

# The Charter Township of Chocolay Comprehensive Plan 2010

---

## Executive Summary

### A. Introduction

The Charter Township of Chocolay wrote a Comprehensive Plan in 2005 that encouraged the Township to establish policies to manage development and growth, and implement strategies that together establish a vision of the Township for the future. The Plan served as a guide to decision-making by the Township, as well as private individuals and entities relative to development. In following the Michigan Zoning Enabling Act, the Township has to review the Comprehensive Plan every 5 years, and make any changes that they feel is needed. Since community planning is a continual process, and the Township has changed we wanted to re-evaluate our goals, principles, and objectives. To do that the Township wanted to re-write sections of the Comprehensive Plan and, in conjunction with the Superior Watershed Partnership, we applied for a Michigan Coastal Management Grant to update our current plan. The new plan will be adopted by the Township Board in 2011.

The Plan is divided into 15 elements: Executive Summary, Demographics, Economy, Housing, Natural Features, Existing Land Use, Public Facilities and Services, Transportation, Visions, Goals, Policies, and Objectives, Areas of Particular Concern, Future Land Use, and Zoning Plan. The Appendices with supporting material follows. This comprehensive land use planning document for Chocolay Charter Township reviews the land use, and demographic trends of the previous decades, recommends numerous land use goals and policies for the next five years and beyond, and projects a physical vision as represented by the future land use map for the communities growth and development.

The Master Plan for Chocolay Charter Township, as recommended by the Planning Commission, incorporates Smart Growth principles as proposed by the Smart Growth Network, the Michigan Planning Association, and many other state and national organizations concerned about the impacts of urban sprawl.

For each element, there is an overall goal supported by a series of principles that together establish the policy foundation for the Plan. Benchmarks are recommended as measurable targets within sections of each element. The goals and principles are further supported by a series of objectives and strategies. Each strategy identifies the parties responsible for implementation and the timeframe in which implementation should occur.



## Planning 101

- Planning is an orderly, open approach to determining local needs, setting goals and priorities, and developing a guide for action.
- Planning is a concentrated effort by the community as a whole, to reach a balance between preserving the natural environment and allowing for new commercial and industrial development.
- A plan is a guide for public officials and citizens to use in the decision making process.

## Planning is Not:

- An attempt to replace market forces of supply and demand. It helps shape and channel.

### **B. What are the Major Goals of the Comprehensive Plan?**

The following are the goals established for each of the major elements. Along with supporting principles, they serve as the policy foundation for the Plan. They are presented by element:

1. **Growth Management:** Growth will be managed in a manner that ensures the best development that is compatible with the community's values and aspirations, while ensuring sufficient revenues to provide facilities and services. Growth and development will focus on preserving rural character of the community.
2. **Land Use:** A consistent, orderly pattern of land use and development will be established that will take into consideration the desire for growth, while preserving the rural character of the community and protecting the natural environment.
3. **Community Character:** The rural atmosphere and natural features of the Township will be used as a template to shape future growth and development.
4. **Transportation:** A transportation network that allows for the safe and efficient movement of goods and people will be supported and enhanced.
5. **Community Facilities and Services:** A range of well-funded community facilities and services will be provided that sustain and/or enhance the Township's quality of life and fulfill the Township's needs as the Township grows and changes.
6. **Parks & Recreation:** A wide variety of recreational opportunities will be provided to all residents and visitors to the Township. Use of recreational opportunities offered by the area's natural environment will be maximized.
7. **Economic Development:** The Township's economic base will be expanded to create diverse employment opportunities, encourage additional investment and reinvestment in the community, and ensure sufficient revenues are available to support the Township.
8. **Housing:** An adequate supply of affordable, safe housing will be provided that is consistent with the needs of current and future residents. In addition to neighborhoods remaining environmentally friendly and low-density in character, they shall also provide fair housing opportunities for all residents. Coordination with public and private sectors should be done to implement specialized housing for the elderly.
9. **Environmental Resources:** Natural systems and resources will be conserved and integrated with development and recreation opportunities to provide a sustainable community.

10. **Implementation:** The Plan will result in measurable, positive change in the community that is consistent with the vision established in the Plan.

