

2000-2020 Master Plan

Appendix: Economic Viability of Agricultural Lands

Background

The 2000-2020 Highland Township Comprehensive Land Use Plan outlines the future goals for development in the community. The Master Plan goals for Agriculture and Rural Residential Development discuss the Township's vision for properties *in case of development*. With recent input gathered from Township residents, residents have reaffirmed interest in seeing farm fields and open spaces preserved. They are looking for more economic opportunities that will preserve the rural character of the Township, and have the ability to use existing buildings, such as barns, farm houses and farmsteads, for small, agriculturally-related businesses or businesses that will not be inconsistent with rural and open space character.

A sub-committee was formed to study this question. They recommended updates to the Township's Master Plan that addresses economic opportunities in rural areas of the community. Information gathered to support the draft Master Plan amendments includes the following:

1. Results from a public meeting, held in January, 2018. At this meeting, participants clearly requested that additional economic opportunities for rural property owners be allowed to support small business ventures in agricultural or open space areas of the Township. The meeting results included a list of possible business ventures.
2. Review of the existing intent and goals for the Agriculture and Rural Residential Future Land Use category in the Master Plan.
 - a. An overarching goal for Highland Township is to preserve rural character in the Township by creating a core of more intensive development surrounded by a ring of lower density agricultural, rural-residential and recreational land uses.
 - b. The Agriculture and Rural Residential Future Land Use category currently calls for any re-development on lands with this future land use designation be residential in nature, and at densities of 5 to 10 acres per dwelling unit. It also permits open space developments with densities of 3 units per acre, with preservation of natural features.
 - c. Accommodate small-scale agriculture is a goal of this future land use category.
3. Identify the "visually prominent" rural open spaces. The Master Plan refers to "visually prominent" rural open spaces, but does not identify their location on a map. The subcommittee referenced an aerial photograph showing active farming operations and natural features, and created a map that identifies the road corridors that contain "visually prominent" rural open spaces.

Draft Master Plan Amendments

Highland Township has used the technique of adopting "sub-area plans" to amend its Master Plan document, rather than doing a complete re-write of the document. Since the topic at hand will impact the entire Township, these amendments are being treated as an "appendix" to the 2000-2020 Master Plan. This approach is similar to a sub-area plan, but applies the goals and policies to the entire Township.

The following is an amendment to the Master Plan.

Agriculture and Rural Residential Future Land Use

The 2000-2020 Highland Township Comprehensive Land Use Plan includes a future land use category called “Agriculture and Rural Residential Development.” It discusses the vision for these parcels in case of development. However, additional guidance is necessary in case a property owner would prefer to leave the land in farming or in a natural state, but use the existing buildings in an economically-beneficial way.

This update provides an overarching policy and specific goals to establish a basis for new zoning or other tools to expand agricultural pursuits into more modern, marketing-based operations, such as community based agriculture (CSAs), you-pick operations, wineries and other economically viable activities. Guidance is also provided to allow re-purposing existing rural buildings for new uses, as long as the activity leaves intact farmland or open space.

Policy Statement

Many of today’s large parcel owners have difficulty using their land in an economically-viable manner while maintaining the land’s agricultural or open space character. This could include:

- A small farmer trying to maintain their farms solely through production of commodity crops (corn, soy beans and wheat), while they could better sustain their farms with additional farm-based business options. The expansion of farm-based, economic opportunities could help large property owners preserve their farms, and in turn preserve the agricultural and open space character in various parts of the Township. In addition, many farm-based economic uses may be developed that minimize or eliminate potential adverse impacts on nearby uses.
- A large-tract property that is not actively farmed, but may have considerable open space that could be used for small-scale businesses that benefit from the rural atmosphere or existing natural resources.

The “test” for any new use is that it preserves the rural character of the area.

Purpose of Master Plan Amendments

Add guiding principles and policies in the Master Plan that encourage economic opportunity on agricultural lands and large tracts with natural features without sacrificing the farmland and open space character.

Master Plan Guiding Principles/Policies:

IN GENERAL:

1. Natural features in the area should be preserved. Such features, including woodlands, wetlands, lakes, stream corridors, steep slopes, groundwater recharge areas, landmark trees, and fence rows should not be modified or removed.
2. The Township will coordinate planning efforts with adjacent Townships along the common boundaries to preserve agricultural land and open spaces in the adjoining areas.
3. The designated area will not be served by public water and sanitary sewer service. Such service would be incompatible with uses that preserve agriculture/open space character. Individual septic tanks/drain fields and water supply wells will be encouraged to serve residences/uses on

individual lots in this area, and under certain limited circumstances, private community wastewater systems may be used.

