

Chapter Five

Coordinated Public Services and Facilities

Introduction

Chapter Four described the planned pattern of land use throughout the county and the Local Participating Municipalities. Chapter Five presents initiatives to coordinate public services and facilities with the planned pattern of land use, and focuses specifically on:

- Circulation
- Sewage disposal and potable water
- Emergency services
- Recreation

The character and feasibility of land use and development is influenced by the extent to which public services are available. In addition, the availability of public facilities and services to people and property directly impacts public health, safety and welfare and, as a result, quality of life.

An important principle of this Plan is that growth and development is to be coordinated with public facilities and services.

On the other hand, public service improvements and the increased development that may result from such improvements should not jeopardize interests in managing growth and development. Thus, it is very important that future public service improvements be coordinated with the planned pattern of future land use.

Circulation / Complete Streets

As the county and its local communities grow, demands on the road network will increase, particularly in localized areas. This increased traffic may lessen the level of service along road segments. Conversely, road improvements may well attract new development which, in turn, will create additional demands.

The daily pattern of nearly everyone's' lives demand the ability to get from one location to another, preferably in the shortest time possible. Whether it be for employment, recreation, schooling, or shopping, a

comprehensive transportation network for vehicles, pedestrians, and bicyclists has become one of the most fundamental necessities in our society today. In Cass County, where so many residents work elsewhere, the importance of personal mobility is exaggerated.

Safe pedestrian and non-motorized travel has received greater and greater focus within the planning and transportation arenas, on local, regional, state and federal levels. The provision of opportunities for safe and comprehensive pedestrian and other non-motorized travel has been found to encourage health in individuals, provide alternative means of recreation, and lessen congestion, air pollution, consumption of fossil fuels and cost of living. The importance of safe and comprehensive pedestrian and non-motorized travel led the Michigan Legislature to amend the Planning Enabling Act in 2010 to require a "complete streets" element in a master plan.

The most fundamental challenge is maintaining the road network that is already in place and where necessary, expanding the network to improve traffic flow, safety and efficiency for all users.

"Complete streets" generally refers to the design of road corridors that take into account the mobility needs of all potential users including pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists, and public transportation users. The "complete streets" program emphasizes safety along roads for all users including all age groups. While recognizing that there is no single "complete streets" design solution that applies to all roads in all communities, the program emphasizes the need for new roads to be designed, and existing roads be improved, to facilitate their safe and efficient use by all prospective users within the context of the particular community's needs and character.

Implementation of a "complete streets" program in a rural area is different than that of an urban center. While an urban community may pursue sidewalks, bike lanes or paved shoulders, bus lanes, convenient public transportation stops, median islands, frequent and well marked cross-walks, and other measures,

rural communities typically have fewer options. However, even in rural communities, the feasibility and importance of implementing a wider scope of “complete streets” measures increases in the community’s planned residential settlement areas and commercial centers.

The circulation system in Cass County falls under multiple jurisdictions. MDOT has jurisdiction over the county’s state highways. Dowagiac and the county’s four villages have jurisdiction of their public road networks. The Cass County Road Commission has jurisdiction over the balance and vast majority of public road miles in the county.

Initiatives:

- 1) Greatest priority for road maintenance and improvements should be placed on those primary road segments serving planned residential, commercial and industrial growth areas.
- 2) Evaluate all proposed road construction for local and regional impacts on business patterns and activities, traffic flow, congestion, public safety, and land use.
- 3) Coordinate road improvements with other local and regional road improvements to address traffic movement in a unified and comprehensive manner.
- 4) Adopt a context-sensitive “complete streets” policy addressing the inclusion of complete streets measures in association with new road projects and as part of incremental improvements to existing road segments.
- 5) Evaluate development plans within the context of “complete streets” to ensure all users of the developments are afforded opportunities for safe and efficient circulation, including neighborhoods and commercial and industrial areas.
- 6) Continually explore opportunities for public transportation where economically feasible, and in coordination with planned growth areas.
- 7) Continually explore alternative funding opportunities to maximize the money available to address circulation and mobility needs.
- 8) Continually communication and coordinate with regional entities including road commissions, the Southwest Regional Planning Commission, and the Niles-Buchanan-Cass Area Transportation Study, to pursue transportation improvements in a unified and cost-effective manner.

