopted statement of policy, in the form of text, maps, and graphics, used to guide public and private actions that affect the future.

A plan provides decision-makers with the information they need to make informed decisions affecting long-range social, economic, and physical growth of a community.

- American Planning Association (APA)

Weldon Township Planning Commission (WTPC) – Weldon Township Planning Commission was reestablished by the Weldon Township Board of Trustees via resolution on February 13, 2018 with an effective date of withdrawal from the Joint Planning Commission on March 13, 2018. The Planning Commission held its organizational meeting on February 26, 2018, and it held its first official meeting on May 7, 2018.

**Solicit Public Input.** On January 23, 2019, the Planning Commission hosted a public workshop where attendees were asked about how they felt about their community, what activities would residents like to see on the vast amount of state lands, what zoning issues are priorities, what recreational activities do residents enjoy, and what type of recreational improvements would residents like to see in the Township. This input was collected on boards and shared with the attendees at the end of the meeting. The five main take-aways from the public workshop were:

- 1) protect the area's natural beauty and the Betsie River;
- 2) preserve the community's rural character;
- 3) leverage the outdoors for recreational opportunities and community enjoyment;
- 4) develop and implement reasonable blight controls; and
- 5) permit and encourage the development of a variety of housing options including workforce housing.

These comments and ideas about how the residents feel about their community, appreciate, and desire to preserve have been incorporated throughout the plan.

**Consider the Region.** Though Weldon Township has left the Joint Planning Commission with Colfax Township and the Village of Thompsonville, this does not eliminate the need for cooperation with its neighbors on land use, planning and development issues. Efforts are ongoing to ensure that planning and development activities taking place in Weldon Township do not harmfully impact its neighbors. The Public Workshop held on January 23, 2019 was open to all. In addition, all adjoining communities received a notification letter in November 2018 from the Township Clerk, Carrie Aldrich, indicating the intention of Weldon Township to update its Master Plan and encourage these neighboring municipalities to offer their input into the plan's development. Prior to the Plan's adoption, the draft plan will be distribution to all neighboring communities for their input.

**Implement New Ideas.** This plan acknowledges that significant changes continue to occur in Weldon Township. As the region continues to evolve, Weldon Township must be flexible and respond to changing conditions, innovations and new information. The 2012 Master Plan identified Smart Growth and New Economy concepts that were more appropriate for urban or suburban areas. This plan introduces Smart Growth concepts and community development concepts that are specifically



January 23rd - Public Workshop - Meeting attendees were asked to describe what they found special in the Township and what keeps them in the community, what they do and what they would like to do on the abundant public lands and detail their land use concerns and/or issues.

designed for rural communities. Following are the guiding principles for growth and development that have been used to inform this 2019 master plan:

Essential Smart Growth Fixes for Rural Planning, Zoning and Development Codes

According to a 2012 study led by Kevin Nelson for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, these steps should be considered that utilize Smart Growth concepts to support reasonable development of rural communities:

1. Determine areas for growth and preservation
2. Reform rural planned unit development regulations
3. Use wastewater infrastructure practices that meet development goals
4. Right-size rural roads
5. Encourage appropriate densities on the periphery
6. Use cluster development to transition from town to countryside
7. Create annexation policies and development standards to preserve rural character
8. Protect agricultural and sensitive natural areas
9. Plan and encourage rural commercial development

According to *This is Smart Growth*, a publication from the Smart Growth Network, growth is smart *when it gives us great communities, with more choices and personal freedom, good return on public investment, greater opportunity across the community, a thriving natural environment, and a legacy we can be proud to leave our children.*

Center for Rural Affairs

The Center identifies building blocks rural communities can leverage to direct their own recovery:

- 1) Community infrastructure remains intact – existing schools, churches, local governments, housing and water/sanitary systems may be leveraged
- 2) Rural areas full of entrepreneurs – rural areas have twice as many sole proprietorships compared to urban counties and 70% of net job growth in these counties have been in non-farm self-employment

Solicit Public Opinion - Prior to the development of the 2012 Joint Master Plan, the Joint Planning Commission distributed questionnaires to area residents at the June 2011 Summerfest and August Street Fair. Among other things, the questionnaire asked citizens what they liked and didn't like about the community, what improvements are needed and their vision for the community. The common thread for most responses were: more things for kids to do; more jobs; more affordable housing; and more retail.

- 3) Farms generate commerce – a single family farm contributes \$720,000 to the local economy, or the equivalent of eight \$40,000 “town jobs” and seven farms support one town business

The Center recommends that all communities can build on these assets by:

- a) Supporting the entrepreneurial spirit
- b) Reinvigorating the agricultural sector by increasing the farm share of the food dollar by supporting cost reductions and increasing the level of on-site processing and marketing share of farmers goods

#### Rural Philanthropy in Michigan Report – Michigan Rural Council, January 2013

This report’s key concept is to develop philanthropic assets in rural Michigan that are designed to create and support local community development financial institutions designed to address local issues. Significant wealth transfer, including in rural America, is underway in the nation over the next ½ century, and this transfer is an opportune time to set up entities to provide funding and expertise for local community investment.

Rural development philanthropy focuses its outcomes on four areas of rural communities:

- 1) People – improving skills, confidence, and competencies of rural residents, especially those of low-income or marginalized
- 2) Culture – advancing the local culture and encouraging active participation of all
- 3) Place – maintaining and building an awareness of the value of place and the natural resources necessary to retain an areas vitality, health, and attractiveness
- 4) Economy – increasing prosperity within the local economy

#### HomeTown Competitiveness (HTC)

A joint program of the Nebraska Community Foundation, Heartland Center for Leadership Development and the RUPRI Center for Rural Entrepreneurship. This community development strategy has four pillars:

#### Putting Smart Growth to Work in Rural Communities – ICMA & Smart Growth Network

- 1) **Support the rural landscape** by creating an economic climate that enhances the viability of working lands and conserves natural lands
- 2) **Help existing places thrive** by taking care of assets and investments such as downtowns, Main Streets, existing infrastructure, and places that the community values
- 3) **Create great places** by building vibrant, enduring neighborhoods and communities that people, especially young people, don’t want to leave

- 1) Developing local leadership
- 2) Increasing community philanthropy
- 3) Energizing entrepreneurs, and
- 4) Engaging youth

Barry, MI Community Foundation utilized the HomeTown Competitiveness (HTC) model to develop a seven necessary community elements:

- 1) Access to basic needs
- 2) Arts and culture
- 3) Health and wellness
- 4) Neighborhoods and communities
- 5) Education
- 6) Environment
- 7) Economy

The community foundation established a fund with its sole purpose to foster an economy that is diverse, vital and innovative, that grows strong businesses and business districts and creates adequate jobs and income for residents. The leadership saw that they were not funding enough economic development projects so they devoted three years of discretionary funding to that purpose and have since established a revolving loan fund to invest in local projects that ensure a vibrant and diversified economy.

Common themes are found throughout many of these resources listed above. Through planning, teamwork, partnership, and the understanding that community development takes time and effort, rural communities have the opportunity to create real and meaningful change.

## Community Profile

### Regional Setting

Weldon Township is located in Northwest Lower Michigan, in the southeastern portion of Benzie County (please see figure 3.1). The area is noted for its vast, rolling natural areas and the beautiful Betsie River. The Village of Thompsonville, a small, charming community with a few historical storefronts remaining, is located in the southeastern corner of Weldon Township. The Village straddles the border between Weldon Township and Colfax Township, to the east.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Weldon Township measures 36.6 square miles while the portion of the Village of Thompsonville within Weldon Township measures approximately 0.5 square miles. The Township is bordered by Benzonia and Homestead Townships to the north, Colfax Township to the east, Springdale Township (Manistee County) to the south, and Joyfield Township to the west. From the least inhabited northwestern most corner of the Township, the Village of Beulah (the County Seat) is located about three miles by air to the northwest. Several regional destinations are located within an hour’s drive including: Frankfort (19 miles); Cadillac (31 miles); Traverse City (29 miles); Manistee (39 miles); and the Sleeping Bear Dunes Lakeshore (30 miles), voted *One of the 21 Top Beaches on Earth* by *National Geographic* in 2017. The Township is located within just a few hours drive of several large cities, including: Grand Rapids (129 miles); Lansing (168 miles); Detroit (241 miles); and Chicago (298 miles).

One of the most prominent attractions in the community is Crystal Mountain Resort & Spa. Among a number of prestigious recognitions, Crystal Mountain was named one of the “Top 12 Best Family Ski Resorts in U.S. and Canada” by *Conde Nast Traveler* in 2017. The 1,125 acre resort plays host to a number of year-round activities and features a walkable and compact village area, as well as four distinctive homesite communities for resort-style living. Within the campus is the Michigan Legacy Art Park. Located on a wooded 30-acre preserve, the park features 1.7 miles of hiking trails over 40 sculptures, poetry stones and an outdoor amphitheatre for concerts. With 600 employees in the winter (500 in the summer) Crystal Mountain Resort & Spa is Benzie County’s largest employer.

Another prominent feature of the area is the Village of Thompsonville. The Village is the focal point of commerce and civic activity in the community, home to a small number of commercial and

Prominent Attractions - Crystal Mountain - Summer activities include Michigan’s only alpine slide, the Crystal Coaster, a one-acre outdoor aquatic Park at Water’s Edge, mountain biking, summer camps and schools and two well-acclaimed golf courses. In the winter, visitors can choose from 48 downhill slopes, explore over 40 kilometers of groomed terrain. The facility plays host to a variety of conferences and special events. Lodging options include hotel rooms and suites, mountain-top condominiums and private homes. The award-winning facility is a four-season resort that offers its guests a wide-range of facilities and activities.



service businesses. The Village has a rich history, particularly in lumbering and the railroad industry. Over the past dozen years, the Village has made substantial improvements to the downtown area, including pedestrian walkways, streetscaping, and new public library. As a result, Thompsonville's downtown is a walkable and attractive place to be, providing a sense-of-place for the entire community.

Figure 3.1 Weldon Township - Regional Context



## History of the Weldon Township and the Village of Thompsonville

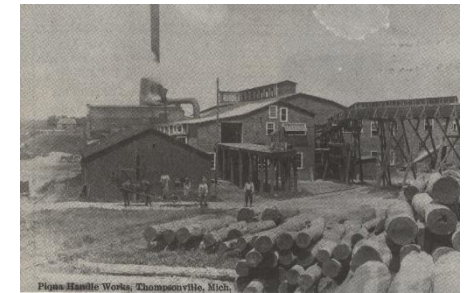
Like most of northern Michigan, the history of Weldon Township is rooted in the lumber industry. On November 13, 1889, Sumner S. Thompson (of the Thompson Lumber Company) gave a deed to the Frankfort & South Eastern Railroad Company for land immediately to the west of the Pere Marquette and Ann Arbor railroads. This area, and other land owned by Thompson in the southeast corner of Weldon Township, was platted on June 23, 1890, and was combined with the Henry Ward Beecher land directly to the east in Colfax Township and platted by his heirs on June 30, 1890. This one square mile became Thompsonville and incorporated as a village in 1892. In those early years, the Village consisted of a few stores, a jail, a hotel, a large hall and a pound to care for stray cattle and dogs.

The two rail lines that converged in Thompsonville brought new commerce and people to the region. The Pere Marquette Railroad was primarily used to haul freight between Chicago and Petoskey while the Ann Arbor Railroad was primarily used to haul freight between Toledo, Copemish and Frankfort. In the early 1900s, the Ann Arbor Railroad operated what was known as the “ping-pong” passenger train, which carried wealthy vacationers between Thompsonville and Frankfort every two hours during the busy summer months. The two train depots eventually closed in 1950 and 1969. Both rail lines have been subsequently removed, and the Ann Arbor Railroad’s former rail bed has been converted into the Betsie Valley Trail, a popular 22-mile route for cyclists, pedestrians, and, in select portions, snowmobilers.

## History of Crystal Mountain

In the early 1950s, the Benzonia High School principal, Ward Creech, set out to find the best location for a ski area. After searching Benzie County and the surrounding areas, he selected a range of hills located in Weldon Township, just west of the Village of Thompsonville - the Buck Hills Range. Through the efforts of Mr. Creech, a dedicated group of local citizens and Weldon Township, the Buck Hills Ski Area was established in 1956. It featured two tow ropes and a small warming hut. The township applied for the state land for use as a public ski facility because it could not be acquired by individuals or businesses.

Greater Thompsonville Area - The Piqua Handle Company made all sizes and kinds of hardwood handles, as well as jointed wood poles for pup-tents in WWI. At its peak, the company employed over 100 men and was Thompsonville’s largest employer. The company closed and moved to Marquette in 1916.



Crystal Mountain - Crystal Mountain in the early 1950s.



In 1960, Toledo Ohio resident Ed Abbey and a group of investors purchased the ski area and renamed it Crystal Mountain. The new ownership group added the region’s first double chairlift, additional rope-tows, a lodge, and large outdoor heated pool.

In 1966, Crystal Mountain was transferred to a group of investors headed by local businessman George Petritz. In 1981, the ownership of the resort was unified by George Petritz after he bought out the remaining partner, Robert Meyer. Prior to Mr. Petritz’s retirement, his daughter, Chris, and her husband, Jim MacInnes, become involved in the management of the resort in 1985 and remain involved today.

## Socio-Economic Characteristics

The following section discusses the population, housing and economic characteristics, and trends for Weldon Township. For the purpose of this plan, we have used figures provided by the US Census Bureau from 1990, 2000, and 2010. Due to the small population size of the Township, the data from the American Community Survey, which is annually updated, was not incorporated into this 2019 update; the sample sizes and correlating estimates utilized in the American Community Survey leads to data with high volatility and large margins of error for less populated communities. In certain instances, the most recent American Community Survey information from 2017 was utilized. Please note, due to their physical and political relationship, Village statistics are included in each of the Township’s statistics.

### Population Trends

There were 542 people living in Weldon Township in 2010 with 441 people living in the Village of Thompsonville. For the Village, this is about a 3.5% decrease over the population recorded in 2000. This Village population number includes both halves of the Village (50% of the land resides in Weldon Township and 50% resides in Colfax Township). In 2010, the population of the Villager residing in Weldon Township was 287 persons with 154 residents living in the Colfax portion of the Village.

Between 2000 and 2010 the population in Weldon Township increased by 2.3%. However, growth over this most recent ten-year period was at much slower rates than between 1990 and 2000. Table 3.1 presents the population trends from 1990 to 2010 for Weldon Township, Thompsonville, Colfax Township, and Benzie County.

**Table 3.1 Population Trends 1990 - 2010**

Community	1990	2000	Percent Change 1990 - 2000	2010	Percent Change 2000 - 2010
Weldon (Township)	448	530	18.3%	542	2.3%
Thompsonville (Village)	416	457	9.9%	441	-3.5%
Colfax (Township)	415	585	41.0%	657	12.3%
Benzie County	12,200	15,998	31.1%	17,525	9.5%
Source: US Census Bureau					

### Population Projections

Recent trends suggest that a modest decrease in the overall population in the Village can be expected over the next two decades. Conversely, we can expect the population of Weldon Township and its neighbors to increase. Although there is no way to predict the total population growth with certainty, we can use projection methods to obtain useful estimates. Table 3.2 presents the population projections for the Village, Townships and County for the next 20 years. The population projection was based on the rate of change from 2000 to 2010.

**Table 3.2 Population Projections 2010 - 2040**

Community	Forecasted Population				
	2000	2010	2020	2030	2040
Weldon (Township)	530	542	554	566	578
Thompsonville (Village)	457	441	426	411	397
Colfax (Township)	585	657	729	809	898
Benzie County	15,998	17,525	19,050	20,707	22,508
Source: US Census, Wade Trim					

Providing population projections in Michigan has been difficult over the last 40 years due to several macro-economic forces that has been impacting the State’s economy and its residents, including: major

shifts in the auto industry; reduction in the manufacturing and construction sectors; and substantial National demographic shifts from the American Midwest to the South and Southwest. Most traditional demographic models illustrated continued growth across most of the United States while the last 20 years have actually shown stagnation and population decline for parts of the country including much of rural Michigan. Illustrative of these changes, the Michigan Department of Transportation and U of M Institute for Research on Labor, Employment, and the Economy (IRLEE) is now projecting that Benzie County will see modest growth --from 17,438 residents in 2020 to 17,711 residents in 2035 – followed by a period of modest decline to 17,556 residents by 2045. This dataset is not broken down below the county level however. There are several exterior factors including ongoing globalization, impacts of technology, spread of broadband, impacts of climate change, and changes to U.S. immigration policy that cannot be factored into these projections. In the population projections model illustrated in Table 3.2, 24 additional residents are expected to be living in the Township by 2040 while extrapolating the M-DOT/UofM model to illustrate a 2045 population that would be similar in size to the present day.

### Racial Make-Up

In 2000 and again in 2010, citizens identified as “white” made up over 96% of the population within the Village and Weldon Township. The number of citizens defined by a race other than “white” is quite small. The largest of these populations is the “American Indian and Alaska Native” population, still not quite 2.5% of the population. Table 3.3 presents the racial make-up of the Village and Townships for 2010.