4. Guiding principles that apply to both agriculturally-related and open-space-related compatible businesses include the following:
 - a. Agricultural and open space views along the road corridors that contain visually prominent rural open spaces will be preserved. The corridors containing visually prominent rural open spaces are identified in the map on the next page.
 - b. Compatible businesses will not generate excessive noise, light, or other off-site impacts.
 - c. Existing agricultural buildings and homesteads, where available, will be encouraged to be part of the compatible business in their existing footprint. If permitted, any new buildings will preserve agricultural character in scale, and the architecture of any new buildings will be consistent with the existing architecture on-site and with agricultural buildings in the neighborhood.
 - d. The site will provide adequate vehicle access from a public road. The public road will be able to accommodate the proposed traffic generated by the use.
 - e. Parking for such use will be located adjacent to the re-purposed buildings, away from residential uses on adjoining lots, and screened from neighbors.
 - f. Lighting for such uses will be the lowest necessary for safe use of the site.
 - g. Hours of operation for such uses will be limited to ensure neighbors have quiet enjoyment of their property.

AGRICULTURE PRESERVATION USES:

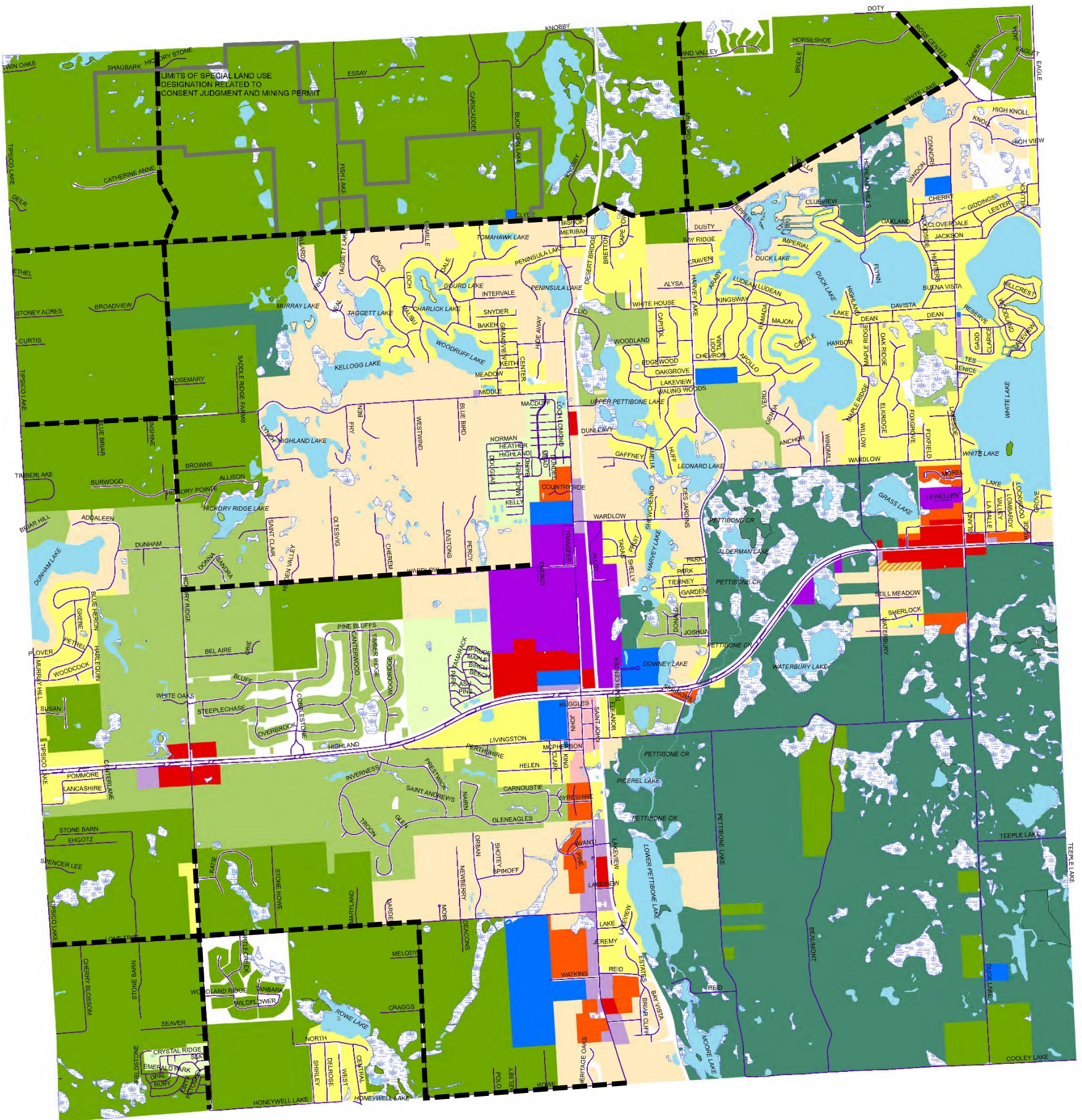
1. Small-scale agricultural operations will be encouraged on lands designated as Agricultural and Rural Residential on the Master Land Use Plan Map. These operations will include cultivation of fruits, grains, and vegetables; specialty farming; woodlot management (timber production); and non-intensive raising, grazing, and pasturing livestock and fowl.
2. Marketing of products produced by small-scale agricultural operations will be encouraged if they are consistent with the Zoning Ordinance and Generally Accepted Agricultural Management Practices (GAAMPS).
3. The amount of land in the designated area that is to be available for agricultural use should be maximized and farming parcels should be contiguous.
4. Compatible agriculturally-related businesses could become established in the designated area. These compatible businesses could include marketing of products produced by small-scale agricultural operations (i.e. farm markets, community-supported agriculture (CSAs), you-pick operations, wine tasting rooms, etc.), but are not intended to establish retail businesses for products not produced by the farm. Any compatible business will be subject to the following guiding principles:
 - a. Compatible businesses will be subordinate to and harmonious with agricultural production. Prime agricultural soils will be preserved.