### **What are the Major Themes of the Comprehensive Plan?**

#### ***Managed Growth***

The primary focus of the Plan is well-managed growth. The Plan contains an element focused on growth management. It is the intention of the Township to encourage growth, but to do so in a moderate, well-paced growth that ensures revenues will be generated to meet the needs of the community. This requires expansion of the Township's tax base and infrastructure to ensure the provision of adequate services. The Township should also look at the location of future public utilities in terms of growth. While some areas in our Township have a municipal waste system, the location is in our high density residential neighborhoods. The Township should explore extending the municipal sewer to other areas, in our Township that are higher density in nature as well. Currently, the Township does not have a municipal water system which has influenced the pace of development. The majority of our residents commented on the Township survey that they would like to see a municipal water system in the Harvey area, but not the rest of our Township.

Growth will be managed through a variety of objectives and strategies: expanding the tax base (commercial uses along the US Highway 41 and M-28E corridor); ensuring development contributes its fair share of the infrastructure costs; and, expanding the housing stock to provide a full range of housing options.

#### ***Sustainability***

To ensure that the Township will be successful in managing growth, it must also make certain that its future is sustainable. Sustainability is measured in many ways: sufficient tax revenues generated to meet local needs; community facilities that meet the needs of residents; a range of affordable housing opportunities; environmental resources that are conserved for future generations; and, development, in appropriate locations, that is consistent with the rural character of the community.

The vision of the Plan is sustainable, provided the economic base grows in tandem with the growth of the community. In 2010, revenues are expected to meet community needs. The Township's future will be sustainable through a number of objectives and strategies: expanding the tax base with a focus on broadening the housing stock to provide a full range of options; strengthening the community's management of the environment; establishing light industry/commercial districts where appropriate; and, adopting a design overlay to future growth of key corridors.

#### ***Managing the Communities Character***

The character of the Township is unique, particularly given its rural heritage and natural features. A survey of the community conducted in 2010 indicated that the rural character of the Township is important to local residents and should be preserved.

The Plan identifies appropriate areas within the Township for various types of new development and recreational opportunities. It recommends the Township protects its character and ensures new development and reinvestments are consistent and compatible with the community's "rural" environment. In the future, the Township will be

faced with pressure from the north to “urbanize”. This pressure would best be managed by taking a proactive approach to zoning within the Township.

### ***Expanding Community Services***

The policies in the Plan promote options for expanding growth and development in the Township. The Land Use Element identifies areas for growth and development along corridors, such as M-28E and US Highway 41S. In order to support this growth, the Township must ensure sufficient services will be available to meet local needs. For example, significant portions of the Township are not currently served by municipal sewer system. The village of Harvey and portions of Riverside and Ewing Park subdivision are on the sewer system. The remaining portions of the Township rely upon on-site septic systems. The entire Township relies on private wells as their source for water. The Township should continue to explore options with the City of Marquette to extend the water line into our Township. According to the community survey that was mailed in 2010, majority of our residents wanted to see water in the Harvey area, but did not want it expanded to our entire Township. The Township should look into adding a new overlay district dealing with wellhead protection, as ground water is how water gets into the private wells.

The Township should explore the opportunity to expand the water, and wastewater along portions of US 41S and M-28 corridor. This will provide the necessary infrastructure for development along the corridor. Specific attention should be given to areas that are slated for future development on lots of 5 acres and less.

This is a concept for the future that will take time and money to implement. It should be pursued as opportunities arise, especially as funds are made available from Federal, state, and local sources for these types of community enhancements.

While this is a long-term vision, the Township will also continue to work with property owners, businesses, and investors to emphasize appropriate development.

### ***Housing for All***

A broad range of housing opportunities is critical to a fully functioning and sustainable community. Examples include decent and livable housing conditions, opportunities for home ownership, and adequate sites for development of new housing, in areas where there is adequate infrastructure to support development. Housing supports economic development by helping attract workers and business owners to the community and can generate positive net revenue (if higher valued and lower density) by increasing the tax base.

