

ONTWA TOWNSHIP

MASTER PLAN UPDATE
VISIONING REPORT

JUNE 2010



INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

The Township is dedicated to expressive citizen input.

Ontwa Township is in the process of preparing a Master Plan to guide growth and development within the community. Citizen input is vitally important to the planning process, and the Township will be using this input to assist in evaluating trends and in forming goals and objectives for the community. To this end, the Township held a visioning workshop to garner opinions of Township residents and business owners.

The event was conducted in one approximately 2.5-hour session at the Edwardsburg Fire Hall, located at 69910 M-62, on Thursday, May 13, 2010. Approximately 45 people participated.

The Township undertook an extensive campaign to advertise the meeting to the public. Notices were posted in several business locations throughout the Township, a press release was sent to several venues including; the Elkhart Truth, the South Bend Tribune, the Edwardsburg Argus, the Voice (a local news magazine), and the notice was also included on Township sewer bills. Members of the Planning Commission and engaged citizens personally invited residents to attend the session.



The event was open to the public and was intended to give community residents an opportunity to voice concerns about current land use and development trends, and the impact these trends may have on demographics, agriculture, aesthetics, open space, lakes, natural features and

transportation in the Township. In addition, the meetings included facilitated group discussions intended to aid participants in identifying and prioritizing the factors that may affect the quality of life in the Township immediately and in the next twenty years or so.

The purpose of this report is to summarize the process of the workshop and its results. In addition, this report places the output from the Visioning Workshop in the broader context of the Master Plan process.

THE VISIONING ACTIVITY

The process will assist the Planning Commission in articulating the values of residents.



The purposes of the workshop included developing general consensus as to current development trends, and generating potential solutions to perceived issues.

The visioning activity was intended to develop a general consensus among the participants as to the likely result of a continuation of the current development trends in the Township, and what those trends may imply. This process will also assist the Planning Commission in articulating the values of Township residents. The information garnered from these activities will be significant to the later phases of the plan preparation process, as described later in this report.

Resource Materials. Before the visioning activity commenced, each participant was given resource materials to support the visioning session. These included a visioning exercise handout and a visual preference survey form. Large display-size maps were exhibited throughout the meeting space to help inform participant discussion.

The Visioning Process. The purpose of the Visioning Workshops included developing general consensus among the participants as to the likely result of continuation of current development trends, and generating potential solutions to perceived issues.

Williams & Works directed the workshops and facilitated group discussions. The atmosphere was open and informal, although the meetings followed an established format to assure a functional outcome. Light refreshments were provided and participants were encouraged to engage the process to provide the Township with the benefit of their experience, expertise and perspectives. The visioning workshop was structured as follows:

1. Welcome and Overview

The consultants from Williams & Works provided a brief introduction to the process and an overview explanation of how the results of the activity will be incorporated into the Ontwa Township Master Plan.

2. Land Use Images

In this activity, a series of slides were shown representing land use conditions common in communities along the Michigan/Indiana border. Participants used a sheet of paper to note their impressions of the scenes. Williams & Works led a general discussion of the images and the land use issues they may illustrate. The primary purpose of this activity was to help the participants begin to think

The land use images were used to help participants think about the multiple dimensions of land use, infrastructure and growth.

about the multiple dimensions of land use, infrastructure and growth as a precursor for the visioning exercise; and to collect participant perspectives relative to the issues the images represented. This activity also helped to “break the ice” among participants.

Several issues were raised in the context of these images, including the advantages of high-quality commercial developments that contribute to sense of place, farmland and open space preservation, lake safety and quality, and utilities. Community members noted that these issues are especially relevant to a visioning session since the Township will likely continue to grow in the future.

3. Visioning Exercise

The larger group of participants was divided into smaller “breakout” groups of about 10-15 persons to discuss the most important opportunities and threats confronting Ontwa Township.

Members of each group were asked to contemplate their impression (or vision) of an “ideal” future for Ontwa Township and to individually list opportunities that support the realization of their “vision.” Conversely, they were also asked to individually list threats that might impede the realization of their vision. The facilitators then led a discussion in which participants shared their lists of opportunities and threats and a group list of all ideas was developed. Once the group list was prepared, the facilitators worked with the groups to identify common items and to further expand on the descriptions to be certain that all understood each item.