- b. The nature of such compatible businesses will be small-scale, and consistent with the character of agricultural lands.

OPEN SPACE PRESERVATION USES:

1. Appropriate open space uses will be encouraged on lands designated as Agricultural and Rural Residential on the Master Land Use Plan Map. These uses will include low-intensity uses that preserve the character of the open space/natural features on site, which include uses such as nature preserves/nature centers, adventure course, or outfitter (in association with hiking, mountain biking, fishing, boating, or other nature-based opportunities), and similar uses. In addition, these uses could also re-purpose existing farmsteads and farm structures on the site for uses such as an event barn, retreat center, craftsman or artist workshop/studio, winery/brewery/distillery and associated tasting room, and similar uses.
2. Marketing of products manufactured by small workshops or small producers will be encouraged if they are consistent with the Zoning Ordinance.
3. The amount of land in the designated area that is preserved as open space/natural features should be maximized and parcels with preserved areas should be contiguous.
4. Compatible businesses could become established in the designated area. Any compatible business will be subject to the following guiding principles:
 - a. Compatible businesses will be subordinate to and harmonious with open space/natural feature preservation.
 - b. The nature of such compatible uses will be small-scale.

CONSOLIDATED MASTER PLAN



HIGHLAND TOWNSHIP 1999 MASTER LAND USE PLAN MAP
 ADOPTED JULY 6, 2000
 AND INCORPORATION OF MICRO-AREA ANALYSES THROUGH DECEMBER, 2010

re-adopted 06/20/2013
 Rev. 1-4-19

Legend

MasterPlan

FUTURE LAND USE

- AGRICULTURAL AND RURAL RESIDENTIAL (5 acre min. lot size)
- OPEN SPACE RESIDENTIAL
- MEDIUM AND SMALL LOT RESIDENTIAL (1.5 to 3 acre min. lot size)
- MEDIUM AND SMALL LOT (LV Zoning)
- MULTIPLE FAMILY RESIDENTIAL
- MANUFACTURED HOUSING COMMUNITY
- OFFICE AND LOW INTENSITY COMMERCIAL
- HIGHLAND STATION
- GENERAL COMMERCIAL
- COMMERCIAL TRANSITION ZONE
- INDUSTRIAL
- INSTITUTIONAL
- PARKS AND RECREATION

--- CORRIDORS THAT CONTAIN VISUALLY PROMINENT RURAL OPEN SPACES