A wide range of policies are recommended to address current needs in broadening the housing stock, to promote affordable housing units that meet housing needs, to encourage preservation of privacy for residents, and to encourage reuse and maintenance of existing housing to prevent deterioration and blight. The Township should ensure that there are housing options for our aging populations.

### ***Environmental Conservation***

Chocolay Township contains numerous natural features including lakes, creeks, woodlands and rolling topography. These features make an important contribution to the quality of life in the Township. The plan recommends a number of means to accommodate development while protecting the valuable resources that are critical to Chocolay Township's quality of life.

The Plan embraces a strong dedication to conserving the natural environment, and features of which are unique to the Township. The Chocolay River and its tributary system are outstanding natural assets that provide recreation, natural beauty, and definition to the Township's character. Inland lakes, extensive woodlots and tree resources, natural habitats, and rolling topography in portions of the Township are other contributors.

The Natural Features Chapter of the Plan focuses on preserving the most outstanding resources, conserve other resources as development occurs, and mitigate the negative impacts of development on the entire resource system. The recommendation of the Plan is to include an environmental assessment map as part of the zoning and subdivision process; amend the Lake Superior Dune Overlay District; and encourage open space areas, maintaining the rural environment desired by the majority of residents.

### **What was the Planning Process?**

- 1. Phase 1 – Getting Organized:** Organizational tasks occurred in the first phase, including meetings of the Township Planning Commission to brainstorm ideas, and issuing a *Notice to Plan* to all registered entities and adjacent Townships.
- 2. Phase 2 – Visioning:** The visioning phase extended throughout the planning process, but its major activities occurred at the onset. Its intent was to gather public input early as a basis for developing the Plan's policies and to continue participation.
- 3. Phase 3 – Existing Conditions:** This phase focused on data gathering and analysis. It occurred simultaneously with the first tasks in Phase 2. The major tasks included collection of data and inventory of existing conditions, including the natural and built characteristics of the planning area, and gathering input from the Township Planning Commission and residents on the needs and desires of the community. This information was analyzed to identify trends, issues, and opportunities.
- 4. Phase 4 – Concepts:** The fourth phase of the planning process involved analysis of existing conditions and concept planning regarding a preferred land use and development scheme for the Township.
- 5. Phase 5 – Draft Plan:** In the fifth phase, the results of the previous phases were merged into a draft document which was submitted to the Township Planning Commission and Township Board for review.
- 6. Phase 6 – Adoption:** Once the Township Board and Planning Commission approved the draft document, the Plan was presented to the County Planning Commission and registered recipients for review and comment. After the 65-day review period, the Township will hold a public hearing on the adoption of the Plan.
- 7. Implementation:** The "real" work begins with the adoption of the Plan. Implementation will occur on an on-going basis. To guide implementation, the Plan recommends strategies using specific timeframes.

## **What Did the Community Tell Us?**

### **1. What do People Value about Chocolay Township?**

According to the 2010 Resident Survey (See Appendices – 2010 Resident Survey), a majority of residents feel the quality of life in their neighborhood is excellent and the quality of life in the Township is good. The most treasured aspect of Township life can be classified as rural character.

### **2. Issues that Need Addressing?**

The survey also indicated that Township residents feel a strong need for changes in, road maintenance, additional housing for seniors, preserve our natural features, redevelop vacant and underutilized land, improve accessibility to open space, and attract new commercial businesses.

### **3. What the Future should hold for Chocolay Township?**

Ideas generated regarding making the Township the best community possible require focusing on road network improvements; updating, establishing and enforcing Zoning Ordinances; managing the amount, rate and quality of growth; encouraging traditional design and thus maintaining the “rural” atmosphere; expanding light retail and home businesses; and, ensuring adequate funding for current and future expanded Township services and facilities. The Township should continue its development of alternative transportation modes such as bicycle paths and continue to try and develop a neighborhood park in the Harvey Area.

## **Major Changes since the last comprehensive plan update**

### **2008**

The Zoning Ordinance was amended to include recommendations for the 2005 Comprehensive Plan. Some of the changes included condensing the rural residential districts into one district: Agricultural/Forestry, allowing for up to four homes sharing one common driveway without having to apply for a private road.