**Table 3.3 Racial Make-Up 2010**

Race	Thompsonville (Village)		Weldon Township	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
White	418	94.8%	521	96.1%
Black or African American	1	0.23%	1	0.2%
American Indian and Alaska Native	11	2.5%	5	0.9%
Asian	1	0.2%	1	0.2%
Hispanic/Latino	6	1.4%	10	1.9%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Some other race	1	0.2%	5	0.9%
Two or more races	9	2.0%	9	1.66%
Source: US Census				

### Age Distribution

The age distribution of Weldon Township population can be an important factor in identifying social, economic and public service needs. There are several identifiable stages that individuals go through during the span of a lifetime. Using US Census Bureau statistics, we have characterized eight life-stages, including: (1) Preschool; (2) Elementary; (3) Secondary; (4) College; (5) Young Family; (6) Established Family; (7) Mature Family; and (8) Retired.

As detailed in Table 3.4, the 2010 Census statistics demonstrate the largest population group is the *Established Family* group, ages 35 to 54 years old for Weldon Township and the Village (ranging between 28% and 29% of the population). This population group was the largest in 2000 as well. Statistics for 2010 show that the smallest population group is the *College* group, ages 20 to 24. However, the *Young Family* group is between the third and fifth largest cohort in the community (on average over 11% of the population). The *College* and *Young Family* population groups are generally considered to make up the new and necessary creative-skilled work force (“creative-class”) identified by the Michigan State University Land Policy Institute. The *Retired* group is the second largest cohort in the Village and Weldon Township and the fourth largest in Colfax Township.

## Households & Composition

Information about the number and types of households can be useful in characterizing the social and economic forces at work in the community. Table 3.5 presents this data for Weldon Township and the Village as compiled from the 2000 and 2010 Census.

From 2000 to 2010, there was an increase in the total number of households in the Township and in the Village. Although not provided, we can assume (based on 1990 and 2000 Census statistics) that the total number of people living in traditional “married-couple family” households decreased. At the same time, number of “female head of household- no husband present” (including those with kids) increased between 2000 and 2010. If we take into account the number of “male householder, no wife present” households (statistics not shown), the socioeconomic changes suggested by the data for Weldon Township are consistent with reported national trends toward more single-parent and non-traditional families and more single-person households.

Statistics aggregated for this Plan also show that from 2000 to 2010, the size of the households and families decreased.

**Table 3.4 Age Distribution 2000 - 2010**

Stage of Life	Age Group	Thompsonville (Village)		Weldon (Township)	
		2000	2010	2000	2010
Preschool	Under 5 years	22	33	21	30
	Percent of Total	4.8%	7.5%	4.0%	7.4%
Elementary	5 to 14	83	51	72	58
	Percent of Total	18.2%	11.6%	13.6%	10.7%
Secondary	15 to 19	37	37	41	34
	Percent of Total	8.1%	8.4%	7.7%	7.7%
College	20 to 24	26	21	27	18
	Percent of Total	5.7%	7.1%	5.1%	5.8%
Young Family	25 to 34	61	57	67	57
	Percent of Total	13.3%	12.3%	12.6%	11.0%
Established Family	35 to 54	122	127	142	158
	Percent of Total	26.7%	28.8%	26.8%	29.2%
Mature Family	55 to 64	41	46	71	75
	Percent of Total	9.0%	10.4%	13.4%	13.8%
Retired	65+	65	69	89	112
	Percent of Total	14.2%	15.6%	16.8%	20.7%
<b>Totals</b>		457	441	530	542
<b>Median Age</b>		34.9	38.5	42.3	46.6
Source: US Census Bureau					

**Table 3.5 Household Trends and Composition 2000 - 2010**

	Thompsonville (Village)		Weldon (Township)	
	2000	2010	2000	2010
<b>Total Number of Households</b>	180	183	217	237
<b>Family Households (families)</b>	120	112	150	152
<b>Percent of family households</b>	66.7%	61.2%	69.1%	64.1%
<b>Married-Couple Family</b>	85	na	117	na
<b>Percent of married couple families</b>	47.2%	na	53.9%	na
<b>With children under 18 years</b>	39	na	55	na
<b>Percent of married couple families w/children under 18 years</b>	21.7%	na	25.3%	na
<b>Female Head of Households, No Husband</b>	25	30	23	26
<b>Percent of female heads of households</b>	13.9%	16.4%	10.6%	11.0%
<b>With children under 18 years</b>	16	16	16	14
<b>Percent of female head of household w/children under 18 years</b>	8.9%	8.7%	7.4%	5.9%
<b>Non-Family Households</b>	60	71	67	85
<b>Percent on non-family households</b>	33.3%	38.8%	30.9%	35.9%
<b>Householder living alone</b>	52	56	54	72
<b>Percent of householder living alone</b>	28.9%	30.6%	24.9%	30.4%
<b>Householder 65 years and older</b>	27	23	25	37
<b>Households w/individuals under 18 years</b>	66	52	60	59
<b>Households w/individuals 65 years and over</b>	52	53	65	87
<b>Average Household Size</b>	2.54	2.41	2.44	2.29
<b>Average Family Size</b>	3.12	2.99	2.87	2.83
Source: US Census Bureau (NA) - Not Available				

## Education and Employment

Table 3.6 presents information on the educational attainment of people in Weldon Township, Thompsonville, and Benzie County as tallied by the US Census Bureau for 2010. In each jurisdiction, at least 72% of the residents are a high school graduate or higher. However, a small percentage of the population has a Bachelor’s Degree or higher (Village of Thompsonville 10.0%, Weldon Twp.10.7%, and Benzie County 25.2%).

**Table 3.6 Educational Attainment 2010**

Educational Attainment (2000)	Thompsonville (Village)	Weldon Township	Benzie County
<b>Total population over 25 years</b>	329	392	12,730
<b>Less than 9th grade</b>	14	5	232
<b>Percent of total</b>	4.3%	1.3%	1.8%
<b>9th to 12th grade, no diploma</b>	76	63	1,060
<b>Percent of total</b>	23.1%	16.1%	8.3%
<b>High school graduate (includes equivalency)</b>	127	172	4,302
<b>Percent of total</b>	38.6%	43.9%	33.8%
<b>Some college, no degree</b>	69	94	2,748
<b>Percent of total</b>	21.0%	24.0%	21.6%
<b>Associates Degree</b>	10	16	1,174
<b>Percent of total</b>	3.0%	4.1%	9.2%
<b>Bachelor's Degree</b>	27	31	1,922
<b>Percent of Total</b>	8.2%	7.9%	15.1%
<b>Graduate of Professional Degree</b>	6	11	1,292
<b>Percent total</b>	1.8%	2.8%	10.1%
<b>Percent high school graduate or higher</b>	72.6%	82.7%	89.9%
<b>Percent with Bachelor's Degree or higher</b>	10.0%	10.7%	25.2%
<b>Source: US Census Bureau</b>			

Education and Community - Numerous studies have shown that educational attainment is related to an individual’s earning capacity. That is, people with higher levels of education tend to have higher total income levels over a lifetime. Therefore, the average educational achievement of the citizens of a community is an indicator of the economic capacity of that community. Communities with higher levels of educational achievement tend to have a higher earning capacity than those with lower levels of educational achievement.

According to the US Census Bureau, between 1990 and 2010, the number of people employed in each jurisdiction increased by (a combined) total of 128 people; however, this is a significant drop from 2000, illustrating the effects of the Great Recession. There was a significant loss of potential employees during the Great Recession as individuals were forced to leave the area in search of employment. It is also important to note the seasonal nature of the County’s employment rate. According to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, there is a seasonal increase in unemployment in Benzie County that ranges from 3.5% to 6.2% each year. This seasonal unemployment rate climbs from a low point in early fall of each year to January of the following year.

**Table 3.7 Employment Status 1990 - 2010**

Employment Status	Village of Thompsonville			Weldon Township			Benzie County	
	1990	2000	2010	1990	2000	2010	Unemployment Rate	
Population Over 16	272	387	371	312	450	449	Jan. (2009)	14.5%
Civilian Labor Force	149	249	188	168	282	249	Jan. (2010)	17.0%
Employed	116	237	163	130	267	211	Jan. (2012)	13.3%
Unemployed	33	12	25	38	15	38	Jan. (2014)	11.9%
Percent of Civilian Labor Force, Unemployed	22.1%	4.8%	15.3%	22.6%	5.3%	18.0%	Jan. (2016)	8.4%
							Jan. (2018)	9.8%
Source: US Census and US Bureau of Labor Statistics								

### Commuting Time

According to US Census statistics, in 2010, the average commute time to work was just shy of one half (1/2) hour. Also, the number of commuters who either walked or used public transportation was minimal. This data suggests that the bulk of the community’s residents continue to travel a significant distance to find work. Table 3.8 demonstrates the commuting status of Weldon Township, Thompsonville, and Benzie County.

**Table 3.8 Commuting Status 2010**

Commuting to Work Workers 16-years and Over (2010)	Thompsonville (Village)		Weldon (Township)		Benzie County	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
<b>Workers 16-years and over</b>	163		206		7,475	
<b>Car, truck or van - drove alone</b>	121	74.2%	126	61.2%	5,929	79.3%
<b>Car, truck or van - car pooled</b>	39	23.9%	56	27.2%	760	10.2%
<b>Public transportation</b>	0	0.0%	11	5.3%	34	0.5%
<b>Walked</b>	3	1.8%	0	0.0%	243	3.3%
<b>Other means</b>	0	0.0%	9	4.4%	36	0.5%
<b>Worked at home</b>	0	0.0%	4	1.9%	473	6.3%
<b>Mean travel time to work (minutes)</b>	25.8		27.4		23.1	
Source: US Census Bureau						

### Income by Household

Total household income is a key barometer of the economic condition of a community. Often, income determines the amount of money available for retail expenditures, housing purchases and local investments. These expenditures and investments directly and indirectly determine the amount of money available for public facilities and services, primarily through the local property tax base.

Table 3.9 presents the median household and family income of Weldon Township and Thompsonville from 1990 to 2010. Overall, the median household income and median family income has increased significantly over the first ten-year period but stagnated for the second ten-year period. From 1990 to 2000 there was a decrease in the percentage of families and individuals living below the poverty line in Weldon Township, but it increased dramatically as the effects of the Great Recession were felt in 2010.

**Table 3.9 Median Household and Family Income 1990 - 2010**

	Thompsonville (Village)			Weldon (Township)		
	1990	2000	2010	1990	2000	2010
<b>Median Household Income</b>	14,531	29,125	32,708	15,833	33,125	31,250
<b>Median Family Income</b>	17,604	31,103	33,500	16,827	37,917	38,750
<b>Per Capita Income</b>	6,473	12,104	15,718	7,311	17,725	19,196
	Thompsonville (Village)			Weldon (Township)		
	1990	2000	2010	1990	2000	2010
	Percent	Percent		Percent	Percent	Percent
<b>Families below the poverty line</b>	21.2%	12.8%	13.2%	16.3%	8.9%	20.9%
<b>With related children under 18 years</b>	31.3%	20.3%	20.8%	26.6%	21.3%	42.4%
<b>With related children under 5 years</b>	19.4%	22.2%	*	11.1%	25.0%	*
<b>Individuals below the poverty line</b>	27.1%	13.3%	*	18.8%	12.6%	*
<b>65 years and older</b>	30.5%	7.1%	*	8.1%	14.5%	*
Source: US Census Bureau 2000 data is from 1999 and 1990 data is from 1998; * No Data in 2010 Census						

### Change in Housing

Table 3.10 depicts the change in housing recorded by the Census Bureau for Weldon Township and the Village from 2000 to 2010. Between 2000 and 2010, the percentage of housing units increased by about 37% in Weldon Township and 10% in the Village. The number of vacant housing units within each jurisdiction increased by over 50% and within this figure, the number of *Vacant Housing Units for Seasonal, Recreational or Occasional Use* increased, most substantially in Weldon Township, by 163 units. Census figures also show the homeowner vacancy rate increased substantially in each jurisdiction between 2000 and 2010, most notably in the Village of Thompsonville (281%) and Weldon Township (381%). The same can be said about the rental vacancy rate with Weldon Township at 38.3% and most notably in the Village (108.2%). A majority of these new units were built at Crystal Mountain.

**Table 3.10 Housing Occupancy 2000 - 2010**

Housing Occupancy	Thompsonville (Village)			Weldon Township		
	2000	2010		2000	2010	
	Number	Number	% Change	Number	Number	% Change
<b>Total Housing Units</b>	221	245	10.9%	483	664	37.5%
<b>Occupied Housing Units</b>	180	183	1.7%	217	237	9.2%
<b>Owner Occupied Housing Units</b>	142	144	1.4%	179	200	11.7%
<b>Renter-Occupied Housing Units</b>	38	39	2.6%	38	37	-2.6%
<b>Vacant Housing Units</b>	41	62	51.2%	266	427	60.5%
<b>Vacant Housing Units - For Seasonal, Recreational or Occasional Use</b>	18	20	11.1%	207	370	78.7%
<b>Homeowner Vacancy Rate</b>	2.1%	8.0%	281.0%	1.6%	7.7%	381.3%
<b>Rental Vacancy Rate</b>	7.3%	15.2%	108.2%	32.1%	38.3%	19.3%
<b>Source: US Census Bureau</b>						

### Age of Housing Stock

A large percentage (35%) of the housing stock in the Village of Thompsonville was built prior to 1970. Units constructed before 1960 or in some cases before 1970, were built with quality craftsmanship but before modern building codes were instituted, and the major systems are reaching their end of life expectancy. These older homes will require significant investments in updating windows, siding, HVAC, electrical, and plumbing systems. In Weldon Township, over 71% of the homes were constructed after 1980. Table 3.11 presents information on the housing stock for Weldon Township and Thompsonville.

**Table 3.11 Age of Housing Stock**

	Thompsonville (Village)		Weldon (Township)	
	Number	Percent of Total	Number	Percent of Total
<b>1939 or earlier</b>	85	34.8%	87	13.5%
<b>1940 - 1949</b>	9	3.7%	9	1.4%
<b>1950-1959</b>	10	4.1%	38	5.9%
<b>1960 - 1969</b>	10	4.1%	50	7.8%
<b>1970 - 1979</b>	44	18.0%	132	20.5%
<b>1980 - 1989</b>	36	14.8%	82	12.7%
<b>1990 - 2000</b>	16	6.6%	185	28.7%
<b>2001-2010</b>	34	13.9%	61	9.5%
<b>Total</b>	244		644	

Source: US Census Bureau 2011 American Community Survey

### Types of Housing Structures

Typical of many small towns throughout northwest Michigan, the bulk of the housing stock is single-family dwellings. Generally, urban areas have a relatively lower percentage of single-family dwellings and a higher percentage of duplexes and multi-family dwellings than their township counterparts, due in part to the availability of municipal services and lack of open, buildable space. However, Weldon Township has a higher concentration of multi-family housing units. This is due to the condominium type housing at Crystal Mountain Resort: 14% are 3 to 4 unit structures and 3.0% are 5 to 9 unit structures. Table 3.12 describes the types of housing in Weldon Township and Thompsonville.

Housing Structures - The compact “village” area of Crystal Mountain Resort contributes to the high concentration of multi-family housing units in Weldon Township.



**Table 3.12 Types of Housing. 1990 - 2017**

	Thompsonville (Village)						Weldon (Township)					
	1990		2000		2017		1990		2000		2017	
Units in Structure	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
<b>1-unit detached</b>	129	63.5%	144	64.3%	191	64.9%	260	77.6%	333	69.1%	487	68.0%
<b>1-unit attached</b>	None	None	5	2.2%	None	None	None	None	10	2.1%	None	None
<b>2 units</b>	None	None	6	2.7%	1	0.3%	None	None	6	1.2%	1	0.1%
<b>3 to 4 units</b>	5	2.5%	None	None	5	1.7%	5	1.5%	48	10.0%	50	7.0%
<b>5 to 9 units</b>	None	None	None	None	None	None	None	None	35	7.3%	16	2.2%
<b>10 to 19 units</b>	11	5.4%	9	4.0%	23	7.8%	11	3.3%	9	1.9%	29	4.1%
<b>20 or more units</b>	None	None	None	None	None	None	None	None	None	None	None	None
<b>Mobile Home</b>	NA	NA	60	26.8%	74	25.2%	NA	NA	41	8.5%	68	9.5%
<b>Boat, RV, van, etc.</b>	NA	NA	None	None	None	None	NA	NA	None	None	None	None
<b>Total Housing Units</b>	203		224		294		335		482		716	

Source: US Census Bureau, 2017 American Community Survey

## Existing Land Characteristics

The characteristics of the land in Weldon Township, and the way people use the land, change over time. Trees grow and mature in areas that were once open fields. Lands that were once cultivated as farmlands become shrub-covered fields. Houses are built in areas that once were forests. In order to make informed decisions regarding future land use, it is critical to have a clear understanding of existing land uses and relationships between land uses.