The group members then ranked the list by using colored stickers to identify the most important threats and the most important opportunities. The participants received two blue dots, two red dots, and two green dots. Each participant used the following ranking system:

Blue: Greatest importance, Numeric Rank = 3

Red: Second most important, Numeric Rank = 2

Green: Third most important, Numeric Rank = 1

This process forced participants to select among the numerous items on the list and focus on the items of greatest interest to them. By assigning a numeric value to the colored stickers, the facilitators used a simple sum of the responses to identify threats or opportunities of highest priority according to group rankings.

The facilitators then reviewed the rankings with the group members to be certain that they understood the results and determine that a general consensus was reached. This also presented an opportunity for participants to review the relationships between some of the opportunities and threats listed.

4. Vision Statements

Participants then crafted vision statements that expressed what the Township would ideally be like in the year 2030. Participants were encouraged to focus on the top opportunities and threats when developing a vision statement.

5. Reports to Larger Group

At the completion of the final exercise, all the participants gathered for a brief report of their activities to the re-assembled plenary group. Each group was represented by a “spokesperson.” The spokesperson summarized the work of their group and the most important opportunities and threats identified.

LAND USE IMAGES

The land use images exercise revealed some striking consensus items among participants, while some other issues required more discussion. Following is a percentage breakdown of how participants responded and write-in comments:



1. Trails.

Which phrase/word best applies?

- 60% Trails are an amenity
- 4% I probably wouldn't use them anyway
- 3% Not a priority

Write-In Comments:

- I'd use them all the time
- I would like to see them connected to the village
- Very, very important
- A necessity! to get joggers off the roads
- Bikes - Safety. 90 mi of snow trails
- Hot button in SW Michigan
- It would be great to have more, esp. if someone else pays for them
- Trails are a major resource draw
- Need them, more, need to create
- Quality of life issue
- Expensive
- I would use



2. Commercial strip mall.

Which phrase/word best applies?

- 44% Offers services and provides tax base
- 42% This lacks character; design standards are needed
- 2% Not inviting; no place for people

Write-In Comments:

- Not large enough to support enclosed malls/free standing comm. business
- Use downtown (US-12) area
- We have enough of them - no more in next 20 years at least!



3. Low to medium density housing.

Which phrase/word best applies?

- 42% Rural living

24% Inefficient use of land

33% Eats up farmland

Write-In Comments:

- All of the above
- Keep community rural or at least regulate/control/enforce!
- I like it
- Build up existing subdivisions before subdividing any more!

4. Open space.



Which phrase/word best applies?

4% Keep people and development away

70% Preserve and protect it

11% Good development potential

Write-In Comments:

- Protect wetlands
- Control its development
- If I own it, I should determine the best use
- Depends on where located and what is put on the land
- Buy it and don't develop it!
- Define open space

5. Public sewer facilities.



Which phrase/word best applies?

53% Promotes development

42% Expensive

64% Protects groundwater and lake quality

Write-In Comments:

- All of the above
- Increases land value on water front. Subdivisions will come
- All the above
- Sewer system - which was demanded by lake residents - has brought the dense development applications on the lakes that the same lake residents now so piously (and sanctimoniously) oppose!
- OSHA violations
- All of the above



6. Agricultural land.

Which phrase/word best applies?

8% Good development potential

51% Support voluntary preservation programs

37% Restrict development

Write-In Comments:

- Use poorer agricultural land for development; preserve better farmland
- Purchase development rights; don't take them!



7. Mixed-use commercial design.

Which phrase/word best applies?

40% Attractive alternative to strip commercial

40% Possibly appropriate in one or two locations

31% Keep in Village, not in Township

Write-In Comments:

- None

8. Multiple-family housing.

Which phrase/word best applies?

11% We need options like this

24% Should be limited to senior housing

22% Does not belong here

Write-In Comments:

- Limit locations
- Limited opportunity
- We have some, use sparingly
- Only in village
- Already here
- Location
- Limited locations in the township
- Village
- In twp, in village
- Is there a need?
- Limited location
- Limited locations and quality standards needed
- Not in environmentally-sensitive areas
- We need options like this, but in the proper area
- There is excess supply already in the village. No more!



9. Lakefront development.

Which phrase/word best applies?

33% Wonderful living experience

53% Control density and uses to protect water quality

15% Detriment to the environment

Write-In Comments:

- No more lakefront development!
- Makes for ugly attitudes
- Limited usage by non-residents
- Safety on the lake
- Lakes are for everyone
- Safety
- Can be if there are wall to wall seawalls: we need to protect habitat, water quality, and overcrowded conditions
- All of the above



10. Medium to high density housing.

Which phrase/word best applies?