The Township also asked our voters to approve a millage that would allow the Township to resurface some of residential districts over a six year period. The millage was approved.

### **2009**

The intersection of US 41S/M-28E/Cherry Creek was reconstructed to allow for better flow of traffic and to reduce the number of accidents at the intersection.

### **2010**

The most significant change in the Township since the completion of the last Plan was the Township received a MDOT Enhancement Grant and DNR Trust Fund Grant. Those grants allowed the Township construction of 1.9 new miles of non-motorized pathway, pedestrian tunnel under US 41S, multi-use bridge over the Chocolay River, removal of pedestrian overpass. This project allowed the Township’s residents to ride their bikes, walk from M-28E to connect with the bike path along US 41S and into Marquette.

## **Land Capacity**

Much of the character of the Township is easily observed from its landscape along US 41S and M-28E. The vast percentage of the Township is dominated by agricultural fields and forested areas, validating the Township's reputation as a rural municipality. Although development has been ongoing throughout the Township over the past five years, the main patterns of development have not changed dramatically since the development of the 2005 Plan.

Much of the residential development in the Township has been relegated to the main traffic arteries radiating out from US 41S and M-28E, which runs north and south and East through the Township. Many physical land characteristics lend themselves well to all forms of land use. Prime agricultural land is usually the most attractive property for developers. With approximately 80% of the land cover in the Township's devoted to forest, agriculture and open fields, it is impossible to ignore the influence of these land uses on the residents of the community.

## **Fiscal Considerations**

The Township currently operates a \$1,589,112.00 budget, using a zero-based budget each year. The Township anticipates receiving \$387,950.00 in State of Michigan revenue sharing funds, and collecting \$ 645,400.00 in property taxes. Additional revenue in the amount of \$140,000.00 is anticipated from the operation of the refuse collection. Other sources of revenue include state swamp taxes, property administration fees, cable franchise fees, interest and dividend income and library tax revenue.

The Township FY 2012 budget indicates the largest expense is for the Township employees' salaries and benefits with a total expenditure of \$608,976.00. Other expenditures include 91,650.00 for Townships recreation and properties. In addition, several of the Township governance area expenses are identified within the budget. These include Supervisor, Elections, Assessor, Clerk, Board of Review, Treasurer, Cemetery and Planning Commission, Streets and Newsletter.

## **Populations Trends and Forecast**

Population is one of the basic elements of any planning analysis. An overall understanding of the needs, wants and characteristics of the people who live in the Township depends on such items as population, types of household, diversity, distribution, changing trends and the reasons for change. The provision of government services to residents is greatly affected by population characteristics. Predictions of the extent and location of future populations allows community planners to determine the level and distribution of new facilities and services. Land use and development decisions by Township and county officials are dependent, in part, on current and estimated future population characteristics.

## **The Township's population from the 2010 Census showed**

### **G. What is the Township's History?**

Chocolay Township was established by order of the County Board on March 17, 1860. The first Township meeting was held at the office of Edwards and Company near the mouth of the Chocolate River on April 2, 1860. Since the early map of 1864, boundaries for the Township have changed and the land mass has become smaller over time. Sections of land once part of Chocolay Township were given to Forsyth, Turin, Sands, Skandia and West Branch Townships. Early property owners of Chocolay Township were John Burt, Jonathan Mitchell, Robert Graveraet, Ellen White and Charles T. Harvey.

From 1870 to 1920, logging and farming went hand-in-hand. Logging was a mainstay of our Township's early economy. Farming had always been an important part of our Township's economy, up until 50 or 60 years ago. There were five dairies that had operated in Chocolay and the last one, Hillcrest Dairy located on the top of Green Garden Hill, closed in 1983. Early businesses helped to sustain the community, such as boarding houses, taverns, shoemaker shop, and candy store. As our landscape has changes, the businesses have changed as well. The Township's commercial corridor is US 41S, where the business range from gas stations, banks, to family operated plumbing and heating company that is a lifelong resident of Beaver Grove.

The Township's current land use is made up of majority residential neighborhoods and commercial businesses that are the service nature. The Township has few farms left and only a handful of industrial businesses.