This section will describe recent patterns of land use in the Greater Thompsonville Area and how those patterns changed between 1978 and 2011. To make this comparison, we have used a geographic information system (GIS) to evaluate and compare three different land use maps derived from aerial photographs and other data. The first map was created for the Michigan Resource System (MIRIS) in 1978 under the direction of the Michigan Department of Natural Resources. The second map was derived by the Land Information Access Association (LIAA) using the MIRIS standards and procedures and based upon aerial photographs taken in 2006. The 2011 Existing Land Use data was created by the National Land Cover Database .

The 1978 and 2006 maps were created by trained technicians following procedures for interpreting aerial photographs and categorizing the land uses identified. In general, land use areas were mapped if they were 2.5 acres or greater in size. For example, a half-acre residential lot in the middle of a forest would be ignored. The 2011 data was created computer analyzed and the categories are expanded. As a result, these maps provide relatively accurate summaries of land characteristics on a township-wide basis, but not detailed point-by-point analyses.

The land use maps in this section should be interpreted in conjunction with the text and tables to gain a better understanding of the variation and distribution of land uses throughout the Township. The data represents the actual use of land as seen from the air and recorded in the land use classification system. This system uses seven major categories, referred to as Level 1 Categories, at right.

The seven major categories can be further subdivided into the Level 2 subcategories listed in parentheses, at right. For example, an area of land classified as *Urban/Built* could be mapped and

### Level 1 Categories

#### **1. Urban/Built**

(residential, commercial, industrial, transportation, parks)

#### **2. Agricultural**

(crop land, orchards, feedlots, permanent pasture)

#### **3. Non-Forested**

(shrub land, scrub land)

#### **4. Forested**

(deciduous, coniferous, mixed, clear cut)

#### **5. Water**

(streams, lakes, reservoirs)

#### **6. Wetlands**

(forested, non-forested)

#### **7. Barren**

(beach, dune, rock)

categorized as *urban residential use*. In some cases, aerial photography and detailed interpretation would allow further categorization to Level 3. However, in performing this analysis for Master Planning purposes, we focused on larger areas of land use, using just Level 1 categorizations.

**Table 3.13 Existing Land Use: 1978 - 2006**

Land Use Level One		1978 Land Use	2006 Land Use
		Percent	Percent
Urban & Built Up	1	2.4%	7.0%
Agricultural	2	2.3%	2.2%
Grass & Shrubs	3	22.5%	15.2%
Forest Land	4	56.9%	53.9%
Water	5	0.3%	0.1%
Wetlands	6	15.6%	21.5%
Barren	7		0.1%

**Table 3.14 Existing Land Use: 2011**

Land Use Level One		2011 Land Use	
		Acres	Percent
Developed, Open Space	1	1,639	7.2%
Developed, Low Intensity	1	369	1.6%
Developed, Medium Intensity	1	46	0.2%
Developed, High Intensity	1	9	0.0%
Barren Land (Rock/Sand/Clay)	7	23	0.1%
Deciduous Forest	4	10,898	47.3%
Evergreen Forest	4	2,604	11.3%
Mixed Forest	4	783	3.4%
Shrub/Scrub	3	1,060	4.6%
Grassland/Herbaceous	3	3,018	13.1%
Pasture/Hay	2	69	0.3%
Cultivated Crops	2	253	1.1%
Woody Wetlands – Emergent Herbaceous	6	2,028	8.8%
Wetlands	6	253	1.1%
<b>Total</b>		23,040	

Maps 1 and 2 depict the distribution of land uses for Weldon Township in 1978 and 2006. The 2012 Greater Thompsonville Area Master Plan illustrated significant increase in the amount of land designated as Wetland uses while a reduction in the amount of land designated as “Water”. These changes are likely due in part to category designation changes between the two maps. The 2006 Map also illustrated a significant increase in the “Urban-&-Built-Up” category. A majority of this land use increase is related to the expansion of Crystal Mountain during that period and the change of its land use classification from “Outdoor Culture, Recreation” to “Urban-&-Built-Up”.

Map 3 depicts the Existing Land Uses for Weldon Township in 2011. Table 3.13 provides the percentages of land areas classified for each Level 1 category in 2011. These calculations are based on mapping with limited level of accuracy (e.g. no mapped areas of less than two and one half (2 ½) acres). From these three maps, general land use comparisons can be made. There is continued expansion of Crystal Mountain and limited development of new “Urban-&Built Up” lands along some of the roads in the Township.

## Community Facilities

### Transportation

The safety, effectiveness and efficiency of local transportation systems are key factors in development, economic vitality and public safety throughout Michigan. However, public roadways and other infrastructure are extremely expensive facilities to build and properly maintain. As a result, transportation planners prefer to plan these investments carefully and well in advance of the need. On the other hand, unexpected commercial and residential development can place unplanned and uneven demands on road networks. Therefore, community planners consider the existing condition and capacity of local transportation systems and potential future needs when developing a community’s master plan.

Based on figures released by the US Census, there was an estimated 37.5% increase in the number of housing units in Weldon Township between 2000 and 2010. These new housing units have added an estimated 3,020 car trips per day to the community street network. (The Institute of Transportation Engineers estimates 10 car trips per day, per housing unit); however, this assessment must be tempered with the fact that many of these units that were built are occupied only seasonally so their expected impacts upon community’s facilities and traffic must be more closely evaluated. Such increases in traffic put an increasing load on the community’s road network and can be expected to increase maintenance and repair requirements over time. Additionally, increased vehicle traffic presents greater safety concerns. In Weldon Township, a majority of these new units were built at the Crystal Mountain complex impacting the roads on the resort and nearby.

The principal and most central thoroughfare in Weldon Township is state trunkline M-115. Located just south of the Village, heading west through Weldon Township, M-115 travels approximately 97



Transportation - M115 is one of the primary entryways into the Greater Thompsonville Area.

miles from Clare to Frankfort and is the primary route for visitors to the area from downstate. Except for M-115, all public roadways within Weldon Township are under the jurisdiction of the Benzie County Road Commission.

Weldon Township’s primary roads include Alysworth Road, Haze Road, Lindy Road, North Manistee County Line, South Pioneer Road, Wallin Road, and South Thompsonville Highway. The road system within the Village follows a basic grid pattern which provides opportunities for citizens to safely and efficiently move around the community.

The Federal Highway Administration has developed a classification system for all streets, roads and highways called the National Functional Classification (NFC). The system was introduced in 1968 with the requirement for all roads to be classified by the mid-1970s. This system is designed to reflect the function of a roadway, which corresponds with the street’s eligibility for certain funding opportunities. Under the NFC, roads are classified into the categories listed and described below. *Map 3* illustrates the designation of roads under the Federal System.

**Interstates and Other Freeways and Expressways:** Serve as the prominent road type in the NFC hierarchy intended to carry the major portion of trips entering and leaving urban areas, as well as a majority of the trips bypassing the area. Principal arterials have planned rights-of-ways of 120 feet or greater, and provide high speed, uninterrupted travel with limited access or restricted access to regionally important urban areas and amenities, such as airports. This system is a major source for interstate travel and fall under the jurisdiction of the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT). No road in Weldon Township is classified as a freeway.

**Principal Arterials** - Relatively high capacity roads which provide unity throughout a contiguous urban area; medium speed/capacity roads for the rest of the county-wide arterial highway system; should have minor access control and channelized intersections. These roadway provide both through and local traffic, and they do provide access to abutting land uses. No road in Weldon Township is classified as a Principal Arterial.

**Minor Arterials** - Similar in function to principal arterials, except they carry trips of shorter distance and to lesser traffic generators. The minor arterial system interconnects with and augments the principal arterial system by providing for trips of moderate length with less traffic

**Transportation (Roads)** - In addition to the Federal designation, the State of Michigan funds and classifies roads under Act 51 in five categories below. *Map 4* illustrates the Act 51 roads.

**State Trunklines** – All freeways, state highways and trunklines are assigned to MDOT for the maintenance, construction, and improvements to these roads. Their primary purpose is to facilitate through-traffic movements.

**County Primary** - These routes serve longer distance trips between major destination points within the County. Primary roads are planned to facilitate through-traffic movement, while allowing access to homes and businesses.

**County Local** - Roads that provide access to homes and businesses and are designed for short to medium length trips. These roads connect to the Primary and State Trunkline roads.

**City Major** - Major routes within a city’s jurisdiction that provide for longer distance trips and higher capacity traffic.

**City Local** - Like County Local roads, these roads provide access to homes and businesses and are designed for short to medium length trips.

mobility. Accessibility is greater but stops are more frequent due to signalized intersections. Minor arterial streets are generally spaced from 1/8 – 1/2 mile in the central business district to 2 – 3 miles apart in the suburban fringes, but are normally not more than 1 mile apart in fully developed areas. Minor arterial planned rights-of-ways are usually 120 feet wide. M-115 and S. Thompsonville Road classified as Minor Arterials.

**Major Collectors:** provide access and traffic circulation within residential neighborhoods, commercial, and industrial areas. These streets differ from the arterials in that they usually enter neighborhood areas to distribute residents throughout the entire system to and from their destinations. Collector streets also collect traffic from local streets and channel them into the arterial system. Major collectors are important intra-county travel corridors and provide service to county seats not on an arterial route, to larger towns not directly served by the higher systems, and to other traffic generators of equivalent intra-county importance. Major collectors planned rights-of-ways are generally 120 feet wide. Lindy Road, N. Manistee County Line Road, and S. Pioneer Road/King/Weldon are classified as Major Collectors.

**Minor Collectors:** Minor collectors are identified to collect traffic from local roads and private property and bring all developed areas within a reasonable distance of a major collector or arterial road. These roads are generally spaced on half section lines. No roads in Weldon Township are designated as Minor Collectors.

**Local Streets:** comprises all streets and roadways not identified in one of the higher systems. Local streets primarily provide direct access to abutting land and to minor collector streets. Movement of through traffic is usually discouraged on local streets. All of the remaining public roads in the Township are designated as Local Roads. Private roads may also provide access to some properties and/or subdivisions.

## Traffic Volume

The volume of traffic that uses a roadway within a 24-hour period is a common measurement of the load or overall use of a roadway. This *annual average daily traffic* (AADT) can be used to estimate the desirable design capacity of a given roadway to provide safe and effective vehicle travel. The Michigan Department of Transportation has measured the average daily traffic volume on M-115

(measured in 2017) at about 3,500 cars per day for the segment between US 31 and the Benzie/Manistee County Line. In addition, MDOT has measured the range of commercial daily traffic 268 commercial vehicles per day. There is some data available for Weldon Township. In 2009, Lindy Road between M-115 and the Village had 1,718 AADT. Weldon/King/Pioneer Road had an AADT of 1,075 while Thompsonville Road north of the Village had 1,458 AADT in 2007. Manistee County Line Road had an AADT of 864 in 2009.

### Gas Prices

The price of gas can have a direct impact on the personal activities and economy of a community. For example, high gas prices can have a significant impact on commuters. According to the 2010 Census Bureau estimates, the average commute time to work was over 27 minutes, which would correlate to at least a 20 mile commute to work. High gas prices can also affect the cost of operating trucking operations. At the development of this document, according to the AAA, the average price for a gallon of gas in Benzie County was \$2.96. Unfortunately, future gas prices cannot be predicted. Public officials have the opportunity to help control transportation costs for the community by encouraging and/or providing for public and non-motorized transportation options and car-pooling in future planning efforts.

### Public Transportation

In 2006, the Benzie County Board of Commissioners formed the Benzie Transportation Authority with directions to establish public transportation throughout Benzie County that *connects people of all ages and abilities to our community and promotes independence and prosperity through a safe and convenient public transit system*. Today the Benzie Bus system operates a fleet of 17 buses and two vans, some of which are equipped with wheelchair lifts. The Benzie Bus makes regular stops in Frankfort, Beulah, Benzonia, Honor, Lake Ann, Crystal Mountain, and Thompsonville. In addition, the Benzie Bus makes daily trips to Traverse City and the Manistee and Traverse City airports. A full one-way fare is \$3.00. Senior citizens, children and persons with disabilities can ride for \$1.50.

### Sidewalks

Walking is the most basic mode of transportation available to human beings. Along with trails, pathways and other non-motorized routes, sidewalks are the primary support mechanism for

Public Transportation - The Benzie Bus provides public transportation options to area residents - connecting to other communities throughout the county and Traverse City.



Walkability - The extent to which the built environment is friendly to the presence of people walking, living, shopping, visiting, enjoying or spending time in an area. (Picture below of downtown Thompsonville)

Dan Burden, Walkable Communities & Glatting Jackson, Kercher Anglin, Inc. *Walkability - Sault Ste. Marie, 2008*

walking in most communities. In addition, sidewalks provide a public focal point to sociable interchanges. In recent years, the term “walkability” has been used to help describe the broad range of community design features that support a walking environment. According to the American Planning Association a “walkable” community is *a place in which residents of all ages and abilities feel that it is safe, comfortable, convenient, efficient and welcoming to walk, not only for recreation but also for utility and transportation.*<sup>1</sup>

Walkability also plays a significant role in placemaking, attracting visitors and allowing people to easily navigate throughout the community, access important cultural, community and business amenities and interact with other people. In general, people are willing to walk between ¼ mile (about 5 minutes) and ½ mile (about 10 minutes) to destinations. If the distance and walking time is greater, people are more likely to use an automobile.<sup>2</sup> The sidewalk infrastructure in downtown Thompsonville provides pedestrians with safe access to area businesses and community assets. These improvements should be considered in the more densely settled areas adjacent to Thompsonville, between Thompsonville and Crystal Mountain, and at the Crystal Mountain Resort.

## Utilities and Infrastructure

### Water and Sewer

Like many rural communities, Weldon Township does not provide public water and sewer service to its residents. However, water service is provided in the Village of Thompsonville. Property owners within Weldon Township and the Village provide sanitary sewer service through private septic systems. In the Village, the water supply system was recently upgraded and it is served by a 100,000 gallon elevated storage tank, three water supply wells, and a network of distribution lines. The elevated storage tank was installed in 1980, along with other upgrades to provide service for a majority of the Village. Prior to these improvements, the system was pressurized by means of a hydro-pneumatic tank. The system’s pressures range from 45 psi to 55 psi, which are well-regarded pressures. Crystal Mountain operates its own private water and sewer system.

<sup>1</sup> *Planning and Urban Design Standards*, American Planning Association. 2006

<sup>2</sup> Dan Burden. Transportation Research Board Distinguished Lectureship, 2001 *Walkable Communities* video - [www.walkable.org](http://www.walkable.org)



Public Water - According to a 2011 water study 20,290,500 gallons of water were used in 2010.

According to the study, based on 2007 average daily flows, the water tower has a limited amount of excess capacity over the present requirements for domestic and fire protection demand. As a result, only 35,825 gallons of excess storage is available to serve the future development needs of the village. This excess storage capacity can serve about 88 households.



## Groundwater

Groundwater provides most of the drinking water to the residents of Weldon Township. Therefore, maintaining and preserving the quality and safety of groundwater is very important. According to the Benzie County 2020 Comprehensive Plan in portions of the county, water tables are close to the surface and soils are highly permeable. This makes groundwater more vulnerable to contamination from surface spills of toxic (and even common everyday) materials, leaking underground tanks and improperly treated sewage. The Plan further states that in some instances, special treatment approaches, such as mounded septic systems, holding tanks and pumped septic systems are necessary to protect groundwater. These can influence the size of building lots and, to some extent, where homes and businesses may be built.

## Energy and Electricity

Electric service in the Village and Townships is provided by Cherryland Electric. A major substation serving the area sits just north of M115, west of the Village. A portion of the Township receives electrical service from Consumers Energy. Propane is used for hot water and heat.

## Communications and Broadband

Internet options are limited within Weldon Township. According to an industry website, [www.highspeedinternet.com](http://www.highspeedinternet.com), a majority of internet connections within Zip Code 49683 which includes all of Weldon Township, only have access via DSL (Digital Service Lines) from three local providers. These connections have a range of download speeds from 3 Mbps to 10 Mbps. Only 41% of the residents within Zip Code 49683 have internet access faster than 25 Mbps. These sub 10 Mbps speeds are relatively slow, and they limit resident's ability to engage in business or pleasure activities that require faster data connections.

## Fire/Emergency/Police

### Fire

The Thompsonville Fire Department was established in 1893. The first fire equipment was a horse-drawn wagon in the summer and a sleigh in the winter that hauled the fire hoses. The department consisted of a Fire Chief and a crew of twelve men.

Equipment was first housed in a shed near Front Street between Lincoln and Thompson Avenues. In 1950, a new cement block firehouse was built and contained two stalls and an office. A blackboard hung on the wall to guide the fireman to fires. In 1997, a new six-bay fire station was built by volunteers. Two of the bays were designated for use by the Thompsonville Ambulance Service. The building also has a community center with a full kitchen and three offices for the Village of Thompsonville. The building was funded by insurance money after the school was destroyed by fire and grants from the Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians and the International Order of Odd Fellows. A local family, the Rebekahs, donated kitchen supplies for the new community center, and it is used frequently for meetings and a variety of community activities.