Sewage Disposal and Potable Water

The majority of residents of the county rely on septic systems for sewage disposal and private on-site potable water wells. The exceptions are generally limited to Dowagiac and the four villages and immediately surrounding areas, and around some of the more outlying urbanized lake areas in nearly half of the county’s townships.

A county-wide sewer study was completed in 1999 and this study presented recommendations regarding how sewer service could most appropriately be expanded to address local needs. The county’s population has likely grown by less than 5,000 persons since the study was completed. The majority of local communities in the county have either updated or adopted new Master Plans including the development of this county master plan, and the policies of the plans typically address where planned growth areas are to be located and implications for sewage disposal and potable water services.

Public sewer and water service can contribute to a more compact development pattern or, if poorly planned, to greater sprawl and consumption of natural resources.

Improperly operating septic systems can contaminate potable groundwater resources, lakes and streams. On the other hand, the unnecessary introduction of public sewer and/or water services can lead to unintended consequences. Development pressures frequently coincide with the availability of public sewer and/or water improvements.

Initiatives:

- 1) Update the 1999 Water/Sewer Master Plan to document current public sewer conditions, available capacities and projected demands, and recommendations for improvements where deficiencies may be identified.
- 2) Discourage public sewer or water service improvements that are not necessary to maintain the public health, safety and welfare or facilitate development contrary to designated growth areas.
- 3) Evaluate decisions to introduce or expand public sewer or water service according to all available options, including services provided by cooperative agreements with neighboring municipalities and regional entities.
- 4) Phase public sewer and water service improvements so that an overly large geographic area is not developed at a rate beyond the

community's ability to effectively manage growth and development.

- 5) Establish wellhead protection areas in association with public water systems including measures to prohibit unnecessary threats to groundwater contamination.

Storm Water Management

Storm water management aims to minimize flood conditions, and control the quality and quantity of runoff that is discharged into the watershed system (streams, rivers, wetlands, lakes, etc.) from a development site.

As buildings, parking lots and other impermeable surfaces increase, the quantity of storm water runoff increases. The vegetated landscape that previously absorbed and slowed much of the water associated with rainfall is replaced by impervious surfaces. Unless specific preventive measures are taken, this condition encourages flooding, soil erosion, and sedimentation and pollution of area water resources. The county's abundant water resources, including its wetlands, lakes, rivers and streams, are vulnerable to degradation.

Green infrastructure, the act of accommodating storm water management through minimal disturbances to on-site natural resources and drainage systems, is a critical tool in maintaining environmental integrity and community character.

Initiatives:

- 1) Ensure increased runoff that may occur as a result of development is appropriately managed to avoid placing excess demand on the capacity of the storm water system into which the runoff is discharged.
- 2) Increased runoff that may occur as a result of development will be appropriately managed to ensure that the quality of the runoff discharged does not undermine the environmental integrity of surface and ground waters including wellhead protection areas.
- 3) Storm water management measures should be based upon "green infrastructure" – planned networks of natural lands, functioning landscapes and other open spaces that minimize alterations to the natural landscape and lessen the reliance on storm sewer and similar "grey" infrastructure.
- 4) Ensure site-specific development practices that maintain or enhance the level of service provided by local storm water management systems.

- 5) Review land use and construction practices for compliance with all local, county, state, and federal regulations regarding storm water management and soil erosion, including the regulations of the Cass County Drain Commissioner.
- 6) Review development proposals within the context of their impact on nearby water courses to ensure discharge practices do not undermine the environmental integrity of these resources.