20% Small lots are good for young people and seniors

4% Great for vacation rentals

44% Too urban for our Township

Write-In Comments:

- Keep away from waterfronts
- Not good
- We have several areas from old plats
- Preserve single family status - reasonable sized lots
- Belongs in the village
- If limited, probably beneficial. Multi-density options have a lot of value
- Depends on what a person wants
- Some of this needed in the mix of planning
- Preserve open space and farmland!

VISIONING OUTPUT

The tables on the following pages include the “Opportunities and Threats” input and the vision statements from the workshop. In each case, the “opportunity” or “threat” is listed as drafted by the group. The statements have been ranked according to total points received during the visioning exercise. The facilitator’s name is the group identifier. The raw scores given to each statement depended on the rankings of the individual group members and since the groups did not have an equal number of participants, the raw scores are not meaningful. Therefore, it is not valid to compare raw scores between and among either the statements or the groups. However, it is appropriate to compare the statements based on the relative rankings assigned by each group.

Finally, it is important to understand that because participants were forced to identify only the three most important listings on the opportunities and threats list, many of the items were not ranked. This does not mean that these items will be overlooked in the process. But it does mean that, relative to the other listings that were ranked, they may have a lower priority – at least in the minds of the participants of the workshop.

Summary. Some of the highest-ranking opportunities involved maintaining the rural character of the community; redeveloping and beautifying the Village of Edwardsburg, notably the downtown area; wetland preservation; and recreational facilities and overall quality of life. Some of the highest-ranking threats dealt with uncontrolled growth and sprawl; environmental degradation; and code and ordinance enforcement concerns.

Rank	Opportunities	Rank	Threats
1	Preserve rural atmosphere and quality of life	1	Lack of code enforcement and follow-through with existing complaints
2	Redevelop Village instead of sprawling into Township	2	No community involvement, participation
3	Preserve wetlands	3	Uncontrolled development
3	Encourage redevelopment of industrial properties instead of building new (eliminate future tax liability)	3	Loss of rural character
4	More light manufacturing, retail shops to promote tourism	4	No rules on lake use/lake traffic - improve enforcement
5	Add walking trails as roads are paved	5	Too much contamination from residential fertilizer use
6	Smaller developments; fewer houses to maintain rural character and affordability	5	Lack of communication between Township and residents
6	Entice new village-scale businesses	5	Growth of trailer parks
6	Limit density of residential development	5	Lack of newspaper reporting on local issues
6	Bury overhead utilities	5	Current growth is beyond local official's ability to effectively control
6	Encourage "green" development and programs (i.e. recycling)		
7	Control urban sprawl		
7	Develop Township-wide Wi-Fi		
8	Pursue state and federal funding as much as possible		
8	Control traffic to prevent traffic congestion		
8	Guide potential location of wind farms		
8	Build political connections		
8	Make the Township a destination		
8	Encourage greater involvement in community from businesses		
8	Support sports complex		

Total Number of Opportunities: 20

Total Number of Threats: 10

Vision Statement: In the year 2030, Ontwa Township will be characterized by engaged and active citizens, superior schools, high-quality lakes and a small-town atmosphere achieved by controlling development and preserving wetlands and green space.

Rank	Opportunities	Rank	Threats
1	Rebuild downtown, beautify downtown Edwardsburg	1	Growth without proper planning, sprawl
2	Develop downtown theme	2	Environmental destruction
3	Sports complex, and pedestrian connections to the lakes	3	“Lake people vs. non-lake people”
4	Reevaluate zoning districts	4	Downtown redevelopment can’t happen without more density
5	More industrial jobs and business investment	5	The lakes are dying
6	Dual-trained fire-fighters and paramedics	5	M-62, US-12 – potential for undesired change and pass-through traffic
7	We do not want a lot of change	5	Higher taxes
7	Relaxed lifestyle	6	Lake-overcrowding
8	Wetland preservation	6	Zoning ordinances not keeping up to date with society
9	Planning for services, commercial near Village	6	County out of touch
10	Central gathering, recreation space	6	Too close to South Bend, Elkhart, Grainger
10	Walking and biking paths	7	Conflicts between suburbanites and farmers
10	Township-Village cooperation, inc. with CIA	7	No history/no identity
10	Better communication with County on vision	8	Too many curb-cuts
10	Good schools	8	Big box stores
10	Nicer parks and beaches	8	Railroad tracks split the town
10	Convention center	8	Growth implications on emergency services

Total Number of Opportunities: 17

Total Number of Threats: 17

Vision Statement: In the year 2030, Ontwa Township will be defined by its beautiful, peaceful lakes; and will be characterized by vibrant, high-quality and attractive corridors that function as the cultural, commercial and entertainment center of the community, as a result of cooperation between the Village and Township.