The fire department is supported by a millage. The department pays for all training of 17 volunteer firefighters who put in long hours on their own time to maintain their training. They have monthly meetings and conduct daily checks to keep all equipment in operating condition. This diligence and dedication earns the fire department a top insurance rating from the ISO. They have a Mutual Aid agreement with all of Benzie County and neighboring Cleon Township in Manistee County.

The days of horse-drawn fire wagons transitioned to gas and diesel engine rigs to fight fires. The fire department has had GMC and Chevy Engines, various Tankers and some 6x6 Army trucks recently joined the fire equipment fleet which includes a 2018 International Tanker, 2004 International Engine, and a 1984 Chevy Engine. The Thompsonville Fire Department responds to an average of 72 calls from 911 each year. It also assists the Thompsonville Ambulance Service on motor vehicle accidents. The station is located on Lincoln Avenue at Second Street, and its call number is Station 8. The volunteer firefighters provide a vital service to the community.

### Emergency

The Thompsonville ambulance service was started in 1976 as a Basic Life Support Service (BLS). Benzie County sold the village of Thompsonville a 1971 Cadillac for one dollar to use as an ambulance. Through fundraisers and donations the Village then purchased a 1978 Chevy Cube ambulance. In 1991, a 1986 Ford Cube ambulance was acquired using revenue from ambulance fund and fundraisers. Thanks to a county millage, the Village bought a 1997 Ford ambulance which service today as a backup ambulance to the main rig, a 2005 Ford ambulance also funded by a millage. The 1986 Ford Cube was donated by the village to its fire department who uses it for their equipment. The ambulance call letters are 11A.

The ambulance service’s first garage was one stall in the old firehouse building. A new fire station was built by volunteers in 1997 on Lincoln Avenue at Second Street. It provided two bays for ambulances, four bays for fire trucks, a community center and the Village offices building.

Top-notch service is provided by six emergency medical technicians and two medical first responders who are all volunteers and a vital part of the community. The EMT’s and MFR’s take refreshers courses regularly to ensure the Village is able to renew its license every three years. All personnel donate their time to stay current on training skills. The service pays for continuing training needs.

The ambulance service is self-supporting on revenue generated from runs which average over 300 calls to 911 each year. Crystal Mountain Resort generates a significant amount activity in the winter months. A generous donation was used to purchase the ambulance service’s first automated external defibrillator. They and Weldon, Colfax, Cleon and Springdale Townships have also donated funds for training of new personnel.

The Thompsonville ambulance has Mutual Aid with Benzie and Manistee Counties and contracts for Advanced Life Support (ALS) intercept agreements with Benzie, Blair, North Flight and West Shore. Its coverage area in Benzie County is Weldon, Colfax, and Joyfield (partial) Townships and Cleon and Springdale Townships in Manistee Count. As a Basic Life Support (BLS) ambulance, the volunteers cover 144 square miles.

Civic Amenities - Emergency Services historic picture below (left to right) include: Ruston Wells; Jim Salois; Gil Krause; Tim Crest; Ron Robinson; and Howard Smith



Personnel meetings are held monthly and daily rig checks ensure ambulances are maintained in running condition. The service has always passed the annual state inspection in good standing.

### Police

The Benzie County Sheriff’s Office serves Weldon Township. Services are funded by a county millage and include emergency dispatch of police, fire, EMS (Communications Division); handling of accident reports , CCW applications, license to purchase and registration of handguns and issuance of free gun locks (Records Division); criminal investigations, School Resource Officer and DARE (Detective Bureau); road and highway patrols, marine and snowmobile patrols, issuing citations, criminal investigations and serving civil process (Patrol Division); processing and supervision of arrested or incarcerated persons by the Sherriff’s Office (County Jail), livestock and enforcement of county and state animal care laws (Animal Control Department). The non-profit Animal Welfare League of Benzie County administers an adoption program for dogs and cats, provides emergency medical treatment to found sick or injured animals and provides educational a “Pet Responsibility” program for elementary schools.

### Civic and Cultural Amenities

#### Post Office

Weldon Township is served by the United States Postal Service, located on Thompson Avenue in the Village. The post office is an important social and functional asset to the community and all efforts should be focused to keep the existing (or future) post office in the downtown area.

#### Library

The Betsie Valley District Library is also located on Thompson Avenue in the Village with the new library opening in March 2014. The library is equipped with multiple computers (all with internet access) and an extensive book, magazine, audio book, DVD and video collection. The library is generously supported by the *Friends of the Betsie Valley District Library*, a 501 (c) (3) organization.

Civic Amenities - Post Office



Civic Amenities - Library



## Schools

Weldon Township children are served by the Benzie County Central Schools. The geographical area of the school district is quite large. The school system (home of the Huskies) consists of one high school, one middle school, and three elementary schools. Betsie Valley Elementary is the school that serves Weldon Township residents, and it is located near the intersection of M-115 and South Thompsonville Highway. Middle school and high school students travel to the joint campus located east of Benzonia on Homestead Road/C-608.

Some families chose to send their children to private schools outside of the district including Fresh Wind in Honor and Interlochen Center for the Arts.

## Trails

One of the community's best assets, the Betsie Valley Trail is a non-motorized trail that runs directly through Weldon Township and the Village of Thompsonville. A former rail line, the 22-mile trail extends from Thompsonville, through Elberta and Beulah to Frankfort. In the winter snowmobiles are allowed on those portions of the trail that run from Thompsonville to Beulah (13 miles). The trail is owned by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MNDNR) but is operated and maintained by Benzie County. Support for the trail is also provided by the *Friends of the Betsie Valley Trail*, a non-profit organization. The Friends are developing a plan to upgrade the surface of the Betsie Valley Trail from Benzonia to Thompsonville. Manistee Trails has identified their desire to extend the Betsie Valley Trail into Manistee County southeast of Thompsonville through Cleon Township. Longer range efforts would likely connect this trail along the vacated railroad right-of-way through to Mesick and onto Cadillac. This connection has not been formulated yet, but it is regionally important for future ridership of the Betsie Valley Trail to assist with supporting a physical trail connection to the White Pine Trail in the City of Cadillac. This connection would tie the Betsie Valley Trail into the north-south backbone of Michigan's emerging non-motorized path network. A more connected network will increase tourists utilizing the entire system for riding, walking, and hiking while providing a recreational benefit to area residents.

The Betsie Valley Snowmobile Trail (MDNR) runs north from Lindy Road on Thurman through the Pere Marquette State Forest via seasonal roads, trails, and easements. This trail serves Benzie County and neighboring counties. The Betsie Valley Trail connects to the Bear River Trail south of

### Civic Amenities - Betsie Valley Trail



Thompsonville that merges with the Platte River Trail that extends throughout much of the Pere Marquette State Forest in Manistee County. To encourage year round motorized recreation, certain roads within the Township are open to ORV/ATV use.

### Parks

Weldon Township operates a park on long-term leased land from the Michigan Department of Natural Resources. This day-use park is located on the northwestern edge of Thompsonville along the Betsie River, and it includes a restroom and walking trail that leads to the river.

Thompsonville operates three parks within its boundaries. Max Bargerstock Field is equipped with two softball fields, one of which is equipped with lights for night play. “Pavilion park” is a small park just off Lincoln Road on Third Street. This park includes a pavilion, playground equipment, basketball courts, a tennis court, a skateboard ramp, and playground equipment. Just east of the diamond railroad crossing, George Sharp Park, the Village’s first park, offers several camping sites with electricity and water.

Weldon Township operates a community garden that is free and open to all Thompsonville area residents on a first-come first-serve basis. The garden’s purpose is to encourage families to garden with their children and educate them on how food is grown. As of writing of this plan, fifteen plots were available with four to them being above-ground planters. Further enhancements are planned including development of a fairy garden and sitting area.

### Airport

The Thompsonville Airport provides two runways for small, light-weight aircraft. The east/west runway is paved (with lights) and the north/south runway is grass. The airport, located just west of the downtown area and conveniently located near Crystal Mountain, is owned and managed by the Village. Hangar lots are available for lease. The airport is often used by remote-control clubs (for remote-control planes).

Civic Amenities: Parks - Max Bargerstock Field



Civic Amenities: Airport - Thompsonville Airport



## Natural Features

### Topography

Outside of two large hills and the slopes near the Betsie River, the topography of Weldon Township is relatively flat. Crystal Mountain is one of those hills with a vertical drop of 375 feet while the other major Township hill is located due north of the Thompsonville, just west of S Thompsonville Hwy. Contour elevations for Weldon Township are depicted on *Map 5*.

### Watercourses

One of the most prominent natural features in the community is the Betsie River. According to the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, the stream originates at Green Lake near the village of Interlochen and flows in a westerly direction to its outlet into Betsie Lake and Lake Michigan near Elberta and Frankfort. A large part of the river lies within the boundaries of the Pere Marquette and Betsie River State Forests and flows through the Betsie River State Game Area near its mouth.

The Betsie River drains a surface area of approximately 165,800 acres and includes about 93 linear miles of streams, 52 miles of which is the mainstream. This main stream cuts on a northeast southwest angle across the southeastern corner of the Township into Springdale Township before running in a northerly direction along the Township’s western boundary. Privately owned, the Betsie River Campground and Canoe Livery is located about a mile west of the Village on the banks of the river.

### Forest Land

There are over 14,280 acres of forest land within Weldon Township with most of the land a part of the Pere Marquette State Forest. Woodlands are not only valuable as wildlife habitat but also for aesthetic enjoyment. Woodlands also moderate certain climate conditions, such as flooding and high winds, by protecting watersheds from siltation and soil erosion caused by storm water runoff or wind. Woodlands can also improve air quality by absorbing certain air pollutants, as well as buffer excessive noise generators. Future development projects should be laid out and designed so as to incorporate existing woodlands to the maximum extent feasible. The location of forest lands and State Forest in the Weldon Township are shown on *Map 6*.

#### Watercourse - Betsie River



**Betsie River Designations -** The Betsie River has been designated by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources as a “Natural Wild and Scenic River.” Therefore, areas along the river are subject to special zoning regulations designed to preserve and protect the natural integrity of the river.

**Forest Land -** There are numerous Forest lands within the Greater Thompsonville Area.



## Conservation Areas

In an effort to guide future conservation efforts and establish criteria that targets specific parcels for conservation, the Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy has identified areas throughout Weldon Township that are acceptable for conservation easements. These areas include natural areas and lands devoted to agriculture. The identification of these potential conservation areas can help guide future planning efforts. *Map 7* illustrates the potential conservation easement areas.

## Wetlands

Wetlands are an important, though commonly overlooked, natural resource which provide both aesthetic and functional benefits. Through the years, over 70 percent of Michigan's wetlands have been destroyed by development and agricultural activities. Therefore, Michigan enacted the Goemaere-Anderson Wetland Protection Act (Michigan Public Act 203 of 1979) to protect the remaining wetlands.

The wetland act authorizes the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) to preserve certain wetland areas. The MDNR may require permits before altering regulated wetlands and may prohibit development in some locations. The MDNR defines wetlands as follows:

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

- Contiguous to the Great Lakes or Lake St. Clair, an inland lake or pond, or a river or stream.
- Not contiguous to the Great Lakes, an inland lake or pond, or a river or stream; and more than five acres in size; except this subdivision shall not be of effect, except for the purpose of inventorying, in counties of less than 100,000 population until the department certifies to the commission of natural resources it has substantially completed its inventory of wetlands in that county.
- Not contiguous to the Great Lakes, an inland lake or pond, or a river or stream; and five acres or less in size if the department determines that protection of the area is essential to the preservation of the natural resources of the state from pollution, impairment, or destruction and the development has so notified the owner; except this subdivision may be

utilized regardless of wetland size in a county in which the above subdivision is of no effect; except for the purpose of inventorying, at the time.

Among the criteria used by the MDNR when conducting a wetland determination are:

- Presence of standing water (at least one week of the year).
- Presence of hydric soil types that are saturated, flooded, or ponded sufficiently to favor wetland vegetation (usually black or dark brown).
- Predominance of wetland vegetation/plant material, or aquatic life, such as cattails, reeds, willows, dogwood, elderberries, and/or red or silver maple trees.
- Presence of important or endangered plant or wildlife habitat or a rare ecosystem.
- The area serves as an important groundwater recharge.
- Size and location - minimum size to be state regulated is five acres unless the wetland is contiguous to a lake, pond, river or stream, or is considered to be “essential to the preservation of natural resources of the state.”

The determination that a site contains a regulated wetland can have several consequences:

- The MDNR may issue a permit to fill the wetland.
- The MDNR may require mitigation, such as replacing the wetlands (sometimes this involves increasing the overall on-site wetland acreage by two or three times).
- The MDNR may prohibit development in the wetland area, if it is determined that there is a “prudent” alternative.

There are roughly 2,281 acres of wetlands in Weldon Township, primarily in three areas – northwest of Thompsonville, along Dair Creek east of Weldon Road, and skirting the Betsie River along the Township’s western border. Wetlands are shown on *Map 8*. Local wetland protection can help preserve these important resources and can be achieved in a variety of ways. Foremost is ensuring that developers have received any necessary MDNR reviews or made permit applications prior to final action on proposed projects.

## Soils

Weldon Township is comprised of four different soils associations: (1) Coloma-Spinks Association; (2) Kaleva-Grattan Association; (3) Covert-Pipestone-Adrian Association; and (4) Kaleva-Benona Association. *Map 9* depicts the soil types present within the Township.

- **Coloma-Spinks Association** - These soils are somewhat excessively drained to well drained and occupy very steep lands. Soils within this association are located along the Betsie River, near Thompsonville.
- **Kaleva-Grattan Association** - These soils are level to gently sloping, excessively drained sandy soils on outwash plains and moraines. Soils within the association are located throughout much of the flat portions of the Township, not near the Betsie River.
- **Covert-Pipestone-Adrian Association** - These soils are somewhat poorly drained to poorly drained and occupy both level and undulating land. These soils are found along most portions of the Betsie River in the Township.
- **Kaleva-Benona Association.** These soils are excessively drained sandy soils on level to very steep land on outwash plains and moraines. These soils are found near the two major hills within the Township.

## Community Assets

To compete in the global new economy, communities must build upon and leverage their distinct community assets, sometimes referred to as “strategic assets”. According to the *Land Policy Institute*, strategic assets are unique resources that can make a region distinct in attracting the right mix of resilient and sustainable growth and global opportunities. As part of the development of the 2012 Master Plan, the joint planning commission members and the residents of the Greater Thompsonville Area were asked to develop a comprehensive list of community assets under the following categories:

- **Natural Assets**
- **Cultural Assets**
- **Special and Unique Assets**

What are Community Assets? Community (or “strategic”) assets are unique resources that can make a region distinct in attracting the right mix of resilient and sustainable growth. Above: Citizens help identify community assets at a public meeting.

Map 10 depicts the location of each asset.

**Natural Assets**

- Betsie River
- State Forest
- Edison Swamp
- North Hills
- Dair Creek/Old Mill Pond
- Beaver Pond/Dair Creek
- Little Betsie River

**Cultural Assets**

- Weldon Cemetery
- Old Thompsonville Dam Site
- Michigan Legacy Art Park Pavilion/Park
- Betsie Valley District Library
- The Diamond RR crossing
- George Sharp Park
- Village Cemetery

**Special & Unique Assets**

- Betsie Valley Pathway
- Sportsman Club
- Old Railroad Trestle
- Day Use Park
- Crystal Mountain
- ATV/ORV/Snowmobile Trails
- Thompsonville Airport
- Betsie River Campground
- Benzie Bus
- Village of Thompsonville

Community (Strategic) Assets  
Cultural Asset - Betsie Valley District Library



This Master Plan has identified those community assets that are significant to community. These assets help to provide a necessary sense of place and a quality life for Weldon Township, and they should not only be revered and protected but leveraged to further enhance the community.

## Vision and Objectives

### The Vision

This section of the master plan describes what we would like Weldon Township to look like in the future. The vision statement conceptualizes the values upon which the goals and objectives are developed and presents a long-range view of the future. The vision statement is based upon the Smart Growth Network’s *Putting Smart Growth to Work in Rural Communities*, the Center for Rural Affairs three tenets, discussions with the steering committee, and input collected at the public meeting and subsequent planning commission meetings.

*Community Vision* – Weldon Township has a healthy mix of beautiful natural areas and rural residences surrounding a vibrant village with small town charm and modern amenities. The people of the area are welcoming, cooperative and work together to support community events, preserve and rehabilitate downtown buildings, cultivate and support new and existing businesses, and manage the community’s natural resources. From the thriving Crystal Mountain Resort, to the pristine waters of the Betsie River, to the lively streets of downtown Thompsonville—Weldon Township offers residents and visitors of all ages access to world-class and year-round recreation. There are great restaurants and services, access to fresh foods, walkable areas, a vibrant downtown, engaging community events, and an entrepreneurial culture with abundant employment opportunities.

### Goals and Objectives

This section of the Master Plan describes the goals and objectives of the community. The goal statements are intended to be realistic and achievable, inspire action and describe the future as the residents of the area would like to see it. As described in the *Introduction*, the goal statements are based upon the *Smart Growth* tenets that are tailored for a rural community like Weldon Township. These Goals and Objectives were affirmed by the Steering Committee after the results of the January 2019 public input workshop.