Though flooding, soil erosion, sedimentation and pollution may originate from site-specific circumstances, their impact can extend to adjacent properties and more regional areas including other downstream communities.

Emergency Services

Within the context of this discussion, emergency services refer to police and fire protection services including ambulatory services.

The Michigan State Police provide emergency services along state highways and in other limited circumstances on an as-needed basis. Cass County's participation in the provision of emergency services is comprised primarily of the County Sheriff's Department including road patrols, 911 dispatch, and management of jail facilities. The majority of the townships in the county rely on the department for police protection. Dowagiac and each of the four villages operate their own police and fire departments or are part of joint authorities for the same. The Tribal Police Department of the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Indians also provides emergency services in the county. Its presence is most visible in the western half of the county and particularly in the Pokagon Township area. As community growth and land development increases, so does the demand for emergency services.

There are no widely accepted standards for police protection levels – what is adequate is largely a function of local public perception. Commonly referenced standards regarding fire protection suggest a maximum service radius from a fire station in low density residential areas of approximately three miles, and an approximately three-quarters to two mile radial service area in commercial, industrial, and high density residential areas.

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Initiatives:

- 1) Encourage the provision of fire protection infrastructure (wells, water lines, etc.) for all new developments that are of a size and density that on-site access to water is considered critical.
- 2) Continually monitor police and fire protection needs and service to minimize service deficiencies and explore options for improved service levels including joint services with neighboring and regional entities.
- 3) Place priority on those emergency service improvements that will impact the greatest number of recipients in the most cost-effective manner – with existing population centers being the principal target areas.
- 4) Encourage the formation and expansion of “neighborhood watch” programs.

Recreation

Like many other public services, demands for recreation facilities and opportunities will likely grow as the county and its local communities grow. Conversely, the availability of potential park sites will diminish as open spaces may be converted to alternative uses.

Cass County operates eight park sites. Some of the local communities maintain recreation facilities as well, while others are without locally-owned and maintained recreation sites.

The importance of locally available recreation opportunities has been widely recognized for its important health benefits, the enhancement of leisure time, and potential economic impacts. The type and accessibility of nearby recreational opportunities can impact the well being of local residents of all ages. “Accessibility” includes the convenience, ease and safety of getting to a park facility and the ease of moving comfortably throughout a park site by all users, including all age groups and persons of all physical abilities.

Cass County recently prepared a MDNR-approved recreation plan which enables the county to compete for state and federal recreation grants to acquire and develop park land for recreation purposes. Some local communities in the county have done the same. These plans typically establish recreation goals and objectives and a five-year action plan in pursuit of the goals.

County Initiatives:

- 1) Maintain a current recreation plan that focuses on providing resource-based recreation opportunities catering to the unmet recreation needs of the county’s population and the enhancement of existing park facilities.
- 2) Aggressively pursue the implementation of the “action program” of the recreation plan.
- 3) Provide assistance to local communities seeking to prepare and/or update local recreation plans.
- 4) Encourage the coordination of recreation plans among neighboring communities, and joint recreation plans that strive to deliver recreation opportunities in a more unified regional effort.

Local Participating Municipality Initiatives:

- 1) Regularly monitor the extent to which area residents are satisfied with the scope and accessibility of recreation opportunities.
- 2) Where there is a demonstrated demand for recreation improvements, and as financial resources may become available, strive to provide recreation facilities in a manner that recognizes the particular needs of local residents.
- 3) In the case where the community does not have an official MDNR-approved five-year recreation plan, and should sufficient public sentiment warrant, explore the development of such a plan. In the case where the community has such a recreation plan, maintain a current action plan and aggressively pursue implementation.
- 4) Encourage the provision of open space and recreation areas within future residential development projects such as platted and condominium subdivisions, to facilitate close-to-home recreation opportunities.
- 5) Explore addressing recreation needs of local residents through cooperative regional efforts.