Rank	Opportunities	Rank	Threats
1	Great community cooperation, social capital, service clubs	1	Loss/destruction of wetland system
2	Room to grow, but planning is important	2	Enforcement of regulations
2	Leadership to learn from mistakes	3	Loss of tax revenue
3	Controlled growth	4	Limit growth with access to lake (keyhole)
4	No current crises - time to plan	5	Overly dense development (multi-family)
4	Time to adopt effective laws	6	Acreage lots/waste of land
4	School system	6	Empty plats/developments
4	Quality lake system	7	Lack of selling the area, marketing
4	Open land available to preserve	7	Lack of quality low-income housing
5	Emergency services: EMS, fire, police	7	Self-interest management
5	High quality families that seek quality schools	7	Community apathy
5	Proximity to major shopping in Elkhart, South Bend corridor	7	Road deterioration
5	Balance of growth and public service demand	7	Sprawl
6	Preserve and protect farmland	8	Open land to develop, lack of buyers
6	Need to further define our vision	9	Too many restrictions, careful balance
6	Quality wetlands		Boat traffic on lake, lack of boat safety
7	Scenic beauty		Closed minds
7	Location - crossroads in region		Lack of job opportunities
7	Small community must be protected		

Total Number of Opportunities: 19

Total Number of Threats: 18

Vision Statement: In the year 2030, Ontwa Township will be a community planned to achieve responsible land use by protecting and preserving its natural resources, by fostering a spirit of social capital, by encouraging cooperative citizenship, while maintaining its identity, its integrity and its quality of life.

Rank	Opportunities	Rank	Threats
1	Strengthen wetlands protection ordinances	1	Lake overdevelopment and wetland destruction, fertilizer and stormwater
2	Unify Village and community with common design theme	2	Need to make efficient use of resources and money
3	Create smart places for jobs (live and work here)	3	Lack of vision for M-62 corridor
4	Biking and walking trails	4	Failure to resolve use of US-12/ M-62 intersection wetland
5	Increase park and recreation areas	5	Lacking buildings in corridor to start with
5	A mix of land uses with businesses, recreation and housing	5	No money
6	Support farm preservation for economy and character	5	Progress is a threat
7	Growing and excellent schools	6	Lack of draw for investors
8	Form-based zoning to encourage sense of place	6	Being afraid to “reach”
9	Dynamic, appealing downtown	7	Mobile home parks (existing and new)
9	Capitalize on regional draw with businesses	7	Tear-down and rebuilds on the lakes, runoff, view and aesthetic impacts
10	More community activities	8	Lack of Township human resources to carry out vision
10	Advance retail opportunities	8	Flat or declining school enrollment may threaten schools
10	Use state highways for trail link (off the road)	8	Overdevelopment threatens watershed and increases flooding
10	Support Edwardsburg sports complex	9	Keep graduates here
10	Reenergize industrial complex		Growth could overtake us
10	Impose higher standards on business development		Big box could come in
10	Improve and modernize Gunn Park		Insufficient training for local officials
10	Support open space preservation for economy and character		Subdivision Platting Act is a “nightmare” and promotes inefficient lot splits
			“Stalled” subdivision

Total Number of Opportunities: 19

Total Number of Threats: 20

Vision Statement: In 2030, Ontwa Township will be a smart place to live and work, surrounded by healthy wetlands and water; achieved through a wetland inventory and workable ordinances and an economic development authority, with jobs located in the Village and M-62 and the East US-12 corridor.

SYNTHESIS

The four breakout groups identified 75 “opportunities” and 65 “threats” in the exercise.

It is helpful to group the opportunity and threat statements into similar categories since the four breakout groups identified 75 “opportunities” and 65 “threats” in the exercise. The following grouping is intentionally general in scope. In addition, in some instances, the placement of statements in one category as opposed to another is a matter of judgment; and other groupings are possible. However, by combining the statements into similar groupings, it is possible to begin to make some generalizations about the opinions of the participants.