- Goals**
- Create a Range of Housing Opportunities and Choices
  - Foster a Distinctive and Attractive Community, with a Strong Sense-of-Place
  - Preserve Open Space, Farmland, Natural Beauty and Critical Environmental Areas
  - Provide for a Variety of Transportation Choices

*Community Vision* – Weldon Township actively preserves its abundant natural beauty and rural character while protecting the Betsie River where an active outdoor lifestyle is supported and reasonable regulations are enforced to control blight with a variety of housing options that are available for all.



- Provide Opportunities for Economic Growth that is Diverse, Environmentally Friendly and Offers Meaningful Employment
- Efficiently and Effectively Provide and Maintain Important Public Services
- Make Development Decisions Predictable, Fair and Cost Effective

**Goal: Encourage a Range of Housing Opportunities and Choices**

- Objective: Increase opportunities to accommodate new professionals, young families, seniors, and others within the lower and medium income range.
- Objective: Revise ordinances to ensure a variety of housing types and density are permitted.
- Objective: Ensure residential development is attractive, well built, well kept and integrates into the natural surrounding and built environment.

**Goal: Foster a Distinctive and Attractive Community, with Strong Sense-of-Place**

- Objective: Establish high-quality visual character throughout the community and revise ordinances to preserve the community's existing character and to limit blight.
- Objective: Support the continue health and growth of Crystal Mountain.
- Objective: Maintain, expand, and market the community's outdoor recreational resources.
- Objective: Support the ongoing production and growth of community events.
- Objective: Encourage civic engagement and volunteerism.
- Objective: Provide for a healthy and active community.
- Objective: Continue to foster collaboration between the Township and the surrounding communities.

Community Objective - Ensure residential development is attractive, well built, well kept and integrates into the natural surroundings and built environment.



Community Objective – Establish high quality visual character throughout the community and revise ordinances to preserve the existing character and to limit blight.



**Goal: Preserve Open Space, Farmland, Natural Beauty and Critical Environmental Areas**

Objective: Preserve the community’s scenic and rural character by minimizing the impacts of development on key natural features.

Objective: Protect the quality of surface and groundwater resources.

Objective: Encourage commercial and residential development towards the Village.

**Goal: Provide a Variety of Transportation Choices**

Objective: Improve the existing road system.

Objective: Increase public transportation services to the community.

Objective: Promote and provide for safe and efficient transportation infrastructure that serves pedestrians and bicyclists.

**Goal: Provide Opportunities for Economic Growth that is Diverse, Environmentally-Friendly and Offers Meaningful Employment**

Objective: Support the creation and growth of mixed-use commercial/residential developments within appropriate locations within the Township and Village.

Objective: Foster greater participation in regional economic and community development efforts.

**Goal: Efficiently and Effectively Provide and Maintain Important Public Services**

Objective: Maintain existing services.

Objective: Work to address the social needs of area residents.

Objective: Continue to provide for a safe community.

Community Goal – Increase public transportation services to the community.



Community Objective – Promote and provide for safe and efficient transportation infrastructure that serves pedestrians and bicyclists.



Objective: Explore new opportunities to utilize alternative technologies (such as solar and wind) while considering the impacts on area residents.

**Goal: Make Development Decisions Predictable, Fair and Cost Effective**

Objective: Edit the existing zoning ordinance so that it supports the master plan and is appropriate for a rural low density community.

Objective: Implement best practices from the Michigan State Housing Development Authority's Redevelopment Ready Communities Best Practices that are appropriate for Weldon Township – a rural low density community.

Objective: Encourage community and stakeholder collaboration.

Objective: Provide a clear set of guidelines and expectations for developers.

## Future Land Use Plan

The Future Land Use Plan and Map depicts the preferred future land uses for Weldon Township and is the general framework upon which land use and policy decisions for the community will be guided for the next 25 years. The Future Land Use Plan was developed after careful consideration of the previous future land use and zoning classifications from the Benzie County Master Plan, Greater Thompsonville Area Master Plan, and the Weldon Township Zoning Ordinance, resulting in six proposed land use classifications for Weldon Township's master plan. In addition, the future land classifications were developed after consideration of the guiding principles outlined in the introduction and several dynamic factors, including existing land use, the area's natural and unique areas, and a community stated goal to maintain its rural sense-of-place. *Map 11* illustrates the Future Land Use of the community.

### Mixed Use

The Mixed Use classification is intended to provide for a mix of commercial, residential, and light industrial uses. The Mixed Use classification encompasses the area immediately surrounding the airport, between the Betsie River and S. Pioneer Road. Development in this area will be compact and walkable with the goal to develop a connection between Crystal Mountain Resort and the Village. Any new development in this area will be serviced by existing public utilities.

### Mixed Use Resort

The Mixed Use Resort area is intended for areas in and immediately surrounding the Crystal Mountain Resort. This area will include a mix of high-density multi-family dwelling units, condominiums, mixed-use buildings, single-family units on small lots, and natural areas. This area will also include a mix of high-density service, commercial, and retail uses. Any new development in this area will be serviced by existing private and/or public utilities.

### Urban Edge

Urban Edge uses are intended to provide areas for single-family homes (and accessory structures) on larger lots and mobile home parks. Residential development in these areas should be oriented to enhance the development of the Village while providing minimal interference with existing agricultural uses. Clustering will be encouraged. Urban Edge uses also will act as a transition between higher density commercial/residential development and the rural environment. Areas classified as Urban Edge development would not be served by public water or sewer. Due to the lack of utilities, the density in these areas would be limited to the layout of the site, ability of site to pass septic system percolation

Neighborhood Residential - Neighborhood Residential uses are intended to provide for single-family residential development consistent with the traditional grid neighborhood of a small village. Neighborhood Residential areas should evoke the look and feel of traditional neighborhoods (e.g. sidewalks, front porches, historic homes).



tests, and setback requirements. With these limitations, the minimum lot sizes would be one-half acre (1/2 ac.) with larger lots often being necessary due to specific utility layout requirements for wells and septic system fields.

### Rural Residential and Recreational

Local leaders and citizens of the community believe it is very important to preserve the natural and rural character of the community. Rural Residential and Recreational uses are intended to provide areas for single-family homes (and accessory structures) on large lots and recreational activities on state and private lands. Rural Residential and Recreational areas will include large tracts of forest and open space, rivers and streams, and other natural areas. Areas devoted to Rural Residential and Recreational uses will be denoted by gravel roads (as opposed to paved) and the lack of traditional urban infrastructure. Agricultural and forest uses are also permitted within the Rural Residential and Recreational district. In general, the density in these areas could be one dwelling units per 15 acres.

### Natural and Public

Local leaders and citizens of the community believe it is very important to preserve the natural character and resources of the community. The State of Michigan has designated the Betsie River as a designated natural river, and the Natural and Public district matches this State land use designation. All of the Betsie River shoreline and most of Dair Creek fall within this designation. No structures are permitted within 200 feet of the water course's high water mark. The district's goal is to protect the scenic beauty and the river's natural quality.

### Agricultural

Local leaders and citizens of the community believe it is very important to preserve and encourage the active/productive farm operations within the community. Areas devoted to Agricultural uses will continue to support farming activities, such as the production of crops, livestock and other goods, orchards, nurseries, farmsteads, value-added agriculture industries, agro-tourism, and other activities closely associated with farming. Areas devoted to Agricultural uses will be denoted by gravel roads (as opposed to paved) and the lack of traditional urban infrastructure. In general, the density in these areas could be one dwelling unit per every 40 acres.

Rural Residential and Recreational- Rural Residential and Recreational uses are intended to provide areas for single-family homes (and accessory structures) on large lots. Rural Residential areas will include large tracts of forest and open space, rivers and streams and other natural areas.



## Zoning Plan

According to section 2(d) of the Michigan Planning Enabling Act, PA 33 of 2008, the master plan shall include a “Zoning Plan” - depicting the various zoning districts and their use, as well as standards for height, bulk, location and use of building and premises. The zoning plan serves as the link between the master plan and the zoning ordinance.

### Relationship to the Master Plan

The master plan describes the vision, objectives, and action policies for the development of Weldon Township. The zoning plan is based upon the results of the master plan - it is intended to identify areas where the existing zoning is inconsistent with the objectives and strategies of the master plan and guide the amendments and revisions to the Zoning Ordinance. As a result of the development of this master plan and several years of enforcing the joint zoning ordinance, which was adopted in 2015, this zoning plan identifies inconsistencies and opportunities for improvement during the revision of the Zoning Ordinance in 2019.

The following pages (and *Map 12*) describe the general purposes and characteristics of Weldon Township Zoning Ordinance. Please note, these descriptions are for reference only.

### Residential Districts

The following districts are considered “residential districts.”

- R-1: One Family Residential
- RR: Rural Residential

The basic purpose of these districts is to provide for a range of housing options. The R-1 District is intended to permit low-density one-family detached dwelling units ranging from ½ acre to two acre lots that encourage a safe environment for family life, provides close proximity to the Village, and reduces pressure for residential development in the RR district. The purpose of the Rural Residential District is to serve as a transition between higher density R-1 and the very low density Forest Recreation District. This area also allows for mobile home parks as a special land use.

What is the Zoning Plan? - The Zoning Plan depicts the various zoning district and is intended to guide in the development of the zoning ordinance.



**Commercial District**

The following district is considered the “commercial district.”

C: Commercial

The basic purpose of the Commercial District is to accommodate the specific shopping and/or service needs of the surrounding residential districts and the motoring public. Use in this district shall take greater care to provide adequate screening and landscaping to preserve the Township’s rural character while protecting adjacent uses from the effects of increased activity generated by their very nature.

**Agricultural and Rural Residential and Recreational**

The following district is considered the “agricultural, rural residential, and recreational district.”

F/R: Forest/Recreation

The Forest/Recreation District is intended to retain the natural beauty of Weldon Township so that people may enjoy the land and maintain the district consistent with current accepted practices. Farming activities and very low density detached one-family dwelling units and mobile homes are intended.

**Natural Public Land Use**

The following district is considered the “natural public land use district.”

NRD: Natural River District

The basic intent (see right) of this district is to apply strict regulations on all lands within 400 feet of the Betsie River. This district also was established to implement Part 305, Natural Rivers, of the Natural Resources and Environment Protection Act (MCL 324.30501 et seq.).

Natural River District - Intent:

1. Promote the public health, safety and general welfare; to prevent economic and ecological damage due to misuse, unwise development patterns, overcrowding, and overuse within the Natural River District; and to preserve the values of the Natural River District for the benefit of present and future generations.
2. Protect the free-flowing condition, fish, aquatic and wildlife resources, water quality, scenic and aesthetic qualities and historical and recreational values of the bestir River and adjoining lands.
3. Prevent flood damage due to interference with the natural floodplain characteristics, by excluding developments which are vulnerable to flood damage and which may reduce the capacity of the floodway of the river to withstand flooding conditions.
4. Provide for uses which complement the natural characteristics of the Betsie River natural river system.
5. Protect individuals from investing funds in structures that are proposed for location on lands which are unsuited for such development because of high groundwater, erosion, or vulnerability to flood damage.
6. Achieve the goals and objectives of the Betsie River Natural River Plan.

**Mixed Use**

The following district is considered the “mixed use district.”

AP: Airport District

The Airport District is intended to provide for general aviation uses, storage of aircraft and other accessory uses customarily found in connection with a general aviation facility.

**Special Overlays**

The following district is considered a “special overlay district.”

ESO: Environmentally Sensitive Overlay District

The Environmentally Sensitive Overlay District is intended to identify, recognize and deal with specific natural characteristics such as wetlands, steep slopes and other environmentally sensitive features which may encompass more than one lot in any or all of the zoning districts. The intent is not to prevent use or development but to require that the principles of conservation and/or preservation be observed to reduce or eliminate the detrimental impacts on these areas.

## Action Plan

This section of the Master Plan outlines the goals, objectives, and strategies for Weldon Township. The Action Policies are organized under the **Goal and Objectives Statements** and based upon the *Essential Smart Growth Fixes for Rural Planning, Zoning, and Development* and other rural development planning policies, previous planning documents and land use planning efforts, discussions with the steering committee, and input collected at the January 23, 2019 public meeting. The proposed timeline for implementation (in red) and the body/agency/board responsible of implementation (in blue) is listed with each strategy. Please see the legend at right for a brief description.

This plan contains nearly 70 strategies, which, at first glance, may seem overwhelming for a small, rural community with limited staff and volunteer capacity. However, the immediate strategies—there are 11 of them—provide a good starting point for implementation. Numerous short term strategies will also be accomplished when amendments to the Zoning Ordinance are made immediately following the completion of the drafting of this plan. After these are accomplished, the Planning Commission can then choose which short-term and long-term strategies to move onto next, while tackling ongoing actions as the opportunity arises.

### Goal: Encourage a Range of Housing Opportunities and Choices

Objective: Increase opportunities to accommodate new professionals, young families and others within the lower and medium income range.

**OG** Strategy: Pursue affordable housing grants through state and federal programs. **TO, NGO**

**LT** Strategy: Identify locations for constructing compact workforce residential units, near the village. **PC**

**I** Strategy: Evaluate and revise the zoning ordinance to allow for a range of housing sizes and densities.

Objective: Provide housing options that meet the needs of seniors.

#### Proposed Timeline Legend

- (I) Immediate
- (ST) Short Term (1- 5 years)
- (LT) Long Term (Over 5 years)
- (OG) On-Going

#### Responsibility Legend

- (PC) Planning Commission
- (TO) Township Officials
- (NGO) Non-Government Organization(s)/People
- (SD) School District
- (LBC) Local Business Community
- (O) Other
- (A) All

- LT** Strategy: Identify locations for constructing single-occupancy apartments, independent living units and assisted living/continuing care facilities that meet the needs of retired baby-boomers, near the Village. [PC](#)
- OG** Strategy: Whenever possible, locate senior housing near existing sidewalk, trail and park infrastructure. [PC](#)
- Objective:** Ensure residential development is attractive, well built, well kept and integrates into the natural surrounding and built environment.
- OG** Strategy: Incorporate applicable concepts from *New Designs for Growth* into the zoning ordinance and encourage developers to take advantage of the *Putting Smart Growth to work in Rural Communities* concepts to work prior to the site plan review process. [PC, TO, LBC](#)
- ST** Strategy: Evaluate the success of the existing property maintenance program and ensure consistent enforcement. [PC, TO](#)
- ST** Strategy: Support existing incentive programs and their expansion that are designed to help clean up and improve residential properties (such as a subsidized paint program and regular clean-up days). [PC, TO, LBC, NGO](#)

**Goal: Foster a Distinctive and Attractive Community, with Strong Sense-of-Place**

**Objective:** Establish high-quality visual character throughout the community.

- ST** Strategy: Incorporate setback and vegetative buffer standards within the Zoning Ordinance. [PC](#)
- OG** Strategy: Support the enhancement of the natural characteristics of the gateway areas into the Village. [TO](#)
- ST** Strategy: Establish strict zoning provisions to regulate the storage and accumulation of excess junk and trash and other blighting factors from residential areas. [PC, TO](#)

Strategy - Develop a sign ordinance that ensures that signs are compatible with the character of the community.



**OG** Strategy: Continue to identify and map key community assets and explore ways to leverage the identified assets for economic prosperity. **A**

**I** Strategy: Through the Zoning Ordinance, regulate strip development and isolated commercial uses. **PC, TO**

**OG** Strategy: Require the installation of underground utilities in connection with all new development. **TO**

**Objective:** Work to maintain the “up north” rural character of the Township and an “up north” town character of the Village while supporting the development of a resort aesthetic at Crystal Mountain.

**OG** Strategy: Celebrate both the community’s connection to the foundation and growth of Crystal Mountain and the community’s role as the gateway to the Leelanau Peninsula. **A**

**ST** Strategy: Identify and use public spaces to establish an attractive gateway entrance into the downtown from Lindy Road, incorporating items such as lighting, landscaping, etc... **TO**

**LT** Strategy: When constructing new civic buildings, consider placement and architectural design that complements the historic character and elements of the downtown. **TO**

**ST** Strategy: Support the development of a simple way-finding signage system that assists visitors in traversing the Township and reaching their destinations in a quick and easy manner. **TO, LBC**

**OG** Strategy: Increase opportunities for community interaction such as outside shopping, art designs and festivals that celebrate community culture and assets. **A**

**Objective:** Maintain, expand, and market the community’s outdoor recreational resources

Strategy - Identify and use public spaces to establish an attractive gateway entrance into the downtown from Lindy Road.



- ST** Strategy: Work with Crystal Mountain Resort to develop a non-motorized pathway connecting the resort, the Downtown and the Betsie Valley Trail. [TO](#), [LBC](#)
- ST** Strategy: Work with other local municipalities within the region to support the development of the Betsie Valley Trail southeast of Thompsonville and support its connection over to the Fred Meijer White Pine Trail in Cadillac, MI. [TO](#)
- ST** Strategy: Work with the County Parks and Recreation Commission to ensure that any potential parks, recreation, and trail projects within the Township would be eligible for funding through the county's recreation plan, so that the Township would be eligible to apply to the Michigan Department of Natural Resources for a variety of available parks and recreation grants. [PC](#), [TO](#)

Objective: Increase the number of community events.

- OG** Strategy: Hold exciting and complementary community events during the same time as special events that are being held at Crystal Mountain Resort, such as the Betsie Valley Half-Marathon. [TO](#), [LBC](#), [NGO](#)
- ST** Strategy: Continue to work with local business owners and community groups to maintain existing quality events while developing new events. [TO](#), [LBC](#), [NGO](#)

Objective: Encourage civic engagement and volunteerism.

- OG** Strategy: Work to promote community activities and governmental meetings. [PC](#), [TO](#)
- OG** Strategy: Regularly solicit input from community members and organizations on important topics that pertain to the community. [PC](#), [TO](#)

Objective: Provide for a healthy and active community.

- LT** Strategy: Work with local organizations, citizens and business owners to enhance and expand the current sidewalk system - integrating downtown Thompsonville with

nearby neighborhoods, trail-heads, parks and community amenities. [TO](#), [NGO](#), [LBC](#)

**LT** Strategy: Work to develop a well-connected system of parks that provide for a wide range of active and passive recreation opportunities. [TO](#), [NGO](#)

**ST** Strategy: Work with Crystal Mountain Resort to develop a non-motorized pathway connecting the resort and downtown. [TO](#), [LBC](#)

Objective: Continue to foster collaboration between Colfax Township, the Village, and the Township.

**OG** Strategy: Continue to explore and discuss topics of mutual interest and concern. [TO](#)

**Goal: Preserve Open Space, Farmland, Natural Beauty and Critical Environmental Areas**

Objective: Preserve the community's scenic and rural character by minimizing the impacts of development on key natural features

**I** Strategy: Continue coordination efforts between local units of government, government agencies and community organizations that contribute to the management and oversight of environmentally sensitive areas. [TO](#)

**OG** Strategy: Provide public access to special and unique areas within the community. [TO](#)

**OG** Strategy: Support expanding markets for local agricultural products. [TO](#), [LBC](#)

**OG** Strategy: Support large and small-scale farming operations. [TO](#), [LBC](#)

**I** Strategy: Ensure that the Zoning Ordinance supports the development of value-added agricultural activities (agribusiness) and agritourism activities within Forest/Recreation and Rural Residential zoning districts. [PC](#), [TO](#)

I Strategy: Develop simple “dark sky” friendly lighting regulations for all new developments and encourage retrofitting of existing lighting to be “dark sky” compliant. PC, TO

I Strategy: Maintain vegetative buffers on rural roads by adopting setback standards for local development. PC, TO

ST Strategy: Consider providing density bonuses to developers that preserve open space and preserve woodlands. PC, TO

ST Strategy: Create incentive programs that will encourage developers to establish conservation easements along ridge lines and provide filtered views from building sites. TO, LBC

LT Strategy: Explore parking lot regulations that address size, landscaping requirements, and alternative surface materials. PC, TO

Objective: Protect the quality of surface and groundwater resources.

ST Strategy: Maintain vegetative buffers along wetlands by adopting setback standards for local development. PC, TO

OG Strategy: Continue to work with regional advocacy groups (such as the Conservation Resource Alliance) to inventory road crossings over streams and consider removing culverts and installing arched culverts (no bottoms) or bridges. TO, NGO

Objective: Encourage commercial and residential development towards the Village.

OG Strategy: Ensure local regulations encourage new commercial and higher density residential development to be located within the Village. PC, TO

**OG** Strategy: Make the Village and the surrounding neighborhoods more accessible to pedestrians. [TO](#), [LBC](#)

**Goal: Provide a Variety of Transportation Choices**

Objective: Improve the existing road system.

**ST** Strategy: Adopt a Complete Streets resolution and work with Benzie County Road Commission to ensure the application of those concepts in appropriate situations. [TO](#)

Objective: Increase public transportation services to the community.

**OG** Strategy: Work with the Benzie Transportation Network to increase the number of runs that connect to Thompsonville community and the “express bus.” [TO](#), [O](#)

**LT** Strategy: Work with MDOT to establish a commuter car-pool parking lot. [TO](#), [O](#)

Objective: Promote and provide for safe and efficient transportation infrastructure that serves pedestrians and bicyclists.

**OG** Strategy: Pass Complete Streets resolution so automobiles, pedestrians and bicyclists are equally considered in local transportation planning decisions. [PC](#), [TO](#), [LBC](#)

**I** Strategy: Utilize the Zoning Ordinance to require the placement of bicycle racks in appropriate locations at major developments. [PC](#), [A](#)

**Goal: Provide Opportunities for Economic Growth that is Diverse, Environmentally Friendly, and Offers Meaningful Employment**

Objective: Support the creation and growth of mixed-use commercial/residential developments within appropriate locations within the Township and the Village.

I Strategy: Ensure that the Zoning Ordinance has regulations that permit new types of environmentally-friendly development that supports new economic activities. [PC, TO](#)

LT Strategy: Adopt land use regulations that preserve the environment while focusing more intensive commercial and residential development towards the Village. [PC, TO](#)

Objective: Foster greater participation in regional economic and community development efforts.

OG Strategy: Ensure that Networks Northwest incorporates local economic development and planning efforts into the region’s Comprehensive Economic Development Strategic Plan. [TO, LBC](#)

OG Strategy: Work with regional Chamber of Commerce agencies to learn about regional economic development programs and themes. [TO, LBC](#)

Objective: Align the Township for success in the “new economy”, which emphasizes asset-based economic development strategy (i.e. what are we good at/known for and how can we make it better/ more visible).

ST Strategy: Promote rural recreation opportunities to nearby, more urban communities by offering one-day recreational trips, community events rooted in local history, farm-based recreation, and opportunities to enjoy the country experience. [A](#)

ST Strategy: Increase the opportunity for public art. [NGO, LBC](#)

ST Strategy: Identify opportunities for local investment and crowdfunding. [A](#)

**Goal: Efficiently and Effectively Provide and Maintain Important Public Services**

Objective: Maintain existing services.

OG Strategy: Continue to study the manner and cost of providing for public services. [TO](#)

**LT** Strategy: Examine ways in which Colfax Township, the Village and the Township could cooperate in providing for specific public services. [TO](#)

**LT** Strategy: Prepare a Capital Improvement Plan during the annual Township budgeting process and update it yearly. [PC, TO](#)

Objective: Work to address the social needs of area residents.

**OG** Strategy: Help social service agencies collaborate, keep informed and educate residents about their services. [TO, NGO, LBC](#)

Objective: Continue to provide for a safe community.

**OG** Strategy: Continue to work with county and state police agencies to better provide police services to area residents. [TO](#)

Objective: Explore new opportunities to utilize alternative technologies (such as solar and wind) while considering the impacts on area residents.

**LT** Strategy: Study the pros and cons of establishing zoning regulations that address wind turbines and solar panels. [PC, TO](#)

**LT** Strategy: Encourage the use of pervious pavement where appropriate. [TO](#)

**Goal: Make Development Decisions Predictable, Fair and Cost Effective**

Objective: Edit the existing Zoning Ordinance so that it supports the Master Plan and is appropriate for a rural low density community .

**I** Strategy: Conduct periodic assessments of the Zoning Ordinance to determine that its regulations and requirements are effective and reasonable. [PC, TO](#)

Objective: Encourage community and stakeholder collaboration.

I Strategy: Work to promote community activities and governmental meetings. PC, TO

OG Strategy: Regularly solicit input from community members and organizations on important topics that pertain to the community. PC

OG Strategy: Develop an outreach program that continues to keep residents and businesses informed and engaged in planning and zoning activities. PC, TO

Objective: Provide a clear set of guidelines and expectations for developers.

I Strategy: Whenever feasible, incorporate illustrations in the Zoning Ordinance that assists in illustrating the regulations contained within the ordinance. PC

LT Strategy: Continue to evaluate the development of regulations controlling Medical and Recreational Marijuana and determine the community's interest in allowing these activities in some form. PC, TO

OG Strategy: Implement the Michigan Economic Development Corporation's Redevelopment Ready Communities best practices wherever possible. PC, TO

## Resource Listing

Weldon Township’s Master Plan is a long-range community policy statement comprised of a variety of both graphic and narrative recommendations intended to provide guidelines for making reasonable and realistic community development decisions. The Plan is intended to be employed by Township officials, by those making private sector investments, and by all citizens interested in the future development of the Township.

The completion of the Plan is but one part of the community planning process. Realization, or implementation of the goals, objectives, and recommendations of the Master Plan can only be achieved over an extended period of time and only through the cooperative efforts of both the public and private sectors. This chapter serves as a resource listing for Township elected officials and Planning Commission members about various tools that are available and used by other communities.

### 10.1 Education

#### 10.1.1 Knowledgeable Local Officials

Ultimately, the responsibility for implementing the Master Plan falls into the hands of Weldon Township’s local officials. This fact is why it is very important that the Township Board, Planning Commission, and the various municipal departments be knowledgeable and focused on achieving the implementation of the Master Plan. It is key that these individuals understand the interconnectedness of the Master Plan and the Zoning Ordinance.

The local officials have to be the catalysts for action, leading the community in the right direction. The Master Plan and Zoning Ordinance are key tools to successfully guide future development, and understanding and utilizing these tools are vital to this success. There are several resources available to offer training including the Michigan Association of Planning, Michigan Township Association, and Networks Northwest.

### **10.1.2 Master Plan Brochure**

It is critical that Weldon Township officials acknowledge, understand, and support the Master Plan. In order to organize public support most effectively, Weldon Township may emphasize the necessity of instituting the Planning Program and encourage citizen participation in the planning process.

Lack of citizen understanding and support could have serious implications for the eventual implementation of planning proposals. Failure of the public to support needed bond issues and continuing dissatisfaction concerning taxation, special assessments, zoning decisions, and development proposals are some of the results of public misunderstanding and rejection of long-range plans.

One of the issues facing the implementation of the Master Plan is that it is a long technical document that does not resonate with the residents and developers. Creation of a graphic pamphlet that illustrates the Future Land Use Map, Goals and Objectives, and some key items from the Strategic Action Plan would help to ensure that the Master Plan is a living document that directs future Township development.

### **10.1.3 Design Standards Manual**

Visual images are another best practice to convey land use planning issues and goals to the resident or developer. These concepts that could be explored in a manual include building massing and placement, parking lot design, landscaping, lighting, signage, and other items that affect the visual appearance of development. Providing a manual that details the type of development that supports the Township's rural character would assist developers and their designers in creating projects that support the community's character instead of detracting from it.

## **10.2 Public Policy**

### **10.2.1 Governmental Cooperation**

Successful implementation of the Master Plan will require bringing together the resources of many levels of government in the Weldon area to be successful. This cooperation is necessary because different governmental entities have different responsibilities and roles to play in community

development. The Village of Thompsonville plays a key role in providing an active downtown district for the Township, and joint efforts are necessary to ensure that development appropriate for the downtown is focused in the downtown district while larger footprint commercial is focused in the Township. The Township doesn't own or maintain its roads, but they play a vital roll driving development within the Township. The Benzie County Road Commission is the agency that will be implementing Complete Streets throughout the Township as well, while Networks Northwest is responsible for the distribution of Federal road funding. The Michigan Economic Development Corporation would assist the Township and region in jobs training and business attraction programs. All of these entities and more affect development within the Township.

### **10.2.2 Public/Private Partnerships**

Implementing the goals and objectives of the Master Plan requires that the private and public sector work together on development projects. Co-development is simply the joint public and private investment for a common purpose. Working in a partnership allows for Weldon Township to become involved in such things as site location selection, planning, site design, utilities and other service agreements, and tax incentives and abatements. These partnerships help to foster development friendly environments, where the Township benefits from increased tax revenue, and the private developers can benefit from decreased cost of improvements.

### **10.2.3 Continuous Planning**

The Master Plan is a living document that needs to be periodically evaluated and updated when necessary. Per the Michigan Planning Enabling Act, PA 33 of 2008, as amended, community master plans must be updated every five years, but it is recommended that the Master Plan be reviewed annually. The Planning Commission and the Township Board of Trustees should be actively engaged with the Master Plan through a joint annual meeting that reviews the goals and objectives and implementation matrix. These reviews will ensure that the Master Plan remains a current document that has currency for the community.

### **10.2.4 Implementation Priorities**

At the end of the previous chapter, the Master Plan includes a Strategic Action Plan. Due to staffing, budget constraints, and inability to implement a wide-range of items concurrently, it is necessary to

strategically develop an implementation plan that correctly orders projects. This will allow earlier projects to lay the framework for future projects or have earlier projects have “quick wins” that illustrate proof of concept projects.

### **10.2.5 Capital Improvements Program**

The term “capital improvements” is generally intended to embrace large-scale projects of a fixed nature, the implementation of which results in new or expanded public facilities and services. Such items as public building construction, park development, sewer installation, waterworks improvements, street construction, land acquisition, and the acquisition of certain large-scale pieces of equipment (graders, sweepers, trucks, etc.) are included in the Capital Improvements Budget.

Few communities are fortunate enough to have sufficient revenues available at any given time to satisfy all demands for new or improved public facilities and services. Consequently, most are faced with the necessity of determining the relative priority of specific projects and establishing a program schedule for their initiation and completion. The orderly programming of public improvements is to be accomplished in conjunction with a long-range plan.

In essence, the Capital Improvements Program is simply a schedule for implementing public capital improvements, which acknowledges current and anticipated demands, and which recognizes present and potential financial resources available to the community. The Capital Improvements Program is a major planning tool for assuring that public improvements proceed to completion in an efficient manner. The Capital Improvements Program is not intended to encourage the spending of additional public monies, but it is simply a means by which an impartial evaluation of needs may be made.

Long-range programming of public improvements is based upon three fundamental considerations. First, the proposed projects must be selected on the basis of community need. Second, the program must be developed within the community’s financial constraints and must be based upon a sound financial Plan. Finally, program flexibility must be maintained through the annual review and approval of the capital budget. The strict observance of these conditions requires periodic analysis of various community development factors, as well as a thorough and continuing evaluation of all proposed improvements and related expenditures.

It is essential that in the process of preparing and developing the program, the Planning Commission be assigned a role in reviewing project proposals to assure conformity with the Master Plan and to make recommendations regarding prioritizing projects, and appropriate methods of financing.

### **10.3 Zoning Ordinance Tools**

#### **10.3.1 Zoning Ordinance Revisions**

Zoning Ordinances are essential in implementing the goals and objectives of the Master Plan. The authority to create a Zoning Ordinance is given to a community by the State for the purpose of promoting community health, safety, and general welfare. Zoning regulations have been strongly supported by the Michigan courts, as well as by the United States Supreme Court.

The intent of zoning is to assure the orderly development of the community. Zoning does this by dividing the community into districts in order to establish population density and regulate the use of land and buildings. Zoning also promotes the general welfare of a community by protecting homes and investments against the potential harmful intrusion of business and industry into residential neighborhoods, requiring the spacing of buildings far enough apart to assure adequate light and air, preventing the overcrowding of land, facilitating the economical provision of essential public facilities, and aiding in the conservation of essential natural resources. This, in turn, helps to protect the property values of the community.

In addition to protection of land values, zoning also includes development requirements (landscaping, lighting, buffering, parking, building design, etc.) that increase property values by requiring attractive quality developments that minimize negative impacts upon neighboring parcels. New zoning techniques and refinements of existing regulations should be evaluated and the Weldon Township Zoning Ordinance be amended as appropriate.

#### **10.3.2 Planned Development**

The use of Planned Development districts are not currently included within the Township’s Zoning Ordinance. Adding this optional zoning tool may be considered during a review of the Township Zoning Ordinance. Planned development districts are often allowed because there is a community desire to provide property owners/developers flexibility to be innovative in their site designs for

larger parcels. Planned development districts may permit denser developments, preserve open space or permit cluster zoning, allow for mixture of uses, provide for preservation of natural features, or other community goals.

### **10.3.3 Site Plan Review Requirements**

The Site Plan Review Process included within the Weldon Township Zoning Ordinance is designed to ensure that all larger scale developments within the Township comply with the requirements within the ordinance and ensure that the developments positively contribute to the character of the Township. Depending upon the community and its design goals, Site Plan Review requirements can be quite stringent. For Weldon Township, one of the major goals of the community is to preserve the rural character from inappropriate or poorly designed development. Per the current Zoning Ordinance, Site Plan Review process ensures that: the landscaping and buffering requirements of the community are met; site layout is appropriate to minimize offsite impacts; site circulation and parking are safely designed.

An assessment of the development projects completed since the current Site Plan Review process was initiated in 2015 should be undertaken to determine if additional design requirements are needed to ensure that developments undergoing the process do uphold the desires of the community. Additional design requirements maybe necessary to ensure the rural character of the Township is retained.