Each item has been categorized into five broad planning issues. These issues have been summarized and condensed from the participants’ opportunities in the tables on the preceding pages. While the tables on the previous pages illustrate the participants’ comments in rank order by group, the following lists organize the opportunities by category. The categories are: Agriculture, Open Space & Rural Character; The Natural Environment; Communication, Leadership & Cooperation; Economic Development & Joint Planning; and Quality of Life & Recreation.

Agriculture, Open Space & Rural Character

Group	Opportunities	Group’s Ranking
1	Preserve rural character and quality of life	1
1	Smaller developments, fewer houses to maintain rural character and affordability	6
1	Limit density of residential development	6
1	Control urban sprawl	7
3	Controlled growth	3
3	Open land available to preserve	4
3	Preserve and protect farmland	6
3	Scenic beauty	7
3	Small community must be protected	7
4	Support farm preservation for economy and character	6
4	Support open space preservation for economy and character	10

The Natural Environment

Group	Opportunities	Group's Ranking
1	Preserve wetlands	3
1	Encourage "green" development and programs (i.e. recycling)	6
1	Guide potential location of wind farms	8
2	Wetland preservation	8
3	Quality lake system	4
3	Quality wetlands	6
4	Strengthen wetland protection ordinances	1

Communication, Leadership & Cooperation

Group	Opportunities	Group's Ranking
1	Build political connections	8
1	Encourage greater involvement in community from businesses	8
2	Reevaluate zoning districts	4
2	Better communication with County on vision	10
3	Great community cooperation, social capital, service clubs	1
3	Leadership to learn from mistakes	2
3	No current crisis - time to plan	4
3	Time to adopt effective laws	4
3	Balance of growth and public service demand	5
3	Need to further define our vision	6
4	A mix of land uses with businesses, recreation and housing	5
4	Form-based zoning to encourage sense of place	8

Economic Development & Joint Planning

Group	Opportunities	Group's Ranking
1	Redevelop Village instead of sprawling into Township	2
1	Encourage redevelopment of industrial properties instead of new	3
1	More light manufacturing, retail shops to promote tourism	4
1	Entice new village-scale businesses	6
1	Bury overhead utilities	6
1	Pursue state and federal funding as much as possible	8
1	Make the Township a destination	8
2	Rebuild downtown, beautify downtown Edwardsburg	1
2	Develop downtown theme	2
2	More industrial jobs and business investment	5
2	Planning for services, commercial near Village	9
2	Township-Village cooperation, inc. with CIA	10
2	Convention center	10
3	Room to grow, but planning is important	2
3	Location - crossroads in region	7
4	Unify Village and community with common design theme	2
4	Create smart places for jobs (live and work here)	3
4	Dynamic, appealing downtown	9
4	Capitalize on regional draw with businesses	9
4	Advance retail opportunities	10
4	Reenergize industrial complex	10
4	Impose higher standards on business development	10

Quality of Life & Recreation

Group	Opportunities	Group's Ranking
1	Add walking trails as roads are paved	5
1	Support sports complex	8
1	Develop Township-wide Wi-Fi	7
1	Control traffic to prevent traffic congestion	8
2	Sports complex, and pedestrian connections to the lakes	3
2	Dual-trained fire-fighters and paramedics	6
2	We do not want a lot of change	7
2	Relaxed lifestyle	7
2	Central gathering, recreation space	10
2	Walking and biking paths	10
2	Good schools	10
2	Nicer parks and beaches	10
3	School system	4
3	Emergency services: EMS, fire, police	5
3	High-quality families that seek quality schools	5
3	Proximity to major shopping in Elkhart, South Bend corridor	5
4	Biking and walking trails	4
4	Increase park and recreation areas	5
4	Growing and excellent schools	7
4	More community activities	10
4	Use state highways for trail link (off the road)	10
4	Support Edwardsburg sports complex	10
4	Improve and modernize Gunn Park	10

NEXT STEPS

The next step in the master planning process is the preparation of policy that comports to the public input received. Goals and objectives will be developed and will form the foundation for the Master Plan. These statements will be used to help guide land use or other planning-related decisions.

As the planning process proceeds, future land use mapping and supporting narrative descriptions will be developed. The future land use section of the plan will guide future development and the character of the built environment in the Township. A zoning plan will also be developed, during the future land use exercise, which will relate the future land use designations to the current zoning districts of the Township, as required by the Michigan Planning Enabling Act.

Implementation strategies will also be written to outline how the Township may achieve its goals and objectives and the recommendations of the future land use narrative. These will be specific strategies and will describe who should do what, when it should be done and with which resources.