The Site Plan Review process may also control developments that may affect groundwater, wetlands, or woodlands. Groundwater recharge areas, aquifers, and wellhead protection areas may require protection. It may be in the interest of the Township to protect wetlands in excess of Michigan Department of Environmental Quality standards found in Part 303 of the Michigan Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act (PA 451 of 1994). Betsie River, Little Betsie River, Dair Creek, and several creeks drains play an important roll in the township, and they should be conserved. Woodlands are found across the Township, and they provide habitat and aesthetic benefits to the community. Certain developers do not take into account the vital role that woodlands provide to a community when designing their developments, and a woodlands preservation ordinance that would regulate destruction of woodlands would best be implemented during Site Plan Review process.

### **10.3.4 Subdivision Regulations**

When a developer proposes to subdivide land, he or she is in effect, planning a portion of the Township. To assure that such a development is in harmony with Master Plan objectives, a subdivision regulation ordinance may be created in accordance with the Michigan Land Division Act, Public Act 288 of 1967, as amended.

Several direct benefits accrue from the regulation of subdivisions by a local unit of government. By requiring the subdivider to install adequate utilities and improved streets, purchasers of the lots are not later burdened with unexpected expenses. A subdivision without adequate physical improvements is detrimental not only to itself, but it also reduces the opportunity for reasonable development of adjacent parcels. In addition, long-range economy in government can be realized only when the subdivider provides adequate improvements.

As a part of its review of proposed subdivisions, the Planning Commission focuses on such features as the arrangement and width of streets, the grading and surfacing of streets; the width and depth of lots; the adequate provision of open space; and the location of easements for utility installations. The subdivision review process is one of the methods of implementing the goals and objectives of the community's Master Plan.

### **10.3.5 Code Enforcement**

The ultimate effectiveness of the zoning code depends on the administration and enforcement of the code by elected officials. If administrative procedures are lax, or if enforcement of regulations is handled in an inconsistent, sporadic manner, the result will be unsatisfactory at best.

The Zoning Administrator is often responsible for carrying out zoning/development related functions, including building inspections, ordinance administration, and community/ developer liaison. Each of these functions requires a substantial investment of staff time. If sufficient time is not made available to carry out these critical functions, they may only be accomplished in a cursory manner.

Therefore, the Township should provide for adequate staff levels and/or consulting assistance to assure that these essential day-to-day functions will receive the professional attention required assuring quality development through conformity with the zoning codes.

Code enforcement may also include the enforcement of General Ordinances passed by the community relative property maintenance. If the Township chooses to further address property maintenance and blight issues, the Township may adopt the International Property Maintenance Code or portions of the code. This code has been adopted many communities across the state to address property maintenance issues that are often visually blighting.

### **10.3.6 Incentive Zoning**

The Zoning Ordinance may include provisions for incentive zoning within certain zoning districts. If developers provide additional items that the Township desires, incentive zoning provides them the opportunity to gain additional development rights or density above the mandated maximum requirements allowed within that zoning district. Community goals identified in the Master Plan should be a basis for identifying desires or needs that will be achieved by allowing developers to exceed standard requirements. Public open space, landscaping that significantly exceeds minimum standards, provision of community building, etc. are all items that communities have received as part of an incentive zoning project.

### **10.3.7 Setbacks and Other Dimensional Standards**

The Zoning Ordinance includes requirements for setbacks and other dimensional standards for landscaping, lighting, parking, fencing, lot coverage, signage, etc. Sufficient setbacks for an agricultural community like Weldon Township are vital to retain its rural character. Unattractive structures and uses can be buffered by appropriately sized landscaped buffers. Natural features, shorelines, floodplains, and other features should all be protected by proscribed setbacks that protect these features from damage or inappropriate encroachment.

### **10.3.8 Overlay Zoning**

This zoning tool allows for a special set of regulations be developed to regulate a specific area within an existing zoning district or extend across multiple districts. Both sets of regulations apply with the

Overlay District, and a development can only be completed if it complies with the requirements included within both districts. Regulations for the district must be clearly articulated along with the goals for the added regulation. Overlay districts have been used to protect historic districts, wellhead protection areas, farmland, open space, and environmentally sensitive areas while retaining the underlying zoning.

### **10.3.9 Open Space/Cluster Zoning**

For communities with significant suburban development pressures, open space/cluster zoning is an often-used design tool that allows the developer to build homes on lots smaller than permitted within the Zoning Ordinance while permanently protecting natural habitats. Confining the development to a smaller portion of the development site allows for the preservation of open space that is beneficial to the Township, the developer, and the residents of the development.

### **10.3.10 Conditional Rezoning**

In the 2006 revision of the Michigan Zoning Enabling Act, it granted local communities the ability to conditionally rezone properties. The Conditional Rezoning process allows the developer to rezone a property that the Township may not want to traditionally rezone because of the impacts of allowing all of the zoning district uses on that specific parcel. To begin the process, the developer must draft up an offer of what uses that would be allowed and what uses they are willing to forego in exchange for the Conditional Rezoning. This offer is presented to the Planning Commission and approved by the Township Board of Trustees. The Township does not have the right to negotiate what the developer is proposing. The municipality may only agree or deny the offer. If approved, a legal agreement is signed between the two parties, and these requirements stay in affect until the developer or future owner asks to have the agreement revised or requests that property return to its original zoning classification.

## **10.4 Public Sector Improvements**

### **10.4.1 Public Realm Enhancements**

Local municipalities do spend significant funds on infrastructure items within the public rights-of-way. These investments include sidewalks, signage, streetscape furniture, public parking lots, parks,

pathways, and public utilities (water towers, manhole covers, utility boxes for electricity and data, etc.) To build a unique sense of place, the Township should develop a unified design aesthetic and logo that is utilized on all publicly-owned items. These unified design cues will help to develop the Township’s identity and pride of place for the residents.

Standard utility boxes can easily be clad in artwork that enhances the public realm. Regular bike racks, benches, garbage cans, and other street furniture can be designed by artists so that they contribute to the public realm as well. These interventions do not have to be expensive, and they may even be funded by local philanthropic organizations.

### **10.4.2 Public Facilities**

Each community invests in its own facilities including: municipal offices, police and fire departments buildings, water/sewer systems, parks, cemeteries, streets and sidewalks, and other facilities. To ensure that costs are being managed and do not exceeded what should be spent to maintain a specific facility. Periodic studies should be conducted to ensure that the facilities are be operated in a cost-effective manner and don’t require significant refurbishment.

### **10.4.3 Transportation Network Improvements**

Roadway networks are a key aspect to the quality of life within communities. Congestion, interconnectedness, condition, all impact a community. Ability of handicapped individuals to be able to move around their communities are affected by the quality of the sidewalk and non-motorized pathway networks. How trucks and freight are able to move around the municipality impact the business friendliness of a community as well.

Complete Streets is a new roadway design concept that all roads should be designed and constructed for all users – cars, trucks, public transit riders, bicyclists, and pedestrians and for all ages and abilities. Building streets to the Complete Streets design standards requires the engineer to consider all potential road users, which will improve a community’s live-ability. Weldon Township should pass a Complete Streets resolution so that Benzie County Road Commission would have to consider all prospective users when any reconstruction work is proposed for roadways within the Township.

The Township should advocate for a county-wide non-motorized network that would connect all of the commercial and residential nodes within the county. Some of these nearby nodes that would be linked as part of a comprehensive plan includes Copenmish, Mesick, Cleon Township, and eventually over to Cadillac and Manistee.

## **10.5 Design Enrichments**

### **10.5.1 Commercial Corridor Enhancements**

M-115 almost perfectly divides the Township in half diagonally, and to ensure the retention of its rural character, the Township should significantly limit commercial development along the highway. Strict design requirements should be employed so as not to alter the general appearance of the community. These design controls would include landscaping requirements, canopy street trees along all street frontages, parking lot enhancements, appropriate lighting, access management and other controls.

### **10.5.2 Gateways**

At the main entrances into the Township, new entrance features should be constructed to identify motorists are entering the community. These points are where the community can first introduce itself to visitors and provide a good first impression. The gateways should include a decorative design feature that uniquely identifies the Township along with some landscaping as well. These features should be installed along M-115 at the northwest and southeast entrances into the Township. Additional routes that are used by visitors to come or pass through the Township should also be considered.

## **10.6 Special Districts**

### **10.6.1 Historic Districts**

There are three levels of historic designation available – National, State, and Local. Each of these districts confers different benefits.

National designation means that a property is listed on the National Register of Historic Places or designated as a National Historic Landmark. These designations do not limit the ability of the property owner to alter their structures. National Register listing requires the potential impacts of all Federally funded or permitted projects to be evaluated during a Section 106 Historic Review process. The designation also enables the project to take advantage of Federal Historic Tax Credit program for all rehabilitations that meet the Secretary of the Interiors Standards for Rehabilitation. Twenty percent of eligible expenses may be converted into equity through tax credit program.

The State Register of Historic Places is only an honorific designation at this time. Buildings that are approved for State Historic Markers are added to the State Register.

Local designations provide for the most control over potential damage caused by intentional or unintentional damage to historic resources by renovation or demolition. All work on buildings located within Local Historic Districts must be approved by the Local Historic District Commission and adhere to the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation. The State of Michigan, under Public Act 169 of 1970, authorized communities to establish Local Historic Districts that would be regulated by Local Historic District Commissions.

From a cursory review of the Township, it is likely that there are no areas that would qualify as historic districts, but there are likely several individual buildings that are worthy of individual listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

### **10.6.2 Brownfield Districts**

Certain locations within Weldon Township may have been contaminated by previous development or contain functionally obsolete buildings. The State of Michigan recognized that these sites would likely not be redeveloped by traditional means due to costs and liability concerns, and these sites were becoming a drag on local units of government because they were often vacant and blighting. The properties may also be allowed to go through the foreclosure process.

To address these issues, the State of Michigan passed the Brownfield Redevelopment Financing Act, Public Act 381 of 1996, as amended to address these contaminated properties. Functionally obsolete or contaminated site are eligible for funding, and eligible activities include site assessment activities, demolition, lead and asbestos abatement, contaminated soil clean-up, infrastructure

improvements, and site preparation activities. In 2017, the Transformational Brownfield Plan Acts, PAs 46-50 of 2017, were passed that allows developers to capture a portion of specific incremental taxes generated from large-scale projects to fund specific allowable expenses during a defined recapture period. These developments are intended to be transformative on local economies and fill funding gaps that cannot be covered by other means.

To accomplish the work, a Brownfield Redevelopment Tax Increment Financing Authority (TIF) district is created with a plan that specifies all of the proposed activities and expenses. The future TIF funds are used to pay back the costs associated with the remediation. Once all of the approved expenses have been reimbursed, any additional dollars may go into a revolving fund to pay for additional brownfield work within the municipality.

Weldon Township has the ability to establish its own Brownfield authority; however it would make sense to utilize the Benzie County Brownfield Redevelopment Authority, which is operating a county-wide brownfield authority.

## **10.7 Financial Tools**

### **10.7.1 Downtown Development Authority (DDA)**

A local unit of government may create a Downtown Development Authority, under PA 57 of 2018, Part 2 (formerly under Public Act 197 of 1975), in order to halt property value deterioration, increase property tax valuation, and promote economic growth in a central business district. A DDA is a quasi-public authority that can create development plans, encourage historic preservation, authorize acquisition of property, fund infrastructure projects, and promote economic growth. DDAs utilize Tax Increment Financing as a tool for generating revenue, and they may also obtain operating millages. DDAs may receive grants and donations to also accomplish their downtown management activities. When a DDA is established, a “base year” for the district’s state equalized value is established. Each year after, the DDA captures the incremental tax growth within the district, and these funds are recycled within the district to encourage additional tax growth.

Townships have utilized this tool for creating new downtowns, but the Township should continue to support the economic vitality of the Village of Thompsonville by supporting the redevelopment of Downtown Thompsonville which could establish its own DDA district.

### **10.7.2 Corridor Improvement Authority**

In an effort to provide a tool for communities to address commercial disinvestment along commercial corridors, the Michigan Legislature passed the Corridor Improvement Authority Act, PA 57 of 2018, Part 6 (formerly Public Act 280 of 2005). This tool is similarly constructed to the DDA legislation with the primary funding tool of Tax Increment Financing, but communities can create more than one CIA district within their boundaries. It is an appropriate tool for Townships that do not have traditional downtown districts or smaller older commercial nodes.

CIA districts must be larger than five acres, consist of at least 50% commercial property, and the land must be zoned to allow for mixed uses, including high-density residential. The municipality must expedite local permits and inspections within the CIA district while promoting walking non-motorized interconnections throughout the district.

Due to the desired efforts to control sprawling commercial development along M-115, the Township shouldn't consider this tool. In appropriate locations, it would provide financing to fund a wide range of activities along the corridor. These improvements would help to link the commercial development between the Village and the Township.

### **10.7.3 Local Development Finance Authority (LDFA)**

A city, township, or urban township may create a Local Development Finance Authority to finance public facility improvements, using Tax Increment Financing. The LDFA act is Public Act 57 of 2018, Part 4 (formerly 281 of 1986). Eligible property consists of property of which the primary purpose is manufacturing, processing of goods and materials by physical or chemical change, agricultural processing, or high technology activity.

For example, upon designation of a LDFA, a community may develop an industrial park and use captured revenues from eligible property within the park for public facilities improvements within the park. Communities may only create a single LDFA within their boundaries.

### **10.7.4 Tax Increment Finance Authority (TIFA)**

Local units of government may establish one Tax Increment Finance Authority (TIFA) district within its boundaries to collect tax increment funds that are to be used to prevent property tax

deterioration within the community. TIFAs may operate in conjunction with or independent of Downtown Development Authorities. Originally established as a PA 450 of 1980, this tool is now governed by PA 57 of 2018.

**10.7.5 Neighborhood Improvement Authority**

Neighborhood Improvement Authorities may be established under Part 8 of PA 57 of 2018 (formerly PA 61 of 2007), and these authorities utilized tax increment financing to fund residential and economic growth activities within residential neighborhoods. The authorities may issue bonds on the expected tax increment revenues.

**10.7.6 Water Resource Improvement Tax Increment Finance Authority**

Water Resource Improvement Finance Authorities may be established under PA 57, Part 7 (formerly PA 94 of 2008) allows all local municipalities to create these authorities to prevent deterioration of water resources and to promote water resource improvements or access to inland lakes or both.

**10.7.7 Conditional Land Use Transfers**

Per PA 425 of 1984, it allows two local units of government to share tax revenues resulting from new or expanding development. These 425 Agreements are designed to create a less contentious method that avoids the lengthy and often costly annexation process. Legally, the land remains in the less-developed community, but the U.S. Census interprets this land covered by the 425 Agreement as transferring to the community that initiated the agreement.

**10.7.8 Special Assessment Districts**

Special assessments are a fee levied by the community for the financing of local improvements that are of primarily benefit to the landowners that must pay the assessment. Taxes levied for public improvements within a Special Assessment District can be applied to such things as utilities systems, drainage improvements, public roads, rubbish collection, bicycle paths, parks, sidewalks, lighting, and tree maintenance. The costs are apportioned according to the assumed benefits of the properties impacted by the improvements.

### **10.7.9 Dedicated Millages**

After the Great Recession, dedicated millages have been a tool that many municipalities in the State of Michigan have used due to the municipal income growth restrictions caused by Headlee and Proposal A on local tax growth. Local units of government cannot increase millage rates without a vote of the people, and many residents do not understand the constraints that the last decade have placed on their local governments so they are less inclined to increase the general millage of the community; however, many tax payers will consider paying for a specific millage. Approval of a special millage reduces the burden on the General Fund revenues of the community by funding a General Fund expense from a dedicated millage. This tool is also used for funding specific projects. Examples include public safety millage, road repair, library, transportation, recreation, and others.

### **10.7.10 Commercial Rehabilitation Act**

The Commercial Rehabilitation Act, Public Act 210 of 2005, as amended, allows local municipalities to create one or more rehabilitation districts where the commercial buildings may receive multiple year tax reductions (up to ten years) for rehabilitating a building within the district. These projects will limit the taxes received by the community for the period granted by the community; thus, this tool should be well-considered by local units of government prior to approval.

### **10.7.11 Technology Park Development Act**

In an effort to support the development of technology parks in Michigan, the Michigan Legislature passed the Technology Park Development Act, Public Act 385 of 1984, as amended to assist with the development of technology-based businesses within Michigan. The act provided the following desired facilities: Research and development; a high technology service such as the providing of services including computer, information transfer, communication, distribution, processing, administrative, laboratory, experimental, developmental, technical, or testing services; a high technology service such as activities including the manufacture of goods or materials, the processing of goods or materials by physical or chemical change, computer related activities, communications, robotics, biological or pharmaceutical industrial activity, or technology oriented or emerging industrial or business activity not involving heavy manufacturing; and/or, a business activity that has

it primary function of developing, improving, or creating new or existing products with certain tax exemptions.

**10.7.12 U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Programs**

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development offers a variety of programs that provide housing support for low and moderate income individuals. Programs include the Section 202, Section 8, Nine Percent Low Income Housing Tax Credit Program, and other funding initiatives. Section 202 provides mortgage and rental subsidies for the construction and maintenance of elderly housing. Only non-profit, private organizations may take advantage of the Section 202 program. Though tax exempt, these developments often return some revenues to the local jurisdictions through the Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILOT) fee to pay for emergency services and utility expenses that the development may utilize on a year-to-year basis.

The HUD Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program funds are distributed through the Michigan Strategic Fund of behalf of the Michigan’s non-entitlement (entitlement communities receive their CDBG allocations directly from HUD) communities. These funds are distributed to the state based upon population and income. The CDBG program’s three main goals are for the: 1) elimination of slums and blight, 2) benefit of low and moderate income individuals, and 3) addressing emergency situations. The program is managed by the Michigan Economic Development Corporation’s Community Assistance Team (CATEam), and Benzie County is located in the CATEam’s Northwests region. When considering a project, contact should be made with the CATEam member to determine financial viability and likelihood of funding.

**10.7.13 Bond Programs**

Municipalities will often utilize bond funding to pay for capital expenses that include large construction projects. Types of bond-funded municipal projects include most infrastructure projects (renovation/repairs or construction of water and sewer systems, park facilities, roads and bridges, municipal buildings, airports, marinas, and other large projects).

There are two general categories of municipal bonds: general obligation bonds and revenue bonds. General obligation bonds are backed by the “full faith and credit” of the municipality, which means that the legislative body pledged its municipal taxing authority to repay these bonds. Revenue

bonds are repaid with income generated by the facility: a toll bridge or the water and sewerage fees for example. Because of the low risk, general obligation bonds offer the lowest interest rates for investors, but they are also one of the safest forms of investment.

To offer municipal bonds for investment, there are significant up-front fees associated with the sale of the bonds including originating fees, legal fees, rating agency fees, printing fees, and credit enhancements. Smaller municipalities often do not have a clear credit history, and investors know little of the financial situation or the local economy. These issues would drive up the costs of borrowing. To address this issue, the State of Michigan passed Public Act 227 of 1985, creating the Shared Credit Rating Program that is operated by the Michigan Municipal Bond Authority.

This authority pools the State's smaller bond issues into larger offerings that are more attractive to investors. The investor's risks are lessened and the State of Michigan has a decades long track record of successfully managing these bond issues. Each municipal within the pooled fund is responsible for their pro rata share of all of the expenses along with repaying their portion of the actual bond amount.

## **10.8 Grant and Loan Programs**

There are numerous grants and loan programs available through both the State and Federal governments. In addition, area community foundations may also have grant and loan programs that provide funding to support certain projects that local units of government would qualify for. A State grant program that may be used to support the creative arts in the community is the Michigan Council for the Arts and Cultural Affairs (MCACA) grant program. Below are five of the most readily used economic development grant programs here in Michigan.

### **10.8.1 Michigan Department of Natural Resources**

The Michigan Department of Resources (DNR) offers a number of grant programs to local municipalities. To be eligible for many of these grant programs, the municipality must have an adopted community recreation plan that has been developed in accordance to the DNR specifications and approved by the State of Michigan. These recreation plans must be current and updated every five years.

Three general grant programs for the development of recreational facilities include: 1) Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund – funds are available for acquisition of land for recreation, scenic beauty, or environmental importance and for construction of recreational facilities. All trust fund dollars must be matching by a twenty-five percent (25%) local match. Recreational facility projects are limited to \$300,000 in funds while the acquisition awards have no maximum. Source of funding is the oil and gas leases on State lands. 2) Recreation Passport Grant program provides grants ranging from \$15,000 to \$150,000 for the renovation of existing facilities with a minimum of a twenty-five percent local match. 3) Land and Water Conservation Fund provides grants ranging from \$30,000 to \$300,000 for the expansion of recreational activities within local communities.

The DNR has a variety of other specialized grant programs for boating infrastructure, off-road vehicle trail improvements, snowmobile trail improvements, dam management, invasive species control, habitat improvement, urban forestry, marine safety, and recreational law enforcement grants.

### **10.8.2 Michigan Department of Transportation**

The Michigan Department of Transportation (M-DOT) provides a variety of grant programs related to infrastructure development. One of these grant programs is the Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) that has been used by many local municipalities to fund a variety of streetscape, non-motorized pathway, and historic preservation projects that enhance the community’s intermodal transportation system. Since townships do not own their own roads, they do not receive any allocations of the state-generated transportation revenues (called Act 51 transportation funds). With the TAP program funds only available to Act 51 recipient communities, Weldon Township would have to partner with the Benzie County Road Commission on a TAP grant application. The TAP program would be a good source of funding to complete a variety of non-motorized transportation projects within the Township.

M-DOT offers a variety of grant programs including Safe Routes to Schools; Transportation Economic Development Fund; Small Urban, Rural Task Force; Freight Economic Development; and Local Bridge programs. Each of these grant programs has different goals and funding requirements.

### **10.8.3 Michigan Strategic Fund**

The Michigan Strategic Fund’s Community Revitalization Program provides loans and grants to a variety of economic development projects, including historic preservation projects. PA 252 of 2011 revised the Michigan Strategic Fund Act to allow for job creation grants and loans to contaminated, functional obsolete, blighted, and/or historic resources.

### **10.8.4 U.S. Department of Agriculture – Rural Development**

The U.S. Department of Agriculture is engaged in rural development activities within each state. Michigan is divided into six districts with local offices located within each district. The Traverse City-Area office is the lead office for the Traverse City area of Michigan. Michigan’s Rural Development office provides a variety of services including: 1) grants and loans for the construction, enlargement, or improvement of essential community facilities (fire and rescue facilities, jails, health clinics, nursing homes, airports, city halls, libraries, community centers, and schools); 2) grants and loans to improve water and sewer facilities in rural communities; 3) housing loans and loan guarantees for rural low income individuals; 4) business and industry loan guarantees for rural businesses.

### **10.8.5 Economic Development Administration – U.S. Department of Commerce**

The Economic Development Administration (EDA) is a department of the U.S. Department of Commerce, and the Chicago regional office provides services in the State of Michigan. One of the programs operated by the EDA is their Public Works program that helps distressed communities revitalize, expand, and upgrade their physical infrastructure. This program enables communities to attract new industry; encourage business expansion; diversify local economies; and generate or retain long-term, private-sector jobs and investment through the acquisition or development of land and infrastructure improvements needed for the successful establishment or expansion of industrial or commercial enterprises. This program has funded portions of industrial park developments across the State of Michigan. The EDA also supports the development of economic development strategies through the completion of Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy plans that will assist local governments in qualifying for EDA support.

## **10.9 Additional Resources**

### **10.9.1 Michigan Townships Association**

A member organization that provides training, newsletters, and consultations to Township officials while advocating on behalf of townships in Lansing.

512 Westshire Drive  
Lansing, MI 48917  
(517) 321-6467  
[www.michigantownships.org](http://www.michigantownships.org)

### **10.9.2 County Extension Services**

In Michigan, extension agents concentrate on assisting communities with land use problems, free of charge. Agents may serve as meeting facilitators and may be able to access additional help from Michigan State University faculty.

Benzie County Extension  
448 Court Pl.  
Beulah, MI 49617  
(231) 882-0025  
<https://www.canr.msu.edu/benzie/>

### **10.9.3 County Planning Commission**

The Benzie County Planning Commission is committed to quality planning through education, information, and advocacy, and it is dedicated to promoting planning practices that benefit the residents of Benzie County. One goal of county planning is to ensure coordination between communities so that individual planning goals and objectives within one community support and do not adversely impact land use efforts in adjoining communities.

Benzie County Planning Commission  
448 Court Pl.  
Beulah, MI 49617  
(231) 882-9674  
[http://www.benzieco.net/departments/planning\\_commission/index.php](http://www.benzieco.net/departments/planning_commission/index.php)

#### **10.9.4 Regional Planning Agency**

Regional planning agencies were formed to ensure regional planning efforts across larger boundaries than cities and counties. In Michigan, many regional planning organizations were formed due to the passage of the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1962 that mandated the formation of metropolitan planning organizations for any urbanized areas over 50,000. Congress wanted to ensure that transportation funds were being allocated on a continuing, cooperative, and comprehensive planning process. Michigan’s regional planning agencies act as coordinating agencies for the local governmental units they serve. These agencies create development plans, and they now conduct all types of research and studies for their planning region. Local municipalities may find their Regional Planning Agency to be a valuable resource for information and guidance. Municipalities in Benzie County may seek guidance from:

Networks Northwest  
600 E. Front St. – Suite 104  
Traverse City, MI 49686  
[www.networksnorthwest.org](http://www.networksnorthwest.org)

#### **10.9.5 Other Local Officials**

Talking with other local units of governments with similar issues and problems can be extremely beneficial in determining successful land use policies and strategies. Fellow officials from neighboring communities have often faced similar problems, and their experience may provide guidance in avoiding similar pitfalls while providing valuable lessons learned.

## 10.10 Additional Opportunities

### 10.10.1 Non-Traditional Conservation Efforts – Site Landscaping and Windbreaks

#### Site Landscaping

The scientific benefits of urban forests and rural windbreaks has developed significantly over the last 25 years. Both conservation interventions will positively impact the physical and mental well-being of Weldon Township’s residents.

Weldon Township is a rural community that has limited urbanized development within its boundaries (excluding the Village of Thompsonville itself and the Crystal Mountain development) so concerns relative developing and maintaining an urban forest canopy is not as important to other more urbanized or forested portions of the State. However, inappropriately designed developments will impact Weldon Township’s rural character. Site landscaping is a powerful tool to preserve the community’s character without impacting new development and investment.

The appropriate amount and location of site landscaping will often provide the necessary visual improvements to nearly any development. Less intensive developments may only require decorative landscaping to be used to aesthetically enhance and soften the development while more intensive developments may require more dense landscape buffering. This landscaping actually shields the site from the adjoining parcels and adjacent road rights-of-way.

Site landscaping is often a mixture of: 1) canopy shade trees planted along all road rights-of-way, 2) general site landscaping that includes a mixture of decorative deciduous and evergreen trees and shrubs that provide visual interest and aesthetic appeal across a development, and 3) parking lot landscaping designed to break-up the scale and size of the hard surface while providing some buffering of the parking use from the adjoining roadways and properties and environmental benefits. More intensive residential development that may be envisioned on the outskirts of the Village of Thompsonville, which should have sufficient landscaping to ensure a pleasing development, and these development requirements should be included with the Township’s Zoning Ordinance. More intensive industrial uses and factory farming should have the more concentrated landscape buffering requirements to limit their impacts upon adjoining property owners and passersby.

Recent scientific studies have found that communities with dense urban forest cover have improved economic, environmental, health-related outcomes than communities with less forested cover. Careful consideration should be given to strike the balance between too intensive regulation while recognizing the off-site impacts that poorly landscaped developments may have upon adjacent properties and the community at large.

### 10.10.2 Open Space Protection

Parks and open spaces are a vital tool in improving a community's quality of life. Many people enjoy active and passive outdoor recreation, and well-utilized outdoor spaces also help to build the sense of community.

With approximately two-thirds (2/3rds) of the Township state forest, utilization of open space protection tools are less likely; however, specific significant sites or resources may require active protection from development, and one or more of these tools may be utilized for these purposes.

There are a variety of tools to protect open spaces and natural features through public and private action:

#### **Land Trust/ Conservancy**

Land trusts, also known as land conservancies, are local, regional, state, national, or international nonprofit organizations directly involved in protecting land for its natural, recreational, aesthetic, historical, or agricultural value. These entities may be established to protect a single parcel, while others may actively pursue and manage open space across an entire region. Land trusts employ numerous tools to protect land, including acquisition/purchase, receiving and holding conservation easements, and facilitating the transfer of ownership of conservation easements to other conservation groups. Because these groups are non-profits, they can generally act faster than local governments when conservation opportunities present themselves.

Conservancies and land trusts may directly purchase and operate preserves for recreational purposes. They can also offer the technical and financial assistance for acquisition of land for conservancy purposes, and often, they work in cooperation with government agencies to

plan for open space protection. Some land conservancies also manage land owned by others or advise landowners how to protect and preserve the natural character of their land. Land conservancies also accept donations of land or conservation easements. The Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy is dedicated to the preservation and stewardship of natural and open space in Antrim, Benzie, Grand Traverse, Kalkaska and Manistee Counties .

### **Open Space/ Conservation Easement**

Open space, or conservation, easements are legally binding restrictions that run with the land in perpetuity. These easements are either given by donation or sold by property owners, and they limit what may be done on the land in perpetuity. Because of the easement, change of ownership does not undermine the original commitment to ensure open space preservation. The easements also provide an economic benefit to the donor/seller by giving a financial benefit (either through cash or value of the donated easement) to them. Easements are a less expensive approach than outright acquisition, and it retains the land in private use thus continuing to provide revenue to the municipality.

Although the initiation of easements by the landowner is voluntary, the development rights that are transferred are maintained in a legally binding manner. Easements are often donated, but can also be purchased. Those making charitable donations of permanent easement rights can benefit from federal income and estate tax relief, provided that the land be used for outdoor recreation, maintenance of natural habitats and ecosystems, scenic enjoyment, or historical significance. The enforcement and monitoring of such easements is often entrusted to a land conservancy. One of the many functions of the Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy involves protecting the region by encouraging landowners to place conservation easements on lands that will protect water quality and sensitive natural areas.

Although they function in the same manner, open space and conservation easements are somewhat different. Open space easements, which are meant to maintain open space for human use, allow limited activities such as agriculture or recreation to take place on the subject property while keeping the encroachment of development at bay. The conservation

easement, on the other hand, is not necessarily meant to protect land for human use, but to protect land that is environmentally sensitive or unique.

### **Land Purchase**

The most straightforward option to preserve natural areas and open space in a community is through direct purchase. Although this is likely the most expensive option, there are ways to pursue land acquisition in an economically feasible manner, such as land banking (land is systematically purchased and set aside), or lease-back/sell-back, whereby the governmental unit purchases the land and either leases or sells it with deed restrictions. There are also a variety of financing options and means available to leverage funds available to municipalities. These methods include sale of bonds to raise capital for land purchase, dedicated millages, state and federal grants for acquisition of land for parks and recreation, donations of funds from foundations, and acquisition by a third party, such as a local, regional, statewide or national land trust.

When attempting to purchase property, timing may be an issue. Tools that may be employed to lengthen the time to raise funds to purchase include Options to Buy or Rights-of-First Refusal. Leasing may also be an option.

One concern is that property values are often artificially escalated when property owners suspect that a public entity is interested in trying to purchase their land. Citizen support for public acquisition may be difficult to gain in areas not experiencing intense development pressure because of the perception that the need does not exist. A second consideration that must be evaluated is that property purchased by the community is property that is no longer on the tax rolls and must now be maintained.

### **Donation**

While a community or land trust cannot force a landowner into donating property, interested landowners may donate their property to a land trust, municipality, or other organization. Public education on the critical importance of the community's natural resource base can go a long way in cultivating landowners to consider land donation. Land

can be donated outright, or landowners may opt for the "reserved life estate" option. The "reserved life estate" option allows the property owner to live on the property for the rest of their lifetime, after which time property ownership transfers to the community or land conservancy. A landowner can also sell their land to an organization at less than the fair market value. The difference in sales price may be claimed as a tax deduction. Because the land is given, this method does not always result in the best land for conservation purposes.

### **Deed Restriction**

Restrictions can be placed upon private property that limits its future uses, including in the form of Subdivision Deed Restrictions and Condominium Documents. Subdivision deed restrictions are used in conventional, platted subdivisions. Site condominium restrictions are usually found in a project's master deed and by-laws. These restrictions can accomplish many objectives, such as: wetland and water body buffers, preservation of existing wooded areas, limitations on pesticide and fertilizer application, natural/indigenous landscaping, impervious surface limitations, etc.

While these restrictions can be similar to those of a conservation easement, they are only enforceable by the prior owner or other involved parties. A site condominium's property owners' association has the power to assess residents, and each resident is a shareholder in the condominium project. In a site condominium, the restrictions are legally binding, and thus must be recorded with the proper authorities. This offers a stronger mechanism for maintaining these restrictions than is possible in a subdivision plat.

Unfortunately, these restrictions may be canceled at any time upon an agreement between the parties to the agreement. Also, like any other development restriction that runs with the land, new landowners must be made aware of the restrictions.

### **Development Right Transfers**

Two types of development right transfer programs exist – Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) and Purchase of Development Rights (PDR). In both instances, the property owners

voluntarily enter the program to transfer development rights from their property to preserve natural features, open space, or agricultural uses from future development.

In the instance of TDR programs, the property owner of a site or parcel within an area that has been deemed for preservation voluntarily sells their rights for future development to a developer or other interested party who then transfers these development rights to a parcel(s) that has been designated to accept additional development above the standard zoning maximums. Through the Zoning Ordinance, the municipality identifies both the development and preservation areas.

With PDR programs, funds are raised from governmental, private, and non-profit sources to purchase the development rights outright. These development rights are then held by the entity in perpetuity. The property owner benefits through reduced carrying costs because the land no longer can be developed to its original highest and most intensive use thus reducing its tax liabilities while the municipality and its residents are able to preserve an asset in its undeveloped state. PDRs conservation approach is similar to an easement program.